

## **A Subjective Assessment of the Oral Doctoral Defense Process in Psychology: I Don't Feel Like Going Into It, If You Want to Know the Truth**

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If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is what my independent variables were, and what I was measuring, and what sort of covariates and all I used during the analyses, and all that Campbell and Stanley kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, the design wasn't all that interesting, and in the second place, once you've spent two years on something like that you sorta want to get it all behind you and think about something else. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me last year about the time I was defending my dissertation and getting my lousy Ph.D.

Where I want to start telling is the day I had scheduled my oral defense. We're supposed to show that after spending about a hundred years researching and collecting data and analyzing and writing it up and all, that we can remember enough about it to spend two hours talking about it in some little room that smells like someone just took a leak in the corner. Personally I wasn't too crazy about the idea on account of it seemed like a waste of everyone's time. Especially mine, when what I really needed to do was to pad my vita and try to find some sort of goddam job. I was supposed to fly out for a job talk the next day and all and sort of had that on the old brain. But this oral defense business was some sort of Graduate College rule naturally, just like it's some sort of rule that the goddam margins on the document have to be exactly one and three quarters inches or something crazy like that. Oral defense. Strictly for the birds.

Anyway, so we're all in this lousy little room, everyone sitting around the table looking solemn as hell. My main advisor was there smirking a lot and making a hell of an effort to say a lot of witty things to break the mood, but it wasn't working. There were four other people I knew from my department, and then there was one guy I'd never seen before, this guy who the Graduate College assigned to my committee for the defense. He introduced himself as Professor so-and-so from the Economics department, and told us he wasn't feeling all that well and maybe had the grippe. That didn't make me feel too gorgeous myself, especially since he'd just spent about five minutes shaking my hand. He smelled like Vicks Nose Drops and had this very damp looking handkerchief sticking out of the pocket of this very sad, ratty old jacket that he was probably born in or something. I wasn't too crazy about being in the same room with him if you want to know the truth.

Then to make it worse he started telling me all about Economics and how a good psychologist can really make a contribution if they have the right background.

He kept telling me about this psychologist he knew and the pot of dough he'd made in Economics. The thing is, all the research I'd been doing wasn't anything like what he was talking about. He was some little cheerer upper. Goddam money. It always ends up making you blue as hell.

So I started talking about my dissertation. I had sort of prepared what I wanted to say, but it turned out I was having a lot of trouble concentrating. For one thing, I was hungry as hell. I had thought about maybe bringing a box of doughnuts into the defense with me, and passing it around, but I wasn't in the mood. You gotta be in the right mood for those things. And besides, I wasn't too crazy about the idea of explaining a big-ass factorial design with my mouth full of chocolate crullers or something. Another reason I couldn't really concentrate was the reason I already told you, that after two years of work I sorta wanted to forget about this project and move on. I'm always thinking of about a million ideas for other experiments when I should be finishing up the ones I'm working on. It's a lousy habit, I admit it, but I always do that.

But I think the biggest reason I couldn't really concentrate on the defense was that I was thinking about that goddam job interview. I was pretty worried about the job market, all of a sudden. I had about a million applications out, but I kept thinking that maybe I shoulda gone into English grad school after all. But I know I would have regretted that. I would have had to put up with a lot of very tall round-shouldered guys talking in these very bored voices about Proust or Joyce or somebody to prove what intellectual bastards they are. What phonies. People were always giving me advice. People were always telling me to look into industry. One guy kept telling me that the big money was in marketing. But I just couldn't see me in a marketing position. All these phony lean-jawed guys named David cleaning their fingernails and chewing the fat with a lot of phony girls named Linda or Marcia or something. Boy, you couldn't pay me to take a marketing job. I'm not kidding. Another thing I didn't want was to have to teach about a dozen courses at some tiny little college in the middle of nowhere and get no research done. Not that I expected to be snapped up by goddam Berkeley or anything, for Chrissakes. I wasn't all that excited about the job possibilities if you want to know the truth. About the only good advice I think I received was from someone who told me that if I knew my statistics there'd always be jobs for me. If you're a good statistician, she said, people will be calling you up night and day. Night and day — that killed me.

Anyway, I finally finished presenting my dissertation and then my committee started firing questions at me. Especially the guy from Economics. The way he'd do it was, he'd start off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show me what a regular guy he was. Then he'd sort of blow his nose for a while and then state the question really slowly, punctuated with a lot of sniffs and coughs. It was pretty sickening in a way. It took him about twenty minutes just to ask a question. And when he'd finally finish phrasing his question he'd give me this icy look, like he'd just beaten hell out of me in Ping-Pong or something. I kept thinking about the job market and it was making me feel all sad and lonesome. Also I had this idea for an experiment on the old brain and what I really wanted to do was get the hell out of there and work on it.

So finally there were no more questions and they asked me to step outside. I wanted to check something in this one article for that idea I had, so like a madman I ran down the stairs to my office. Some stupid bastard had thrown peanut shells all over the goddam steps and I damn near broke my crazy neck. And just about the time I got back to the conference room my advisor and everyone else came out and started congratulating me and shaking my hand and calling me "Doc-

tor Caulfield" and all. Very big deal. The Economics guy was blowing his nose all over the place and slapping me on the back like I'd just won the goddam Olympics or something. It was kind of nauseating, if you want to know the truth. He told me not to worry about getting a job, that something would turn up. "After all," he said, "you've got a Ph.D." Witty bastard. All I meet are witty bastards.

We were all going to go off and get a drink, but the Economics guy started looking at his watch a lot and decided he couldn't make it. He apologized like a madman, but I wasn't too goddam sorry to see him go. He took off down the hall. He was half way out the door when he turned around and yelled something at me, but I couldn't exactly hear him. I'm pretty sure he yelled "Good luck!" at me. I hope not. I hope to hell not. I'd never yell "Good luck!" at anybody, especially a recent psychology Ph.D. It sounds terrible, when you think about it.

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