By HARRIET VAN HORNE

Vindication should be sweet. But one is always embarrassed to write, "Well, now, weren't we saying precisely that just the other day?"

That sort of thing always strikes me as a bit too smarmy and self-preening. Nevertheless, I cannot help remembering all the scurrilous letters that came in last winter when I referred to the militancy of Women's Lib as "castrating females." They wanted my head on a platter. They were so veened and so anxious to proclaim the delights of their teeming beds that I was sorry I ever used that clinical phrase.

But recently my eye fell upon a newspaper headline: "Links Women's Lib and Impotence." In brief, doctors are reporting a significant rise in impotency among young men. And the boasted, braless girls on the barricades are being held responsible.

A normally aggressive male can stand up to the challenge of women who take karate lessons and spit our four-letter words to men who doff their hats in elevators. "But the more passive male eventually becomes impotent because unconscious fear or hostility toward women," says Dr. B. Lyman Stewart of Los Angeles.

The melancholy fallout from female aggression gets further documentation from an article in a recent Harper's Bazaar. Dotson Rader writes in "The Feminization of the American Male" that authoritarian women are causing men to become passive and hostile. "This hostility," he notes, "prevents a man from becoming whole and results in anti-social and self-destructive behavior."

I know little of Mr. Rader's background save that he's a freelance writer disinclined with the radical movement. (One of his books is "I Ain't Marchin' Any More.") Harper's Bazaar establishes him as quirkily and immature with one statement: "At 29 he is single and wants to be a cowboy actor."

Well, this would-be cowboy actor believes the American male could do with a touch of toughening. But he's as inconsistent in his way as some of the Women's Lib polemists.

What we must do is decrease the pressure on men to compete and master; decrease their freedom of spontaneous action and healthy aggression; and end their captivity to women in the early years..."

"A woman in short, in harems, in emasculated men by demanding too much of them. It is enormously difficult, Mr. Rader says, "for young men even to survive manhood in the United States."

Student rebellion, crime, family abandonment, school and job failures are all, in Mr. Rader's view, the fault of castrating females.

It's a thesis stated in more scholarly fashion by Dr. Patricia B. Brown, a sociologist, in her book, "The Feminized Male." The schools play a decisive role in taming the rough beast in every boy, she believes. Boys are rewarded for the passive, feminine qualities: obedience, conformity. Neatness, Mr. Rader suggests that, co-education be deferred until the last year of high school. Both agree that we should have more male teachers. Women tend to force boys into attitudes of docility.

But Mama is only half the problem, Mrs. Sexton reminds us. The other half is Papa. The absentee father, the ineffectual father who says, "That's your mother's problem," and, of course, the brutal father against who the dutiful son will take up arms if necessary, all work against the boy's self-fulfillment as a man.

"No doubt I shall be hearing from Women's Lib again this time, reminding me the impotency was a problem in our society long before," Ti-Grace Atkinson denounced heterosexual love as demeaning to women. And there are elements in this masculine failure that have little to do with the current mood in the male psyche.

Psychiatry stresses that impotency may be caused by man's primitive fear of being "damaged" by the all-devouring earth mother. It is also pointed out that impotency frequently has elements of simple revenge. So has female frigidity.

If men are damaged in their self-esteem, if they are made to feel responsible for all that ails womanhood today, naturally they are not going to fall easily into the role of tender, ardent lovers.

"Give the girls on the barricades another five years and there may be a parade up Fifth Avenue by the Men's Liberation Movement," we wrote last February. That may have been a rash statement then. Today I'm not so sure.