Taking on the Persona of a Suicide Bomber: a Thought Experiment

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Abstract

Nineteen university students experimented taking on the persona of an apprehended suicide bomber. The role play explored the psychological mechanisms of dissociative phenomena, euphoria or a sense of empowerment contemplating suicide bombing; responses of imagined secondary traumatization; identification with the victim group; creation of fictive kin; choosing the (imagined) target; and their (imagined) moral reasoning. Results were eerily similar to accounts of real (failed) suicide bombers. Subjects identified with secondary trauma and fictive kin; and reported revenge and justice seeking as motivators; dissociation, some having experiences of euphoria or empowerment when contemplating strapping on a bomb. Their moral reasoning was nearly identical with the one of suicide bombers, despite none of them being Muslim. Most imagined targeting children or civilians. This leads us to the tentative conclusion that psychological mechanisms underlying the contemplation to engage in suicide terrorism may be universal.

I. Understanding Suicide Terrorism

In the West, we live in a post-modern society in which we have lost our understanding of communal values and the ideas of self-sacrifice on behalf of the group. Indeed, we struggle to comprehend an individual who does not deem his own life and pursuit of it as more sacred than anything he could achieve by setting it aside. For this reason most of the early writings on the 9-11 bombers and on suicide terrorists in general found them incomprehensible, mad, beyond reason or driven by poverty and illiteracy to commit inhuman deeds. However, in time researchers found that these conclusions were wrong and that human bombers are in the main not psychologically disturbed [1], are less impoverished and more educated than their peers (Atran, 2003; Sageman, 2004, Speckhard, 2005; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005). Indeed among samples of Palestinian (from the second intifada) and Chechen bombers it was found that suicide terrorists were often college educated and came from less impoverished sectors of their societies than their peers (Atran, 2004; Merari, 2003; Merari, 2005; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006; Akmedova, & Speckhard, 2006).

Those who study suicide terrorism have argued that as a phenomenon it arises from a unique synergy between the personal factors and individual motivations and social political concerns that foster it. As a tactic, suicide terrorism requires an ideology of martyrdom to sustain it. This ideology, which may exist completely independent of religion, is the glue that marries the individual motivations of the "would be" human bomber to the social political factors and groups that promote its use. That the ideologies that promote the use of suicide terrorism as a tactic may exist completely independent of any religion and be utilized in support of human bombing is a crucial point to make - one that is often missed by those who lump all suicide terrorism together with so-called "Islamic" based terrorism. Indeed suicide terrorism has been used by Marxist and non-religious groups as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and is as prevalent in groups whose ideologies are *not* related to Islamic beliefs as those that are.

Religion, poverty, illiteracy and madness put aside, one still must ask - once the marriage of individual motivations, ideology and political goals of the sponsoring organization has been achieved - how does an individual go forward to become a human bomb? How is he or she able to knowingly get in a car, truck or even on a bicycle, or most horrific of all - strap a bomb onto his or her own body - to in essence become a human bomb that goes directly to his target to explode him- or herself? How are these individuals psychologically able to manage their fears and put aside the universal instinct for self-preservation? If it is not religion sustaining them in all cases, or madness driving them, how do suicide bombers make the decision to carry out such acts and what psychological processes aid them to go forward to their own deaths and the destruction of others - often including innocent civilians? These are the questions for which we sought answers.

We have limited answers to some of these questions from our own interviews and the research of others with failed suicide bombers – those who were apprehended prior to detonating their devices; interviews with their family members, acquaintances and handlers or senders as well as the study of the last testaments of successful bombers (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005; Speckhard, 2005; Argo, 2003; Hafez, 2004; Atran, 2003; Merari 2003). From these sources it appears that bombers are fairly rational in their decision-making processes and that they do not appear depressed, psychologically disturbed [2] (Akhmedova, K., 2003) or suicidal in the normal sense of the word, or psychopathological in their views of others (Atran, 2003). Yet there must be some active psychological ingredient present in all of them, which makes it possible for them to do the unthinkable – die in order to kill. We were curious to explore if the   ability to put aside one's instinct for self preservation consists of universal traits that could be identified and studied and perhaps addressed when one seeks to curb the use of this particularly horrific terror tactic?

II. The Bomber Within

Indeed, after studying human bombers in Chechnya and the Palestinian territories and finding that personal experiences of daily humiliation; severe bereavement and traumatic stress, loss, frustration, desire for justice and nationhood, loss of all meaningful roles, and the desire for revenge often act as individual motivations for this type of self sacrifice, the lead author wondered if perhaps there is a universal capacity within all individuals to carry out such an act, a capacity that perhaps extends to all human beings? That perhaps we all carry a human bomber within - that every individual has their breaking point and given the right situation, circumstances, politics, and ideology anyone can become a suicide bomber? [3]

As researchers of suicide terrorism we were curious to learn about this potential breaking point and wondered if there are universal rationalizations given for and psychological defenses that are enacted by people of any nationality or religion when they consider, or actually carry out, strapping a bomb to their own bodies to go and explode themselves. Given that many real would-be bombers have been apprehended and given interviews about their decision-making process, psychological state and thoughts in carrying out such a mission, we wondered how similar the responses of 'normal' subjects of a similar age and educational background might be

if the 'normals' were placed in a similar situation – even in a fantasy – to those of actual bombers. If so, we asked ourselves: would they make similar or very different rationalizations, speak of similar or different use of defenses? We wanted to know, if placed in such a fantasy role, whether they might voice similar or very different thoughts and feelings to those expressed by actual suicide bombers apprehended before detonating themselves.

To study this we decided to conduct a "thought experiment" in which subjects – that is university students of varied international backgrounds – were asked to take part in an exercise in which they would be asked to briefly imagine taking on the persona of a suicide bomber in order that we could study what psychological states they would experience in that role. In this exercise they were asked to enter briefly into a role play in which they took on the role of a bomber apprehended shortly after strapping on a bomb and going to his target but apprehended just prior to exploding himself and to give an interview from that psychological point of view. We wanted to learn whether, once in role, 'normal' students might give evidence of the use of psychological defenses reportedly utilized by real bombers, and whether they might identify from a distance with the traumas of others. We also wanted to know whether the concept of "fictive kin" might be operational for them. In addition, we wanted to study their decision-making process in the imaginative exercise - of how they picked a target and whether or not they justified targeting civilians.

III. Taking on the Persona of a Suicide Bomber - The "Thought Experiment"

Sample

Our thought experiment was conducted in English at a Belgian University within an English speaking college in Brussels (the Free University of Brussels, Vesalius College). 19 subjects of varied nationalities (1 each of Swedish, Bulgarian, German, Indian, Norwegian, Italian, British, Puerto Rican, Dutch, 2 unspecified, 2 Belgians, 6 Americans) and varied majors (1 philosophy; 1 anthropology; 1 economics; 1 communication; 2 psychology; 2 international studies; 3 computer science, 6 political science, and 2 unspecified), all aged between 19-24 and of both genders (7 female and 12 male) were recruited to take part in the experiment. In regard to their religious upbringing, 6 had an atheistic/agnostic background, 8 had a Christian background (5 Catholic, 1 Protestant, and 2 Orthodox), 2 had a Christian/atheist background, 2 had a Jewish background and 1 unspecified. The sample contained no one of Islamic heritage. None of the subjects had prior military experience.

