

Gulf War II Syndrome?

The Ministry of Defence is quite rightly planning to run physical and psychological tests on British soldiers who have served in recent wars, to try to ascertain whether they have suffered illness as a result. As the leader of the study **commented**:

“The immediate concerns are first, whether or not there will be a repeat of the kind of physical health problems experienced by Gulf One (1991 Gulf War) soldiers and, second, the increasing concerns about psychological issues,” study leader Simon Wessely told the paper on Sunday.

He is, of course, referring to **Gulf War Syndrome**, a distressing condition whose only scientifically established symptom is that the sufferer tends to attribute subsequent ailments to it. Fortunately, most Gulf War veterans did not catch Gulf War Syndrome. We hope that Gulf War II syndrome does not claim as many victims as its predecessor.

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Apparently, common symptoms o...

Apparently, common **symptoms** of GWS include fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, cognitive problems, skin rashes, and diarrhea. So at first it sounds like a run-of-the-mill vague pseudomedical condition, and a fine opportunity for litigation (as **The World** hints).

I wonder if anybody has considered that GWS may be due to a chronic activation of the so-called 'acute phase' of the body's immune response. In general, people who are depressed or anxious can become ill in this way. The most likely cause is a moral one. One has failed to perform a duty or has done something unforgettably shameful. I expect that war, which is obviously a dramatic event, provides plenty of scope for such failure. Dylan Evans thinks that the **placebo effect** operates by damping down the acute phase mentioned above. I recommend his book BTW, it's an exceptionally clear and interesting discussion. In it he breaks the taboo of linking physiological malfunction to beliefs. I wish he had made the final step of providing an evolutionary rationale for the fact that coercion stress impedes physical health. Humans are the only animals which think in order to thrive. They

are vulnerable to bad memes, especially from members of the tribe who are closely related to them biologically. Therefore genes might viably exist which help to kill off those who cannot understand the world or who have acted badly by their own lights.

This might explain why Ayn Rand's character, John Galt, always enjoyed perfect health.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 02:22 | [reply](#)

John Galt

Since John Galt was a fictional superhero, he could not be otherwise. Ayn Rand made up for her alter-ego John by suffering some very strange and debilitating maladies and delusions. She never admitted any of these. It was the other guy who had problems.

by a reader on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

Who is John Galt?

Just kidding. :-)

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 02/19/2004 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Immune system and GWS

Perhaps I should flesh out my earlier comment. Of the many soldiers who went out to the Gulf, a tiny minority did some things that made them ashamed. Perhaps someone became paralysed with fear just before action. Perhaps somebody else drove a jeep carelessly whilst tired and killed a friend. When they get back home they experience nightmares and regret. This triggers phase 1 of their immune systems (lethargy, fever, inflammation), whilst suppressing phase 2 (tailored antibody production). As a result they get ill more easily, catch viruses, lose motivation and generally feel physically bad. Then they hear about Gulf War Syndrome. They remember all the special injections they received in case of chemical attack. B follows A therefore A caused B and presto, their maladies are explained and the guilt is obscured and abated. Then a slightly larger minority, encouraged perhaps by counselors, accident lawyers, and the anti-war media, decide to try to cash in on GWS through litigation. After all, it's surely no worse than making a false insurance claim...

I could be quite wrong about this guess. I should also add that the majority of our armed forces are good, decent and honorable people that carry forward a great tradition. They have an awesome supply of common sense including a judgement of right and wrong that leaves most of our politicians, academics and journalists far behind.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 02/19/2004 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

gulf war syndrome

you know fuck all about gulf war syndrome you stupid arse

by a reader on Thu, 09/30/2004 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

Such Brilliance (was gulf war syndrome)

'you know fuck all about gulf war syndrome you stupid arse'

Such wit! Such rhetorical flair! Sir, I take my hat off to you and concede that I have been totally wrong about Gulf War Syndrome. I prostrate myself before your supreme wisdom.

Alan

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 10/03/2004 - 02:01 | [reply](#)

re: brilliance

why feed the trolls?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 10/03/2004 - 03:29 | [reply](#)