

Slanted: How the News Media Taught Us to Love Censorship and Hate Journalism

A Special Interview With Sharyl Attkisson

By Dr. Joseph Mercola

Dr. Mercola:

Welcome everyone. This is Dr. Mercola, helping you take control of your health. And we have a real treat for you. A top-notch, award-winning investigative journalist and one that there are not many, one with integrity, Sharyl Attkisson. She has written a new book called “Slanted” and it's coming out on, right around Thanksgiving, November 24th. So let me give you a little history about Sharyl, in case you don't know who she is. She's been a long-time reporter, started in Gainesville in 1982. It's hard to believe when you look at her, but 1982 is when she started. And she progressed through three other cities before she went on to anchor at CNN from 1990 to '93. And then, she went into over two decades to work at CBS News where she finally resigned after, I guess, experiencing what she writes much about in the book, basically, the rapid and progressive deterioration of objective journalism, and she went on to start her own podcast called Full Measure. So with all that, I really appreciate the opportunity to dialogue with you today about your new book. And so welcome, and thank you for joining us.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Thank you so much for having me. May I add one more small note to your-

Dr. Mercola:

Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Sharyl Attkisson:

So I do have a podcast called Full Measure After Hours and The Sharyl Attkisson Podcast, but my Full Measure is mainly a Sunday television news program to 43 million households every Sunday, depending on where you live. So we try to do the kind of reporting you like, Dr. Mercola. The stuff that the mainstream news will not report anymore. But to me qualifies as ordinary news stories about things people care about that you're not seeing so much anymore on the regular news.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. I just want to congratulate [you], you're doing a spectacular job and for having the courage and the bravery to persist. And then, essentially, experiencing the brunt of the conventional narrative, and being vilified and censored on most of the platforms.

Sharyl Attkisson:

You know what that's like.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah, oh, absolutely. I've been there and done that as many of us have. But that's what we're going to talk about today. And before we dive into the book, I guess, I was hoping to see in your book, something about the reasons why this is occurring, and you so brilliantly describe the specifics of what's happened. And many of it is eye-opening, especially, when it relates to Trump. I had no idea what the progression was until I read it in your book. But I'm wondering, because it's so useful to have historical perspective. So I believe in the '50s, the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) has been well-documented to have a secret campaign, actually, called Operation Mockingbird, which I suspect you're familiar with. And they recruited leading American journalists. And really, to me, that seems to be the beginning of the co-opting of the media to fill their propaganda and dictate that narrative. And I'm wondering, if you've tied that into what's happened now, that was a long time ago. That was 70 years ago they did this. And obviously, it's rapidly, accelerated this century. So I'm wondering if you've tied that together to what's happened in the last two decades.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Let me just say that through selective leaks to reporters who will publish what they're asked to publish, if they're given a scoop from, let's say, intel sources who want to be anonymous. There are all kinds of ways the intel community has and can manipulate the news. But we reached a new level in 2016, 2017, because they don't even have to whisper in our ear to get us to report stuff. We hired them, meaning, [John] Brennan, [James] Clapper, [James] Comey, all of them were hired as consultants, were invited on the news directly. You didn't have to put them through a filter and anonymous sources, although plenty of anonymous sources were also used. But daily putting forth their propaganda, much of which, obviously, was proven false, particularly on the Trump, Russia narrative. But every day, think about this, we allowed them to plaster the airwaves and even after they were proven admittedly wrong, and Brennan even saying, "Oh, I got that information in the end." After two years of spewing this false information, they're still consulted by the media. They're still used. So it's so easy for an intel operation if they wish to use the media towards whatever goal they may have.

Dr. Mercola:

So do you believe that the CIA's campaign, Operation Mockingbird has persisted and it's just accelerated? And what we're seeing is the acceleration of that initial entry into controlling the narrative?

