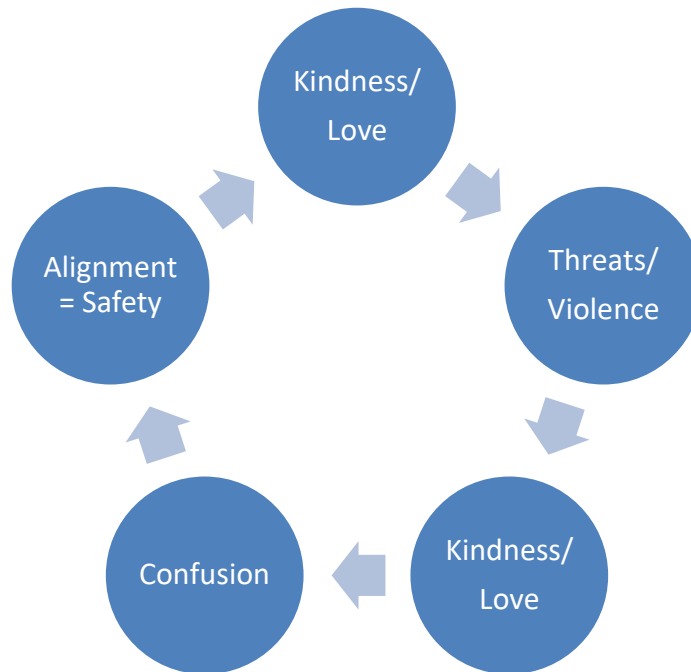


# Stockholm Syndrome and Trauma Bonding



As we learn more about the impact of trauma, it is imperative to understand the concepts of traumatic bonding, dissociation, cognitive dissonance, and Stockholm Syndrome.

Trauma bonding consists of strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other. Several conditions must be present:

- There must be an imbalance of power with one person more in control of key aspects of the relationship, such as setting themselves up as the authority through such tactics as controlling the finances, making most of the relationship decisions, or using threats and intimidation so the relationship has become lopsided.
- The abusive behavior is sporadic in nature. It is characterized by intermittent reinforcement, which means there is the alternating of highly intense positives (such as kindness and affection) and the negatives of abusive behavior.
- The victim engages in denial of the abuse for emotional self-protection. In severe physical or psychological abuse, one form of psychological protection is dissociation where the victim experiences the abuse as if it is not happening to them, but as if they were outside of their body watching the scene unfold. Dissociative states allow the victim to compartmentalize the abusive aspects of the relationship in order to focus on the positive aspects.

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The use of denial and distancing oneself from the abuse are forms of what is called **cognitive dissonance**. In abusive relationships, the victim's circumstance is so far removed from healthy expectations of what a relationship is intended to be, that it is dissonant or out of tune with their pre-existing expectations and reality. Since the victim feels powerless to change the situation, they rely on emotional strategies to try to make it less dissonant. To cope with the contradicting behaviors of the abuser, and to survive the abuse, the person *must change how they perceive reality*. The more the victim has invested in the relationship, the more they need to justify their position. Cognitive dissonance is a powerful self-preservation mechanism which can completely distort and override the truth, with the victim developing a tolerance for the abuse and normalizing the abuser's behavior, despite evidence to the contrary.

## Stockholm Syndrome

This phenomenon has been difficult to explain, though studied by many experts, however, most agree that the development of Stockholm syndrome is an unconscious, automatic emotional response to the trauma of being victimized (DeFabrique N, et al. 2007).

The victims perception of the perpetrator has been misconstrued and the brief lack of violence (i.e I was *allowed* to live, or I wasn't beaten today) , is perceived as an act of kindness, and that perceived kindness morphs into affection (Pakistan Today, 2013).

D.L. Graham and colleagues broadened the classic understanding/theory of Stockholm syndrome through their studies.

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 et al., 1994, p. 33).

Furthering the above factors in their recent article, Julicha and Oak (2016) present the case that the grooming of the victim also leads to the development of Stockholm syndrome. Their correlation between Stockholm syndrome and the grooming by abusers is noteworthy. They explore the cognitive dissonance that is reconciled in the victims psyche, that the cognitive distortions that are re-framed lead to a pseudo agency, and the belief that the abuser will intuitively know if they are disloyal, are results of the grooming process.

Understanding some the basic concepts with traumatic bonding can assist service providers and law enforcement with an understanding of victims' lack of self-identification as a victim, and their defense of their perpetrator.

# Stockholm Syndrome and Trauma Bonding

## References

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