Recruitment

The subjects (none of whom declined) were invited by the student members of the experimental team to take part – being invited from the hallway immediately during the time of the experiment - and told if they agreed that they should wait a short time period in the hall before being invited into the experimental room to take part in a brief psychologically oriented "thought experiment", giving an interview on a subject that should not be embarrassing to them (following an informed consent protocol). Upon their arrival for the interview the subjects were invited to take part in the "thought experiment" in which they were asked, immediately at the time of the interview if

they would be willing to take on the persona of an individual that we would describe to them and then once having assumed that role give an interview based on the thoughts and feelings that they experienced in the role described to them. All of the subjects were told that we did not reasonably expect the experiment to cause them any harm or significant distress or humiliate them and that the only foreseeable risk to them was if they were actively suicidal. All students were screened negative for any active suicidality and informed consent was obtained prior to proceeding with the experiment, making clear to the students that they could discontinue the experiment at any time and for any reason.

The Role Play

Following obtaining informed consent and the proceeding introduction, we verbally presented to the subject the scenario for the experiment as follows:

> For this experiment we would like you to take on the persona of a suicide bomber. For this role you will be a Palestinian living in the Palestinian territories. You probably know something about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, no? (Affirmation was gained in all cases, although one (American) subject was particularly naïve and even unsure where Israel was located). As a Palestinian living in the Palestinian territories you are from time to time subjected to all day curfews lasting sometimes for several days in which you are required to stay in your home. You suffer many small indignities and your life is not easy. Your economic situation is difficult and you often face the necessity to cross checkpoints to get to school or work if you work. You are aware of the Israeli practice of destroying the homes of suicide bombers, although, on the other hand, you also know of the practice of families of "martyrs" receiving financial compensations often including new homes and raised standards of living as a reward for their family member's action. You have, for various reasons, decided to become a suicide bomber. You may have many motivations for deciding to become a bomber, which you are free to make up as you role play, but we would like you to consider that there was a particular galvanizing event in your decision making process - the fact that you witnessed, not in person, but on television, the mistaken shootings of two young children (boys) by Israelis special forces - an event which may in reality occur occasionally. This event disturbed you greatly. Likewise you were not actively recruited by a terrorist organization to become a bomber, but instead you volunteered, seeking out the terrorist organization yourself, asking for the means to carry out this act. You also picked your own target, which you are free now to pick in the role-play. It might be a pizza parlor, a bus, a military checkpoint, or any crowded area, or place. You are free to choose it. You may have a preference for a place populated by soldiers or by civilians. You may choose to avoid a place where there are many mothers and children or that may be less important to you. In any case you were furnished by the terrorist organization with a suicide belt and the instructions on how to use it– you know this device by which suicide terrorists carry out their acts - it's strapped to their bodies and they

have a detonator? (This was answered in the affirmative in all cases). Now, to make this "thought experiment" plausible we ask you to pretend that you went so far as to strapping on the belt and going to the target where you were about to detonate, but that you were discovered and apprehended before detonating – hence you are still alive and we can now interview you about your thoughts and feelings up to that point. Having been apprehended you are, in this scenario, currently in an Israeli prison and life is not so great for you. (Then asking the subject directly.) Is this okay of you? You can take on this role and we can begin our interview? (The answer was affirmative in all cases, although often with some nervous laughter and brief expressions of doubt about one's ability to carry on "in role").

The rational for giving this scenario was as follows: We were interested to compare what average college students of varied nationalities and religious backgrounds would say when role playing the part of a Palestinian bomber to what actually apprehended Palestinian and other human bombers often say about themselves; we also wanted to compare what our subjects would say with what the experts on real human bombers have to say about them.[4] To do so, we wanted our person in role-play to have suggestions about how stressful and humiliating aspects of daily life can be for Palestinians (economic hardships, curfews, checkpoints, etc.), particularly during the time period of the Second Intifada when there was a huge spike in suicide terrorism. Likewise, we wanted our fantasy role-play bomber to reflect on the current Palestinian terrorism situation in which bombers more often recruit themselves than are being recruited. We were also curious to know how active and strong the concept of "fictive kin" and secondary traumatization might be if we introduced into the imagined role play the aspect of having witnessed not in person - but over the television - an Israeli act of aggression (admittedly a mistaken shooting) of children not related by blood to the person witnessing it via television. We wanted to know whether our role player would show somehow that he or she had psychologically identified with the children victims, even going so far as to consider them related to him or her in some manner (i.e. fictive kin). We also wished to learn how our role player would pick his or her target if free to do so and what he or she would feel in imagination when "recalling" strapping on an explosive self-detonating device. We did, however, not give any additional information about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict other than these specific bits of information because we did not want to introduce any potential bias to the role-play. The information was presented verbally because the subjects were of many different nationalities and more proficient in oral versus written English. The verbal explanation also opened rapport and facilitated the move to the experimental interview.

The interview began immediately at this point, with the experimenters asking the subject how he was being treated in prison, about their family members and if their families knew where he was and if he had contact with them and concerns about them. All of the subjects went immediately "into role" and deepened their experience of the role as they proceeded with the interview. The subjects were asked how they decided to become "martyrs", using this word to affirm their assumed world-view. After discussing the jail and their imagination of their families all of the subjects went deeply into their assumed roles and moved easily to speaking freely in response to research questions posed to them about how they decided to become bombers and how they

picked their targets. After this, the subjects were asked to describe how they felt upon receiving the bomb and strapping it on to their bodies, what they felt at that moment and what happened as they moved to their target. The interview ended with their imagined description of how the scenario ended in arrest and imprisonment.

Following the conclusion of their role play, all of the subjects were carefully debriefed with questions about how they felt participating in the experiment, whether or not they were surprised by their own answers (most were), whether it was difficult to move into the role play (all said it was strange at first but that they easily moved into it as they began to make up their story and that they strongly identified with the character they role-played - even though most had little to no knowledge of either the subject of suicide bombing or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict). Lastly, subjects were assessed to be sure they had moved completely out of the role play, were back to "normal", and were not emotionally upset. (The process upset only one woman and this was due to her alarm over the fact that she had expressed a strong aspect of revenge stating when in role that she would target young children. She received further debriefing about her strong identification with the traumas of the children "shot on television" and became calm and self accepting again, although she remained surprised at the intensity of her desire for revenge in the role play). Subjects were then thanked for their help in the research project.

IV. Results

The results of this experiment are quite interesting in light of how "normal" college students approach the role of a suicide bomber in comparison with the information available about the mentality and decision-making of real suicide bombers (from interviews with apprehended bombers, their family members, close associates, hostages and senders). We were particularly struck by how easily a normal student would take on this role and imagine making similar decisions and describe similar mental processes to real suicide bombers. This leads us to conclude that perhaps the mentality of revenge, generalizability of revenge to wider targets than those who caused the original harm, and the psychological defenses enacted to face one's own death by self-explosion are not limited to bombers but are universal to all persons. We discuss our results in comparison with existing data below:

Witnessing Trauma, Identifying with the Victim and the Concept of Fictive Kin

The concepts of secondary traumatization (Atran, 2003; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006)[5], witnessing or identifying with the victim has a large psychological literature. Indeed the current definition of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) defines an event capable of engendering acute or posttraumatic stress disorder as one in which the person experiences, *witnesses*, or is confronted with an event or events that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others and that the person's response involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed DSM-IV-R, American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

The fact that *witnessing* or experiencing injustices in a conflict zone can be an individual motivator for terrorist activity including becoming a human bomber has been borne out in many

research endeavors including research interviews of both Chechens and Palestinians (Argo, 2004; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005; Speckhard, & Akmedova, 2006a; Speckhard, & Akhmedova, 2006b; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005). Clearly absorbing the traumas of others and identifying with them can be a motivating force both within conflict zones and even far from them.

