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Different Names for Bullying

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CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

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PROPOSAL GUIDELINES (7 Pages, max.)

1. Film Title: Different Names for Bullying

Director: Marco Poggio

2. Logline (1-3 sentences)

“There's all different forms of bullying,” says Steven Gray, a Lakota rancher and former law enforcement officer living in South Dakota. In this look into Gray's life, we learn about two instances of bullying: the psychological and physical harassment that pushed his son, Tanner Thomas Gray, to commit suicide at age 12; And the controversial construction of an oil pipeline in an ancient tribal land that belongs to the Lakota people by rights of a treaty signed in 1851, which Gray sees as an institutional abuse infringing on the sovereignty of his people. Gray is involved in the movement that has been fighting the construction of the pipeline.

3. Synopsis (1 page)

Steven Gray, a Native American member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, has been in the frontline fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline construction since its early stages. Brought up in a family of ranchers, Gray work several jobs in his family's ranch, construction, and law enforcement. Gray explains how his tribe and his family's cattle would be affected in the event of an oil spill into the Missouri River. Gray, who lives in a small piece of land in a Indian reservation in South Dakota, offers insights in the life of people in the reservation, a reality that is mostly misunderstood, stereotyped, or ignored by the mainstream public. The movie shows Gray's direct involvement in the opposition to the pipeline at a camp in North Dakota, along the Cannonball River, which has been already defined as the largest gathering of indigenous tribes in American history.

4. Structure, Style and Format (1/2 page; 1-3 paragraphs)

The film is narrated off-camera by the main character. He is an unreliable narrator for the most part but the point of the movie is not to fact check what the narrator says, but rather familiarize and sympathize with his reality.

5. TREATMENT (1.5 – 3 pages, max.)

ACT 1

The movie begins with footage by and about protesters who were confronted by North Dakota law enforcement with water cannons near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. A portion of audio podcast by the National Public Radio explains the confrontations are about the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Right after, we meet Steven Gray, a rancher who has Native roots. Gray talks about his struggle with the painful loss of his son, Tanner, who committed suicide in 2014 at age 12. We learn Tanner killed himself after being bullied by some schoolmates. Once we acknowledge Gray's pain, his background narration keeps us focused on the issue of bullying. What's bullying?

It is simply an act of harassment someone suffers by hand their peers? Or is it something bigger? Gray suggests, without making it obvious, that bullying is a state of mind that is traditionally European, and which has been used to colonize the world. As we are asked to think about bullying in this widened frame of mind, we see aerial footage of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The viewer makes the connection between the micro and the macro aspects of bullying. We know it's not just about the death of Tanner, which devastated the life of a man. It's about bullying in a universal sense. The pipeline is just the last example of Native people being bullied by special interests and the government that stays behind to protect them. Native people once lived unhindered in North America, but then were colonized, almost entirely exterminated and put in pockets of the country called reservations. Gray takes us to a piece of land across the road from his father's home, where his son is buried. We see the makeshift bull near Gray's house, where Tanner used to play. We see his bike, photos of his hanging from the walls and hear Gray's distraught voice.

ACT 2

The second act opens with Gray saying "There are so many forms of bullying" and we see a range of bullying acts that exemplify the essence of bullying in both a narrow and wide sense. We see Gray taking part in a protest march as a response to pipeline workers who plowed a piece of land that is scared burial ground of the Lakota. A fragment taken from DemocracyNow! broadcast from September 3, which went viral on Facebook, introduces the scene of the march. A summary explanation of a possible oil contamination of the water is interlaced with the scene of the March, held together by Gray's narration. Gray says his brother has worked as a union man for a company that builds pipelines, including the Dakota Access Pipeline. Gray says he understands his brother needs for a remunerative job and doesn't blame him for taking part in building the pipeline. The second act continues with a visit Gray pays to his father, John Gray, whose stance on the pipeline is different. While he says he understand the need to protect the water, he justifies the need for pipelines. He says he understands "both sides," which has a deeper than usual meaning because his two children are effectively on two opposite sides of the pipeline controversy. John Grays appears to be more in favor of the construction, although he says he expects the construction company to furnish the pipeline with proper security measures.

ACT 3

The third act begins with more news footage showing raids to protesters' camps. Police in tactical gear enter teepees with weapons drawn, arresting peaceful protesters. "They try to push down the Indians again," Gray says. "It's still the government that tells us: 'You do as we say'." A scene in which Gray fixes a ranch fence, gives a glimpse of the rural life of South Dakota, in particular, in the context of the Indian reservation. His narration completes the visuals by explaining that context: lack of jobs and opportunities, nepotism, and a high poverty rate, which, Gray says, is conducive to bullying. The response to the death of one of the Gray family's horses, subtly introduces us to the values of the

Lakota people, who cherish animal life and nature in general. Gray points out that “Lakotas think about the future,” in their attention towards sustainability. We then see life inside the camp in North Dakota: volunteers feed people, kids playing basketball, children running, horses and people chanting. Gray explains how the anti-pipeline movement has been peaceful since its inception and it intends to remain so in the future. A procession of Native Meshika ends the movie.

6. Access

I was granted good access by the main character of my story. I also have a good relationship with the chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe,

7. Audience Outreach and Engagement

I’m currently working on a social media audience engagement campaign to promote the movie. I recently finished my final cut, and I made a one-minute social video: <https://vimeo.com/196631913>. I’m working on a trailer and a three to four short videos with snippets from the movie for promotion. I’m also in contact with the Native American Journalists Association, of which I’m a guest member, to plan a screening of my movie.

8. Project Status/Timeline

1. September 2016: Trip to North Dakota
2. October 2016: Trip to South Dakota, North Dakota
3. December 2016: Final cut. 15 minutes
4. January 2017: Proposal for funding
5. April 2017-June 2017: More shooting for final version of the movie (90 minutes)

9. Appropriateness (1-2 paragraphs)

My movie describes the controversy of the Dakota Access Pipeline without relying on sources that have been all over social media in the past months. I do not have environmental activists as my characters, or people with specific agendas. My main character is just a citizen of a reservation who puts himself on the frontline of the fight without serving any third-party interest, so I believe it makes him the right candidate for telling the story.