

The Myth of Santa and Learning from Others

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According to *The Santa Survey* [www.thesantasurvey.com] 30% of people around the world said their trust in adults had been affected after they had found out the truth about Santa. Finding out about Santa is just one of many staging posts on the journey towards adolescence. Enlightening a child about the Santa myth helps them move into the 'adult world' as they get told the secret lie that Santa is something for children and that you are entrusted with carrying that forward as you eventually become an adult; the child becomes part of the conspiracy.

Is it correct, that we teach successive generations of children that it is ok to lie, even if it is just about Santa Claus? Plato, in his allegorical story *The Ring of Gyges*, suggests humans are inherently immoral and will take personal advantage of situations. Yet many people would agree that some forms of lying are actually necessary in some situations.

Children will learn that there are lies but different types. Some for good and some not so. It is an open question whether the Christmas Lie encourages children to be more flexible with truths. The Santa story is a societal collective myth but one could argue it has become an essential part of growing up for many children. Who wouldn't want to believe in the good of people? I know that I do!

One aspect of learning which is somewhat unique to human development is that of our incredibly ability to learn by imitation. This essential developmental skill is crucial in child development and as many parents will know, constant imitation of good and bad elements of parental behaviour, can be a mix of fascination, embarrassment, and downright dangerous.

The Christmas Lie (see the article *A Wonderful Lie* published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* by this author) is a collective myth that many people in many countries perpetuate at this time of year. Children learn from their parents and imitate many behaviours. When children discover that Santa is not real and thus the realisation sets in that parents *can lie*, do they question the truth of anything else they might have been told?

Santa Claus, providing presents for children on one day of the year, sounds wonderfully innocent and well intentioned. However, he often seems to provide presents to children in relation directly proportional to their familial wealth. One adult in England recalls, as a child, he couldn't figure out why Santa, with all his magic, would not provide food to children in need in some locations. This goes to show that children are not wholly unquestioning disciples of Mr Claus. They often slowly learn themselves that the construct of a jolly benevolent bearded man delivering presents to every house in the land is not compatible with their nascent lived experience.

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Over 4,000 people from around the world have taken part in [The Santa Survey](#) and it is still open for responses.