The likelihood of posttraumatic responses occurring in those living in conflict and terror ridden zones via witnessing versus personal and direct experience and even outside those zones is greatly increased these days by satellite television and Internet coverage. Indeed Nicole Argo (2006) reported the following from one of her Palestinian research interviews:

> The difference between the first intifada and the second is television. Before, I knew when we were attacked here, or in a nearby camp, but the reality of the attacks everywhere else was not so clear. Now, I cannot get away from Israeli attacks - the TV brings them into my living room. When they are not in my camp, they are in Rafah, Gaza City, Ramallah, Jenin.... And you can't turn the TV off. How could you live with yourself? At the same time, you can't ignore the problem - what are you doing to protect your people? We live in an internal struggle. Whether you choose to fight or not, every day is this internal struggle. - PFLP leader, Khan Yunis, June 2004.

Incarcerated Palestinian "would be" suicide terrorists also recount their traumatic stress responses after viewing televised images of violence. "The things we see on television are nauseating and make us lose our taste for life.…" "Beforehand I saw pictures of dead or wounded children on television.." One such respondent even goes so far as to credit what he saw on television as the main motivation for his thwarted act of suicide terrorism, "The pictures we saw on television are what influenced me and pushed me to make the decision to do the operation" (Hass, 2004).

Terror-sponsoring organizations understand this psychological effect and make use of televised and Internet images to motivate and capture impressionistic youth into joining *Jihadist* groups. Indeed some of the images found on the Internet used on behalf of promoting Al Qaeda type terrorist ideologies urging violent responses to the West have become iconic. When one delves deeper into the images and stories behind them, the truth is often much different than what is portrayed, but like all iconic images – the truth is often of much less importance than what the images have come to represent – a rallying call to action on behalf of the downtrodden and victimized.

In this research we were curious to learn if we introduced the element of witnessing trauma into an imaginary role play – in this case witnessing an act of mistaken aggression over the television, but not in person – in which an Israeli soldier mistakenly fires upon and kills two Palestinian boys would act strongly as a motivator and rationalization for becoming a suicide terrorist. We suggested to our subject that this was a type of "galvanizing event", something that pushed the "would be" terrorist into action but we left it up to the student to incorporate this aspect of the narrative into his or her own role play. We were curious to know how much impact witnessing over television, but not experiencing in reality would play a part in an imagined role-play

concerning what the person offered as rationalizations, justifications and motivations for violence.

Moreover, we were curious about the concept of fictive kin – if and how the subject might incorporate this concept into their role-play. Scott Atran (2003) writes about this anthropological concept in terms of terrorism studies stating that current terrorist ideologies, particularly those of an Islamic nature and their sponsoring units often promote this concept within their ideology and practices. They do this by referring to other Muslims, albeit individuals of completely differing cultures and nationalities undergoing traumas in other parts of the world as fictive kin naming them "brothers". On the home front, they also make use of this concept by encouraging terrorist members to identify with their terror cell mates as fictive kin - being loyal to and willing to die for them as they would for mother, father, brother or sister – a phenomena we have found in our research as well (Speckhard, & Ahkmedova, 2005). We were interested to learn if our subjects would incorporate and identify with as "fictive kin" - the story about two killed children that we had offered them - into their imagined world. We coded for evidence of identifying with fictive kin if the subject created a family member in imagined role play of the same age as the boys and/ or directly named a relationship to the boys – i.e. stating they could have been my sons or brothers (and therefore I was willing to die on their behalf).

Remarkably, this concept was quite active in the sample (see Table 1). Seventy-nine percent of the sample (15 of the 19) subjects identified immediately with the shooting of the two small children by fantasizing themselves as either the parent of small children or the older sibling of younger siblings – hence it appeared that they had made the shootings of the small children that they were told were only witnessed from afar (over television) personally "real" for them and a traumatic event with which they identified. One subject, for instance, told us that he was the father of two children and spoke about how disturbed he was by what he had viewed on television, "I saw on television innocents just born into this war killed brutally." Another male student explains how he kept his feelings at bay (in role play) for strapping on the bomb by focusing on his feelings for the children who were killed, "I was thinking of the kids at home the whole time, it made me stronger … it could have happened to them. It could have been my brothers. As I went toward the target I didn't look to the soldiers. I was thinking of those two boys - it made me stronger. I felt conscious of what I was going to do, to help stop massacres. Everyday kids die from Israelis soldiers."

Television and Internet images are an amazing medium when one considers their potential to traumatize. Even when one witnesses events from a distance over this medium, the psychological impact can be immense and the memory of it can be confused with having had the experience in reality. Take, for instance, one subject who was told by the researchers that he witnessed the event on television but in the interview tells us he saw the shooting with his own eyes (neither is true, but he confused having been told he saw it on television with having seen it in reality). From our own interviews with terrorists (Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2005) and those of others (Haas, 2004; Argo, 2003) we know that many strongly identify with traumas they have only seen over the television. From this research as well as our field interviews we suspect that many people who view traumas over television and the Internet may feel this way. The same is true for victims of terrorism; some have strong and acute stress responses from viewing televised images of events they were not even close to experiencing.
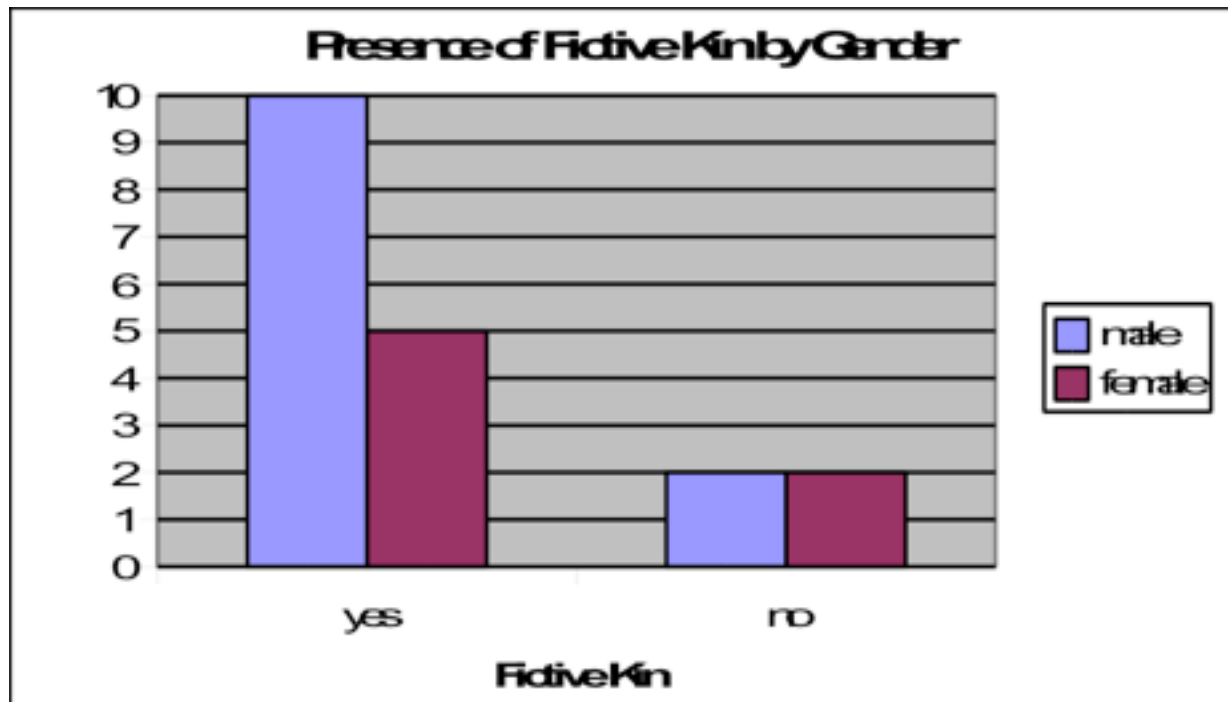
Table 1:Presence of Fictive Kin by Gender

Choice of Target – Revenge and Generalizability of Revenge

Humans have a strong, possibly innate, desire for, and willingness to enforce, fairness. There are a limited number of ways to deal with an offense: denying the hurt, reframing it in some way that explains or justifies the offender's behavior, receiving fair restitution, forgiving, accepting the transgression, or obtaining successful revenge. Revenge is also something that is often claimed to be related to Islamic related terrorist ideologies as though Islam is to blame, when in fact the desire for, and willingness to enforce, fairness – even by enacting revenge upon an offender – is more than likely to have an innate basis which can be universally found in all persons.

