
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Stockholm Syndrome and Child Sexual Abuse

Shirley Jülich

ABSTRACT. This article, based on an analysis of unstructured interviews, identifies that the emotional bond between survivors of child sexual abuse and the people who perpetrated the abuse against them is similar to that of the powerful bi-directional relationship central to Stockholm Syndrome as described by Graham (1994). Aspects of Stockholm Syndrome could be identified in the responses of adult survivors of child sexual abuse, which appeared to impact on their ability to criminally report offenders. An emotional bond, which has enabled

Shirley Jülich, PhD, holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences, Post Graduate Honours First Class in Social Policy, and a Doctorate in Social Policy. She is Senior Lecturer, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. Her research interests focus on the intersection of child sexual abuse, recovery, and justice.

Address correspondence to: Shirley Jülich, AUT, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1020, New Zealand.

The author thanks the survivors of child sexual abuse who contributed to this study.

The research this article is based on part of a Doctoral study undertaken at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand. Supervised by Associate Professor Marilyn Waring and Dr. Warwick Tie of Massey University, the project was granted ethical approval by the Human Ethics Committee of Massey University, Albany in June 1995. The work was supported by grants from Massey University and the Auckland Medical Aid Trust.

Submitted for publication 1/9/03; revised 3/17/04; revised 8/7/04; accepted 8/10/04.

Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, Vol. 14(3) 2005
Available online at <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JCSA>
© 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1300/J070v14n03_06

the sexual abuse of children, has served to protect the offender long after the abuse has ceased. The implications of Stockholm Syndrome could offer valuable insights to those working in the field of child sexual abuse. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Child sexual abuse, Stockholm Syndrome, recovery, disclosure

It is generally assumed that children who are victims of child sexual abuse are unable to disclose or criminally report because of a lack of voice, lack of power, or inability to frame their experience as abusive. These are not the only reasons. If they were, as child victims matured, they would not only disclose, they would criminally report. A study conducted in New Zealand by The Otago Women's Health Survey of 1991 (Anderson, Mullen, Romans, & Herbison, 1993), interviewed 252 women (between 18 and 65 years of age) who had reported contact and non-contact sexual abuse before the age of 16. The research team found that while 71% had disclosed to another person prior to the interview, only 7.5% of the women interviewed had reported the abuse to any investigative authority.

In response to questions asking what had prevented them from disclosing abuse, 65% ($n = 164$) women provided multiple reasons: 29% expected to be blamed, 25% were embarrassed, 24% did not want to upset anyone, 23% expected they would not be believed, 18% claimed they were not bothered by the abuse, 14% wished to protect the abuser, 11% feared the abuser, and 3% wanted to obey adults (Anderson et al., 1993). Of those who gave reasons for non-disclosure, 116 women reported they had not wanted to disclose their abuse, 25 had wanted to disclose but did not, and 23 women had unintentionally disclosed abuse. It is noteworthy that of the 164 women who gave reasons for why they did not disclose abuse, only 25 women indicated they had actually wanted to disclose. These findings might not surprise professionals working in this area who were familiar with Summit's (1983) paper describing the Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (CSAAS).

The same phenomenon has been observed with victims of domestic violence who have been reluctant to disclose abuse within an intimate relationship. A similar intimate relationship has enabled the sexual abuse of some children. Powerless to stop the abuse, children, and indeed victims of domestic violence, have utilized a variety of strategies to survive. Graham (1994) identified the same survival techniques in the cases of some hostages who have been held captive. There is an established body of literature documenting the contradictory relationship that develops between hostages and hostage-takers (Goddard & Tucci, 1991), which recognizes that bi-directional bonding within the relationship is often perceived to be necessary for the survival of hostages. This phenomenon is usually referred to as the Stockholm Syndrome. Graham (1994) identified similarities in the relationships and subsequent interactions between hostages and hostage-takers and victims of abusive interpersonal relationships. Although children have not usually been described as hostages, they could be described as captives, particularly of those who sexually abuse them.

My interest in Stockholm Syndrome emerged as I was analyzing the interviews (18 women and 3 men ranging in age from 26 to 52) and attempted to understand why survivors were reluctant to report the perpetrators to the authorities. I began to consider that their reluctance might be due to reasons other than those identified by the women in the Otago Women's Health Survey of 1991. Those survivors who had been subjected to ongoing contact with sexually abusive members within their family or social networks (20 of the 21 in the interview group) seemed to be emotionally bonded to the offender, and this appeared to contribute significantly to their reluctance to criminally report. One survivor was sexually abused on one occasion. Although she too had never criminally reported the offense, her reasons for not reporting were similar to those of participants in the Otago Women's Health Survey of 1991 (Anderson et al., 1993).

In this article, I will suggest that aspects of the Stockholm Syndrome, as discussed by Graham (1994), can be identified in the voices of adult survivors of child sexual abuse. This is not to say that all victims of child sexual abuse would be affected by symptoms of the Stockholm Syndrome. As all 21 survivors in this research project had been sexually abused by a person whom they considered to be part of their family or social network, it is not appropriate to consider any implications Stockholm Syndrome might have for those victims who have been sexually abused by strangers. Throughout the discussion, I have used the term "victim" to denote a victim of a child sexual abuse and "adult survivor"

or “survivor” to denote those victims of child sexual abuse who have contributed to this research study. Graham (1994) often used the term “abuser” to denote a captor. I adopt her terms in direct quotes, otherwise I use the term “offender” in order to emphasize the criminal nature of these acts. When quoting survivors, I use the terminology they used as they described their circumstances. To protect anonymity, I do not quote directly all survivors who contributed to the study.

