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**The myth of “Stockholm Syndrome”**

**(and other concepts invented to discredit women victims of violence)**

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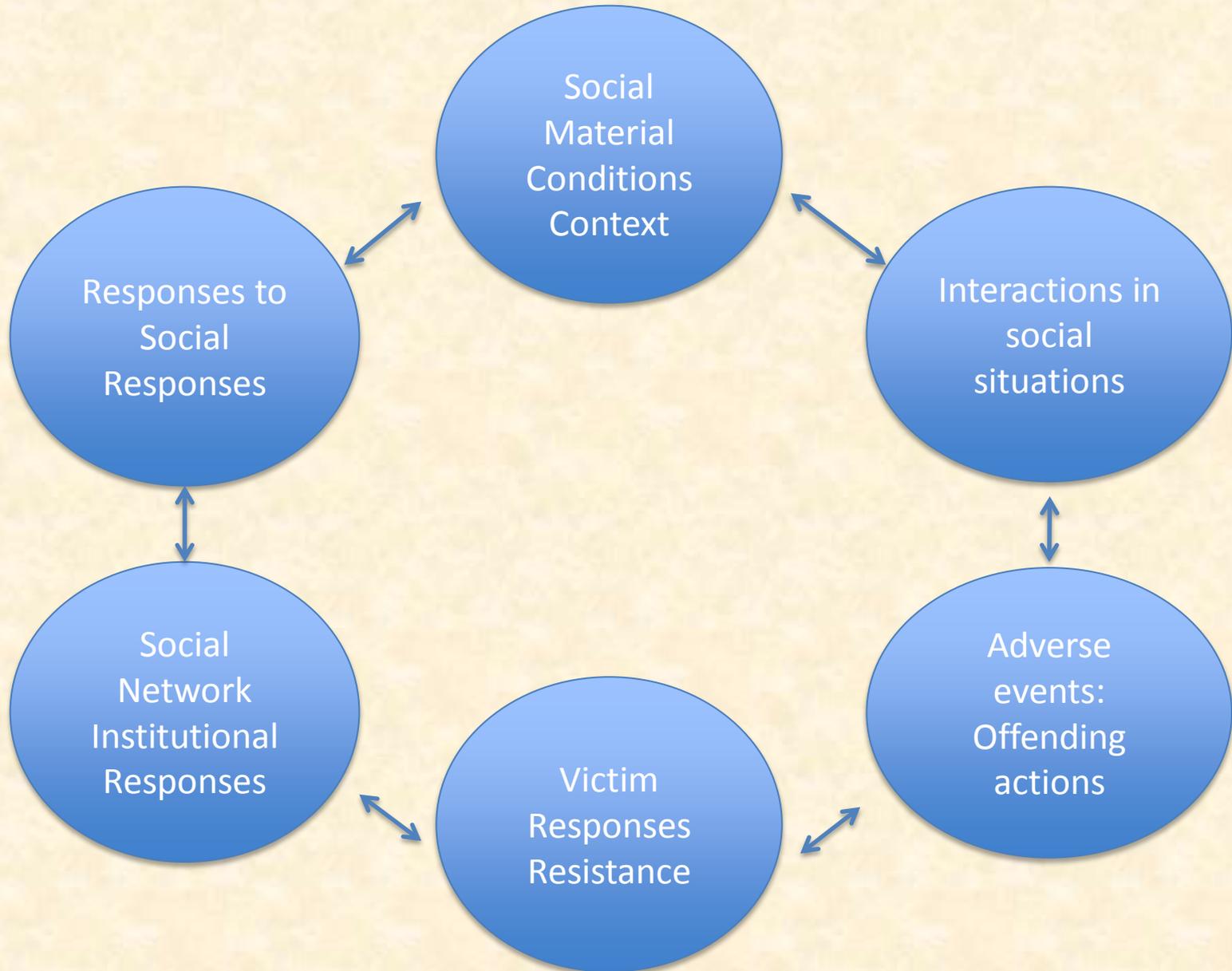
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I dedicate this presentation to Kristin Enmark.

Kristin, sitting up on the stretcher, being taken out of the bank.