Indeed it was reported in *Science* (Knutson, 2004) that researchers studying the concept of revenge in laboratory settings found that people playing a game with real money will pay a fine to punish players who stray from concepts of fair play. The laboratory game was set up so that in each interaction a subject was allowed to choose to give their partner money, which was then quadrupled for the recipient. The player receiving money was then given the chance to split half of this windfall. That is, he could reciprocate in fairness to the first player by sharing half of it or defect from the game and keep the money himself. If the receiving partner decided not to reciprocate and defected, the first subject could choose to administer punishment. In the initial trial, the punishing player did not pay to punish, but subsequently the punishing player was only able to punish by fining the other player for not sharing his windfall by having to pay from his own money half the amount of the fine to do so. In both cases, brain imaging of the punishing

player suggests that there is an anticipated pleasure associated with the satisfaction of punishing a transgressor and that this pleasure exists even when one must pay to do so. If viewed in strictly economic terms, paying to punish another player is irrational behavior. However, when one factors in the emotional pleasure and satisfaction of punishing a transgressor, this benefit then outweighs spending costly personal resources (i.e. in this case money) to do so.

The Knutson study, which is only one of a growing body of literature, underlies the growing recognition that perhaps concerns over social justice are innate. While extrapolating from laboratory findings of concepts of fair play to individuals witnessing what they perceive as socially unjust actions is perhaps unmerited, it does shed some light on why individuals – even human bombers - might be willing to put aside the personal costs (i.e. sacrificing themselves) in order to punish others, and thereby depriving the anticipated satisfaction of ensuring that transgressors receive their just due. Indeed researchers have often heard exactly this justification given by "would be" bombers, in bomber's last testimonies, from their family members and close associates etc. (Merari, 2005; Speckhard, 2005b ; Speckhard, & Ahkmedova, 2005; Argo, 2003)

It is also interesting to consider the concept of generalized revenge which relates to the individual's, as well as his sponsoring organization's justifications for targeting acts of revenge to a wider group, including civilians, than those who in the bomber's and the sponsoring organization's perceptions are directly responsible for the injustices. Akhmedova (2003) has studied this concept in Chechnya. There, the majority of the population consists of ethnically Islamic people who share in their Chechen traditions the ideology of revenge. According to this ethos when a family member is harmed or killed it is the responsibility of specific family members to seek out the transgressor and make him pay accordingly. This ideology of revenge is strictly codified and does not in normal practice spread beyond seeking out the originator of the harm or his close family and obtaining repayment for his deed. Recently however, with widespread war, resulting psychological traumatization, bereavement and the importation of a terrorist ideology this mindset is changing: revenge is becoming generalized in the minds of many.

Akhmedova (2003) found in her study of 653 clinical subjects who had undergone war traumas that those who had the highest levels of posttraumatic effects had undergone a transformation in this regard (Akhmedova, 2003). They endorsed revenge in thirty-nine percent of the cases and no longer regarded revenge as a duty to find and repay in kind the person who had harmed their family, but instead generalized their revenge – to enact harm on any member of the ethnic group from whom the harm had originated (i.e. the Russians military or civilians). With increased traumatization, generalized revenge became both sufficient and acceptable. There were also positive correlations between their endorsement for revenge and increasing levels of religiosity, aggression, suspiciousness, and negativism (Akhmedova, 2003).

We see a willingness to target civilians reflected in the Palestinian case. In a research interview from his jail cell in Jericho, the leader of the PFLP, Ahmed Sadat, (Speckhard Palestinian interview October 2004) told us that there are no civilians, except for children in Israel because all women and all men train for the defense force at age 18 and they all serve in reserve units. Therefore, when one targets adult civilians in his logic, one is targeting the defense force.

Likewise a mother from Gaza whose children were recently killed in the crossfire between terrorists and Israelis cried out after picking up the body parts of her innocent children, "Let Sharon lose his son. Let Sharon collect the parts of his son". Then, pointing to her own body, "Put the explosives here! I'll go to the tank and explode myself" (Erlanger, S. 2005).

In regard to our thought experiment study, we were curious to observe how easily normal students far removed from conflict zones would, while in role-play, embrace the concept of revenge and how much they would generalize their revenge-seeking behaviors to justify targeting civilians (see Table 2). In this case, it was very interesting to see that only twenty-six percent (5/19) of the subjects who when given complete freedom to chose their target reported limiting their choice to a strictly military or government target (i.e. military checkpoint, government house, etc.). Remarkably, one third of the sample (6/19) deliberately chose targets involving children, teenagers, and extremely sensitive places (children's schools, McDonald's, the Western (Wailing) Wall, UN conference, etc.) in order - as they stated - to inflict the worst and most horrific revenge on their enemies. One young woman explained, "I chose the Western Wall because it is where I'd inflict the most pain, hit them where it hurts." The remainder or forty-two percent of the sample (8/19) chose civilian targets but did not mention specifically targeting children, teenagers or extremely sensitive locations (i.e. cafes, buses, busy markets, etc.). Hence the majority of the sample – seventy-four percent (14/19) displayed behaviour in line with the concept of generalized revenge and the willingness to target civilian populations.

Examples of statements made by the students about how they picked their targets were as follows: A young man explains, "I was going to the government building, because I wanted the people in charge with some authority to die." A young woman states, "I didn't think for a moment of the people I would kill, of their pain or their relatives' emotions." A young man states that his target was a school. When asked why, he explained, "They kill our children all the time. If you want to hurt them you have to hurt their future." Another young woman stated, "I went on a crowded bus full of civilians. Because they pick civilians - to kill them." A male student explained, "My religion does not encourage killing, but after their atrocities it is what they deserved. There is no distinguishing between victims, as many people could suffer for what had been done." Regarding targeting civilians, a female stated, "I had a quick flash of pity, but I didn't let it overtake me." Another male student recounted, "I wanted to shock as much as possible. I wanted to be sure it will be on television. To be sure of the impact." When asked if he felt any guilt he said, "I've been through so much, all I wanted was revenge."

