

## **Weaponizing Santa: The Predation of Conspiracy Theories**

### **Abstract**

Many personality traits and behavior trajectories are established early in childhood. Parenting strategies and early schooling are especially formative, and this socialization is central to many theories of crime. Some parenting techniques rely on deception as a tool to protect and distract children from negative stimuli, such as telling a child that babies are brought by storks. Deception can also incentivize prosocial childhood behaviors. For example, Santa Claus will give the better gifts to the well-behaved children, while Krampus may abduct you if you behave badly. Like Santa Claus, many of these deceptive conspiracies are widely socially-accepted, culturally embraced, and form part of many childhood identities. Although childhood conspiracies are usually eschewed by adulthood, this presentation/chapter argues that the appeal of conspiracies is often used to prey upon people in order to manipulate them socially, politically, and economically. Furthermore, conspiracy theories can take on a life of their own preying upon unlikely others who prefer to remain unchallenged in their core beliefs. After discussing how conspiracy theories provide a generalizable technique to avoid engaging with challenging or undesirable ideas for people of all ages, this presentation/chapter discusses how and to whom modern conspiracies have spread, leading to unlikely allies.