

Suicide by Cop

By:

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Use of the third person pronoun "he" and any of its forms in this paper is intended to include both masculine and feminine genders.

At 11:30 AM, June 17, 1981, 38 year-old William Griffin walked down the worn, wooden stairs leading from his second floor bedroom in his parent's Rochester, N.Y. residence to their orderly living room. Without a word of warning, he shot and killed his mother and a handyman with blasts from a shotgun, then critically wounded his stepfather. He then walked two blocks to a neighborhood bank where he took nine bank employees hostage, while ordering nine customers to leave. He thereafter initiated a 3 1/2 hour standoff with police and FBI Agents, during which he shot and wounded the first two police officers who responded to the bank's silent robbery alarm, and shot six different citizens who happened to be walking near the bank.

Placing all the bank employees in a small inner-office, he told the manager to call the police and tell them, "If they don't come into the bank and execute me (Griffin) in one-half hour (3:00 P.M.), I'll start throwing out bodies."

Refusing to negotiate with the authorities, Griffin gestured toward a young female teller and told her, "Get up and get in between the (two glass) bank doors." Reluctantly doing as she was ordered, she cried out that she was the single parent of a young son. Ignoring her pleas, at exactly 3:00 P.M. Griffin fired his shotgun for the last two of the nearly 100 shots he had fired that day. Both of the heavy rounds struck teller Margaret Moore, violently blowing her through the outer glass door. Griffin turned and walked across the bank lobby and stood in front of a large, full-length glass window, directly across the street from where he knew police snipers had occupied the second floor of a church. The sniper, given the proverbial green light to shoot this man who had just wantonly murdered a teller, said, "I put the crosshairs on his head and fired." Griffin fell to the floor, dead.

A subsequent search of Griffin's bedroom produced a personal diary, a review of which revealed a particularly insightful entry dated 13 months previous. In a rambling account suggesting a history of psychosis, entitled "Something for the Pope," Griffin indicated his plan consisted of him, "... entering a neighborhood bank and demanding the sheriff and state police take my life for not allowing me the position of liberty here in the dominion of earth."

In his tormented mind, William Griffin had developed--and carefully written in his diary--his personal blueprint for his own death. Setting his deadly strategy in motion, a scheme that would force the police to act as his executioner; he did everything necessary to insure the success of this plan, to include slaying an innocent bank teller previously unknown to him. What Margaret Moore represented to Griffin, other than a means to facilitate his own death wish, was carried to the grave with him. This was not an "ordinary" crime gone bad, it was the carefully planned suicide of a man who wanted to be killed by the police.

As one of the two negotiators who had attempted in vain to talk Griffin out of this situation, this author needed to know what we had missed. Why did Griffin do this? To our knowledge, prior to the Griffin case, never in the history of the United States had a hostage taker killed a hostage on deadline.

But were Margaret Moore and her fellow bank employees actual "hostages" in the true sense of the word? If we accept this author's definition of a hostage as, "a person held at a location known to the authorities, and threatened by a subject or subjects to force the fulfillment of substantive demands made on a third party," we have all the elements in this situation, given we consider Griffin's demand to be killed, a true "substantive demand." But if

not a conventional hostage situation, one in which a bank robber might say, "Give me a car, \$50,000, and a ten minute head start and I'll release my hostages," what was it? Was this a tragic but isolated incident; was it a homicide/self-initiated suicide-to-be; or was it one of the first clear examples of a form of manipulative behavior known as victim precipitated homicide, or "Suicide by Cop" (SbC).

Consider the following. In July 1985, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Randy Kutej, a 24 year old unemployed suspected narcotics user and dealer, armed with a double-barreled shotgun, entered a local convenience store at 5:00 AM and took the lone store employee hostage. He telephoned the local police, announced what he had done, and demanded the police provide him with additional firearms. Kutej appeared intoxicated, irrational, and angry over his alleged inability to find work. He soon changed his demands to one gun and one bullet, indicating "he wanted to blow his brains out."

Four hours later, after taunting police SWAT team members by tossing beer cans at them, Kutej told his hostage, "Oh hell, I'll just put an end to this myself." When the store manager declined Kutej's offer to leave the store ahead of him, Kutej turned and walked out the front door alone. As he left the store, he took long strides as one who had complete confidence in what he was about to do.

