

APPLICATION FOR THE PROFESSIONAL WRITING MINOR

2018-2019

Chinmayee Balachandra

University of California, Santa Barbara

Application for the Professional Writing Minor (2018-2019)

Students interested in the Professional Writing Minor submit an application in the fall quarter of their senior year. Because the Minor has limited space and the application process is competitive, students should put together the application with care. The application has three components, which should be ordered as indicated below and presented together in a portfolio (e.g., a folder or binder) with a cover page. Sample portfolios are available in the Writing Program office. All submitted portfolios will be returned once the selection process is completed.

1. Prefatory Material

Please fill out and print the following four pages:

- I. Personal Information and Academic Preparation
- II. Writing History
- III. Statement of Goals for Pursuing the Professional Writing Minor
- IV. Track Choices and Explanation

Feel free to reformat these pages to suit the layout of your portfolio (e.g., different font, margins, etc.), but be sure to include all of the information requested.

2. Résumé

3. Writing Samples

Include samples of your previous writing from academic and professional contexts. Directors of all the tracks recommend that you provide a brief (1-2 paragraph) preface before each writing sample to discuss its relevance to your portfolio.

The writing samples should total no more than 15-20 pages (*not* including prefaces) and should consist of work selected from a range of projects created for both class and non-academic work and volunteer settings (i.e. jobs, internships, volunteer work, student organizations, etc.). Provide a preface that explains the context and purpose for each document you have selected. Portions or excerpts of larger projects and electronic documents such as websites or PowerPoint slides are acceptable. Academic essays are acceptable for all tracks **except Business Communication**.

Once you have submitted your application portfolio to the Writing Program Office, please email the director of your desired track of the Minor:

Business Communication: LeeAnne Kryder, kryder@writing.ucsb.edu

Multimedia Communication: Madeleine Sorapure, sorapure@writing.ucsb.edu

Professional Editing: Craig Cotich, cotich@writing.ucsb.edu

Science Communication: Janet Mizrahi, mizrahi@writing.ucsb.edu

Writing and Civic Engagement: Patrick McHugh, pmchugh@writing.ucsb.edu

I. Personal Information and Academic Preparation

Personal Information

Name: Chinmayee Balachandra

Local Address: 6575 Segovia Unit 11, Goleta, CA 93117

Phone Number: 916-717-9740

Umail: cbalachandra@ucsb.edu

Primary (non-umail) Email: chinmayee.b2015@gmail.com

Academic Preparation

Overall GPA: 3.65

Major: Biopsychology

Minor: applying to Professional Writing Minor

Upper-division writing courses* completed as pre-requisites for the Minor:

Course	Instructor	Grade
WRIT 105C	Kara Mae Brown	A
WRIT 107WC	Kara Mae Brown	A

*Please note that a course taken at another college/university needs to be approved as a pre-requisite by the director of the Minor track to which you're applying. Please submit a separate folder with the syllabus, assignments, and writing samples for this transfer course.

Upper-division writing courses in progress as pre-requisites for the Minor:

Course	Instructor
WRIT 105SW	Kenny Smith

Other Writing Program courses planned for winter and spring:

Course	Quarter
WRIT 109HP	Possibly Spring 2019

Total units (approximately) you plan to take during winter quarter? 16 Spring quarter? 16

II. Writing History

Briefly describe your history as a writer, including writing you have done in academic courses, on your own, and at work (300 word limit).

While I've been writing for a while, it wasn't until college that I discovered the intersection between public outreach and creative non-fiction, and my subsequent passion for it. I have taken a number of upper-division courses that require a great deal of writing, including a number of higher level sociology courses, Asian American studies courses, and classes within the writing program itself. I have also taken courses in Feminist Studies.

For the last two years, I have worked as a content creator and developer for SexInfoOnline.com (sponsored by the Soc. Department), which is a website dedicated to comprehensive and accessible information about love, sex, and relationships. In this organization (we call ourselves the SexPerts,) I have written countless articles about a wide variety of topics, ranging from HIV/AIDS and ovarian cancer to the facets of a healthy relationship. My experience working with SexInfoOnline has been extremely rewarding, and gave me my first taste of the importance of public outreach and increasing the accessibility of information. Additionally, during my term as the Chair of the National Women's Student Coalition with the United States Student Association, I drafted and sponsored an administrative resolution and agenda devoted to prioritizing reproductive health education on college campuses, which passed.

In Writ 105C (Creative Non-Fiction) with Professor Kara Mae, I learned extensively about the power of telling the truth. More specifically, telling *your* truth. This class actually encouraged me to look further into the writing program and opportunities in general, especially because up until this point, there wasn't much cross-over between my STEM/academic interests and writing. I submitted one of the 105C pieces to the CCS Writing Competition, and one first place for Most Excellent Writing in the Essay category. I also have taken WRIT 107WC, where I created a website, and am currently taking Writing for Science Communication.