The student's own amazement at themselves, at how easily and completely they could take on in a role-play the perceived injustices of Palestinians and how strongly they wished in the role-play to enact revenge – and to do so in an expressive manner – causing their enemy to feel the same pain they felt, was one of the most discussed aspects in debriefing with the students. Most stated in the role play and the debriefing that they understood that acts of revenge would likely do very little to change the situation and might even worsen it, but that it was still important to enact revenge to express their pain and for purposes of social justice. One young woman, as stated earlier, became upset with herself and cried briefly after the experiment because she had said she would target a children's school – an aspect of her desire for revenge that deeply surprised and horrified her. Most of the students in the debriefing admitted they knew very little about suicide terrorism in general and had few opinions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict prior to participating,

yet they surprised themselves that they had identified so strongly with the Palestinians and chosen civilian targets on the basis of the desire for revenge.
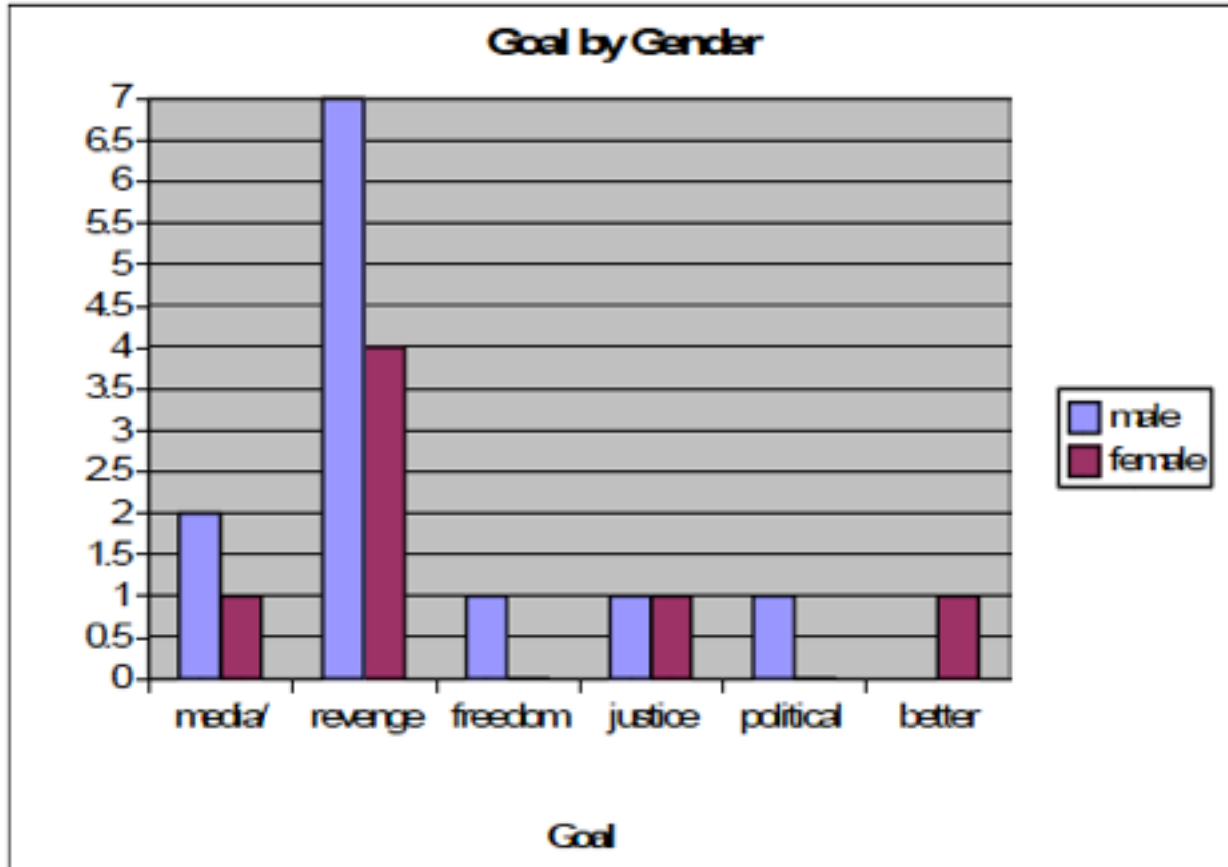

Table 2: Goals according to Gender

Motivations and Commitment to Carrying out the Act

When we asked our role-playing students about their motivations for carrying out a suicide act, sixty-three percent (12/19) cited oppression or suffering; forty-two percent (8/19) referred to the "fictive kin" story we had told them about the two boys being killed; another eleven percent (2/19) referred to stories they invented about other blood relatives being killed; and five subjects (twenty-six percent) cited expressive reasons – "to give a message".[6] Likewise, when we asked them about their goal in carrying out such an act, seventy-nine percent (15/19) stated enacting revenge and acting for reasons of social justice; eleven percent (2/19) stated political goals of bringing freedom or a better place to live; twenty-one percent (4/19) wanted to send a message; and one subject wanted to bring media attention and public awareness to the Palestinian cause. An example of one male student's rationale was as follows: "(After) all the suffering of my people I wanted to do something. I saw a lot of people die. I just want to do something." He goes on to say, eerily echoing words often heard by real bombers, "(It's) something you have to do. It's duty for your people – nothing more."

Out of curiosity, we decided to also ask the role-play students whether, upon being caught, they regretted having carried out their mission or if they remained committed to it. Half the sample volunteered that they would do it again. It was interesting to observe the emotional effect of taking on a martyr identity – that, once in role, they became very committed to their role and the sense of purpose derived from it. Without any suggestions to do so, many described their act as self-sacrifice for their communities and took on a sense of honor for what they were doing. One for instance stated, "I was very angry at these people for stopping me from fulfilling my destiny. (Would you repeat it?) "Yes, I'd plan it better. I'd use a way they couldn't stop me." Another young man described his conflicting feelings (imagining) strapping on a bomb - feelings for which he ultimately came to terms with by seeing himself as a martyr for a greater cause, "it (the bomb) felt very, very cold. Physical aspects, it takes a lot of conviction, conflicting feelings, (but) in the end you know what you have to do. Intense emotions, a sense of power, sense of duty, purpose. (Fear?) I tried to overcome it. I convinced myself. I felt fear, but it was something I could deal with. I should respond to the call to arms. It was an important way to use my life." This same young man stated, "I feel like I accomplished something, I was ready to die. I'd do it again. I blame them, they drove me to do this to save my people." Another young man stated that in strapping on the bomb he felt a, "Sense of power, a sense of duty – a purpose." Another young man explains that, facing death, "It was worth something. I was not afraid." A young woman compares life in general to her willingness to sacrifice herself, "I don't really mind. There is nothing so amazing on this earth. I wanted to help." A young woman states that even the expressive nature of the act made it worth dying for, echoing how many Palestinian bombers speak of their recognition that often their acts do very little to change things but at least express their pain and make the other feel it as well (Argo, 2003). This young subject states, "It was worth it to die if it sends the message."

Feelings About Facing Death

All the subjects were asked about their feelings facing death. Sixty-eight percent (13/19) stated that they were peaceful when facing death. A young man stated, "I'd be in a much better place. I told my family of my plans, goodbye, it was peaceful on both sides. (Their) provider has left them in a most honored way." A very bright young female student stated in her role-play a somewhat irrational view of how death would bring her peace of mind, perhaps reflecting how young people often do not totally comprehend the finality of death. She explained that she viewed facing death as, "Peaceful, I'd be at peace, no longer frustrated and no longer see others frustrated. It would be good for my own state of mind." Perhaps this can be compared to the real thwarted Palestinian student human bomber who agreed to be a bomber but told his sender he would have to wait for his mission until the day after he completed his exams – as though having completed his exams would make any difference after his death.

Emotional State and Use of Dissociative Defenses to Face Strapping on the Bomb

Dissociative defenses [7] are commonly active in survivors of psychological traumas (those with acute and posttraumatic stress disorder) and in individuals who grow up under repetitively traumatic circumstances, such as those that characterize the lives of many suicide bombers.

Dissociation - that is the disruption of the normally integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment - as well as the ability to enter and make use of a dissociative trance state – is frequently observed in trauma survivors. Traumatized individuals, especially those who have suffered multiple and repeat traumas (particularly in childhood) have often learned to utilize this defense to detach themselves from overwhelming horrifying, terrifying and life-threatening circumstances.