For purposes of this article, a child is defined as a person, male or female, under the legal age of consent, which in New Zealand is 16 years of age. An offender is an adult, male or female, who has reached the age of majority, currently 20 years of age in New Zealand, or is at least five years older than the child victim who is under the age of 13, or 10 years older than a child victim who is older than 13 but not yet 16. In this article, child sexual abuse is defined as contact abuse and includes the following behavior: genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, attempted or completed intercourse, and encouraging the child to perform such acts on the offender. Further, child sexual abuse can be understood as an ongoing sexually abusive relationship that has occurred within the context of the child’s family or social network.

METHOD

The research on which this article is based was part of a broader doctoral research project in the discipline of social policy that aimed to inform policy makers and analysts about the relationship between justice and the recovery process of adult survivors of child sexual abuse. The research methods used included participant observation in self-help groups and community groups, unstructured interviews with adult survivors and key community informants, a case study that involved observation of regular counseling sessions between a survivor and a registered counselor over a one year period, and focus groups convened for the purpose of writing a report on aspects of justice which was subsequently submitted to the New Zealand government. Those survivors who were interviewed learned about the research project through my involvement with the self-help groups and focus groups, and research information sheets distributed to various helping organizations. All interviews took between two and three hours and were conducted at a time and place determined by the survivor. All survivors interviewed gave their permission for the interview to be taped and later transcribed by a

typist who had signed a confidentiality agreement. Pseudonyms were applied randomly to protect anonymity of all participants.

For each interview I provided the following framework for survivors to use, but I left it up to them as to whether they used this or not.

- Your experience of child sexual abuse.
- How this has impacted on your life.
- What have you done to recover from child sexual abuse?
- What has been most helpful?
- If you had the power to change the criminal justice system, what would you change?

Apart from this framework my only contribution to the interview was to clarify points survivors raised.

It emerged through the interviews that survivors were frustrated by attempting to identify their experience and responses in various theoretical explanations. Consequently, I undertook to identify relevant explanations in the literature, which best reflected the circumstances of the survivors I had interviewed. Although CSAAS (Summit, 1983) adequately reflected the victimization process experienced by all survivors in this project, Stockholm Syndrome appeared to extend CSAAS beyond adolescence into adulthood offering important insights into the persistent reluctance of adult survivors to criminally report and at the same time highlighting the roles of bystanders and outsiders. Bystanders are family members or close family friends who should have been able to protect the child, but were unable to intervene because they too were subjected to the complex dynamics of child sexual abuse, or simply did not know it was occurring (Herman, 1997). By contrast, outsiders, those who have not been subjected to these complex dynamics, have found it difficult to understand the reactions of victims and their continued loyalty to offenders (Graham, 1994). Importantly, subsequent discussion with survivors indicated that the description of Stockholm Syndrome not only offered a less stigmatizing model helping them to understand their entrapment, but also provided hope for ongoing recovery. The limitations of this study lie in a lack of sufficient interviews to establish statistical significance and confidently extrapolate findings across a broader population of child sexual abuse victims.

Stockholm Syndrome

The term “Stockholm Syndrome” was initially used in 1973 to describe the reactions of four bank employees who had been held hostage

by two ex-convicts during a bank raid in Stockholm, Sweden (Graham, 1994). During their six days of captivity, the hostages developed an emotional bond with the hostage-takers to the extent that they not only identified with the hostage-takers but also came to view the police as the enemy. Subsequently, the hostages attempted to protect the hostage-takers from the police (Goddard & Tucci, 1991; Graham, 1994). The relationship between the hostages and hostage-takers did not cease at the end of siege but persisted for years after the actual incident. The reactions of hostages in this event, and other similar instances, have been studied to provide the basis for what has come to be known as Classic Stockholm Syndrome (Hacker, 1976; Soskis & Ochberg, 1982; Strentz, 1982; Kuleshnyk, 1984; Graham, 1994).

Drawing on the literature related to hostages, Graham (1994) extended Classic Stockholm Syndrome to provide an overarching theory referred to as Graham's Stockholm Syndrome Theory. She theorized that emotional bonding could occur between a victim and an offender and reviewed the literature relating to nine victimized groups to determine whether bonding to an offender occurred as it had in Stockholm Syndrome. These groups included 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, and hostages in general. It was found that in all nine groups, bonding between an offender and a victim occurred when the four following conditions co-existed: (a) Perceived threat to survival and the belief that one's captor is willing to carry out that threat; (b) The captive's perception of some small kindness from the captor within a context of terror; (c) Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor; and (d) Perceived inability to escape (Graham, 1994, p. 33).

I will review each of these precursors drawing on information provided in the interviews with adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

Perceived Threat to Survival

Graham (1994) argued that emotional abuse, or the threat of harm, was a threat to physical survival. The sexual abuse of children has included physical and emotional abuse, which has threatened a child's psychological survival, and, in some instances has threatened his or her physical survival. Survivors of child sexual abuse recounted how they had experienced physical violence or the threat of physical violence. Belinda (Interview 12) remembered that, "he gave me a hiding [a physi-

cal beating] and called me a naughty bad girl and all that sort of stuff.” Gwyneth (Interview 21) reiterated these feelings by stating, “I always used to have a dreadful fear of my father because he used to physically beat us up, too, and I have always had this fear of him, he’s always been this big bad man to me.”