III. Statement of Goals for Pursuing the Professional Writing Minor

Briefly describe your desire to join the Minor, as well as your goals for pursuing the Professional Writing Minor (300 word limit).

My desire to join the Minor stems from wanting to develop an academic career in writing. As a STEM major, I have had to actively seek out opportunities to write by consistently taking classes outside of major, looking for and submitting to competitions, finding upper division GEs with an emphasis on writing, and joining specific organizations. Writing is a huge part of my life, and after I learned about this Minor, I realized how fulfilling it would be to integrate writing not only in my personal life, but my academic career as well. Additionally, as someone deeply interested and committed to social justice and public outreach, I have found that civic engagement through the written word is deeply powerful.

Specifically, I am extremely passionate about public health and its intersections with social justice, including health disparities in minority populations, reproductive justice and education, and healthcare policy. I believe that there is a colossal amount of misinformation going around about these topics, and the antidotes are dedicated, well-informed writers armed with the tools to successfully disseminate information to the public. Because I feel that all the tracks I have selected are applicable to my goals, I hope to do the same work no matter where I am admitted. I wish to learn the ins and outs of professional communication, effective rhetorical strategies, and use them in an internship that shows me exactly how the aforementioned skills would function in the real world.

Writing will be a huge part of my professional career, and I think the web page for the Minor describes it best: "Students considering the minor should think of it as an apprenticeship in the world of professional writing, not simply as a set of courses in which someone will tell you what to do." This is an extremely unique experience, and if I have the privilege to take part, it will equip me with skills and confidence of the utmost caliber for the foreseeable future.

IV. Track Choices & Explanation

Desired Track of the Minor

First Choice: Writing and Civic Engagement

Second Choice: Science Writing

Third Choice: Multimedia Communication

Explanation of Track Choices

Briefly discuss your choice of tracks in terms of your short- or long-term goals (200 word limit).

One of my foremost academic and personal interests is social justice work and activism through public outreach. For this reason, I feel that the Writing and Civic Engagement track would best fit my needs. I believe that the burden falls on those who communicate news to the public to be credible, forthcoming, and accessible. This track will teach me about the most effective rhetorical strategies to advocate for issues that I believe in, and I feel that this skill will be invaluable in my career. This track has an incredibly diverse amount of applications, including those within policy, creative writing, social justice, journalism, and more. I hope to write op-eds and work in public health policy in the future, and I know that the tools I would gain within this track would be absolutely essential to my success.

My second track choice is Science Writing, because I am so interested in the intersections between science communication, public health, and medicine. Within this track, I would gain the invaluable skill of breaking down and analyzing scientific journals and work, and then reproducing it for the general public, while still maintaining the scientific integrity of the work.

My third track choice is Multimedia Communication because I feel that I can achieve all of the aforementioned goals within this track as well. Additionally, the track description states that “the projects in the Multimedia Communication track are flexibly designed to accommodate students from a variety of majors with diverse career plans.” To me, this means that this track would definitely be useful for me in regards to public health work and civic communication on a large scale.

Chinmayee H. Balachandra

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Education

- 8/15 – Present **University of California, Santa Barbara** Santa Barbara, CA
- B.S. Biopsychology- Pre Med (Expected C/O 2019)
 - Awards: 4 Times Deans' Honors (GPA of 3.75+), Psi Chi International Honors Society in Psychology

Experience

- 9/17 – Present **Board of Directors- United States Student Association** Washington, D.C.
- Chair of the National Women's Student Coalition*
- Board member at USSA, the country's oldest and largest national student-led organization
 - Elected to the position of National Women's Student Coalition by the Womens' Student caucus at the USSA National Congress in September
 - Currently working on a national campaign for more affordable college tuition, as well as a caucus-based goal to create a standardized, campus-wide reproductive health outreach program
- 8/17 – Present **META Lab- UC Santa Barbara** Santa Barbara, CA
- Undergraduate Researcher*
- Run experiments in Dr. Jonathan Schooler's lab, under the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at UCSB
 - Conduct neuroimaging fMRI studies, process results through MATLAB, utilize coding schemes to categorize and classify emotional responses to awe-inspiring stimuli
- 8/17 – Present **Partners in Wellness- UCSB Health Professions Association** Santa Barbara, CA
- Clinical Volunteer*
- Partners in Wellness is a unique clinical volunteer program at Cottage Hospital that was created in order to improve patients' wellness and overall hospital experience. There is a large emphasis on patient care and communication, and volunteers work closely with the hospital staff as valued members of the patient care team.
 - Was chosen for this selective program after a rigorous application and interview process, and now work with a shift group every week on the Infectious Disease, Neurology, Oncology, and Orthopedics hospital wings
- 8/16 – Present **Sociology of Human Sexuality (SOC 152A)- UC Santa Barbara** Santa Barbara, CA
- Teaching Assistant*
- Grading free-response midterms and finals for Sociology of Human Sexuality, one of the largest classes offered at UCSB
 - Hired for this position after receiving high scores in SOC152A and gaining admission into SOC 152B (a discussion-based honors seminar), and then finally chosen through a selective interview process
 - Develop lesson plans and run study sessions intended to help students gain a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of human sexuality, and thus be better prepared for exams.
- 2/16 – Present **SexInfo Online- UC Santa Barbara (sponsored by John and Janice Baldwin)** Santa Barbara, CA
- Writer and Content Developer*
- Brainstorm and develop articles relevant to sexual health, love, and relationships
 - Research and develop culturally sensitive answers to reader's questions, which often deal with topics such as sexual assault, pregnancy, reproductive rights, and more, and reach more than 200 countries worldwide.

