

Stockholm syndrome essay



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August 23, 1973 Kreditbanken in Stockholm, Sweden a two armed robbers escorted four bank employees into the vault, where they remained for five days. The space was very limited, and supplies even more so, the six of them were in near constant contact with one another and no one else. The robbers were careful to put in place a few methods to keep possibility of rescue relatively low. Dynamite and snare traps attached to the victims was the preferred preventative measure to stop or slow police progress, if the robbers were attacked the hostages would die and rescue efforts were for nothing.

The police brought the situation to an end and after the hostages were freed they defended the armed robbers, not out of threat of violence, instead because they had formed a bond and saw the robbers in a positive way. Two of the previous hostages set up a fund in order to help pay for defense fees in court to defend the captors. Although not deeply documented a form of the syndrome may have afflicted slaves after being freed under the Emancipation Proclamation.

The master presided over the land the slaves were allotted to, no outside contact may be made, escape often had penalty of death, and all facilities were provided by the master. Some slaves were against the idea of leaving slavery, thereby entranced by the syndrome. (Krasnec) Stockholm syndrome is a term used to describe when a kidnap or barricade victim sees their captor in a positive way and forms a bond with them. The captor is no longer a wolf among sheep they are identified as another human being, one who controls life and death.

Simply waving a gun around and shouting orders does not trigger the response of actual compliance, initially it is simply fear for life. While much is still unknown about the syndrome it has been theorized that there are four contributing factors to the development of the syndrome “ perceived threat to one’s physical or psychological survival at the hands of an abuser(s), perceived small kindnesses from the abuser to the victim, isolation from perspectives other than those of the abuser, and the inescapability of the situation” (Cantor 379).

In the experience of a thirty year veteran negotiator Captor and victim relationship should be strangers for Stockholm syndrome usually sets in exclusively when the first impressions are violence and benevolence. Some think of this effect as a branch of the defense mechanisms maintaining life by pleasing the will of the captor, so long as the captor is happy they will not cause more harm. The brain is basically telling a lie to the rest of your existence saying that these people can be trusted, just behave yourself and everything will be okay.

Sometimes the cognitive ability of the victim diminishes and they are unable to think for themselves, the captor has near total control of the victim, this can be caused from the victim noticing the captors’ dislike for freethinking, a wandering mind may find a way out of the situation. Long term barricades and kidnapping means the captor needs to fulfill some needs of the victim such as; food, water, use of lavatory, and potentially allowing medical attention. When these needs are met without violence but still feeling that the victim may be killed at any point, the captor portrays a pseudo father or mother figure.

The victim becomes entirely dependent upon them for survival and feels as though they are being protected from danger, when the captor refrains from violence it is looked upon as an act of kindness. The bond is usually strong to the point whereas the victims express sympathy towards the fate of the captors after the situation is resolved they are often quoted as saying things like ‘ I feel bad they were gunned down like that’ but the extent to which Stockholm syndrome may be stretched is far beyond this.

In 1974 Patty Hearst was kidnapped by a paramilitary group Symbionese Liberation Army. The leader intended to carry on the work of Charles Manson by calling for a rise of the underprivileged through use of violence to those in the status of money and wealth. The leader decided that making her into a member would serve as a powerful message towards his cause; in order to shape her into a revolutionary he subjected her to harsh psychological methods.

Patty was blindfolded for two months and kept in a closet isolated from everything; physically and sexually abused, she was often told she may die, and forced to record hateful messages about her family; which were in turn sent to her family. She joined the group and was famously photographed holding an assault rifle in front of the group’s symbol. Patty Hearst knew the only to survive was to join them and become a good little soldier for them, to please the captor and allow her continued existence.

Stockholm syndrome is a potentially useful tool for negotiators if they know how to assist in its development. However it is a somewhat double edged blade, there are three parts to the syndrome; the victim looking upon the

captor with affection, the victim looking towards rescuers as evildoers, and the captor looking at the victim as a person. The part of the bond negotiators are interested in is the captors realizing their hostages are real people with responsibilities and families. Humanizing these poker chips makes it harder for the captor to actually pull the trigger and kill them.

The use in the syndrome is raising the life expectancy of the individuals caught in the middle of a horrible situation. More often than not people cannot handle becoming a hostage, it does not quite sit right in their gut, as such these people who are not trained in any form other than television may attempt to perform a highly intricate scissor kick, slip, fall, and catch a bullet in the face. Negotiators ask the captors questions about themselves but also slip in a few about the hostages in order to force interaction and allow the captor to accept the victims as people.

The tactic of slipping some cognitive rufilin into a hostile brain sounds a lot more like a game of Russian roulette than it does a negotiation tactic. If the negotiator begins asking too many questions about the victims he may be putting them at harm by increasing their life value, the captor may take advantage of this and proceed to more risky measures. However as a syndrome it does sound entirely plausible that the brain will lie to itself in order to potentially keep itself alive, it is not mistaking friend for foe, it is more accepting the cards dealt.