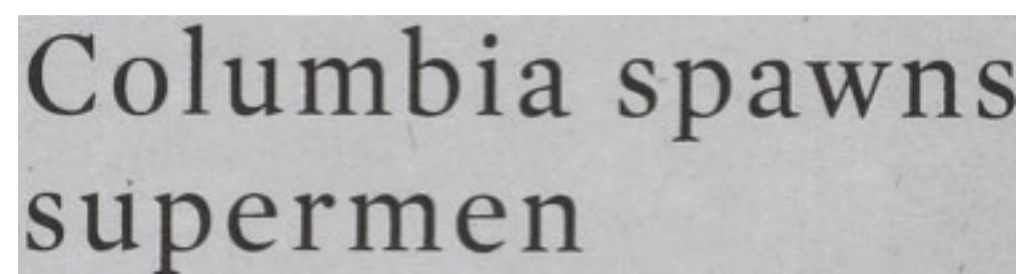


COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXXXV, Number 81, 21 September 2011 — Columbia spawns supermen
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]



Columbia spawns
supermen

The third annual World MRSA Day, an event geared towards raising awareness about methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, will be held on October 1st at the Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill. MRSA is a bacterium that claims more American lives yearly than AIDS due to its fierce resistance to many antibiotics. How did such a heinous strain of bacteria come to be? Through medicine, actually. While the discovery of antibiotics in the 20th century killed many types of bacteria and saved countless lives, it also set off what is called an "evolutionary arms race," a biological principle whereby any bacteria able to withstand an initial antidote adapts to become stronger. Naturally, we respond with a more potent medicine, and the ensuing back and forth eventually creates a "superbug," such as MRSA, which is impervious to most antibiotics.

Perhaps this consequence is a pitfall of medical technology. Has our relentless pursuit of more powerful remedies not only produced problematic ailments, but also slowed natural selection? Could it be that we are accidentally creating a world where evolution is stagnant in humans but accelerated in bacteria? To counter this troublesome trend, maybe we should invest in a trial society where, in order to return to our survival-of-the-fittest roots, we put the subjects' bodies through rigorous tests of durability. It may sound counterproductive, but the specimen capable of enduring the harshest, unhealthiest conditions would of course be stronger than the one that relies on state-of-the-art medical care.

Fear not, scientists, for that exact experiment is currently ongoing at Columbia University, albeit unintentionally. To the casual observer it quickly becomes apparent that a large percentage of the male population at this esteemed institution has no regard whatsoever for its collective physical well-being. As a result, optimal tests of resilience that can serve as research into this superbug crisis are born.

What has given rise to this treacherous, yet self-imposed state? It starts with nutrition, and poor nutrition at that. Columbia Dining obviously supplies excellent food service, but for many without dining plans, finding a structured diet is unlikely. Far too often subjects give in to the aromatic temptations of Koronet's or Five Guys or especially the halal carts, whose Napoleonic surrounding of the main quad coupled with their



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Tough Guise

impressive but suspect ability to provide five kinds of meat from a single cooler creates a huge draw. To make matters worse, our dietary intake proportions are dangerously lopsided: while fruits and vegetables exist only in still life paintings from Art Hum slides, the average male gets 800 percent of his daily protein recommendation, supplemented by shakes, bars, and more shakes. Such unbalanced ratios, only barely functional when augmented with caffeine at every meal to serve as human motor oil, make it impossible to maintain peak health.

Not that a balanced diet would make a difference anyway, considering the jarring lack of sleep that appears to be universal on the Columbia campus. Students seem to be under the impression that taking four naps a day makes up for staying up until 2:30 every night streaming Entourage episodes or stumbling home on Saturday at sunrise. Thus, the advised ten hours of sleep daily for teenagers is unfortunately closer to the weekly regimen for many Columbians as they try to juggle academic, athletic, and social responsibilities.

To top it all off, we require our immune systems, reduced to shambles at this point, to ward off sickness and infection under the most trying of circumstances. Indeed, making out with the entire field hockey team over the course of two weekends while using primarily Febreze and Axe to clean our bodies and possessions definitely puts the white blood cells to the test. And, as is often the case, when our germ-fighting defenses fail, men usually forego trips to Columbia Health Services or St. Luke's Hospital, both closer to campus than Mel's but far less popular, in favor of the homemade remedy of Advil, Luden's cough drops, and Natural Ice.

The final glorious result of this enclosed system here at Columbia will be twofold. Firstly, the students who survive this health obstacle course will be of the highest level of Darwinian fitness, advancing human evolution in Morningside Heights at a rate far faster than the rest of the world. Essentially, we will have created an army of Six Million Dollar Men, able to maintain their health against any and all odds. Secondly, we will have constructed the equivalent of an evolutionary détente, as the weaker students will be so withered after their four years that a mere fleabite would be entirely sufficient to knock them out, let alone some dreadful bacterium, making the existence of the latter entirely unnecessary. So take the initiative! Continue to eat poorly, sleep rarely, and be generally unhealthy! With any luck we'll create a society of supermen—where the superbug is utterly superfluous.

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