Activities

- 8/17 – Present **I Am That Girl UCSB** Santa Barbara, CA
- Co-Founder and Chapter Co-President*
- Founded a local chapter of I AM THAT GIRL at UCSB, an international organization with over 200 chapters around the world. The goals of the organization are to lift girls up and create a safe and empowering space for women.
 - Initiate and organize meetings
- 6/16 – Present **UCSB Ravaani** Santa Barbara, CA
- Co-Captain*
- Co-Captain of UCSB's premier South Asian A capella team
 - Arrange and perform innovative mashups of Eastern and Western styles of vocal music
 - Selected to perform at various showcases and competitions across the nation

The following is an Administrative Resolution (AR) I wrote for the National Student's Congress, hosted by the United States Student Association (USSA). During this annual congress, we as a body decide which topics are affecting students the most, and need to be prioritized for the yearlong agenda. As the Chair of the National Women's Student Coalition, I felt that it was my duty to advocate for reproductive and LGBTQ sex education, in a comprehensive, standardized format. The AR was then voted on by the delegation, and passed. I have chosen to include this because I feel that this is an example of civic engagement and working within policy, especially considering the specific language and format that was needed to present this during Congress.

Administrative Resolution

Issue: Reproductive Justice Education and Outreach Program

Sponsors: Chinmayee Balachandra

Member/Region: National Women's Student Coalition Chair

Whereas, education around reproductive justice, particularly in regards to womxn's/LGBTQ sexual health, contraception options, and resources, is lacking in campuses across the country.

Whereas, there has been no reproductive justice campaign that is focused on education, and an important USSA goal is community outreach to implement long term change.

Whereas, many campuses already have trainings for various social justice concepts and issues that provide "certifications" for participants.

Whereas, establishing a training through USSA for reproductive justice-related education would allow for wide dissemination of such information for womxn/LGBTQ folx in communities across the country.

Be It Resolved, that USSA membership votes to establish a standardized training program in which topics such as womxn's and LGBTQ sexual health, contraception, resources, etc are extensively and inclusively covered. In this program, trainees will not only learn this material and how to effectively disseminate information to the community, they will also act as campus representatives for reproductive justice action efforts as well as provide safe spaces and accessible and up to date information with the communities who need it. Additionally, this training program will consistently evolve to ensure it always includes the most recent developments in medical science and reproductive justice as a whole.

Explanation: One of the biggest barriers to reproductive justice is a lack of comprehensive and inclusive education about its numerous facets, e.g., sex education, sexual health, contraception, LGBTQ sexual health, etc. The best way to combat this on college campuses is to offer a standardized and consistently up to date source of information through a trained representative, especially because these topics are sensitive and should be handled with compassion and care.

The following is my essay from Writ 105C, or Writing for Creative Non-Fiction. I took this class with Professor Kara Mae Brown. I chose to include this piece not only because it was recognized during the CCS Writing Competitions, but also, because it reflects on a topic that is extremely important to me. This piece is about the supposed link between creativity and mental illness, with an extremely personal story of my great-aunt woven throughout. While writing this piece, I had to do a great deal of research to present finding from both sides of the argument, and I feel that this style of creative non-fiction is an hugely useful way of making discourse accessible and interesting to the public. Discussions about mental health are certainly a huge part of public health outreach, and I believe that personal stories, much like this one, are powerful tools in dispelling stigma and opening up the conversation.

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A Veritable Tempest in the Brain

Author's notes: Some quick definitions- *Mysore Maharaja* (the king (*Maharaja*) of a very wealthy province (*Mysore*) in my home state in India), *Brahmin* (priestly caste, highest in the social hierarchy of Hindus), *Ajji* (grandmother)

...