Kutej confronted the SWAT officers outside the store by raising the shotgun to his right shoulder and pointed its menacing twin barrels at the officer closest to him. This threatening gesture was met by a volley of four shots. When officers inspected his shotgun, they found it to be inoperative. Kutej died of his wounds two days later. Investigation revealed Kutej, the subject of prior drug investigations, had that same day viciously assaulted his

younger brother, and may have been "high" on a new type of designer drug. Kutej had a strained relationship with his parents and had few friends, the closest of which had recently died from a drug overdose. With the exception of his dog, a Rottweiler, he lacked any psychological or emotional support system. Life was apparently worth very little to him, and he took an action sure to end his worldly problems.

One week later, this same police department was notified of a man with a gun in a local apartment complex. A police officer on foot patrol saw a man walk out of an apartment carrying a rifle. When the officer challenged this person, he raised the weapon, pointed it at the officer, and backed into the apartment. As the door to the apartment slammed shut, the officer distinctly heard a voice cry-out from within saying, "Help me, help me!" Police hostage negotiators and SWAT team members responded to the scene.

Attempts by police to negotiate with this man met with little success, and his call to his social worker was abruptly terminated when the police cut his telephone line, ostensibly to deny him access to anyone other than the police negotiator.

All appeared quiet when suddenly, without warning; he stepped out of the apartment, confronting the SWAT officers surrounding his doorway. As one of the officers called him by name, he yelled, "What do I have to do to get you to kill me, maybe this?" When he raised the rifle to his shoulder in an obvious threatening manner, the police shot and killed him.

Immediate examination of the rifle revealed it was unloaded. As police entered the apartment, they found the source of the plaintive cry heard earlier by the first officer. The cry for help had come from the victim's talking parrot.

Local newspaper headlines told another story of life-and-death in ten quick words.

"2 Cult Members seize Bus;
Shot and Killed After Hostages Freed"

Arkansas Gazette
Little Rock, Arkansas

On July 3, 1982, Keith Haigler and his wife Kate, both of Jasper, Arkansas, seized control of a Trailways Bus with 16 people on board traveling from Little Rock to Wichita, Kansas. The Haiglers, ages 26 and 24 respectively, were members of a small religious cult called the Foundation of Ubiquity (FOU), also known as the Father of Us. They demanded to meet with reporters from a local television station "to tell the world that the messiah has arrived." They also indicated they wanted to die that day so they could be resurrected.

Neither of the Haiglers directly threatened the bus passengers, although both had loaded revolvers tied to their hands. They did tell the authorities they would "blow-up the bus and destroy Jasper," if police attempted to assault the bus. The Haiglers were using the act of hostage-taking to obtain maximum media attention.

The Haiglers wanted public attention via the media to expedite their suicidal plan. Keith, known to his friends as "FOU Jr.," indicated his wife and he were the two witnesses spoken of in the Bible in the book of Revelation, Chapter 11:

3. "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth."

7. "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them."

11. "And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them."

Keith Haigler continued: "That's the message I've been telling you for a year, and we've waited at the land (FOU land) to give interviews.... It's happening here today in FOUville.... The message is, the Messiah is here.... Father FOU exists.... It's all there in Revelation, Chapter 11."

The Haiglers, who probably suffered from a shared paranoid delusion, made relatively simple demands of the local sheriff. The story of FOU (ironically, the French word for mad or insane) must be broadcast on national television.

Keith told Sheriff Ray Watkins, "After we are killed this afternoon, our dead bodies are not to be tampered with, embalmed or any other means of society's funeral rights. The bodies are to be taken to the land of the messiah, Emory Lamb (the leader of FOU), whereupon they will lie until July 7th, when the spirit of life will enter unto them and we will stand on our feet. This demand must be met or Jasper will be destroyed. Once again, it is not our wish to hurt anyone." The message, written in the form of a letter, was signed "Sincerely, with the kindest of thoughts, Keith FOU Haigler and Kate FOU Haigler."

Keith indicated the one thousand two hundred and threescore days (1,260), as indicated in Revelation 11:3, began running for the Haiglers on January 21, 1979, and ended on that date, July 4th, 1982. Although Keith appeared to consider the various alternatives to his death posed to him by the Sheriff and the television newsman, Kate remained fixated on their mission, telling her husband, "Let's get on with it."

Good to their word, the Haiglers released their hostages after obtaining a promise that their story would be "aired to the world" and their dead bodies would be placed on their land. After a local television reporter reminded them of the deadline for the evening

news broadcast, the Haiglers walked from the bus, knelt on the highway next to each other, briefly kissed, and slowly moved forward on their knees (to avoid being shot in the legs) in the direction of officers approximately 75 yards away. As they pointed their weapons in the direction of the authorities, State Police sharpshooters, previously ordered to shoot at the right shoulders of the two, fired.