Sharyl Attkisson:

I don't know enough about whether it's considered something under the umbrella of Mockingbird, but I firmly believe that there have been ongoing campaigns that continue today, maybe separate operations by intelligence agencies and officials to manipulate the news and certainly have things reported a certain way to try to push for certain outcomes in politics here at home and internationally.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. And it is not only the government that's seeking to direct the information that we're being fed through all these different platforms, which is shockingly consistent among the major

platforms. I mean, the typical disparity you see between CNN and Fox News, and some of these issues that is – like, Google and Facebook and Twitter, they're all highly consistent, and so many of these issues with respect to anything that objects to the COVID-19, World Health Organization (WHO) narrative, or vaccinations, they're all locked tight in a barrel. And I'm wondering, if another influence might be the Gates Foundation because the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has been tied to over 20,000 grants. Totaling more than \$250 million, a quarter of a billion dollars directly into the widest variety of media sources, like The Guardian, the BBC, NBC, PBS NewsHour, The New York Times and a list of dozens of other major agencies. So I'm wondering, if you think that also has an influence in the way the news is being shifted?

Sharyl Attkisson:

I haven't studied the Gates influence in particular, but you know I've written about the pharmaceutical industry-

Dr. Mercola:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sharyl Attkisson:

-interests in general, and their influence in the media, which is, pervasive and overwhelming. It's gotten to the point where the kinds of reporting we were all doing in the early 2000, very important reporting on medicine, not just vaccination, but other medicine that had issues, of course, much medicine is life-saving and does great things, that goes without saying. I kind of compare it to just because you do a story on faulty Firestone tires doesn't mean you're anti-tire. We're trying to abolish all tires, that's silly. So we were all doing stories on medical problems and they're still happening, a lot of big medical prescription drug issues, but you're not seeing the reporting anymore. And that's after this relationship changed, whereby the media rely so much on the prescription advertising.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Some people watching this maybe forgot, or aren't old enough to remember that advertising prescription drugs on television used to be illegal or vaccines on television used to be illegal in this country. But in this time period, when it became legal, news broadcast networks partnered with the pharmaceutical industry at a corporate level to lobby Congress to make this practice legal. We're one of the few countries that allows it. And now, that relationship, we're inextricably intertwined financially. And that's when you can see we stopped the fair reporting on so many of these important topics.

Dr. Mercola:

Yes, indeed. And you're right. It just seems like it was the other day, but it was literally 25 years ago, 1996, I think under the Clinton administration where they made it legal to advertise these drugs. To the best of my knowledge at this point, there's only one other country in the world, I think, it's New Zealand that allows this. And everyone growing up in this country that's younger than 20 or 30 years old thinks it's normal. That this is the way it's supposed to be, that this is right. And it was a crime if you did it before '96. It was a crime. You'd be prosecuted.

Sharyl Attkisson:

When my daughter was born in '95, and when the TV was on, typically, maybe the news and those ads, not just for prescription drugs, but for over-the-counter medicine would come on, I started to see through her eyes, I'm sort of like it's brainwashing because there were so many commercials that were telling you, if you have any little thing wrong, you need to take a medicine for it. And sometimes you may, but not all the time for everything. And I used to tell her when she was really little in a commercial would come on and I would say, "You don't really necessarily need to do that. You don't need to take a pill." I just kind of tried to get her to look at it a different way so she wasn't brainwashed into thinking that a pill must be taken for everything you think you need to improve. And yeah, I think it's a huge issue in this country and people my age, who should remember a time when it wasn't advertised, sometimes I bring this up and they'd forgotten that this sort of advertising didn't used to be legal here.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. It's just crazy. And as a physician, trained as a physician, yeah, I can personally testify to the amount of brainwashing that occurs to medical students. I mean, you are given the narrative that drugs are the answer. Then that shifted about a hundred years ago when Rockefeller and Carnegie got into the story of 1910 and really changed the medical curriculum to exclude these natural approaches. But these drugs only treat the symptoms. They rarely, if ever, treat the foundational cause. I'm not as optimistic as you are with respect to being such a great benefit to mankind. I mean, it's clearly helped some people, but in almost every case, there's some other measure that can more effectively address the cause rather than treat the symptoms. Because the symptoms are just a warning to your body that something's going wrong. And if you don't do it, yes, you're going to have to suffer the consequences of this illness. But if you just treat the symptoms, it's more than highly likely that something even more serious will get you further down the road. So-