Survivors of child sexual abuse perceived this threat to survival as extending to others emotionally close to them. They saw themselves as being responsible for the safety of others.

If I told Mum, he would just tell her I was lying and then he would just hit Mum like he always did. I tried to keep out of his way, but what ever I did, it didn’t seem to work. The confusion and fear grew. He actually tried; he tried at one stage to touch my sister. She hit him, so he gave her a hiding and she went home and told Mum . . . Mum confronted him about it and he told Mum it was all in her head . . . he gave Mum a hiding for it. So that’s why, at that stage I knew then that I couldn’t approach her about it, and because of the fact of the physical violence, I couldn’t, I knew what his reaction was going to be if she confronted him . . . I didn’t want to put her in any more harm as it was, ‘cause she was going through enough as it was, anyway. (Rosalind: Interview 6)

Survivors reported they were threatened in a variety of ways: the withdrawal of love; damage to things that they owned and valued; and the threat of something happening to the offender, a family member, or someone they loved.

He’d cry sometimes he’d get that serious. “You can’t do that, [disclose the sexual abuse] Mum and Dad would kill me.” So he knew it was wrong, but he would threaten me with other ways. Either he wouldn’t love me anymore, you know, if I told on him, or take something that I really valued as a young kid, usually toys and stuff. When you’re young those things mean the world to you, and he’d take something and destroy it, he’d burn it or chuck it away or rip its legs off you know, which is really upsetting to a little girl. (Sharon: Interview 14).

Survivors of child sexual abuse reported that emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse was in some respects more difficult to deal with than any physical abuse. Sharon (Interview 14) explained that, “it’s the things that people say to you, for me it was the things that were said to me that I can’t forget, not so much the actions, or the physical violation,

it's the things that were said, that's the hard bit to get rid of." Furthermore, Rosalind (Interview 6) commented that, ". . . there was the verbal abuse, which he did on all of us including my mother, about how we were dumb, we were no good for anything and all that sort of stuff, and that's very hard to get over."

Words that are spoken cannot be taken back. They assume a power of their own. When an adult within a child's family or social system has spoken to a child, he or she has spoken as a person in authority. Such an adult would likely be a person who claimed to love the child and a person upon whom the child might depend for protection and the basic necessities of life. Sandy (Interview 19) provided an example of this deceit in her statement that, "they told you were not good, you're horrible, none of the other children liked you."

As adults, reflecting on their childhood, survivors of child sexual abuse did not doubt that their lives were threatened. Carol (Interview 7) explained that, "a child has been put into a situation that endangers their life. And it does endanger your life, because so many survivors have died from suicide. And it endangers the quality of your life." Sarah (Interview 16) reflected how she perceived her options during the abuse:

The police would come in, my father would be taken away, my mother would blame me, or if she didn't blame me she'd certainly be upset because she loved him, my brothers and sisters would hate my father, we'd have no money, which in those days we didn't have much money anyway, so where do you go? Not very far.

Survivors of child sexual abuse reported that they were threatened. If they had told anyone what was happening, they felt they would be responsible for the family splitting up, people going to prison, children being taken away from their homes, families being left without money. Even those not threatened so explicitly were aware that if they had told someone what was happening to them, their family as they knew it, would have been threatened. Survivors of child sexual abuse repeatedly commented, "If you do not have a family what do you have?" This was a very real threat to a child's survival: a threat to both their physical and psychological survival.

Perceived Kindness

Graham (1994) argued that a person whose survival was constantly under threat would perceive kindness differently than a person whose

survival was not threatened. They showed how battered women could perceive the cessation of violence as a demonstration of kindness. Some survivors of child sexual abuse spoke of being flattered that they had been singled out for such adult treatment. Anna (Interview 11) commented that, "I was flattered that he gave me a lot of attention, he was interested in things happening in my life, how things were going at school, he treated me like a grown up and he gave me lots of extra pocket money."

Others spoke of experiencing physical sensations that were enjoyable, albeit confusing. All survivors who had been sexually abused by a family member, or a close family friend, commented that they had believed the offender loved them. Sarah (Interview 16) remembered that, "my father always told me that everything he did to me was for my good."

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse tended to minimize their victimization. Comments were prefaced with the phrase, ". . . at least he didn't . . ." and concluded with such phrases as ". . . sexually abuse my sister" or other members of the family, ". . . hurt me" or other members of the family. Frequently survivors commented, ". . . it wasn't that bad" or ". . . it could have been worse." The following survivor said she had been willing to put up with abuse rather than be sent to a children's home:

I know at one stage my sister and I had to go to a children's home because my mother was sick, and I would have done anything, I would have put up with being beaten six times a day rather than go back to live in a children's home. You know. So after that, being abused, it wasn't nice, but it was better than being in a children's home. (Sarah: Interview 16)

The mere fact that survivors believed the offender loved them could be taken as an indication that kindness existed. The act of being singled out for special attention, special outings or special gifts could also be interpreted as an act of kindness. The observation made by many survivors that it could have been worse indicated that kindness might still exist.