Similarly, individuals with near-death experiences often report dissociative responses to them such as depersonalization (the feeling of being outside one's body) or derealization (feeling things are not real). In the near death moment, individuals often report feeling as if they are outside of their bodies, observing from a distance, as if everything is not real, or as if they are watching a movie, are still, blissful, joyful, etc. (Greyson, 2000).

Likewise, dissociation is a defense frequently engaged in individuals enacting normal suicide probably to overcome the horror of taking one's own life. Bruce Bonger (2004), for instance, recalled his work studying the video and audio recordings left behind of normal (i.e. non-politically motivated) suicides who recorded taking their own lives. He stated that, generally speaking, there is clear evidence that the individual becomes highly dissociative as he makes the last moves before taking his own life, particularly when using a violent method. Similarly, an Israeli study of 'normal' suicides showed that suicidal people differ from non-suicidal in their tendencies towards body dissociation, body protection and body in general (Orbach, Israel, et al. 2001; Speckhard, 2004). Their study showed that people who experience physical or mental traumas often change their perceptions and body experiences, and suffer symptoms such as bodily detachment. They also found a very high correlation between dissociation and suicide, suggesting that early trauma can lead to dissociative episodes and furthermore to suicide ideation.[8]

The dissociative function – that is the ability to enter into a trance state and separate oneself from fear, dread, and grief – seems to be both a facilitator and a commonly spoken about characteristic of those who commit acts of suicide terrorism. Failed bombers often speak of utilizing what appears to be a dissociative defense to manage their fears in strapping on a bomb and moving toward their own self-induced deaths. Almost universally, the putative bombers describe their psychological state (with their bombs strapped on) as one of "floating" or "bliss", or they report having "felt nothing", etc. Such descriptions are consistent with dissociative trance and feature prominently and repeatedly in accounts given by failed suicide terrorists to journalists and researchers (Hassan, 2001; Haas, 2004; Speckhard, & Akmedova, 2005; Speckhard, 2005). When bombers speak of feeling in this dissociated state, a sense of euphoria or "dissociative" bliss (Speckhard, A. 2005), we hypothesize that they have accessed a neurobiological brain state which is in all likelihood endorphin induced - as is also hypothesized for other self injurious behaviors (i.e. self cutting, anorexia, bulimia).[9]

An example evidencing the dissociative defense in a real bomber follows below. Arin, a twenty-four year Palestinian woman was arrested after going to bomb herself. She had worn her explosive belt for six hours, but opted against detonating and returned home. She was interviewed in Israeli prison in March 2005 by the first author (Speckhard, 2005). Arin recalled her normal tendency to dissociate when experiencing negative situations and emotions and her

mental state with the belt on. "I was not conscious. When I meet bad things I, Arin, move away. I collect the bad things and work out of myself." She stated, with the bomb on, "I felt very nervous. I felt my mind stopped. For six hours I cannot think." Then she stated how her dissociative trance was interrupted by seeing babies. "Just at the last moment. I looked at the people. I looked at the babies. I saw babies. I thought if he dies what should I tell God? What should I tell Him? If he wants to cut my life and take my soul okay, but I don't have the right."

We were particularly interested to learn if the normal students in our role-play exercise would also give evidence of the use of a dissociative defense when imagining strapping on a bomb and if they would also speak of any type of "high" or "blissful" state in describing the time when they approached (in imagination) the final moments before detonating their devices. We were surprised to find that, even in role-play, a majority of the sample, seventy-four percent (14/19) referred to what could be considered a dissociative defense in response to imagining strapping on the bomb. Thirty-seven percent (7/19) of the subjects also described using this dissociative response in a way that went so far as to induce (in their imaginations) a euphoric state of mind. These responses are described below:

A young female student stated, "It (the bomb) felt heavy, not only physically but emotionally heavy, because there was no turning back once it's on. I had no fear – more of a tranquility. Committing so strongly – it is like your medicine, your remedy – that this will solve everything . … The journey with the belt – it was like a dream, I floated along. I interacted with people, but my mind was not there. I was not totally unconscious, but it was a muted scene, my senses were dulled. It felt euphoric, everything at ease." When asked how she felt about being caught, she stated that being arrested felt like "being woken up from a dream." When asked whether, upon being freed, she would attempt another attack, she answered, "I'm not sure if I would do it again. It's like a drug. It's very euphoric, but I'm not sure I would want to do it again, rather just remember it the way it was."

Another female student told us, "It was very easy for me to contact the organization. I did it very quickly after I decided it – it had to be quick. I was in a kind of euphoria. I was afraid it wouldn't last – I had to hurry. I saw a fantasy of myself as a saint, a martyr in a children's book… I was happy people will talk about me." Another female stated how she felt strapping on the bomb (in imagination), "I felt it was the beginning, starting. Kind of feels like the first step. From then on I started getting adrenalin, a good feeling. I was not scared. I thought of my mission that I was going to fulfill."

A male student explained his imagined mental state with the bomb strapped on, in these words: "Right before I was caught. I felt a very peaceful moment. I'd made everything let go, I'd been cleansed of all doubt, all big burdens lifted from me. There were very vivid, very bright colors, and I could smell the air. My adrenaline was pumping and I noticed everything, like in sports."

A young male student explained about putting on the bomb, "It felt good. When you walk in with a sense of purpose, righteousness, correct actions." Answering when we asked him if he felt afraid. "No of what? You know you are going to die." But he did admit that he was afraid of death at other times, but in this purposeful incident he said he was not scared at all. "I was calm. It's like being in control of your own destiny. No matter what happens you can always blow yourself up. I felt confidence and knowledge that my destiny is already sealed - no one can

change it. You lose that insecurity of the future." When asked if any of these feelings approximated a sense of bliss or euphoria he answered, "In a way. I felt calmness and security. It wasn't happiness. It was knowing you are doing something right. I didn't consider the possibility of being caught."

A male subject explained pushing his fear out of conscious awareness in favor of focusing solely on his goal at the time when he was anticipating exploding himself, " (There was) not fear – totally empty. I was waiting to explode the bomb. Only my family came to my mind. I will leave them behind for a greater cause." Another young man stated, "I didn't feel it. I was conscious I would kill some people, at least I hoped to. It was the last thing I would carry. … (Fear?) I was trying not to think of it. I was not really conscious of what I had."

A female student explained how she (imagined) feeling putting on the bomb, "I was taught how it would work, I knew if… weird at first. We had practiced. I knew it was the right moment to do it. I knew I would be honoured by family and friends. I had negative feelings that I had to do it to be noticed and then I felt good, the cause would be good. I felt happy because I knew it was good, because I felt a real sense of pride." She goes on to explain how she used a dissociative defense to shut out her fear and recognition of the finality of death. "I was very focused, shut everything out. (In your own world?) Yes. …You just see the plan, in the future, getting to that goal. I don't know why I wasn't terrified. I knew everything would be better afterward."

Religion and Dissociation

Some students mixed statements of religious beliefs with descriptions of their dissociated mental state. A male student, for instance, explained how he felt (in imagination) with the bomb strapped on: "When one is dying for one's religion it is the most noble death one can experience.   I also felt heavier. I felt a certain peace of mind. I was dying for my religion and using my religion. I felt a little high on myself, in that state of mind – you have to understand, everything stops around you - you're in your own little world. It's strange. (A good feeling?) Yes definitely. (Still have it?) Yes. (Could it be stronger?) Yes by completing my mission. I felt untouchable and a sense of awe." Another young man regarded his future in terms of religion, "It's up to Allah – he will decide what he will do for me. I wanted to die for him." A young woman stated, "I was very scared, I was scared of the physical hurt, the pain. I was not scared to leave my family because I was persuaded that I would see them again – I am very religious. They will be with me in heaven. If I die tomorrow I will see them again. The only thing I feared was the pain."