Both were struck and knocked down by the fusillade. Kate, who fired the first shot in the direction of the officers, pointed her revolver at her wounded husband and shot him once in the chest. She then turned her gun on herself, firing a single round into her right chest. Keith was pronounced dead at the scene, and Kate was "DOA" at the local hospital.

Local authorities arranged for the Haigler's bodies to be turned over to their respective parents. Keith was buried and Kate was cremated four days later. The Haiglers had carefully planned their own death at the hands of the authorities, in their minds the "beast" referred to in Revelation 11:7. Only their mutually anticipated resurrection escaped the finality of their plan.

The above cited incidents are but four of many of obvious, and some not so obvious, occurrences of victim precipitated homicide, referred to here as "Suicide by Cop." Too often a person armed with a weapon, to include broken, unloaded, or toy guns, has confronted police in such a manner as to elicit a violent, self-defense action by the officer. Others, such as Kate Haigler, have fired shots at officers, or like William Griffin, have killed another to elicit their desired response from the nearby authorities. Police, in frustration after being forced to shoot such individuals, have said, "The fool, didn't he know I would shoot him," or "Why did he make me kill him?"

A former military veteran shot his girlfriend and seized her and a second hostage in a VA hospital in Phoenix, Arizona. He demanded police kill him, saying he was "bored with life." Ricky Kloha said he would kill his two hostages if officers didn't kill him.

Police negotiators, recognizing the potential for a SbC, persevered in their attempts to negotiate with Ricky. They were later able to strike a bargain with him for the release of his hostages in exchange for a soft drink and four cigarettes. When Kloha indicated a willingness to sell his gun to the officers, they negotiated a sale price of \$50. Kloha, taking the \$50, gave up his gun and surrendered to police.

Ricky Kloha did everything he could, short of killing a hostage or shooting at police, to bring about his death at the hands of the authorities. At the 11th hour he made a decision not to precipitate a final confrontation and not to force his own death. But why are police often forced to participate in such incidents?

The answer may be so obvious, we look past it. The police have the guns. They have the training to react to potentially life-threatening situations with accurate and deadly force, and they are readily available, as close as your telephone.

Movies and police dramas on television have contributed to the belief that death by shooting can be a nice, clean, relatively painless process. "One shot by a cop" may be perceived as a quick way to end a world of problems. But do the police really have a choice when faced with the Kutejs and the Griffins of this world? Must they react so fast, with such deadly force? Are police truly at risk from such individuals?

Law Enforcement Officers Assaulted and Killed

FBI statistics indicate during the period 1981 through 1991, 3,776,105 reported assaults occurred on law enforcement officers. A total of 628,429 individuals were identified in these assaults, suggesting more than one officer may have been assaulted by the same individual, during the same incident.

During a similar period from 1979 through 1991, 1044 U.S. law enforcement officers were killed by 1,434 identifiable assailants. Of this total number of "cop killers," 972 of which had prior arrest records, 1213 were subsequently arrested and charged, 162 were justifiably killed by law enforcement officers, and 60 subsequently committed suicide by their own hands.

Writing in the 1984 edition of the Journal of Criminal Justice, Terance Miethe referred to studies which indicate between 22 and 50 percent of all homicides investigated by the police are victim-provoked by the use of physical force.

Examining the figures cited above reveals that 15 percent of the killers of police officers were themselves killed at the scene of the incident or later committed suicide. This figure is below that cited by Miethe (for all homicides) by anywhere from 7 to 35 percent. Several questions arise concerning these figures:

- 1) Are some police assailants and/or "cop killers" not being properly identified as possible SbCs?
- 2) Are some provokers less apt to confront a law enforcement officer to bring about their own death?
- 3) Does the law enforcement officer's level of expertise in approaching a distraught or menacing individual positively contribute to this lower percentage?

There are no law enforcement studies which show what the situation really is. The actual number of individuals who assaulted police or otherwise created a situation leading to a confrontation that they thought would bring about their own death is unknown. However, the media is replete with examples in which individuals appear to have provoked a confrontation with police officers.

The "victim" of a victim-precipitated homicide is one who commits an unorthodox type of suicide, by precipitating his own death through another person. This type of individual has suicidal impulses that are manifested in his self initiated victimization.