# Response-Based Contextual Analysis



Meeting Kristin Enmark

## What is “Stockholm Syndrome”?

“a victim's emotional ‘bonding’ with their abuser”

“Symptoms” include:

- Victim having positive feelings toward the abuser
- Victim having negative feelings toward family, friends, or authorities
- Abuser having positive feelings toward the victim
- Victim supporting or helping the abuser
- “Infantilization”
  - regression to an infantile state
  - modeled on dependence on mother

## Why examine “Stockholm Syndrome”?

It is both a cliché and an accepted “clinical” reality, a received truth.

It reveals a style of *theorizing the oppressed*, as submissive and deficient, as in need of instruction, correction, as participants in their own oppression.

It supports a host of related notions that are widely in use today.

The analysis can show how a more contextual analysis produces a very different view of the circumstances and participants.

It makes a concrete difference.

It became possible.

## The Cultural Roots of “Stockholm Syndrome”

Psychoanalysis is more deeply rooted in Europe than in N.A. or elsewhere. It is such a powerful force, so extensive in its influence, that it often goes unnoticed.

Psychoanalysis:

Normally, child *identifies* with and *internalizes* values of parents

Anna Freud: (Children)

“Identification with the aggressor” is an ego defense against terror, fear

Bruno Bettelheim:

Observations of Jewish prisoners in concentration camps

Marxism:

The oppressed do not revolt, but submit, because they are duped, gulled, deceived into believing capitalism is “delectable”: They develop a “false consciousness”

## Theorizing the Oppressed:

Psychoanalysis and Marxism:

(e.g., Eric Fromm, Paolo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, bell hooks, Michel Foucault, Michael White, etc. . . . )

Related concepts:

infantilization

internalized oppression: “Uncle Tom”, “Self-hating Jew”

traumatic bonding, enmeshment, co-dependency

repetition compulsion

lateral violence

(e.g., applied to violence by Indigenous peoples against one another and in women’s organizations)

women choose, or unconsciously attract, abusive men

battered women’s syndrome

the “Cycle Theory of Violence”

learned helplessness

cognitive distortions (e.g., the world is an unsafe place)

## **Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Because of their identification with the oppressor, they [the oppressed] have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. (p. 30)

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. . . . [A]lthough they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. (p. 32)

As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically accept their exploitations. (p. 51)

## **Antonio Gramsci**

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity. . . . [This] contradictory state of consciousness [often] does not permit of any action, any decision, or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333)

## **The Cycle Theory of Violence**

The batterer, spurred on by her apparent passive acceptance of his abusive behaviour, does not try to control himself. (Walker, 1979, p. 57)

During the first stage . . . the woman tries to calm the abuser and often changes her lifestyle to avoid angering the man. This usually sets a precedent of submissiveness by the women building the gateway to future abuse. (Ciraco, 2001, p. 169)

## The Stockholm Syndrome Scale

Graham, Dee L. R. et al. (1995)

### Examples from 49 Items

- I do not want others to know how angry my partner gets at me. (Core, .64)
- I both love and fear my partner. (Core, .65)
- I dislike others telling me my partner is not good to me. (Core, .52)

ABC Sydney Interview on “World Today” with Dr. Frank Ochberg, “world renowned psychiatrist who specialises in trauma” (Tanya Nolan).

Introduction by Michael Vincent on cases of kidnapping and confinement in Cleveland and Los Angeles.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2014/s4010609.htm>

**FRANK OCHBERG:**

“The thing that strikes me and breaks my heart is how often this is happening right under our noses in what we think of as regular families, because the rates of incest and of child abuse and of sexual trauma in the family are quite high.

So think about that, Michael, it's going on in a different, apparently more normal scenario and, if the girls don't leave, they can't leave, they are traumatised, abused, infantilised. They're made into almost domestic creatures. By domestic, I mean the way we train pets to obey.”

MICHAEL VINCENT:

“Can you outline for me what the trauma bond is? How is it that someone links themselves mentally, emotionally to someone who abuses them in such a way?” FRANK OCHBERG:

“Let me start with the Stockholm syndrome. This is a situation in which suddenly, out of the blue an otherwise normal person is held hostage by a criminal who has the power to kill them and, within a matter of hours, the hostage is treated like an infant and has a kind of regression to infantile emotions. They can't eat; they can't talk; they can't use a toilet; they can't move without permission. To do so risks death and they accept the feeling that this is the giver of life just like my mother was.”