Anyone who met Shaila never forgot her. With jet black hair, eyes as luminescent as the moon, and a ringing laugh, she was always the center of attention. Indeed, men loved to give her attention. Their wives loved to hate her for it. My mother, Shaila's niece, remembers her at family weddings, enrapturing her audience with grand tales of performing in the Mysore Maharaja's court, gesticulating wildly while describing the luxurious palace and the important people who arrived from far and wide just to hear her sing. She was a prolific author and musician, and throughout her career, published numerous complex treatises on Carnatic classical music and its historical significance. A polyglot, she translated many works into French, German, Italian, and Russian, and was well known to be an impressive member (more shockingly—a woman) of regional academic circles. If Shaila was the sun, everyone around her were eager, faithful planets, orbiting her with some futile hope of getting closer to her and her glory.

Of course, she came with her own idiosyncrasy. Just a few natural eccentricities to be expected from a woman of her caliber, everyone said. She possessed an extremely short temper, and was prone to powerful mood swings. Every so often, Shaila would fluctuate from inspired spells of creativity, in which she would spend night after night scribbling into music journals and practicing songs till her voice was raw, to intense bouts of despair, where she would sleep for days on end, only waking to forlornly sip on tea and lament her fading youth. Shaila was also given to extreme flights of fancy, her favorite being a dramatic narration of a dream where God blessed and thanked her for spreading His glory with her beautiful voice. When the house grew tired of her diatribes, she would go out to the bustling sidewalk and animatedly tell it to anyone who would listen. She was assuredly strange, and my mother has many memories of peering into her bedroom window as a little girl, only to be quickly shooed away because *Aunty isn't feeling well today, let her rest.*

Here is where the familial oral tradition becomes murky: every living family member seems to have a different opinion of the events that transpired shortly thereafter. This period in time, it seems, is when the sine curve of Shaila's sanity grew in amplitude and tightened in frequency. My aunt says that this is when Shaila began to dabble in the occult, worshipping and seeking favors from deities considered inauspicious by her fellow members of the *Brahmin* caste. My mother vaguely recalls hushed whispers as the women gathered in the kitchen—*"Did you see what she's wearing? She looks like the walking dead! What's wrong with her?!"* Shaila stopped combing her hair, started wearing torn, dirty *saris*, and frequently disappeared late into the night. She insisted that all of this was simply the result of enlightened self-realization—that she was finally free from all physical constraints. Rumors swirled through social circles of the small town—apparently someone had seen Shaila at the crematorium, smearing ashes all over

body. Another neighbor reported that he had spotted Shaila wandering in the nearby woods, wailing at the top of her lungs. No one knew what was happening to her.

As her symptoms reached their apex, Shaila fell deeper and deeper into confusion and paranoia: she refused to let anyone other than her sisters in the house, and spent most of her time fervently praying to a small homemade shrine, rocking back and forth on the hard granite until her knees bled. Ultimately, Shaila succumbed to her illness (now suspected to be bipolar II disorder). Tragically, she died chasing a hallucination of one of her gods down the stairs—in her excitement, she fell and hit her head, and suffered irreparable brain damage. Her legacy perished with her-- no longer was she a paragon of achievement and success—now, she was an embarrassment. The family swept her illness under the rug as best they could, and turned my great aunt's story into something of a cautionary tale. A warning about what happens when geniuses become arrogant in their craft, or about the fragility of creative, intelligent people.

I first became curious about Shaila Ajji after Robin Williams' death, around three years ago. The beloved comedian, often hailed as the "funniest man in the world," was found dead in his Marin County home on August 11, 2014, hanging from a nylon belt. Toxicology reports found antidepressants, caffeine, and Parkinson's drugs in his system, and the autopsy ruled his death as a suicide. My mom knowingly shook her head at the television screen and said "What else can you expect with these kinds of talents? Just look at my Shaila Aunty," and proceeded to tell me her story. I was struck by the sheer mysticism of the whole thing: it seemed that the general template for recounting my great-aunts' horrific demise was that *everyone* knew it was coming. Everyone was—and still is-- convinced that Shaila lost her mind as a price for all of her talents, i.e., the tortured genius. As more news about Williams' suicide rolled out, I began to notice a common theme in headlines and publications. Many blamed his death on his talent and

that he, like many other creative people, found the world too difficult to cope with. A number of historical figures seemed to fall into this category: Vincent Van Gogh, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, and Virginia Woolf, to name a few. Human beings are fixated on trying to explain why terrible things happen to people we love and admire; particularly if they are invisible terrors like mental illness and suicide. But is it really that simple? There are many geniuses who are completely neurotypical, just as there are plenty of averagely intelligent people with mental illness. Perhaps, this issue is far more complex than we thought.

...