The role of the "victim" in a SbC situation is characterized by his having been the first in the homicide drama to use physical force directed against his chosen executioner. Most people know law enforcement officers are taught to use only the minimum force necessary to resolve an incident, and will use deadly force only in response to a life-threatening situation. The potential SbC knows and understands violence and uses the weapon of the law enforcement officer to commit the act of suicide by the hand of the officer.

Profile of a Suicide by Cop

The following represents a behavioral profile of a potential SbC and by itself should not be utilized in classifying an individual as suicidal:

He is often a member of a lower socio-economic class, who has integrated aggressive, other oriented behavior as a problem solving model. He may seek to destroy himself because of depression, desperation, and/or a need to punish society--by his death--for the "wrongs" it has committed against him.

Because of his aggressive life style, poor self-concept, and individual social standards, he may not view death at his own hands (suicide) as a socially acceptable method of death, therefore he may confront law enforcement officers; in a way that he knows will require them to use deadly force. He may use any means necessary, to include the killing of an innocent person or the slaying of a police officer, to bring about his own death in a way that will allow society, so he believes, to perceive him as a victim of others, not of himself.

If prior to his confrontation with the authorities, the individual has killed another, especially a significant other, the guilt hypothesis would suggest that his self-esteem is so threatened, he believes that society's hatred for his offense, and therefore himself, will only be satisfied by his violent death at the hands of the authorities. The SbC may subconsciously agree with the norms of society, norms which he has internalized within his own social consciousness, but with which he has consistently disagreed and fought against when represented as the standard by other social groups. The individual and his sense of self-worth then becomes the legitimate target for aggression.

Indicators of a Potential SbC Include the Following:

1. If he is the subject of a self-initiated hostage or a barricade situation, the individual refuses to negotiate with the authorities.
2. He has just killed a significant other in his life, especially if the victim was a child or the subject's mother.
3. He demands that he be killed by the police.
4. He sets a deadline for the authorities to kill him.
5. He has recently learned he has a life-threatening illness or disease.

6. He indicates an elaborate plan for his own death, one that has taken both prior thought and preparation.
7. He says he will only "surrender" (in person) to the officer in charge, e.g., the chief or the sheriff.
8. He indicates he wants to "go out in a big way."
9. He presents no demands that include his escape or freedom.
10. He comes from a low socio-economic background.
11. He provides the authorities with a "verbal will."
12. He appears to be looking for a manly or macho way to die.
13. He has recently given away money or personal possessions.
14. He has a criminal record indicating past assaultive behavior.
15. He has recently experienced one or more traumatic events in his life that impact on him, his family, or his career.
16. He expresses feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Although not all inclusive, any one or more of these indicators will help to identify a person who is possibly depressed and/or suicidal. A combination of these indicators should be considered evidence of a possible SbC, especially if this individual confronts the authorities in a way that could bring about his own death.

Police Response to a Potential Suicide by Cop

If an individual is identified as a potential SbC, the police response should be low key and non-dramatic. The infusion of lights and sirens only contributes to the carnival-like nature of confrontations between armed individuals and the authorities. The arrival of the

media simply adds more fuel to the fire already burning within the suicide-prone person. The emotional and physical stimulation provided by such an atmosphere, only further convinces the individual that he must carry out his perceived role.

In situations such as these, time may become an all of the authorities. Time will allow them to consider their alternatives in dealing with a potential SbC. An informed, objective appraisal of the individual and the legitimate threat he poses to himself, his "hostages," and to law enforcement officers must be made. As Lt. Robert Loudon (ret.), former commander of the NYPD hostage negotiation team once said, "Safety and control must always be the prime considerations in the decision making process." Can you identify and control the situation, contain the crisis, and safely resolve the incident before a potential SbC forces you to take drastic physical action against him? That is the challenge faced by law enforcement officers when confronted with such individuals.

Conclusion

Suicide and homicide are theoretically linked. When the stress and anxiety level of an individual, combined with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness bring him to consider suicide, he must then choose his method of death. Many times the unknowing law enforcement officer has been "chosen" to complete the suicidal person's death wish. The exact number of individuals that have forced a confrontation with police to bring about their own death is unknown, but the threat such individuals pose to others, and especially to law enforcement officers is very real.

To understand the concept of victim precipitated homicide, "Suicide by Cop," and to know the indicators of this phenomena, may help to save the lives of many untold police officers and others who will come face-to-face with this ultimate physical and psychological challenge.

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