Frank Ochberg's website:

<http://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/ochberg-interview#section-stockholm-syndrome>

“And these became part of the negotiation strategies. But these little gifts of life were creating something paradoxical, ironic, astounding. . . . [W]hat [victims] were telling me was, "I didn't realize it at the time, but I felt a growing attachment, affection.”

Sometimes, depending on the age and the gender, it was sexualized. That happened in the original Stockholm case—Kristin had sex in the vault with her assailant. That is somewhat disputed, and after the fact some of the stories changed. Patty Hearst's story has various explanations one way or another. But this is not a result of brainwashing. This is something fundamental.”

## Timeline

- 1972 → Israeli athletes taken hostage and murdered at Munich olympics
- 1972 → Hostage taking in Stockholm: “Stockholm Syndrome”
- 1972 → Patty Hearst is kidnapped: Famous case of “Stockholm Syndrome”
- 1979 → The cycle theory of violence. Battered woman’s syndrome
- 1980 → PTSD is invented by American Psychiatric Association  
Pressure from military veterans’ advocates.  
Applied to rape victims.
- 1981 → Rise of “the culture of trauma”

# The Context

Sweden, August 1973

The reality of high rates of gender based violence and violence against children is not yet part of the broad public and professional discourse.

- Sweden is a small country. Media is limited.
- Social Democratic government in power for 30 years.
- Olof Palme, Prime Minister: A “strong man” directly involved in public events.
- Election time.
- King Gustav is dying.
- The police are untrained for hostage situations. No SWAT team (until 1986)

## **The information used in this presentation:**

- Interviews with Kristin Enmark  
Privately with Kristin and the journalist she is working with
- Translation of the phone call between Kristin and Olof Palme
- Interviews with senior Swedish police official with knowledge of the police response and key participants (i.e., Nils Bejerot)
- Interviews with Swedish citizens
- Article in english by Nils Bejerot explaining his leadership of the police response

## Summary of the “Social Drama” at Normalmstorg

August, 1973. Janne Olsson, a minor thug, tries to rob Handelsbanken in central Stockholm, but police arrive before he can escape.

He takes four hostages, three women and a man. Police immediately intervene and are rebuffed.

Nils Bejerot assumes lead of police response. Olaf Palme becomes involved.

It quickly becomes a media event, live t.v. and radio.

Clark Olafsson, a classy criminal, is taken from prison to the bank the next day.

The hostages get newspapers, listen to radio, do radio interviews, have phone calls with family - from inside the bank vault. Kristin phone Olaf Palme.

Police gas the bank vault and end the seige after 6.5 days: No one is killed.

Kristin Enmark criticizes authorities and is said to have “Normalmstorg Syndrome”.

## **First set of key events:**

- The botched robbery and taking of hostages
- Initial police response
  - Mistaken identity of the robber
  - A near miss
- Clark Olafsson enters the scene
- The phone call with Olof Palme. Kristin asks to leave the bank with the hostage takers

## The Phone Call

Kristin Enmark & Olaf Palme

When Kristin Enmark phoned Prime Minister Olof Palme, the hostage drama had been going on for 36 hours.

Kirstin later shared that Palme asked if it wouldn't be nice for her to "die at her post". This question is not included in the recording nor in the police transcript. It is gone, but you can tell where it was in the conversation when, apropos of nothing, near the end of the conversation, Kristin suddenly says, "Elisabeth says that dead heroes there are plenty of dead heroes and Kristin says, "I don't want to be some dead hero".

Kristin: Yes, my name is Kristin Enmark and I am one of the hostages at Kreditbanken and I would like to talk to Olof Palme.

Receptionist: One moment.

K: Thank you. (Pause, transfer to another receptionist)

R: Prime Minister's office. Eva Leander.

K: Yes, this is Kristin Enmark and I am one of the hostages here at the bank and I would like to talk to Olof Palme.

R: Yes, that . . . can you wait a bit?

K: Yes. (background noise, and then Kristin asks someone). "These don't cut out right? These calls don't cut out? (the response is unclear)

R: Hello?

K: Yes.

Kristin: But, you. . . . If he sees a police in here, he'll shoot. Do you understand that?