This conundrum goes further back than most of us have imagined. In 370 BC, Plato coined the term *theia mania* (divine madness) and described it as a gift from the gods. Socrates proclaimed in *Phaedrus* that the "best things we have come from madness," and early Greek poets like Virgil regarded madness as something only the luckiest, most blessed people experienced—it could only be explained as "God whispering in their ears." Eastern texts, like the Hindu *Avadutha* and Tibetan scripture speak of "holy madmen" who have transcended the bounds of societal norms purely by the merit of their spiritual and intellectual advancement. In 6th century Christian tradition, Sant Simeon is said to have been mad with "divine ecstasy," once dragging the corpse of a dead dog through town, claiming it represented the spiritual baggage that holds humanity back in our quest for salvation. Another, more comical account, records Simeon throwing nuts at a church congregation, which he later explained as punishing hypocritical people who engaged in worldly acts of religiosity in place of true faith. Other Christian scriptures welcome "charismatic madness", often citing that Christ himself was considered mad in his day. In Islamic Sufism, "mad" holy men were respected as mystic

devotionalists, and followers strived to emulate the carefree manner in which they abandoned social conformity for God.

More recently, The Age of Genetics has allowed us to explore the very fundamental building blocks of what makes us human. Scientists are now actively searching our DNA for an explanation of the “mad genius,” with some very intriguing results. According to a paper published the Association for Psychological Science, a certain TIT mutation in the neuregulin 1 gene is related to psychosis and altered pre-frontal cortex activity. Curiously, subjects with the TIT mutation scored far higher on creative achievement and creative thinking cognitive tests.

In another comprehensive study by the Karolinksa Institute of Sweden, a survey of Swedish national registries (analyzed at a population size of greater than 200,000) showed that individuals with bipolar disorder are significantly overrepresented in artistic and creative professions (e.g., art, music, performing arts, film acting). Additionally, surveys of artists and musicians across European countries found that an average of 38 percent of them had sought treatment for depression, far higher than the standard norm.

However, some neuroscientists aren't so sure. Psychologist Judith Schlesinger, author of *The Insanity Hoax: Exposing the Myth of the Mad Genius*, says that the link has been entirely overblown, and that there is little evidence that “a poet or comedian is anymore disturbed than the mail carrier.” Other scientists in the community agree, stating that the methods used to measure “creativity” and “madness” are poorly defined and unstandardized, making the aforementioned studies fundamentally unreliable. For example, creativity is often measured through a simple task, like finding a novel way to solve a relatively simple problem. While this might test visuospatial creativity, it has little relevance to musical or kinesthetic creativity. Additionally, how does a scientist define “madness” accurately and professionally, without

further stigmatizing the mentally ill? Is it fair to call a high functioning person with major depressive disorder, or a schizophrenic successfully managing their illness with medication “clinically mad?” Or is madness just defined as deviation from the norm?

...

So yet again, the path forward is unclear. Maybe mental instability is the genetic rent that highly creative people owe for being blessed with talent. That idea has certainly pierced the public conscience for a long time. Perhaps it is our way of making the deaths of our beloved artists and creators somewhat easier on our collective psyche. I would argue, however, that most of these theories are missing a key aspect of our development: nurture. The nature vs. nurture debate has plagued evolutionary psychology since the establishment of the field, and although there are staunch adherents to either sides of the spectrum, most psychologists have come to the conclusion that the two are inextricably linked to shaping our personalities. In Shaila Ajji’s case, she spent much of her life pigeon-holed by her own talent. As a child, she rarely played outside or spent time with children her own age. Her mother (my great-great aunt) was an accomplished singer, and ruled Shaila’s childhood with an iron fist. She would severely punish her for any mistake while practicing, to the point where according to Shaila’s sister, the “poor girl feared failure as if it was death.” Once, after her daughter received second place in a regional singing competition, Shaila Ajji was punished with cold, stale leftovers and the silent treatment for a month afterwards. Because of this, perhaps, Shaila Ajji was incredibly affectionate to her nieces and nephews, often saying “*Nange matru sukha irlilla, adike ninage korthini.*” This translates from my mother tongue, Kannada, to “My mother never wanted my love, so I’ll just give you all of mine.”

