

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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KIDNAPPING FOR KICKS IN NEW YORK

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A bizarre new service offering 'designer kidnapping' for thrill-seeking New Yorkers is dividing opinion across the city. Brock Enright, a 25-year-old artist, has created a business where people pay him thousands of dollars a time to be violently abducted. Around 30 people have used the service so far, and dozens of other personalised 'kidnap plans' are in preparation. Each kidnap is different, to cater for the particular tastes of the individual. Clients are mostly bound and gagged and taken away for a period of incarceration that lasts for hours, or even days. "It's about stepping outside of yourself. I wanted to see what I could do," said Jason, a carpenter, in his mid-20s, who has gone through the kidnap experience three times already. "I just wanted to see if it was possible for me to be in a situation like that."

Thrill of the unknown - Many clients are abducted in the street, day or night. Some wake up at home to find Mr Enright's operatives - or "birds" as he calls them - looming over them. "One of my favourite ones is the guy who loves small places. When I abduct him he's always under his bed, says Mr Enright. "He wants to be taken out of his home always." Psychotherapist Sheena Hankin believes there could be therapeutic value in kidnapping for fun - and would even try it herself. "We're built for it. It gives us a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. "Having had enough courage to go through something, when you get off the rollercoaster you feel really good about yourself. "When you come out of this kidnapping - you've survived it," she said. Kidnap "victims" agree a time-frame for their abduction, but the thrill comes in not quite knowing when the "birds" will strike.

Booming business - Brock Enright says that the profile of his average client is changing. More men are coming to him keen on trying to evade their kidnappers. The danger may lie in not knowing when the hunted will cross the line and start fighting back. There's nothing illegal about the business, but the New York Police Department is not happy about it. "It's not something we condone," said a police spokesman. "Something like this tends to desensitise people - especially if you find yourself in a real-life negative situation down the road." The director of New York's Institute Against Violence, Professor Gerald Landsberg, agrees: "It can cause psychological damage, because it gives the impression to the person who participates that they can do anything. "They're 'super-people' which can lead to other kinds of activities that are probably not in their best interests, or people that they know."

'Destructive activity' - Other care organisations are also angry. The New York social workers' association says it's a destructive activity to be "enjoying" at a time when children continue to be regularly abducted from the street with tragic consequences. Surprisingly however, there have not been any cases so far of outraged New Yorkers intervening in a kidnap scenario on Manhattan, despite the fact that many are carried out on city streets during the day. As the whole business began initially as a piece of video installation art, before he realised its commercial potential, Brock Enright is well aware of the reason. "People don't seem to bother us because they see a video camera - maybe two or three cameras going. Then they say - oh, it's a movie." However Mr Enright admits to concerns that the service is beginning get out of hand and is becoming too violent. "Right now I am worrying. I'm thinking about it a lot."

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