

**Post-Degree Stress Disorder**  
(or why psychology graduates should never be used in research)

**I. Askew** Good morning, you must be Diana Ranged. I'm Ian Askew and I'd like to thank you for helping me with my research on *The Emotional Well-Being of New and Older Graduates*. Now to start generally, would you say that your degree in ... what was it now ... psychology ... has affected you as a person?

**D. Ranged** No, I always sit like this. Oh I see what you mean. Well, I try not to think about it because it was a stressful time. The flashbacks are less frequent now, though, and the recurring nightmare is beginning to lessen in intensity. Actually, I was wondering what design you've chosen for your research. Isn't it a bit dodgy gathering data from psychology graduates who are familiar with all sorts of questioning procedures?

**I. Askew** We can discuss that at the end, if you're interested.

**D. Ranged** Ah, you mean debriefing. Great – I've missed all the debriefing that went on when I was a student.

**I. Askew** Ye-es. Now you mentioned flashbacks. Could you give me more details?

**D. Ranged** Well, the main scene seems to be triggered by all sorts of everyday activities. For instance, I'll be standing quite innocently in the post office queue trying to ascertain if the people waiting constitute a normally distributed random sample, as one does, when it all comes back to me – the tedium, the headaches, the nausea, the learned helplessness, the total mind-numbing hell of ... of...

**I. Askew** Of...?

**D. Ranged** Of the statistics lectures! I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to scream. Actually, I was wondering if the title of your research is rather ambiguous and ageist. I mean, does the *Older* refer to chronological age – in which case it's an unacceptable manifestation of ageism – or does it refer to the time elapsed since graduating?

**I. Askew** The latter, as a matter of fact, although I really don't see...

**D. Ranged** Well in that case, perhaps you should use some other description, such as *Nearly New* – ha! Whatever you do decide to use, though, I take it you have clearly defined categories of time elapsed, to enhance statistical analysis? God, I hate that word.

**I. Askew** Analysis?

**D. Ranged** Statistical. Perhaps you're going to use qualitative analysis, though. I did a bit of course work on qualitative analysis. I never did find out exactly what it was.

**I. Askew** To get back to the point – you mentioned a recurring nightmare. Would you like to tell me briefly what it entails?

**D. Ranged** No.

**I. Askew** No?

**D. Ranged** Yes, no.

**I. Askew** Ah. Well now, a complete year after having graduated, would you say that your life has reverted to normal, in terms of emotional stability?

**D. Ranged** It would depend how you define emotional stability, of course, with all its inherent subjective complexity. Also, I'm afraid I don't subscribe to the concept of normality – not in the way it's normally conceived, anyway. I mean, there are fundamental judgemental issues inherent in any consideration of the word *normality*. For instance, any deviation from normal seems to imply abnormal with all its negative connotations, although the so-called abnormality might just be a grossly misinterpreted refusal to conform.

**I. Askew** I see. Well, what about your academic horizons? Have they reverted to a more ... usual ... state of affairs? Do you still read psychological journals, textbooks, papers, reports? Or do you read more mainstream literature, like ... what are they called now ... oh yes, novels.

**D. Ranged** I'm a bit concerned about this particular post-degree aspect, to be honest. I thought I'd got over my compulsion for browsing through *Psychology Yesterday, Today and Forever* and the like, but only last week I found myself entering the university library for no other reason than to see the latest in *The Scandinavian Journal of Psychosexual Cognitive Developmental Disorders*.

**I. Askew** That disturbs you, does it?

**D. Ranged** Wouldn't it disturb you?

**I. Askew** Do you often answer a question with a question?

**D. Ranged** You mean like you just did?

**I. Askew** OK, let's move on to confidence. Would you say you have more confidence since having graduated?

**D. Ranged** Mmm. I'm not entirely confident I could give you a truthful answer on that. It really depends on how you define confidence, of course. Socially, intellectually, emotionally ... is there such a thing as emotional confidence?

**I. Askew** I feel there should be, but I'm not sure. Shall we take social confidence?

**D. Ranged** I'd rather not. The counselling has helped, but I still feel rather vulnerable.

**I. Askew** Let's talk intellectually, then.

**D. Ranged** I thought we were.

**I. Askew** I mean intellectual confidence. Has yours improved since the degree?

**D. Ranged** It really depends on how you define intellectual, of course. The notion of measuring intelligence seems rather a stupid idea to me. I mean, has anyone agreed yet what intelligence actually is? I remember I did a lot on intelligence for the degree, but at the end, I felt I just wasn't intelligent enough to have grasped the ... the...

**I. Askew** The underlying conceptual framework?

**D. Ranged** The fundamentals.

**I. Askew** Well, how about other aspects of your post-degree situation, then? Would you say you had become more analytical?

**D. Ranged** I haven't really thought about it. Although when I do try to analyse the situation, I'm very much aware of all the confounding variables. It feels as if they're out to get me everywhere. Waiting all the time ... lurking ... skulking ... loitering ... purposely intent on confounding me in all their ... variability. It's horrible!

**I. Askew** Would you like a glass of water?

**D. Ranged** No thank you, I've got a bottle of vodka in my bag.

**I. Askew** Could I have a swig? No, it was a joke! Er ... let's see, what is there left to ask you? Ah, language. Would you say you now have greater powers of articulation?

**D. Ranged** What? Well, it would depend on how you define articulation, of course.

**I. Askew** Oh, never mind. To be honest, Diana, I'm not sure there's much point ... I mean, much mileage in continuing along these lines. Perhaps you would fill in one of these questionnaires? No ... best not!

**D. Ranged** Are you all right?

**I. Askew** It depends on how you define all right, of course. Actually, I do feel rather ill. Well, thank you for your time, you've been most unhelpful!

This article was rejected by *The Psychologist* in April 1998!