Isolation

Graham (1994) noted that in hostage situations, isolation from persons other than the captor was usually physical. This isolation would not be as

obvious in an abusive relationship. A victim might not be physically isolated from other persons, and from an outsider's perspective should be able to maintain contact with others outside of the relationship. However, the emotional and psychological isolation that victims have experienced has been profound. Many survivors reported ongoing isolation. According to John (Interview 24), "the areas that are important to me are the degree of isolation that I felt and still feel."

Graham (1994) commented that offenders used a variety of strategies to discourage disclosure by their victims. Similarly, survivors reported that they had been prevented from disclosing thereby maintaining the sense of isolation. These strategies included, but were not limited to, threats of violence against the victim, members of their family or family pets, claims that the offender would go to jail or that the family would break up.

My uncle repeatedly told me that what we were doing was wrong. It was wrong in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of God. He said that on Judgment Day, God would forgive us both. But if anyone found out what was happening he would go to jail. I would go to an orphanage and my father would lose his job. My mother, brother, aunt and cousins would have no one who could go to work and earn the money. They would lose their homes and have no food or clothes. It became my responsibility to make sure this didn't happen. I was about 8 years old, possibly younger. (Anna: Interview 11)

Offenders have isolated children by telling them they would not be believed and would be blamed for what had happened. Whether survivors had been told this or not, as children they were in no doubt that if they had disclosed they would have been blamed or disbelieved. Anna (Interview 11) did not "recall being told I would not be believed or that I might be blamed for the sexual abuse but I certainly understood that this would be likely." Sarah (Interview 6) stated that, "I knew if I had told someone, I wouldn't have a family and that was all I had. Really what else do you have when you are a child, you only have your family. I had no friends outside of the family."

The isolation survivors experienced was reinforced by the apparent lack of action by various authorities. Sarah (Interview 16) found it difficult to understand that, "with all the things that happened—the doctors, the hospitals . . . I had the same leg broken six times . . . how did they not know? What was there to give me any confidence that if I told someone that I would be believed and that someone would protect me?"

The isolation that survivors of child sexual abuse experienced as children has often persisted through into adulthood. Those survivors who have attended self-help groups commented that these groups helped to break down those feelings of isolation. Gina (Interview 4) stated that, "It's [the self-help group] just so nice, and that for me encourages me that I'm not out in the world all alone." Celia (Interview 8) found that it was "helpful to be with other women, I found it helpful to be anywhere where I wasn't isolated, and I mean at this stage I had no life, so it wasn't like I had things to do or people to see."

Graham (1994) noted that the victim's internalization of the offender's belief that the victim deserved the abuse, which has been experienced by the victim as shame, has further isolated the victim from the perspectives of others. Survivors of child sexual abuse not only blamed themselves for the abuse, but also they expressed feelings of guilt and shame. Carol (Interview 7) said she often felt, "ashamed, I feel different from other people." Sarah (Interview 16) confirmed that, "I don't want to be blamed anymore for this, I was a child without voice or power, I was not in control. I didn't stop it even when I could have, when I was older. I must be to blame for some of it."

While they were being victimized, survivors of child sexual abuse were isolated from other persons, from other perspectives, and knew only the perspective of the offender. This isolation has persisted into adulthood; it has been very difficult to break down. Feelings of guilt and shame were also evident. Similarly, they have been very difficult to overcome.

Perceived Inability to Escape

Prisoners and hostages who have been physically confined certainly experienced a decreased ability to escape. Hostage-takers or captors have used the threat of violence to prevent any escape (Graham, 1994). So have child sexual abuse offenders. The threats some offenders made to children in their effort to silence them, also rendered them incapable of escape. It was not merely a perception for survivors that many were unable to escape. A number of survivors of child sexual abuse tried to stop abuse, but were unable to do so. According to Rosa (Interview 18), she was "shouting at him and pulling at him, telling him to get away from me." Rosalind (Interview 6) remembered that "I still kept trying to get away but whatever I did, I couldn't." Gina (Interview 4) recalled that, "Looking back [I did] all sorts, protective sorts of things, trying to get clean, trying to get away."

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse commented that other adults or bystanders, who must have known what was happening, did not protect them. For some a lack of protection added to their perception that they could not escape. Celia (Interview 8) stated that, "I've always been very aware from a very young age that whatever was going on in my life had something to do with the fact that my mother wasn't quite with it, and whatever situation I was in, was because my mother wasn't protecting me from that."

The responses of various agencies, or outsiders, could validate the perception that children who are being sexually victimized are unable to escape. The following survivor was raped at the age of thirteen by two young men. Kiri (Interview 25) recounted that, "my father drove me to the police station and I gave a statement. I was told it was going to help other women. I gave a statement. I was placed in Social Welfare care from then on until I was old enough to get a job."

As adults, a number of survivors believed that an offender could abuse a child without other adults, or bystanders, being aware. For a child this could be interpreted as proof of their inability to escape. Anna (Interview 11) stated that, "I was never sure if my aunt knew or not. On the one hand I believe she must have known, did she never wonder why it took him so long to say goodnight? On the other hand I know that these people [offenders] are so plausible, they hide it so well. We underestimate how clever they are."

Some survivors believed their mothers had to know, but were unable to protect them as they too were being victimized. Sarah (Interview 16) remembered:

She [my mother] had to know . . . where was she when he was in my bedroom? Sometimes he would spend a lot of time and he would bring the "things." He didn't hide them in anything; he just came upstairs with them. They were gynecological instruments, a speculum. He used the same "things" on her [my mother]. Sometimes on weekends they [my parents] would be upstairs in the afternoon, when she [my mother] came down, sometimes she would be crying or walking funny.