As she rose through the ranks of academia, she faced a barrage of sexism, criticism, and condescension. She never married, and as a single, well-educated woman from a high-caste family, she faced a great deal of scrutiny. In Indian culture, there is an incredibly specific list of achievements a woman must trudge through to be considered an ideal Hindu woman. Shaila Ajji paved her own way, and paid the price. Like many prodigious people, she was constantly criticized, judged, and ultimately, abandoned. Yes, her art was admired and adored, but too often, the person creating the art was far less of a priority to those consuming it. Her experience wasn't very far off from the stories of many artists that dominate our headlines. Kurt Cobain spent much of his teenage life defending his hapless mother from an abusive boyfriend. Vincent Van Gogh spent his formative years in a boarding school, and described his childhood as "austere, cold, and unhappy." Sylvia Plath lost her father as an eight-year-old, and records that as the first moment of a "profound loss of faith." The list is endless. Trying early circumstances, coupled with the harsh and unrelenting scrutiny of fame, seem to be as potent of a catalyst for mental health issues as any genetic predisposition. Is it possible that by touting the popular enigma of the "mad genius," we are actually doing a grave disservice to the very artists whose work we hold so dear? Perhaps, we are telling them that their worth is purely defined by the art they produce from their pain. Shaila Ajji deserved better. Every poet, writer, musician, artist, or performer who ever succumbed to the very pain their consumers exploited, deserved better. We deserve better.

Changing our narrative about the intersections between creativity, mental health, and our environment might be the first step in mending the damage our society has inflicted on artists. Deconstructing our notions about how to engage in, consume, and foster creativity might uplift our communities in more ways than we could ever dream of.

This piece is an article from my work in SexInfoOnline. I chose this piece about HIV/AIDS specifically because I feel that it is a good example of my skills as a science communicator, as well as being able to work through the constraints of a website. This piece took an extremely long time to write, as the research on this topic is extensive and ever-evolving. Also, I feel that this piece expresses the importance of civic engagement, as it seeks to dispel misinformation about a topic that was and continues to be heavily political in nature.



HIV/AIDS

HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, is a sexually transmitted virus that if left untreated can progress to AIDS. AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, and is the symptomatic part of this infection. Because HIV is a "retrovirus," each virus is encased in a protein shell, which allows them to attack and alter cells from the host cell's DNA. Once HIV is in the blood stream, it targets specific cells that are very important to the immune system's ability to fight off infection, such as CD4 cells (T cells).

HIV then hijacks these cells and uses them to create HIV-positive DNA. Over time, so many of these cells are attacked that an infected person is unable to fight off infections and disease. This depressed immune system is the direct precursor to AIDS, during which opportunistic infections that would not normally be life threatening become extremely dangerous, and often cause HIV/AIDS-related deaths.¹

Where Did HIV Come From?

Currently, a group of scientists have identified a species of chimpanzee in Central Africa as the source of HIV infection in humans. They believe that the simian immunodeficiency virus, or SIV, was the chimpanzee version of the virus, and was likely transmitted to humans and mutated into HIV when people hunted these chimpanzees for meat subsequently coming into contact with the infected blood. Further studies report that HIV may have jumped from apes to humans as far back as the 1800s. Over time, the virus slowly spread across the rest of the world, reaching parts of North America during the mid-to-late 1970s.¹

Transmission/Pathology of HIV and AIDS

HIV can be present in blood, semen, vaginal fluids, saliva, urine, and breast milk although the concentration and likelihood of contraction varies for each of these bodily fluids. The virus is most commonly transmitted through the exchange of blood and semen, since these two fluids contain the highest concentration of the virus. Once the virus infects the body, HIV attacks the CD4 lymphocytes, or T-cells, in the blood. T-cells are central to the

This stage is the final and most severe stage of HIV infection, and it is usually diagnosed when the CD4 cell count drops below 200 cells/mm. At this point, the immune system is badly damaged, leaving an infected person dangerously susceptible to an increasing number of severe medical conditions, known as opportunistic illnesses. Without treatment, people with AIDS generally survive about 3 years. Symptoms of AIDS include chills, night sweats, rapid weight loss, sores of the mouth/anus/genitals, fatigue, dark blotches under the skin/inside mouth, and pneumonia.³

Testing

There are a few types of common HIV tests. The most common is the antibody screening test, or immunoassay. This tests for the presence of antibodies that your body automatically makes to protect against HIV once infected. This test can be conducted in a lab or as a rapid test at the location where a person is being tested. The test is generally performed on blood, as the levels of antibodies would be higher in blood than any other bodily fluid. Another method of testing detects both antibodies and antigens. An antigen is a part of the virus itself. These antigen identification tests are useful for early detection, as they can find HIV as early as three weeks after a person has been exposed. This type of testing is meant only for blood sampling, and is not available at all testing sites. A third type of test is the



rapid test, which is used for screening and produces results in 30 minutes or less. It is important to conduct a follow up test, because if the rapid test is administered before antibodies can be found in the blood, it may give a false-negative, (or HIV-negative) result. Finally, follow up

diagnostic testing is performed if any preliminary tests are positive. This test consists of the antibody differentiation test, which distinguishes which strain of HIV is present, as well as the Western blot or indirect immunofluorescence assay, which both detect antibodies.

