

## English and psychiatry

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The writers who capture the minds and ears of the psychiatric community have a variety of motivations. They could want you to endorse a drug, a diagnosis, or a theory. In their efforts to persuade you, they will use rhetorical strategies. Rhetorical strategies are methods of writing to persuade a reader of an over-arching conclusion. With training in these strategies, it becomes easier for members of all disciplines, including psychiatry, to understand what methods of persuasion are being used on them.

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was released in May at the American Psychiatric Association's Annual Meeting in San Francisco. The text's unveiling was not only highly anticipated, but highly contentious. A significant amount of discussion surrounding the momentous occasion occurred, discussion which continues today. Examining this discussion is the key to understanding the state of the psychiatric community. This discussion is what brought me, an English major and junior at Elon University, to the Annual Meeting.

I went to the conference to present a poster at a session for young investigators. My poster covered my research on the discourse of the psychiatric community. Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR), my concentration area in the English major, has a long history of exploring complex communities like social work and engineering. Like a psychiatrist researches their patients' behaviors and thoughts to

understand what help they need, a rhetorician researches documents to understand how communities work and propagate. This history gave me the perfect opportunity to combine my interests in psychiatry and rhetoric by examining the psychiatric community and its impact on the development of the new DSM. More specifically, my research used rhetorical techniques to analyze the forwards of the DSMs and the white papers that contributed to the Generalized Anxiety Disorder section in the DSM-5.

At the conference, I received a number of questions about my findings and a few about my methods, but the most interesting conversations were with members of the community who wanted to know how English relates to Psychiatry. They asked how an English major became interested in Psychiatry, why I chose to apply my methods to their community. The humanities and the sciences seemed like two different worlds that people didn't seem ready to mix. I was surprised because the rhetorical studies community is one of the more inclusive communities. However, there is a contention between the scientific and rhetorical communities about what really constitutes knowledge. The scientific community favors an objective view while rhetoric promotes a social constructivist mentality.

I'll admit there are differences between the two disciplines. We have different methods, different texts, different styles of citation. Yet, life rarely hands us two entirely different worlds, and in the Venn diagram of English and Psychiatry, there are similarities. We both utilize qualitative, and, yes, quantitative data. For example, in my research I use charts of length and instances of rhetorical strategies to analyze documents. We both understand the importance of words and their meanings, for

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instance, each word is carefully chosen in the editing of the DSM-5. We both exist in professions in which there are no absolutes, neither can be considered to have an infallible answer for everything.

However, not only are there similarities to consider, but I submit that rhetorical methodology can be used to inform members of the psychiatric community. Textual analysis can be used to analyze psychiatric texts, including diagnosis manuals, white papers, and journal articles to find the purpose of the writer, context of the document, and much more. For instance, when reading a white paper arguing for a change in a specific diagnosis, it is helpful to know how to look for motivations and strategies used to persuade.

In conclusion, I believe it is important that psychiatrists consider the rhetorical strategies used in the texts they write and read. Every word in a psychiatric text carries meaning and can influence a life.