If an adult were unable to protect him or herself, a child would be no better equipped. Children could interpret this perceived failure of adults, or bystanders, to protect them as further proof that they could not escape.

Very often the abuse did not stop until the child was old enough to leave home. Sarah (Interview 16) stated that, "I stopped it by leaving home when I was 16." Celia (Interview 8) reiterated this point, "I spent most of my childhood waiting 'til I could get away."

As children, survivors were unable to escape. They did not have the language to relate what was happening to them. Their perception was distorted. Furthermore, if the sexual abuse was occurring in their home they had nowhere to go. An inability to escape was their reality.

The four precursors of Stockholm Syndrome: (a) a perceived threat to survival, (b) small kindnesses, (c) isolation, and (d) a perceived inability to escape, were evident in the responses of adult survivors of child sexual abuse. As Graham (1994) predicted, the responses of these survivors highlighted that all that all four precursor conditions were so interdependent that it would be unlikely to have a high degree of one precursor without a high degree of the other three precursors. This analysis of survivors' responses established that the four precursor conditions necessary for the establishment of Stockholm Syndrome co-existed within this group of child sexual abuse survivors.

Psychodynamics Underlying Stockholm Syndrome

Outsiders, those who have not been subjected to the effects of Stockholm Syndrome, find it difficult to understand the development and maintenance of the strong bond that appears to exist between victims of child sexual abuse and offenders. The convergence of the four precursor conditions for Stockholm Syndrome has generated the following psychodynamics that could account for the puzzling behavior of people who have Stockholm Syndrome.

Graham (1994) explained this as follows. The offender threatened the survival of the victim. Unable to escape and isolated from others, the victim turned to the offender for nurturance and protection. The need to be nurtured and protected combined with the will to survive compelled victims to actively search for expressions of kindness, empathy or affection from the offender. The victim suppressed any feelings of danger, terror or rage, and through this denial, was able to bond to the positive side of the offender. To facilitate survival, the victim similarly suppressed his or her own needs and became both hypervigilant and hypersensitive to the offender's needs, feelings, and perspectives. To more readily anticipate the needs of the offender, the victim attempted to view the world through the perspective of the offender. The harder victims worked to meet the needs of the offender, the stronger their

bond became to the offender. It was through this process that victims came to view any would-be-rescuers, such as parents, police, therapists, or friends, as the "bad guys," because that was the offender's perception. The offender became the "good guy" and victims eventually believed that they deserved the abuse or were somehow responsible for it. The victim interpreted this survival strategy as positive feelings for the offender.

Children could be particularly susceptible to the development of Stockholm Syndrome. The sexual abuse of a child, typically, has been enabled because of a pre-existing emotional bond. The continuation of this relationship has occurred because a child simply had no other choice, but to survive the best way he or she could. Nurturance and protection are basic needs. Victims of child sexual abuse, very often, have been abused by a person who had the responsibility of providing these basic needs. Children have not yet formulated or identified their individual needs, feelings, and perspectives. They have viewed the world around them from the perspective of important adults in their lives, usually their parents, close relatives, or people in some position of authority.

Graham (1994) argued that if victims were subjected to the four precursor conditions for a prolonged period of time (i.e., months or years) they eventually understood their sense of self worth from the perspective of the offender. Any pre-existing sense of self worth was supplanted. The longer victims were exposed to these conditions, the more difficult it was for them to change their perception of themselves and the more difficult it was for victims to psychologically break away from the offender. Graham described the mechanisms that complicated psychological separation from the offender. Victims in a state of isolation did not want to lose the only positive relationship they perceived themselves to have, and neither did they want to lose what they perceived as their self-identity. These fears were expressed by feelings of abandonment, emptiness, loneliness, and an inability to live without the offender. The greater these fears, the more damage there was to the sense of self. Without the offender a victim might have no sense of self, or might have to struggle to find a sense of self. The fear victims had of the offender served to keep them loyal. They had been harmed once and had no basis to believe it would not or could not happen again.

Because of their dependency and lack of power, children could fear the offender for a prolonged period and could remain curiously and perversely loyal well into adulthood. They might never be able to separate psychologically from the offender. Unlike adult victims of kidnapping

or other abuse, who might retain pre-existing undamaged sense of self, children are in the process of developing their sense of self. Survivors of child sexual abuse appeared to have difficulty in separating psychologically from the offender. Many indicated they felt isolated and expressed fear of what the offender could do to them or other members of their family. They expressed frustration regarding the lack of understanding demonstrated by outsiders, both within their family or social system and those societal systems they have encountered as they have proceeded to confront the victimization they were subjected to. Many survivors indicated that they knew the offender had a difficult childhood or had been sexually abused. The loyalty of some survivors to the offender was at times overwhelming, considering the victimization to which some had been subjected.