Strategies of Mind Control

Even those who did not give decisive evidence of dissociation cited other psychological strategies to enable them to strap on the bomb and go forward in their imagined role. One young man referred to using "self-induced mind control"; another stated, "Yes I was nervous. I tried to keep my feelings inside as best I could. I just tried to keep to myself, not to make eye contact." Another male student stated, "I was trying not to think of it. I controlled my fear by imagining all the good - that I was helping, (I) kept my feelings far away." Another young man expressed the importance of community and family support in keeping focused on his self-destructive goal,

"I didn't have to train. (I was) mentally prepared totally because I had nothing else except family but I know they agree and are really proud that I did this." Another male student stated that he controlled his emotions, "by (the) knowledge that my death would have a purpose. I was thinking of suffering we have to go through each day. (Focused?) Yes, but in a meditative way. I told myself, this is the way it should be."

Positive Emotions with Bomb Strapped on

Incredibly, when asked about what their mental and emotional state was with the bomb strapped on, eighty-four percent (16/19) of the sample imagined experiencing positive feelings going forward to explode themselves.

Feelings of Empowerment

Forty seven percent (9/19) stated that they suddenly felt empowered as they strapped on the bomb. A male student explained, "(Once the bomb is strapped on) "your actions are inevitable – no one can stop you no matter what you do. It (the sense of feeling powerful) happens at the decision point, when I knew I wasn't going to stop." Another male stated, "It felt like I had extra power. Knowing I could take someone's life with the press of a button. It felt really good – like I could do anything." Another male, "I felt powerful, very powerful, full of courage, full of might. It was the first time I felt that way." A young woman stated, "yes it has power to kill and to take lives without them having any say, like a surprise. I had never taken another's life in my hands before. I had to be strong and couldn't back down. I couldn't let fear interrupt my mission. I didn't feel joy but pride."

A young male stated, "(It was the) first time in my life (that I) feel powerful over those people who steal the power from me. I never felt powerful. First time in life I had ability to do something. I felt in control of my destiny."
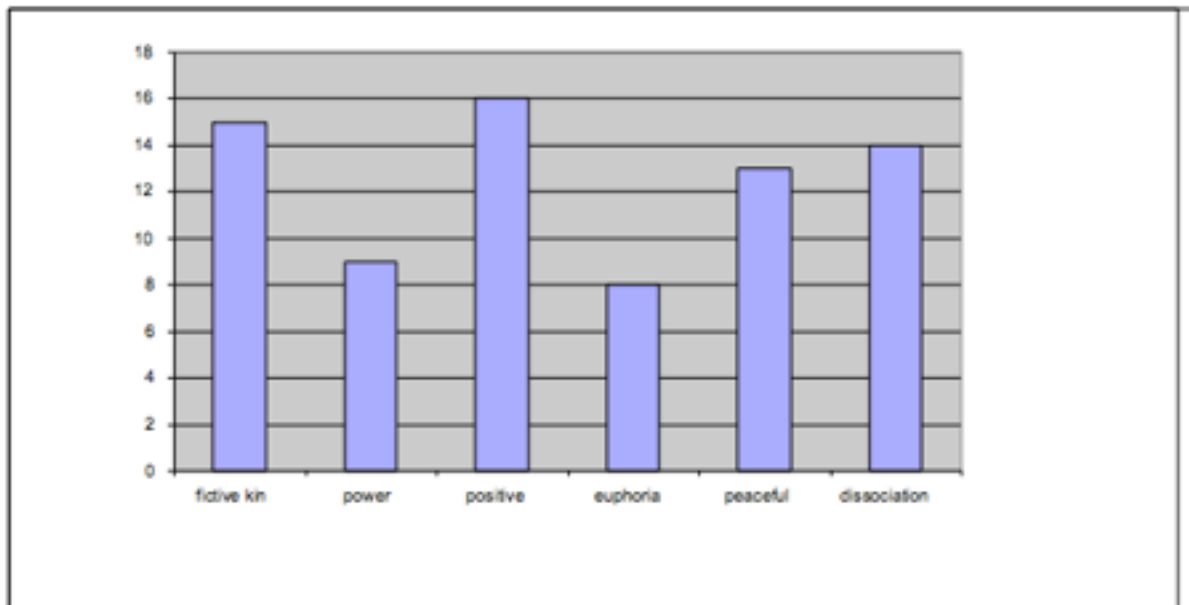
Table 3: Emotional State Participants Expressed Regarding Strapping on Bomb

V. Implications

This study, while rather unorthodox in its methods of comparing role-playing 'normal' college students to actual suicide bombers and its reliance on the one side to imaginary experiences does manage to shed some light on how even a normal college student could see him- or herself at a point where he or she is ready to sacrifice him- or herself for what he or she sees as a greater good. In this case, our role-playing bomber students spoke about enacting through terrorism revenge seeking, expressive and social justice seeking behaviors. We were amazed to observe how easily the mix of circumstances, situation, individual motivations, ideology of terrorism and terror sponsorship can lead to an individual, at least in role play, imagining doing what, to Westerners, is nearly always viewed as a complete and total anathema.

Our student subjects were as surprised as we were with how easily they slipped into this role and how deeply they embraced it - however momentarily. They were impressed, as were we, how once in role, they felt strongly the desire to enact revenge – even choosing children, young people, and sacred places as their targets.   Moreover, we were deeply impressed with the fact that while in role-play nearly three quarters of our student sample spontaneously referred to enacting a dissociative defense to enable them to imagine strapping a bomb to their bodies, with one quarter of the sample taking this imagined defense to the point of inducing an imagined state of euphoria.

Chillingly, the students felt empowered with a bomb strapped on and imagined it as a positive rather than negative experience. Likewise, over half of them stated that they would repeat their attempt if they got the chance. We were deeply struck by how impressionable this age group appeared to be and how easily in role-play they could glorify the idea of giving their lives for something greater than themselves. Self-sacrifice and seeing oneself as a hero, appeared

important in their descriptions of why they would do it and remain committed to trying to repeat it.

While we cannot know how closely imagined experiences would match the real world - and this was admittedly a small exploratory study - we can compare the role-play students' responses to real world human bombers. In doing so, we find many matches. Both speak of enacting a dissociative defense even to the point of feeling a state of euphoria to enable them to overcome the self-preservation instinct and sacrifice themselves by explosive device. Both justify the act by reasons of enacting revenge, seeking social justice and expressing pain. Both ignore the criminal aspects of their act and consider it instead in terms of taking on a positive identity – the sacrificial martyr on behalf of the community and for the greater good. Both speak of being a bomber as a positive versus negative experience that they regret not having succeeded in carrying out. In the case of real bombers, these rationalizations may have been suggested to them by their sponsoring organization or the terrorist ideology – in the case of our role playing bombers they came up with them spontaneously with little reference to, or knowledge about, terrorism studies. Indeed, in the debriefing period we found that none of the students had strong feelings or in-depth knowledge about the political situation in Israel or about suicide bombing in general.

Alarmingly, this group of students also provides evidence that primary traumatization experiences may not be necessary as motivators for this type of revenge seeking behavior – that secondary traumatization and identification with victims as "fictive kin" can be equally powerful motivating forces. This is what is seen in non-conflict zones such as Morocco and in Western Europe where instigators have radicalized terrorist recruits through Internet downloads that helped them to identify with the traumas of Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq or Afghanistan (Speckhard, 2005; 2008).

