

APPENDIX

The "Stockholm Syndrome": What Is It?

(Based on Materials by Ms. Kathleen Trigiani, published in 1999 on the Internet Site, "Women's Web Ring")

The term "Stockholm Syndrome" was coined in the early 1970's by Professor Nils Bejerot to describe the puzzling reactions of four bank employees to their captors. On August 23, 1973, three women and one man were taken hostage in one of the largest banks in Stockholm, Sweden. They were held for six days by two ex-convicts who threatened their lives but also showed them kindness. To the world's surprise, all of the hostages strongly resisted the government's efforts to rescue them and were quite eager to defend their captors. Indeed, several months after the hostages were saved by the police, they still had warm feelings for the men who had threatened their lives.

The Stockholm Syndrome compelled journalists and social scientists to research whether the emotional bonding between captors and captives was a "freak" incident or a common occurrence in oppressive situations. They discovered that it is such a common phenomenon that it deserves a name. Thus, the label Stockholm Syndrome was born. It has happened to concentration camp prisoners, cult members, civilians in Chinese Communist prisons, pimp-procured prostitutes, incest victims, physically and/or emotionally abused children, battered women, prisoners of war, victims of hijackings, and, of course, hostages. Virtually anyone can experience Stockholm Syndrome if the following conditions are met:

- There is a perceived or real threat to survival and the belief that one's captor is willing to act on the threat;
- The captive has a perception of small kindnesses from the captor within a context of terror;
- There is isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor;
- There is a perceived inability to escape.

Long-term psychological studies of this and similar hostage situations have defined a fairly clear and characteristic set of symptoms for the Stockholm Syndrome:

- ✓ The captives begin to identify with their captors. At least as first this is a defensive mechanism, based on the (often unconscious) idea that the captor will not hurt the captive if he or she is cooperative and even positively supportive;
- ✓ The captive seeks to win the favor of the captive in an almost childlike way;
- ✓ The captive often realizes that action taken by his would-be rescuers is very likely to hurt him instead of obtaining his release. He or she fears that attempts at rescue may turn a presently tolerable situation into a lethal one—for example, that if the bullets of the authorities don't get him, quite possibly those of the provoked captor will;
- ✓ Long-term captivity builds even stronger attachment to the captor as he becomes known as a human being with his own problems and aspirations. Particularly in political or ideological situations, longer captivity also allows the captive to become

familiar with the captor's point of view and the history of his grievances against authority. The captive may come to believe that the captor's position is just.