Sharyl Attkisson:

An acquaintance of mine, who's a medical doctor, and I won't pinpoint the places just to protect his identity. But he thinks a lot like you do about the influence of the pharmaceutical industry on medical students who are taught very much about all the good that vaccines do, but they're not taught much, if anything at all, about – they're not knowledgeable about the side effects, and the drawbacks, and the problems, because a lot of this curricula is sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry. Some of the books are written by the pharmaceutical industry and so on. And he became a head of a program at a medical school in the Midwest.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And he wanted to erase the pharmaceutical influence. That was his goal. And he's not a fringe guy. He was someone who practiced in the Washington, D.C. area at a very prominent position. And he was really gung ho at first. And I saw him just decline in his optimism over the course of about a year until a point where he said to me, "I can't do it." He said there was so much resistance at the medical school for the tiniest change to try to take out the influence of the pharmaceutical industry. He said, "I just tried to stop the lunches from coming, the sponsored lunches. As a start, I didn't even get to the big stuff." And he met with so much resistance from

professors and members of the medical school and so on. He gave up, he just said he couldn't do it.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah, that's no surprise. And it reminds me of my experience in my training program where, you're right. I forgot about those sponsored lunches. It was like, there was a specific day of the week, usually, [inaudible 00:12:32]. That every day that week, some drug company would come in and buy the whole staff lunch. That was just the process. We were expecting free lunch that day. And it's a subtle form of propaganda. And then of course they get their ability to pitch it for five or 10 minutes and why their product's so great. You get that continuously and then it's going to change your belief system. And they claim it doesn't have any influence on your prescribing habits, but that's just nonsense, clearly does. So anyway, that's a little bit off tangent.

Dr. Mercola:

I want to get back to your book, but before we go into the details of your book, I wanted to address this further censorship issue, which is after Gates, then you've got this organization called NewsGuard, which ostensibly was spun-off to fact-check the materials. Well, who is checking the fact-checkers? And if you do, NewsGuard is almost entirely funded by the pharmaceutical industry. So how can they possibly be objective and fact-checking? And the reason why it's so important is that it's integrated in most all browsers now. They've got this really clever feedback system from red to green and gives you some indication that maybe, "there is a real threat on here."

Dr. Mercola:

For a while, when we were on Twitter, there was a NewsGuard, but it was Twitter itself that, if anyone tried to click to a link to our site, they would get a warning that looked like it was malware or spam or some vicious content that's going to destroy your computer. And then they just stopped that completely and just banned the ability. We can still post on Twitter, but no one can post our links because it won't let you, Twitter just stopped it. But anyway, the point is that there are these processes that are just in place within the last year or two that have really designed to continue to restrict the information that the public is receiving.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Well, this started, and I traced this in my second book, "The Smear," to Media Matters for America, which is, not to get political, but it happens to be started by a political activist. The left wing propaganda group, Media Matters for America, that supported Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and is a big smear organization. And they acknowledged going to Facebook about the time when they were worried that Donald Trump was going to get elected. And they really felt that the only thing giving him a leg up, and they still believe this today, some of them, is his social media outreach. And they tried to think of a way to control, with the kind of news people could get, the social media that they could get. And so they lobbied, Media Matters, Facebook, and tried to convince them and did so successfully, and to taking a sort of fact-checking brand new role that nobody had ever asked for, people online, ordinary people like us.

