PROJECT SYNOPSIS

America: land of the free and home of the huge. From super-sized french fries to SUVs, Americans like their products big. Size is connoted with power and affluence. This is nowhere more apparent than in the area of love. It is perceived to be more alluring to have a big home, paycheck and for men, physique. For men to be competitive in finding a mate, nothing makes you stand out more than having massive muscles, and if not, a big car or well paying job will compensate nicely. One unthinkable object the size wars have affected is: the penis. To have a large one is to be seen as being blessed with something that can please sex partners the world over and impress your friends. To have a small one is to lead a lonely and inadequate existence.

In the U.S., thousands of men each year undergo the expensive and painful procedure of phalloplasty, or penis enlargement surgery. Most of these men are already six inches in length, which is considered average size. Hundreds of thousands more are displeased with their penis size and contemplate the procedure even though a larger penis does not mean increased sexual satisfaction for them or their partner. Spending upwards of $5000 for the operation and after six months of dangling weights from it for hours a day, an improbable one and a half-inches has been added only to the flaccid length of the penis, not the erect length. Despite being deemed by the American Urological Association and the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery as too dangerous and experimental to have reliable satisfactory results, phalloplasty still continues. Until made aware, the men who undergo phalloplasty are in danger and are risking something important to their self-esteem, identity, health, and future. Phalloplasty has become a refuge for men who feel trapped by inadequacy and therefore subject themselves to this costly procedure which can lead to scarring, disfigurement, and impotence. Bigger is Better: the rise and fall of modern masculinity explores the size craze, why these men are so unhappy with their penis that they would undergo a dangerous major cosmetic operation, and what it means to be a man in contemporary society.

The penis has a long and bizarre history and Bigger is Better’s host, Richard, a puppet that strikingly resembles a penis, takes us through its history. He follows the origin of phalloplasty which was brought to the United States in 1992 by a Chinese doctor who developed the procedure by experimenting on
Bigger is Better: the rise and fall of modern masculinity
a documentary by Becky Goldberg

corpses. Richard brings us to date where phalloplasty grosses $13 million a year. He satirically traces the penis' symbolic evolution from a “demon rod” to a “battering ram” to grasp how it has gained the social importance it possesses today. He even pays a visit to Baltimore, Maryland’s William P. Didusch Museum of the American Urological Association which houses all things relating to the male reproductive organs. Richard interviews men and women on the street about their preferences and thoughts on the penis. By understanding the personal, sexual, and psychological attachment between it, its owner, and admirers, we see how the penis plays an overly important part in men's lives.

Bigger is Better also chronicles one man’s search for a larger penis. By getting to know him, his surgeon, friends, and loved ones, and by documenting his progress, we gain an understanding of the psychology behind a phalloplasty patient. Speaking with past phalloplasty patients, we discover the risks and supposed benefits involved in the decision of undergoing phalloplasty. We inquire about how it has affected their lives personally, physically, emotionally, and sexually. John Wayne Bobbit underwent phalloplasty after his penis was severed from his body. Since, he has gone on to act in pornographic films. Ron Nance, a 47-year-old carpenter from Monterrey, California, went to Dr. Melvyn Rosenstein for phalloplasty. After nine visits to Rosenstein’s Los Angeles office for touch-ups, Nance was left impotent by the operation. Claudio Martell, a lounge singer, died on Dr. Ricardo Samitier’s operating table after Dr. Samitier could not stop excessive bleeding during a penis widening procedure. He neglected the fact that the patient was on blood thinners for an enlarged heart. He lost his license and was charged five years for manslaughter. Speaking with Dr. Samitier, Dr. Rosenstein, and their previous patients, we see how this new and unregulated cottage industry can create irreversible mistakes.

Within the medical community there are conflicting views on the ethics and necessity of phalloplasty. Dr. Douglas Whitehead, phalloplasty surgeon, advocate, and president of the American Academy of Phalloplasty Surgeons, discusses the demand for his work, significance of his organization, and how the procedure is done. Dr. Jack McAninch, a urologist who also repairs botched enlargements, familiarizes us with the procedure’s hazards and pitfalls. Specialists at the American Medical Association and the American Society of
Aesthetic Plastic Surgery explain how the medical world’s lack of knowledge and supervision of phalloplasty make it an experimental high-risk procedure.

The yearning to become the male sexual ideal has created a boon of merchandise from creams to pills, hypnosis to pumps. The penis has shifted from a body part to a platform to sell products, all claiming to give you the larger penis your sexual partner has been yearning for. Creating a commodity of the penis and male sexual ability, this capitalizes on the anxieties of men who feel they do not measure up. We wittily show how internet spam, instructional books, and newspaper ads are being marketed to men and women instilling ideas of shortcomings. Do these products really work? Trying them out on a male crew member, we expose the results. Also speaking with Gary M. Griffin, author of the books *Penis Enlargement Methods: Facts and Phallusy* and *Straight Talk About Surgical Penis Enlargement*, we see how those in the phalloplasty industry package and sell this procedure to the public. Members of www.measurection.com, an online forum and support group for men with small penises, describes the pressure men face over penis size.

Talking with a man whose career revolves around his penis, porn star Jeff Stryker, creator of *Jeff Stryker's How to Enlarge Your Penis* video and sex toy, “The Vibrating Performer”, we see why, in his line of work, size matters. The makers of Trojan, America’s most used condom, explain the sizing of their products and their most popular styles.

