

Psychiatrist Turns the Cherished Belief in Santa into a “Mental Disorder”

CCHR says mental health professionals diagnosing children's belief in Santa as harmful is symptomatic of how childhood gets wrongly labeled as a mental disorder

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-- Psychiatrists have re-defined many childhood behaviors as mental disorders. They've also diagnosed the cherished belief in Santa Claus as harmful to children, and deemed parents who instill this belief to be liars and betrayers. However, [Citizens Commission on Human Rights International](#) denounces this, saying everything from problems with reading or mathematics and poor conduct to fidgeting in the class and losing toys is now coded in psychiatry's diagnostic

manual to enable the profession to bill insurance companies and thus capture part of \$90.5 billion a year behavioral market in the U.S.[1] It says that psychiatry has come under criticism for reinventing many childhood behaviors as mental diseases, but when a leading international psychiatrist, G. Brock Chisholm, first declared Santa a myth, warning parents not to encourage belief in him because of the danger to children's mental health, there was public outrage.[2]

CCHR says that outrage is still warranted but should be directed to psychiatry's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) which, since it was first published in 1952, has increased the number of childhood disorders included in it by more than 1,400%. Today, children barely out of diapers are diagnosed with mental illness, leading to treatment, including prescribed psychiatric drug consumption by the very young.

Chisholm's statement in November 1945 earned him the title of “the man who killed Santa Claus.” He stated: “Any child who believes in Santa Claus has had his ability to think permanently



CCHR says a tradition of mental health professionals diagnosing children's belief in Santa as harmful is symptomatic of how childhood gets wrongly labeled as a psychiatric disorder, to capture part of the \$90.5 billion a year behavioral treatment market

destroyed.”[3]

Chisholm’s remarks provoked widespread criticism and a storm of media coverage, with calls for his resignation from public office as Deputy Minister of Health in Canada. However, the calls went unheeded he went on to be appointed the first director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948 and co-founded the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) the same year.[4]

In 1945, he also advised leading Washington, D.C. authorities, including the Deputy Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion, that the idea of “good and bad” had caused “frustration, inferiority, neurosis and inability to enjoy living”[5] He attacked teachings of right and wrong as instilling guilt, fear and prejudice in children, that, in turn, caused war.[6]

Chisholm charged psychiatrists, whom he asserted had “escaped” from their “moral chains,” with the responsibility of freeing “the race...from its crippling burden of good and evil.”[7] Through the WFMH, Chisholm’s beliefs were executed, with one of its founding reports stating: “...[T]he family is now one of the major obstacles to improved mental health, and hence should be weakened, if possible, so as to free individuals and especially children from the coercion of family life.”[8]

More than 70 years later, Santa was still under attack. An essay by a psychologist published in the prestigious Lancet medical journal claimed that while children eventually are told the history behind Santa, they also learn “that their parents have blatantly and consistently carried on a lie for a number of years.” “The disappointment,” it was astoundingly claimed, “is so searing that it creates a ‘JFK effect’ [the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963]—people remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard the sad news. For many people, they write, the holidays never again hold the same kind of magic.”[9]

A Psychology Today article in 2012 shockingly suggested that Santa could foster the development of “magical thinking” which can lead to “a host of superstitions and irrational beliefs that are often at the core of maladies like OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorders] and various psychoses.”[10]

Tim Carey, Ph.D. once wrote an article, “What Do Santa Claus and the Chemical Imbalance Have in Common?” in which he said: “Whereas, in the Western world at least, Santa Claus is generally associated with kindness, warmth, and good tidings, the chemical imbalance narrative is mostly accompanied by misery and mayhem.” However, “there is not one shred of evidence for the notion that an imbalance of chemicals in the brain causes mental health problems.”[11] This fact was borne out by a study published in Molecular Psychiatry earlier this year that thoroughly disproved the chemical imbalance theory that had been fed consumers for 35 years.

Implying that a cultural institution such as Santa is a mental disorder or that children’s belief in him could predispose them to OCD, exemplifies what is wrong with pediatric psychiatry. The psychiatric trend to redefine problems in life as mental illness is particularly pernicious when it

involves children.

As sociologist Frank Furedi points out, “Since the late 1970s, there has been a creeping tendency to portray children as uniquely vulnerable to emotional damage. Before then, it was commonly believed that children could recover their strength and resilience in the aftermath of an emotionally difficult experience.”[12]

We need more of the latter, which is why CCHR’s [Fight For Kids campaign](#) is vital to reinforce that Childhood is Not a Mental Disorder—and neither is believing in Santa.

[Read full article here.](#)

[1] “U.S. Behavioral Health Market Size to Worth Around US\$ 132.4 Bn by 2027,” Precedence Research, 10 Nov. 2021, <https://www.globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2021/11/10/2331828/0/en/U-S-Behavioral-Health-Market-Size-to-Worth-Around-US-132-4-Bn-by-2027.html>

[2] Josephine Mazzuca, “Santa’s No Hoax: Canadians Say They Believe,” Gallup, 24 Dec. 2002, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/7468/santas-hoax-canadians-say-they-believe.aspx>

[3] “Brock Chisholm,” The Canadian Encyclopedia,” 30 Mar. 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/brock-chisholm>

[4] Op. cit., Gallup, 24 Dec. 2002

[5] <https://beststartforkids.org/failing-education/education-not-learning/>

[6] Op. cit., The Canadian Encyclopedia

[7] Brock Chisholm, “The Reestablishment of Peacetime Society: The Responsibility of Psychiatry,” William Alanson White Memorial Lectures, Second Series, First Lecture, 23 Oct. 1945, Psychiatry: Journal of Biology and Pathology of Interpersonal Relations, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Feb. 1946), p. 9

[8] “Proceedings of the International Conference on Mental Hygiene,” International Congress on Mental Health, London, 1948, ed. J.C. Flugel, D.Sc. (Columbia University Press, New York, 1949), Vol. 4, 16-21, Aug. 1949, p. 259.

[9] Anna Almendrala “Psychologists Think Your Lies About Santa Will Damage Your Kids,” Huffington Post, 1 Dec. 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/psychologists-think-your-lies-about-santa-will-damage-your-kids_n_5835d898e4b01ba68ac3e3a7

[10] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-well/201209/is-telling-kids-santa-claus-is-real-bad-idea>

[11] Tim Carey, Ph.D., "What Do Santa Claus and the Chemical Imbalance Have in Common?" MAD, 16 Oct. 2016, <https://www.madinamerica.com/2016/10/santa-claus-chemical-imbalance-common/>

[12] <https://www.spiked-online.com/2017/12/13/turning-childhood-into-a-mental-illness/>

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