There are also two home HIV tests currently on the market: the Home Access HIV-1 Test System and the OraQuick In-home HIV test. The Home Access HIV-1 Test System is a home collection kit where a person collects a blood sample by pricking their finger, and then send it to a licensed laboratory. Anonymous, accurate results may be available by as soon as the next business day. The manufacturer also provides follow up tests and confidential counseling/referrals for treatment if the test is positive. The OraQuick In-Home HIV Test involves swabbing the inside of your mouth for oral fluid, and using an in-home kit to test it. Results are generally available in 20 minutes, but this should be used

This piece is an excerpt from my website that I created in WRIT 107WC, with Professor Kara Mae Brown. My website was called tvispolitical.wordpress.com, and it was dedicated to thorough reviews of the sociopolitical implications of some of today's most popular TV shows. In each post, I did a great deal of research about the shows and the particular aspects of politics that they were commenting on. This is also in the format of an op-ed. I chose to include this because I think it demonstrates my ability to use multimedia communication, creative writing, and advocate for an issue all through the very accessible medium of a blog.

television is political.

Comedy



On The Importance of Everyday Representation and Nuance: Brooklyn 99

I first heard about Brooklyn 99 on Twitter. A clip from the show had gone viral, garnering nearly 10,000 retweets and 50,000 favorites. It was captioned “why I love Brooklyn 99,” and showed the opening bit from Season 5, Episode 16×17. The lead character Detective Jake Peralta, played hilariously by SNL star Andy Samberg, is assisting a witness in identifying a criminal from a lineup of potential suspects. The victim states that although she didn’t see the criminal, she can distinctly remember him singing “I Want It That Way,” by Backstreet Boys. Detective Peralta, an ardent fan of the group, immediately commands each man in the line-up to sing a lyric from the song.

The confused men acquiesce, and the scene quickly devolves into a boy band-esque serenade with Jake enthusiastically scream-singing along. Eventually, the fifth man sings his line passionately, and Jake excitedly compliments him saying, “I got chills.



Literal chills.” Immediately, the horrified witness exclaims “Number 5! It’s him! Number 5 killed my brother!,” and a sheepish Jake responds with “Oh my god, I forgot about that.”

As soon as I saw that scene, I knew this show was something special. To me, that video represented the perfect blend of pop culture, dark humor, and comedic timing. Consequently, I began watching the show, and as expected, I was hooked.

As I watched the show, however, I began to realize that Brooklyn 99’s strength did not rely solely on comedy, but rather on the vast diversity of experience and identity represented on the show. Andre Braugher plays the no-nonsense captain of the 99th precinct, Detective Raymond Holt. The character is extremely steadfast, honorable, and serious, to the point where after much effort to get the captain to laugh, the precinct discovers that his genuine reaction to anything he finds funny is “That is the funniest thing I’ve ever heard,” said with a completely straight face. More importantly, however, Captain Holt is a gay, black man.



His identities are often mentioned, with his equally serious husband, Kevin, a university professor played by Marc Evan Jackson, frequently appearing on the show. Characters on the show often discuss the difficulties Captain Holt has faced to get to his current position, unabashedly highlighting the rampant homophobia and racism that plagues the NYPD.

The show also doesn’t shy away from addressing the current climate around police, with one poignant episode about Captain Holt and Sergeant Terry Jefford’s (played by Terry Crews) conflict reporting a fellow officer for inappropriate conduct. In “Moo Moo” (Season 4, Episode 16,) an off-duty Detective Terry is stopped in his own neighborhood while searching for his daughter’s lost toy. The white cop who stops him is extremely aggressive, and the confrontation ends with Terry at gunpoint, about to be handcuffed. Throughout the interaction, Terry repeatedly assures the cop that he’s NYPD, and that he doesn’t have his badge because he’s off duty. It is painfully apparent that the cop doesn’t believe that Terry belongs in the neighborhood, and Terry’s shaking, raised hands are chillingly indicative of his helplessness in the situation.

This scene is particularly powerful because it evokes imagery that is all too familiar in today’s climate: one of the most significant symbols from the Black Lives Matter movement is the phrase, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot.” Protesters often chant the words while marching and holding their hands in the air, in order to make a statement against the killings of unarmed black people by police departments across the country. In Brooklyn 99, Sergeant Terry plays a lovable, easily worried, yogurt-loving father of two, who wants nothing more than to help his community and be a good father to his children. He is portrayed as the ideal role model for his friends, family, and community. However, as we are jarringly reminded, none of this matters to the cop who only sees Lieutenant Terry as nothing more than threatening stereotype.