Just as many human bombers are not motivated in any sense by religion despite Islam often being blamed as the source of all suicide terrorism, none of our students were of Islamic background. Yet they easily embraced this act in role-play and, in doing so, gave very similar responses to actual bombers. Clearly being able to realistically contemplate the use of this terror tactic is neither limited to people of Islamic background nor to Islam.

The implications of this experimental study for counterterrorism experts are that we must consider the motivating role of injustices and experiences of psychological trauma – even witnessing from afar - over Internet or television the traumas of others – in potentially opening a pathway and motivation for individuals to consider human bombing. Our study underlines the fact that terror-sponsoring organizations that promote their suicide bombing ideologies over the Internet, making use of visual images and films of the traumas of others – particularly those they can somehow link to their witnessing audiences as "fictive kin" (i.e. your Islamic brothers in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, etc.) - have in their repertoire powerful psychological tools that can strongly motivate individuals into action. Indeed, in Brussels the authors have learned that in certain Internet cafes invitations appear as "pop ups" on the screen to the browser to consider joining the "worldwide jihad"; it directs the interested recipient to further information and contacts. Given how easily we observed our students taking on a martyr identity for a role play and identifying strongly with the victims of injustice (i.e. the two boys we told them about who

many identified in their role play as fictive kin) our findings suggest that normal European and American youth of this age, if psychologically vulnerable for some reason, may not be so difficult to pull into these types of activities.

Currently Europe is home to large pockets of disenfranchised youth, many Muslim, who can readily identify with their oppressed "Muslim" brothers in other lands. Given our findings, we should not be surprised that recruiters are able to use the Internet and images of injustices in other parts of the world to foster identification with, and even ties of "fictive kin" on behalf of the "victims" shown. When they couple this with an ideology that promotes self sacrifice and human bombing to help the victims and as a means of attaining a positive self identity, it may not be difficult for them to move impressionable young people to action. Indeed, Europe has already reported cases of cells and self-radicalization over the Internet, and many more report about recruiters using such images in person. It is important also to say, given our findings of how easily normal students could identify with this role, that it may not be only Muslim youth who are vulnerable but youth in general - and even older persons who are lacking positive life paths and who fall under the influence of such suggestions. We already have evidence of such cases from Europe – Richard Reid (the shoe bomber), Muriel Degauque (the Belgian woman who blew herself up in Iraq), and cases where others have begged their organizations to become martyrs. Indeed, it is not just living in a conflict zone that makes one vulnerable to becoming a human bomber. Ideas - of pain and injustice, identifying with victims and feeling a sense of expressing that pain, fighting to make it right or at least revenging for it, belonging to something bigger than oneself and taking on a heroic role - all appear to be important factors into what goes into making a human bomber.

Likewise, the use of the dissociative defense may be something that is universal in all human beings and easily accessed by individuals who once having reached their breaking point and signed on to an ideology of self-sacrifice may be able to utilize to experience actually strapping on a bomb as positive goal oriented and even an ecstatic or euphoric, rather than negative experience. If this is combined with religious ideology (of any type) it is likely to reinforce the ecstatic and euphoric qualities induced by the dissociative defense which, in turn, may reinforce the perceived religious nature of the suicide "mission".

The fact that role playing European and American students can so easily embrace the role of human bombers and end up spontaneously giving reasons, rationalizations and defenses similar to those real thwarted bombers give when interviewed, gives credence to the very real possibility that suicide bombing, far from being a mystery that we cannot understand – is a result of that we may all harbor - aggressive, vengeful and justice-seeking tendencies within us. In fact it may only be a mix of circumstances, situation, ideology and relationships that need to come together to bring these to the forefront. Our study shows that indeed we may all carry a human bomber within.

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Notes

[1] A. Speckhard (2005) has, however, argued that bombers coming from conflict zones frequently show evidence of posttraumatic and dissociative symptoms and those coming radicalized Muslim groups such as those found in Europe and totalitarian regimes in the Middle East often suffer from social marginalization, alienation and extreme frustration and may also be utilizing a projective defense, projecting their own sense of badness (for things they feel guilty over) onto the West stating that it must be destroyed.

[2] Speckhard differs from the common view that there is no psychological disturbances observable among human bombers – her interviews with and regarding Chechen and Palestinian bombers often reveals severe personal and secondary traumatization contributing to severe dissociative and posttraumatic symptoms which in her view contribute to the transition in the psyche from normal individuals to those willing to become bombers. Likewise she points out that radicalized Muslim youth in Europe often suffer severe identity issues, which contributes to their willingness to take on self sacrificial roles in behalf of the group.

[3] Palestinian psychiatric researcher in Gaza, Eyad Sarraj, asks in fact, given the daily injustices, chaotic relationship of actions to consequences, and the abnormality of life in conflict zones whether is it not amazing that there are not more human bombers (Eyad El Sarraj, 2002).

[4] We decided for this sample to base our comparisons on Chechen and Palestinian casess. - While the more recent spate of suicide bombers in Iraq has greatly changed the age profile (they tend to be older and often married with children) until recently suicide bombers were often young single persons, many pursuing university degrees or were already college educated.

[5] Also referred to in clinical and other helper settings by Charles Figley as 'compassion fatigue'.

See :"Compassion fatigue as secondary traumatic stress disorder: An overview. Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized. Figley, Charles R. (Ed). (1995). Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized. Brunner/Mazel psychological stress series, No. 23. (pp. 1-20). Philadelphia, PA, US: Brunner/Mazel.

[6] The total numbers may add to more than 19 because some subjects listed more than one motivation; the same is true regarding goals.

[7] According to the American Psychiatric Association, the essential feature of dissociative disorders is "a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment" - American Psychiatric Association (1994) Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th ed.). Washington, D.C.: Author. - In the case of suicide terrorism, this means an emotional barrier is unconsciously erected, walling off the negative emotions generated by choosing to die in this manner and may even include compartmentalizing the event from one's ambitions and daily life. One bomber for example, when planning his attack, suggested that he could not carry a bomb until after his university exams – suggesting that while on the one hand he acknowledged that he was going to his death he was able separate this reality so completely from his mind that he still felt that the need to complete his exams prior to going to explode himself.

[8] This finding is supported by other research as well. A study by Suleyman Salih Zoroglu et al. showed that any kind of trauma and especially dissociation highly contributed to suicide attempts and self-mutilation. In their study they found that those participants who were abused or neglected had 7.6 times higher suicide attempts than those who were not. Another study by A. Bessel at al. yielded similar results. The researchers found that childhood abuse is a predictor for suicidal behavior and that dissociation is correlated with suicide attempts. Their results showed that people with childhood trauma, when under stress, tend to react in a self-destructive manner. Separations with parental figures and lack of a "secure" attachment was found to have a consolidating role in self destructive behavior. Simpson and Porter write that self-mutilating behavior in reaction to hostile environment and/or isolation are related to primitive behavior, that is also found in animals. Gladstone, Gemma et al., found that women with a history of sexual abuse, physical abuse, childhood emotional abuse or parental conflict at home were more likely to attempt suicide and engage in self-harming behavior; they also became depressed earlier (than those without a history of sexual abuse) and were more likely to experience panic attacks. An interesting find in their study is that women who experienced childhood physical abuse are more likely to engage in interpersonal violence in their adult lives.

[9] There is a growing literature showing that dissociative experiences may be endorphin-mediated and that self-injurious behaviors can be related to, or induce, these endorphin-mediated states. See Russ for example who found in a sample women with borderline personality disorder, that women who had more trauma symptoms and higher levels of dissociation did not experience pain while indulging in self-destructive behavior as opposed to those women who had lower levels of trauma and dissociation.