The media is saturated with images of male sexuality. Masculinity experts Susan Bordo and Michael Kimmel discuss the burdens of the male sex role instilled by the media. They discuss how it aggrandizes the importance of men’s sexual prowess coupling their success in bed with the notion that “bigger is better.” David M. Friedman and Maggie Paley, authors of books on the penis, discuss its role throughout civilization, individually, and culturally.

Besides focusing on the plastic surgery capitals of the United States, Miami, Los Angeles, and New York, the film examines how other cultures perceive male sexuality. We visit the Kanamara festival in Japan, a festival celebrating male fertility and the Icelandic Phallological Museum, a penis museum in Iceland’s capital, Reykjavik.

The visual style is of verité filmmaking, sit down interviews, and archival material. Anatomy charts provide an understanding of the phalloplasty
procedure and the male physique. Still photographs are used to illustrate the characters before and after surgery. Archival health videos provide a comical look of the male sex role and how it has been historically designated. Portrayals of the penis in art are investigated from Michelangelo to Tom of Finland to Louise Bourgeois. The film combines elements of vintage advertisements, pop culture, modern media, and imagery of phallic objects from the Washington Monument to cigars. All these elements are used to illustrate that in modern America, size is what counts.

_Bigger is Better: the rise and fall of modern masculinity_ is unique in that it addresses issues of masculinity, America’s size craze, and the questionable motives of the medical industry that society is reluctant to challenge. By calling attention to this and addressing ideas that are overlooked by the public, _Bigger is Better_ reaches out to people and makes them aware of how they can proactively contribute. As a catalyst for debate and a powerful means for social change, the film will reach diverse and mature audiences from all backgrounds because culture’s size fixation and the limits of masculinity affect us all despite age, race, or gender. By showing how culture places such an importance on size and how it relates to sex roles, the film urges viewers to challenge their own views and the world around them. An outreach effort is planned for college campuses and especially medical schools because they can affect the most change within the surgical practices of the medical community. Progressive media and socially active institutions are being approached to collaborate and spread awareness along with the films message. The plans for distribution include film festivals, cable and theatrical release.

More than ever there is a chance to redefine what it means to be a man without having to conform to what has been forced upon us in the past. With this film I want to show that the template that has been proscribed to half the world’s population need no longer apply. Culture is surrounded with impossible sexual standards but is uncomfortable to discuss them candidly and seriously. The models of male sexuality that seemed all pervasive are unrealistic. The risks men are taking by going under the knife, taking pills, or using pumps shows that they are being given the wrong information either by the media, their friends, or loved ones. I want to demystify the messages society is being sent and relieve the pressures men feel. _Bigger is Better_ amusingly illustrates society’s obsession with
Bigger is Better: the rise and fall of modern masculinity
a documentary by Becky Goldberg

size in things from cars to homes to income and exposes the phalloplasty industry’s manipulation and capitalization of these obsessions. The film combines personal stories of loss and love, humorous social commentary, and social advocacy. Exploring the role the media has in creating the archetype of what men and their sexuality should be, the film allows viewers to personally reevaluate their definitions of what it means to be a man in contemporary society. It questions the practices of the medical industry and shows how man’s self perception, confidence, and sexuality are shaped, subjects not often discussed openly. The film humorously and boldly dissects the social construct of masculinity and investigates the pressures it imposes. We can see the lure that a bigger penis has and how the empty promises of phalloplasty take advantage of men while falsely reinvigorating their sexual confidence. Bigger is Better urges men to realize “it’s not the size of the ship but the motion of the ocean” that counts.

FILMMAKER BIO

I am a documentary filmmaker originally from Omaha, Nebraska. Graduating with a degree from New York University’s film program with a focus in documentary, I was nominated Best Female Student Filmmaker from the Directors Guild of America East Coast. I recently finished a college and university tour with another documentary I directed and produced, Hot and Bothered: feminist pornography. The film takes a rare and empowering look into the pornography industry and feminist community to see how they intertwine within the politics and poetics of female sexuality. Hot and Bothered has garnered a Haig Manoogian Production Grant, a Chicago Underground Film Fund Grant, and was nominated for a Moxie Films Documentary Grant. The film has also played at festivals across the US and Europe. As a filmmaker, I am interested in the important part sexuality plays in everyday life. I want to uncover the socio-sexual issues that are ignored by the media and public and question its perceptions and misconceptions. Bigger is Better: the rise and fall of modern masculinity fulfills this commitment to my artistic goal and is exemplary of the kind of socially progressive documentary work that I aspire to do. What interests me the most about documentary filmmaking is the ability to reach people on political, personal, and emotional levels. I have something to contribute to the documentary world by producing work that is thought-provoking, acts as a social
commentary, and advocates social change. I have worked for over three years in documentary film for filmmaker Michael Moore and for companies such as HBO, The Independent Film Channel, and VH1, Bravo. Working for Michael Moore on Fahrenheit 9/11 has allowed me to get more involved in socially conscious filmmaking and I have learned and been inspired by the process and pitfalls of making such controversial work. It also gave me hands-on experience of making a documentary for theatrical release. My experience working for HBO on various documentaries including Pornucopia: Going Down in the Valley, In Memoriam, and Devil's Playground has taught me about the documentary filmmaking process for television release. It has given me a familiarity with television documentary work from everything from content, budgeting, audience, and distribution.