

Rosenstein uses phrases like “shower syndrome.”

It is, he says, the “privileged signifier,” or original symbol, from which all other symbols take their meaning. The ancient Egyptians had much the same view. They deified the penis for what they saw as its godlike ability to create life, carrying phalluses in religious processions in order, as Voltaire explained, “to thank the gods for making the human frame so instrumental in the perpetuation of the human species.”

To certain pre-Christian thinkers, the symbolic applications of the penis seemed almost limitless. “The penis corresponds to one’s parents, on the one hand, because it is itself the cause of children,” wrote Artemidorus, the second-century Greek soothsayer. “It signifies a wife or mistress, since it is made for sexual intercourse. . . . It indicates brothers and all blood relatives. . . . It is a symbol of strength and physical vigor. . . . It corresponds to speech and education. . . . The penis is also a sign of wealth and possessions. . . . It also indicates the respect that is inspired by high rank.”

Of course, few actual penises seem capable of supporting such a profusion of symbolic attributes. Which is why, in the view of Lacanian theorists, all men feel castrated; the more importance they attach to the penis, the smaller it appears. And that, in turn, may explain why ritualistic penis enlargement has been a feature of many cultures. The most popular technique, tying weights to the penis, has been practiced by groups ranging from the Caramoja tribe of northern Uganda to the sadhus of India. The sadhus, a cult of ascetics who can be found along the banks of the upper Ganges, believe that God dwells in the penis. By attaching weights to their penises from the time they are young, they stretch them to lengths that range from twelve to eighteen inches. The older sadhus tie their penises in knots and wrap them in their loincloths.

Variations on this practice exist in America today. I spent a Sunday afternoon in April at a meeting of an anti-circumcision support group in Huntington Beach, just south of Los Angeles. Eight men sat in a circle of folding chairs in an air-conditioned office in a small strip mall. They complained about the medical conspiracy to mutilate male infants for profit and discussed their various efforts to “restore” their foreskins. They were equally interested in penile lengthening.

Roland Clark, the host of the meeting, has designed a device for that purpose, which he has named the Hangman. Consisting of weights and surgical hose, it lengthens the penis in a manner not unlike that employed by the sadhus. The weights come in sizes ranging from ten to twenty-two ounces.

“Currently, I’m wearing an eighteen and a twenty-two taped together,” one of the men volunteered.

This was greeted with murmurs of admiration. The man, who described himself as an orthodontist, had two and a half pounds of deadweight suspended from his penis.

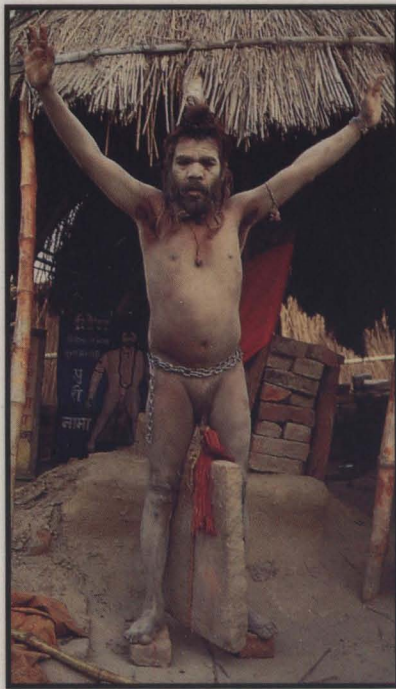
I said it seemed to me potentially dangerous.

“I can show you mine,” Clark said. “You can see if I look normal.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

Of course, explained Clark, you couldn’t wear the weight contraption all day. “I get up at six-thirty, put it on, shave, eat breakfast, letting it hang over the chair, take it off, go to work. In the evening, I repeat.” In this way, he said, he’d gained an inch and a half in little more than a year.

“Maybe we can get John to start on it, and in a year he can



Using weights, Indian sadhus stretch their penises up to eighteen inches.

come back and show us his results,” the orthodontist said.

“Yeah, we’ve got to get you started, John.”

“I’ll think about it.”

When the meeting drew to a close, Clark said, “I’ve got product in the back if anyone needs more weight. Also, we’re making a promotional video. If any of you guys are interested, we need penises at different stages.”

Merchandising the Power Totem

“DR. ROSENSTEIN IS A marketer’s wet dream,” Chris Solton said. “He’s got a product guys want.”

Solton is the marketing director of the Rosenstein Medical Group, which is the business operation Rosenstein has created to sell penile augmentations. The office suite, in a tower in Century City overlooking Beverly Hills, was eerily empty when I went there. It had a reception area but no receptionist. I wandered around, peering in vacant offices and calling out Solton’s name.

Solton—who, when he finally appeared, gave me a bone-crushing handshake—is young and blond and strong-jawed. He wore a white shirt, a tie, and two-tone wing tips, and he exuded an uncomplicated male vigor.

“Two point two million women have had their breasts enlarged,” he told me after showing me into his office, which has sweeping views but an anonymous, uninhabited feel. “Only—let’s take a high guesstimate—eight thousand