Major Indicators of Stockholm Syndrome

Graham (1994) argued that it was not necessary for victims to display all indicators of the syndrome to be identified as having Stockholm Syndrome. She contended that Stockholm Syndrome describes a continuum, that is, a combination of indicators could be present to varying degrees. However, a victim would need to display more than one indicator to be identified as having Stockholm Syndrome. Graham (1994, pp. 42-43) suggested that the following indicators serve as a guide to determine the presence of Stockholm Syndrome:

1. The victim shows symptoms of ongoing trauma or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
2. The victim is bonded to the offender.
3. The victim is grateful for small kindnesses shown by the offender.
4. The victim denies the violence which is occurring or is able to rationalize the violence. The victim denies his or her own anger to others and to him or her self.
5. The victim is hypervigilant to the offender's needs and attempts to keep the abuser happy. This hypervigilance is unidirectional, not bilateral.
6. The victim views the world from the offender's perspective. She or he may not have her or his own perspective; thus the victim experiences his or her own sense of self through the offender's eyes.
7. The victim sees would-be rescuers as the "bad guys" and the offender as the "good guy" or the protector.

8. The victim finds it difficult to either leave the offender or to separate psychologically from the abuser.
9. The victim fears retaliation from the offender.

As the interviews with survivors were analyzed, it was easy to identify a combination of the above indicators in the responses of many of the survivors. Examples of these indicators are evident in the voices of survivors quoted in this article. So too are the cognitive distortions associated with Stockholm Syndrome.

Cognitive Distortions

Graham (1994) identified a series of cognitive distortions, or survival strategies, that could occur in anyone victimized by chronic interpersonal abuse. These distortions included self-blame, seeing the offender as a victim, and believing that if they only loved the offender enough, the abuse would stop. Graham (1994) argued that cognitive distortions served three functions: (a) minimized the terror, (b) facilitated bonding, and (c) instilled hope in the victim. As terror was suppressed, the victim and offender falsely attributed the victim's arousal and hypervigilance to love, as opposed to terror. Bonding was facilitated between the victim and the offender, which subsequently instilled feelings of hope in the victim. The survival strategy, whereby the victim redefined the relationship as one of care, encouraged the offender to do the same, and subsequently the chances of survival were increased.

These cognitive distortions or survival strategies are exemplified in the following comments made by survivors. This first survivor talked about the emotional bond she had to her father and subsequent conflicting emotions she experienced.

That was what the conflict was; in every other way he was a good father. You had every reason to be proud of the fact that he was your father. Unlike a lot of other fathers, he didn't drink, he was intelligent, you know. I came from a poor area, so that both my parents stood out amongst the usual parents of that area. When the abuser is not someone that is removed from the family, all those hurts and effects, create a conflict in your mind. This is your husband, this is your father, this is your uncle, or your brother, who you love, but you don't want them doing that. So there's conflict, you don't want to remove them, you don't want to not love them, but you know that's not right, so there's that conflict. Whereas if

it's someone outside the family, it's not a conflict, you're not going to rip the family apart. I can remember sitting on my father's lap at a family gathering, I don't know how old I was, eight or nine, and knowing what he was doing, and all the family was sitting around and knowing that if I moved the rest of the family would know what he was doing, and he knew that I couldn't move, because then the rest of the family would know what he was doing. And I can remember looking at my mother thinking, why can't you see what he's doing, and maybe she did, I don't know. (Sarah: Interview 16)

When the sexual abuse stopped, some survivors experienced further conflict. On the one hand they were pleased the abuse had stopped, but on the other hand, they felt abandoned or rejected. They did not understand why the relationship had altered:

All of a sudden this person that I loved and trusted was pushing me away . . . I'd like, put all my trust into him and he just cut me off dead. That was it. Our relationship went to pieces. From that moment on we grew apart, when we had a fight it was a fight, not a brother and sister spat, it was don't even speak to me, you know, and it was like he was taking it out on me, and I was like, what have I done? (Sharon: Interview 14)

Anna (Interview 11) remembered that, "when the sexual abuse stopped I was around 11 or so, I was just starting to go through puberty, it just stopped I didn't know why. I was quite happy that it had stopped, but I also felt rejected. It's a feeling that I have never really been able to understand."

Many survivors, in their efforts to understand why they had been sexually abused as children, identified that the offender had been abused as a child. This knowledge appeared to provide comfort for some survivors. For others, it provided a reason as to why the abuse occurred.

So when he said to me, well that guy did this to me [sexual abuse as a child], I was like, ah right, finally! It was like a piece of puzzle that was missing for me, you know? It was almost like, yippee, he was responsible for what he did, but would he have done that if that hadn't have happened to him? I don't think so. But being a sexually abused person, I know, well I think I know, I can relate to him to a degree as to what he would have gone through when he

was a kid. Do you see what I mean? And there is a part that does excuse him, because sexual abuse is awful, and you don't really have much choice when you're that age. (Sharon: Interview 14)

Tracey (Interview 17) commented, "I think we now accept that there are victims out there, but perpetrators are also victims . . . They are all human beings, how can you hate another human being that was probably abused when he was a child . . . you just perpetuate it, you've known inadequacy. I couldn't trust him [my father], but I don't hate him."

For survivors of child sexual abuse, these cognitive distortions persisted well into adulthood. The following comments were made by a survivor talking about how she felt as an adult disclosing child sexual abuse. According to Karen (Interview 18), she "kept crying . . . Because, because I can't, because I'm this little girl, I mean, for me it's like, you know, I was the little girl telling on my father, telling on my family. And the regression was immediate and frightening and overwhelming . . ."

The following comments highlight how difficult it has been for survivors of child sexual abuse to separate psychologically from offenders.

