



A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis

David M. Friedman

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Whether enemy or ally, demon or god, the source of satisfaction or the root of all earthly troubles, the penis has forced humanity to wrestle with its enduring mysteries. Here, in an enlightening and entertaining cultural study, is a book that gives context to the central role of the penis in Western civilization. A man can hold his manhood in his hand, but who is really gripping whom? Is the penis the best in man -- or the beast? How is man supposed to use it? And when does that use become abuse? Of all the bodily organs, only the penis forces man to confront such contradictions: something insistent yet reluctant, a tool that creates but also destroys, a part of the body that often seems apart from the body. This is the conundrum that makes the penis both hero and villain in a drama that shapes every man -- and mankind along with it. In "A Mind of Its Own," David M. Friedman shows that the penis is more than a body part. It is an idea, a conceptual but flesh-and-blood measuring stick of man's place in the world. That men have a penis is a scientific fact; how they think about it, feel about it, and use it is not. It is possible to identify the key moments in Western history when a new idea of the penis addressed the larger mystery of man's relationship with it and changed forever the way that organ was conceived of and put to use. "A Mind of Its Own" brilliantly distills this complex and largely unexamined story. Deified by the pagan cultures of the ancient world and demonized by the early Roman church, the organ was later secularized by pioneering anatomists such as Leonardo da Vinci. After being measured "scientifically" in an effort to subjugate some races while elevating others, the organ was psychoanalyzed by Sigmund Freud. As a result, the penis assumed a paradigmatic role in psychology -- whether the patient was equipped with the organ or envied those who were. Now, after being politicized by feminism and exploited in countless ways by pop culture, the penis has been medicalized. As no one has before him, Friedman shows how the arrival of erection industry products such as Viagra is more than a health or business story. It is the latest -- and perhaps final -- chapter in one of the longest sagas in human history: the story of man's relationship with his penis. "A Mind of Its Own" charts the vicissitudes of that relationship through its often amusing, occasionally alarming, and never boring course. With intellectual rigor and a healthy dose of wry humor, David M. Friedman serves up one of the most thought-provoking, significant, and readable cultural works in years.

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