



Stockholm Syndrome

Among the most troubling aspects of the Jaycee Lee Dugard abduction case is her "strong feelings," according to her stepfather, for her alleged abductor. Victims have a long history of identifying with their captors — and it often keeps them alive

By Laura Fitzpatrick | Monday, Aug. 31, 2009

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Time and again during the 18 harrowing years she spent in captivity, Jaycee Lee Dugard must have had the chance to flee. But she apparently never tried, returning instead to a compound in the backyard of the man who allegedly abducted and raped her. "Jaycee has strong feelings with this guy," her stepfather Carl Probyn said after she resurfaced on Aug. 26. "She really feels it's almost like a marriage."

Baffling it may be, but Dugard's experience fits with a phenomenon often called the Stockholm syndrome--in which victims come to feel compassion and even loyalty toward their captors. Named for the site of a 1973 robbery in which Swedish bank employees held hostage for six days embraced their captors upon release, the condition is controversial: no standard diagnostic criteria exist to identify it, and critics insist it's largely a figment of the media's imagination.

Nonetheless, there have been several high-profile cases that appear to support the theory. Heiress Patty Hearst famously abetted her abductors in a 1974 bank robbery. By the time Missouri boy Shawn Hornbeck reported a lost bike to police 10 months after his 2002 disappearance, he'd adopted his abductor's last name. And Natascha Kampusch, an Austrian girl held for eight years in a cellar, reportedly burst into tears on hearing news of her captor's suicide following her escape.

As critics note, these cases are the exceptions. According to a 2007 FBI report, 73% of captives display no affection for their abductors. Still, crisis negotiators encourage captor-hostage bonding in hopes that being viewed as a fellow human being will help the victim survive. Which means Dugard's apparent reluctance to attempt an escape may ultimately have been her ticket to freedom.



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