Olof: He'll shoot at the police.

Kristin: He'll just shoot. That's what he's said, that's what he's said. He'll shoot at his own brother! They came down and said that, "your brother wants to talk to you", and he said, "if he comes down I'll shoot him", and then they sent him down and if he has said he'll shoot him he'll shoot him. He does what he says he will! And by the way, he's not a "Desperado". And there are no narcotics here like it says in the newspaper, there is nobody here using narcotics, and no whiskey or other alcohol like it also says in the newspaper. In fact there are a lot of dumb things written in the newspaper. And he doesn't hold us in a chokehold, he hasn't done a single thing to harm us.

Olof: He hasn't held you in a chokehold?

Kristin: No! He's held his arm across our chests and held the submachine gun in the other hand. And of course, if you're sitting 38 meters away in a bush in Berzelii Park, then it might look like a chokehold. But he's never held us in a chokehold. He hasn't done anything to hurt us.

Olof: Oh. So yesterday, before Clark got there, he didn't hold you in a chokehold then?

Kristin: Oh no no no! He tied us up, actually he didn't tie us up, another guy did that. And then he sat us up here. He didn't touch us. He sat there the whole time saying "relax", like "take it easy". That's what he did, honestly! He hasn't tried anything. Not a single chokehold has occurred here. Nothing.

Olof: But are you really experiencing the police to be a hostile power?

Kristin: Yes, you know what? I do.

Olof: Why? Don't you think . . . (cut off by Kristin)

Kristin: And you understand, I want out of here, and I trust that they'll drop me off. I do. I do.

Olof: But why would he drop you off when he won't let you go now?

Kristin: Why would he? Because he wants to get out of the bank. And if he has us with him he knows that nobody will do anything. Nobody will shoot when we're there, right? That's what you've said. Nobody wants to harm us.

Olof: No. But the moment this guy puts down the weapon then nobody's life is in danger. You must know that?

Kristin: No, of course I understand that, but he wants out of the bank. He has a little money here that he wants out.

Kristin: If you were in my shoes then you would. . . . and if I were Prime Minister, then you're darn tootin' you would be calling me and asking me for the exact same thing. I know that.

Olof: That's not necessarily true... (Cut off by Kristin)

Kristin: Yes it is!

Olof: . . . because I'm not so sure I would believe them.

Kristin: Ya ya ya. You would. (Pause with background noise) Now Elisabeth is saying that, "There are plenty of dead heroes."

Olof: Pardon?

Kristin: "There are plenty of dead heroes", says Elisabeth.

Olof: Oh.

Kristin: I don't want to be some dead hero.

## **Second set of key events:**

- Going to the bathroom
- Volunteering to go with the robbers
- End of the hostage taking
- Police abuse of captors and grand-standing
- Dignity on the stretcher
- Criticizing police and saying positive things about the robbers after the drama ended

## **Senior Swedish Police Official**

“The police response was completely disorganized and dangerous. It is pure luck that no one was killed.”

“The police in Sweden did not wake up until the assassination of Olof Palme.”

“A lot of people made really good careers out of Stockholm Syndrome, Nils Bejerot and a lot of police officers as well.”

“Because we were so certain about Stockholm Syndrome. It's a gender thing, actually. Its quite easy to silence a woman just by saying these things.”

“Nils Bejerot, I knew him quite well. He did diagnoses without ever seeing the people, often he did this, and wrote reports later saying he did an examination.”

“None of the hostages has really been heard. It's a failure of the Swedish justice system, I think.”

## **Conclusion:**

Kristin Enmark was responding to both the hostage takers and a disorganized and dangerous police-state responses, while protecting and keeping solidarity with her fellow captives.

As a 23 yr. woman, Kristin showed extraordinary presence of mind and determination throughout the ordeal (not infantile regression).

Kristin criticized the police and state response and refused to speak with Nils Bejerot, who had refused to speak with her during the hostage-taking.

Nils Bejerot, who directed the police response and was in an obvious conflict of interest, invented “Stockholm Syndrome” to silence Kristin Enmark.

The invention of “Normallmstorg Syndrome” entailed an abuse of male-state power and still works as one of many closely related concepts that blame victims, mostly women, while denying the reality of their resistance and ignoring the central role of social responses.

**Thank you!!**