I was still in a sort of . . . in a very co-dependent relationship with my parents. I wanted to try and fix things in their lives, [as an adult] I wanted to be their little child . . . I wanted things to be good for them. (Carol: Interview 7)

I make excuses for him, if I read a story about someone like my father and the things he did to his daughters, I would think that such a person is a monster. But he was my father. The only father I ever had. I don't have a choice, I can't have another father or go back and change it. I guess that's why I have toned my story down and only told part of it, the whitewashed parts. The parts that weren't too bad. (Sarah: Interview 16)

Both male and female survivors of child sexual abuse have struggled to separate psychologically from the offender. John (Interview 24) noted that, "before I could confront my uncle I would have to do more work on myself. I am not capable of physically confronting him. I still have this impression of my uncle having superiority over me."

The cognitive distortions have persisted long after the abuse ceased continuing into adulthood. An emotional bond has developed between

the child victim and the offender, typically a close family member or family friend. This is evident in the following comments.

All touch is nice, so that it is not wrong initially, it [sexual abuse] normally is only touch initially, I don't know many children who've enjoyed the later parts of abuse, that's totally different . . . affection is what you get from parents, and it seems like affection to start with. (Sarah: Interview 16)

I did everything with my brother as a kid, on the weekends we did everything together, we were good friends, you know, we used to fight all the time, but we were really good friends, and then because he had that sort of bond with me, I think that's why he could use that to his advantage. (Sharon: Interview 14)

Although the bond between victim and offender has broken down over time, without some sort of intervention, this has occurred very slowly (Graham, 1994). Counseling could be one such intervention. One of the processes of counseling, amongst others, has been to challenge these cognitive distortions or survival strategies, thereby enabling a review of the relationship and empowering victims to establish their own perspective and discover a sense of self. This in turn could enable victims to separate psychologically from offenders. Nonetheless, as survivors of child sexual abuse learned about other victims who had been victimized by the same offender, they often initiated action in order to protect other children. Cindi (Interview 20) exemplified this by stating, "he [my father] has a second wife, Philippina wife, or did have, and he has a son by her, I guess I felt like, that her son [my stepbrother] was at risk . . . I guess . . . [that's the reason I went to the police]." These feelings were reiterated by Carol (Interview 7), "I called up a hot line, because I was afraid my nephew was being abused, because he was left at my parents' house every other weekend, terrific place to leave a child." The comments made by the following survivors similarly indicate that the new knowledge about the offender could act as a catalyst for action."

When I found out there were other victims, I couldn't believe it, I had thought I was the only one. In fact they seemed to be falling out of the woodwork, and I was the oldest. I felt so responsible. If I had have told someone all those years ago, maybe the others

wouldn't have been abused. I felt an overwhelming responsibility to do something, I was not in a position as a child to stop the abuse, but as an adult I certainly could. So I went to the police. I needed to give that responsibility to someone else. (Anna: Interview 11)

If I thought my father had been running around interfering with other girls too, I think I would have reacted differently. I'm almost 99 per cent certain that he never has. My brother, my younger brother, has a daughter, and she, from the age of about three, was allowed to go and stay with Granny and Granddad. At this stage my sister and I got together and said, do we say something or do we not, and we did. It was his decision that she [his daughter] could still go, he felt that nothing would happen and if it did she would say so. We tried to tell him that that's not always the case. It was his decision and as far as I know she's never been touched. (Sarah: Interview 16)

She [my sister] told our friend's daughter that he [our father] had been touching her. Yeah, up 'til then I didn't know. He actually touched her the night before he was arrested. That's basically why I never really did anything because I thought I was the only one. Same old story. I thought well, at least if he was doing it to me he wasn't doing it to them. But if I'd known beforehand . . . that was the only thing that stopped me from actually doing anything about it, was because . . . if I'd know that he was touching her then I would have done something about it a lot earlier, if I'd known. (Rosalind: Interview 6)

As Graham (1994) observed with hostages, this new information served to disrupt the bond between the adult survivor of child sexual abuse and the offender.

DISCUSSION

The emotional bond between most survivors of child sexual abuse and offenders in this particular study has appeared to persist into adulthood. Graham (1994) argued that this bond was a consequence of the abuse and the subsequent survival strategies of the victim: "Victims with the syndrome do not stay with their abusers because they have bonded with the abuser; they bond with their abusers because they see

no way to escape” (p. 50). In the instance of child sexual abuse some sort of a bond existed prior to the commencement of sexual abuse. Pedophiles have spoken of establishing a relationship with a potential victim and gaining their trust as a part of their *modus operandi* (Briggs, 1995). Without an established pre-existing relationship, chronic abuse could not persist. The risk of the victim disclosing the abuse would be too great. The position of power the offender has held relative to the victim, combined with an established relationship, enabled the offender to exploit this relationship and sexually abuse the child, safe in the knowledge that the child would not likely disclose or would be reluctant to disclose.

Graham (1994) argued that the length of time hostages were held captive might not be the relevant variable to determine the development and maintenance of Stockholm Syndrome. She claimed that this was more dependent on the events and psychological processes that occurred during the period of captivity. The development of Stockholm Syndrome and its maintenance were more likely to be dependent on the victim’s perceived ability to escape. Although adult survivors of child sexual abuse, as a group of victims, were exposed to the four precursors identified by Graham (1994) for prolonged periods, they have revealed in excerpts included here, that they believed their inability to escape was indeed real.