This struck me as an incredibly important moment because it addresses the common myth of respectability politics. After police shootings, the ensuing flurry of viral hashtags is often accompanied by a curious phenomenon: posts decrying how the victim was a “straight A,



honors student," or a "talented athlete with a bright future." People lament that such an upstanding student/citizen "didn't deserve this." That begs the question however, does someone with a criminal record "deserve it?" Do previous run-ins with the law, or perhaps traces of marijuana in a house, or Facebook profile pictures with sagging pants and gold grillz justify police brutality? If so, how can our collective moral compass be truly just, if it conditionally grants

sympathy only to those who were "respectable enough" at the time of their death?

The danger of respectability politics is that it protects no one; as illustrated in Brooklyn 99, it doesn't matter that Terry is a fine, upstanding cop. Even on his own street, with his sergeants' badge a block away in his house, Terry still has to answer for his Blackness. Terry survives this encounter, but in the real world, so many have not been so lucky. They have had to answer with their life. This scene makes this point unabashedly, and it stuck out as one of the strongest moments in the show thus far.

Once the officer looks Terry up in the system, he realizes his mistake, but the damage is already done. Later on in the episode, Terry meets with the officer for dinner, expecting an apology. Of course, the cop is extremely regretful, but with a twist: he says "If I had known you were a cop, I never would have treated you that way." Terry asks if this means that he's only sorry for not knowing Terry was a cop, and the cop incredulously replies "uhh.. yeah." After further questioning, the cop states that Terry doesn't really "look like he belongs in that neighborhood," so he was "just doing his job." I remember feeling startled by the cops' blatant admission of his own prejudice, but then, I checked myself. What about this was so surprising? Was I more shocked that the cop was racist, or simply that he was forthright about it? Upon some self-reflection, I realized it was the latter.

In the era of covert racism, I find that I am far better equipped to handle micro-aggressions and underhanded comments, like the woman in Taco Bell telling me she thought I was beautiful and "exotic," and that I speak "such excellent English" for a "foreigner." Not only can I handle these moments, I expect them. Unfortunately, this has left me sadly unprepared for more overt, albeit less common instances– the day my boyfriend and I were kicked out of a 7/11 in Encinitas for speaking in our native language comes to mind (apparently, we made the cashier uncomfortable.) Sometimes, I blissfully forget that this still happens to people everyday. Perhaps some of that could be attributed to my "model-minority status."

According to the model minority myth, East and South Asians in America are often perceived as highly intelligent and successful. The intelligence is attributed to genetics, and thus, no one feels the need to debate Asian-Americans' right to the American dream. Unfortunately, this does not apply to public perception of Black and Latinx people, and many students and professionals from these groups are forced to defend their right to exist in academic and professional spaces. Consequently, Black and Latinx may face more racism and discrimination. It follows that they would experience more overt racism as well. Brooklyn 99 guided me down this train of thought, and it marked the second time in one episode that this show had made me really think critically about race.

My favorite part of the episode however, is when Captain Holt steps in and refuses to allow Terry to file a complaint. Terry is left hurt and confused, and the viewer no less. It didn't make sense to me at all: why would Captain Holt, a Black, gay NYPD Captain refuse to allow a fellow Black officer to hold someone accountable? The audience remains in the dark until Terry confronts Captain Holt about his decision. Holt falters, and then explains his heartbreaking reasoning: from personal experience, he knows that if Terry submits this complaint, the department could blacklist him, and consistently pass him up for promotions and other opportunities. He explains that as minorities in the predominantly white, straight and male NYPD, he and Terry are always being surveilled. If they speak out or "cause trouble" of any kind, they will be punished for it. However, he realizes that Terry isn't obligated to feel the same way he does, and that it may empower him to confront this injustice. Acknowledging this, he helps Terry submit the complaint.



This scene demonstrates true nuance, which many discussions about race often lack. Societal inequities are often depicted as black and white, with racism often being depicted as an ill of the past, and one that only persists in the outskirts of the American consciousness. Also, response to discrimination is often depicted one-sidedly, with MLK being cited as the only acceptable response to racism (it's worth mentioning that during his peak popularity, the FBI wiretapped Dr. King's phone and repeatedly sent him hostile cease-and-desist letters.) Even now, we can see this concept of "respectability" rear its head in the response to Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the national anthem in protest of police brutality.

Society expects marginalized groups, even while responding to injustice, to act within a pre-approved template. Brooklyn 99 stands against that. The show allows complexity and depth within two characters that share the similar identities, thus subverting the all-too-common generalization that marginalized people from the same group must share the same experience. Ultimately, the show uplifts Captain Holt and Sergeant Terry's humanity by allowing them to be different. This, I think, is the power of Brooklyn 99. It doesn't just have a diverse cast of characters for the sake of fulfilling some quota, but rather, with the intention of telling diverse stories. The show reminds us to critically examine our perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality. It reminds us that these identities don't define people, but are facets to their entire, complex humanity. Most importantly, Brooklyn 99 reminds us to listen to each others' stories, and learn everything we can.

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