The cognitive distortions were a survival strategy that resulted from exposure to the four precursor conditions that Graham (1994) identified as necessary for the development of Stockholm Syndrome. Unless the cognitive distortions were present, to some degree, Stockholm Syndrome could not be said to be present. Therefore, she concluded that the cognitive distortions were part of the development of the syndrome. The development of Stockholm Syndrome in children could be similar to that in the hostages described by Graham. The very fact that a person was able to sexually abuse children would indicate that the offender was able to influence a child’s thinking to obtain his or her silence for a period of time.

As previously noted, this article is not suggesting that all victims of child sexual abuse would be victims of Stockholm Syndrome, but it would seem that those who have been subjected to an ongoing sexually abusive relationship within the context of their family or social networks could be especially susceptible to the development of this syndrome. In the first instance, the dependency of children on adults for nurture and protection would promote the development of an emotional bond. The stronger the emotional bond and the closer the familial rela-

tionship between victim and offender, the more susceptible the victim of child sexual abuse could be to developing Stockholm Syndrome.

Stockholm Syndrome may provide a rational and compelling explanation for the perplexing reluctance of adult victims of child sexual abuse to disclose and also perhaps for the equally frustrating phenomena of victims, who disclose or criminally report and then retract allegations. Offenders are skilled manipulators, many of whom are able to manipulate victims (and sometimes bystanders too) for long periods of time; construct elaborate systems of denial; and maintain relationships under false pretences. Bystanders, particularly those who have developed a bond with the offender, might not be supportive of criminal reporting and could pressure victims to maintain the conspiracy of silence. Therefore, they may be unwilling or inappropriate support persons for victims of child sexual abuse; they may be unreliable or overtly damaging witnesses in court proceedings. Victims of child sexual abuse who choose to pursue justice will possibly require a level of support that bystanders might be unable or unwilling to provide.

Victims of child sexual abuse might not be able to disclose, or criminally report, until they have begun the process of psychological separation from the offender. For many victims this could be some years after the sexual abuse has ceased. Outsiders could find it difficult to understand the reluctance of child sexual abuse victims to criminally report, thereby inadvertently contributing to the victimization process. Due to the impacts of Stockholm Syndrome, the responses of child sexual abuse victims could be misinterpreted by outsiders as ambivalence or contrariness. The introduction of any statute of limitations could disadvantage victims of child sexual abuse. A time lapse should not be a defense argument for the offender. Criminal justice agencies would do well to consider carefully the prevalence and cascade effects of Stockholm Syndrome as they evaluate delayed complaints or so-called vexatious allegations.

Stockholm Syndrome as a phenomenon is rarely discussed in the literature of child sexual abuse. Thus, it is not surprising that victims of child sexual abuse do not identify themselves as victims of Stockholm Syndrome. Not only are the excerpts of "voices" included in this article congruent with Stockholm Syndrome, many of the tragically familiar and especially puzzling features of child sexual abuse and long term damage for adult victims become surprisingly plausible within the rationale of Stockholm Syndrome. The presence of this syndrome could complicate the recovery process of child sexual abuse victims. Therefore, it is recommended that the features of Stockholm Syndrome be in-

cluded in the training of those professionals providing services to victims of child sexual abuse. These will include medical practitioners, psychologists, counselors, therapists, social workers, mental health workers, police officers and all justice practitioners.

It was not easy for survivors, as either children or adults, to disclose child sexual abuse. The deeply entrenched survival techniques utilized by survivors have continued to protect the offender long after the abuse ceased. Consequently, adult survivors were reluctant to criminally report the sexual victimization they were subjected to as children. Stockholm Syndrome might not be the only explanation available to explain this phenomenon. Nevertheless, this syndrome has offered valuable insights regarding the reluctance of adult survivors to criminally report child sexual abuse. Despite the limitations of this research, the analysis of interviews suggests that a careful study of this syndrome by professionals in the area of child sexual abuse could yield valuable information that is more applicable to a broader population of adult victims of child sexual abuse.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J., Martin, J., Mullen, P., Romans, S., & Herbison, P. (1993). Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse experiences in a community sample of women. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(5), 911-919.
- Briggs, F. (1995). *From victim to offender: how child sexual abuse victims become offenders*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Goddard, C., & Tucci, J. (1991). Child protection and the need for the reappraisal of the social worker-client relationship. *Australian Social Work*, 44(2), 3-10.
- Graham, D. L. R. (with Rawlings, E. I., & Rigsby, R. K.). (1994). *Loving to survive: sexual terror, men's violence and women's lives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hacker, F. J. (1976). *Crusaders, criminals, crazies: Terror and terrorism in our time*. New York: Bantam.
- Kuleshnyk, I. (1984). The Stockholm Syndrome: toward an understanding. *Social Action and the Law*, 10(2), 37-42.
- Soskis, D. A., & Ochberg, F. M. (1982). Concepts of terrorist victimization. In D. A. Soskis & F. M. Ochberg (Eds.), *Victims of terrorism* (pp. 105-135). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Strentz, T. (1982). The Stockholm Syndrome: law enforcement policy and hostage behaviour. In D. A. Soskis & F. M. Ochberg (Eds.), *Victims of terrorism* (pp. 149-163). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Summit, R. C. (1983). The child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 7, 177-193.