Sharyl Attkisson:

We're not begging for our information to be curated. That was a demand, a pretend demand that was created by the propagandists who wanted to control the information. They had to make us think that we needed a third party to step in and tell us what to think and sort through the information. And I remember when President Obama gave a speech in late 2016, I believe, it was in September at Carnegie Mellon University. And he introduced the idea – again, people may forget there was a time nobody was doing this. He said, "If somebody needed to step in and curate information in the wild, wild West environment of the internet." And I remember at home going, "No one had ever suggested that before, but if this is on the President's plate, that somebody is pushing for it, some special interest wants it." And from that moment on, the fake news effort, the fact-checking, which is usually fake fact-checking, meaning it's not a genuine effort, it's a propaganda effort, all of that took hold.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And then you've seen it explode as we come into the 2020 election, for much the same reason, whereby, the social media companies, and third parties, and academic institutions, and nonprofits like NewsGuard, I don't know that it's a nonprofit, but an organization that holds itself out to be some sort of independent arbiter, they insert themselves. But of course they're all backed by certain money and special interests. They're no more in a position to fact-check, sometimes then, an ordinary person walking on the street on a subject, but you pinpointed it correctly. They have interests. They make sure certain things are not seeing even if true. And I think this is the most serious threat that I'm looking at right now to our media environment. I'm afraid that our kids will be telling their kids of a time when you used to be able to go on the internet and find most any information you wanted, because we are increasingly being pointed only to that, which they, people who control the information, wish for us to see. And as you saw, if you looked through my new book, "Slanted," we really focus a lot on that censorship and that aiming of information.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah, that's a brilliant point because the key is that this whole new generation of Americans coming up will look at this as normal, to be fact-checked into suppressing anything that disagrees with the narrative. And that's exactly the way it should be. Just like they believe now that it's okay, there's nothing wrong with advertising drugs on TV. So given another 20 years, it's going to be the completely new normal. Assuming it doesn't change, I'm hoping that we'll have some change. One thing that's inevitable in life is change. So thank you for pointing it out. But the thing that opened my eyes the most about your book is your exposition about the vilification of Trump. And I'm not a Republican, I'm not a Democrat, I'm neither. If anything, I'd be a libertarian, but certainly not a Trump supporter and I didn't vote in the last election. But if I had, I probably would have voted for him. It's the lesser of two evils. So I have no dog in the race. I just want to preserve personal freedom and liberty.

Dr. Mercola:

So I wasn't watching or reviewing things very carefully back then as I am now, because of just, I don't know, I just am. But a bit probably because of the COVID-19, and the riots, and progressively increased threat to our liberty. So I'm more concerned about it. But I don't think you're a Republican or a Democrat either. You're completely objective. And so the reason I think it's important to state that is, because if you were like a Fox News reporter, it would be easy to share what you did in the book, but you very carefully go over how he's been vilified. And if you

are a reporter in conventional media, it's almost impossible to provide any report on Trump that doesn't vilify him. So can you describe it more eloquently and the specifics, because it was just brilliant and what you – there was a whole chapter devoted to this.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Thank you. It's hard for a reporter today to even talk about this, because if you, as a news reporter, say anything about President Trump that is not an attack in this environment, you're instantly portrayed as a sycophant or a Trump supporter. So you have to, if you're me, be willing to be called that in order to tell the truth from an objective standpoint about how the press is reporting on this President. And they have admitted, if you simply look at the record, they meaning, The New York Times and other major news organizations. If they have suspended their normal ethics and standards after President Trump was elected, if not shortly before, because they consider him uniquely dangerous. Therefore, you don't have to follow the normal rules and guidelines when it comes to fair and accurate reporting, which I think is one of the most absurd things I've ever heard in my life, from someone in our profession, because the standards exist precisely so that we report on everybody the same way. In other words, using the same standards, whether we like them or not particularly, perhaps, if we don't like or agree with the candidate, that's when the standards become most important.

Sharyl Attkisson:

But you need only look at Politico, for example, during the last election, I interviewed them. Shortly afterward, someone who's in charge of some of their coverage on a totally unrelated subject in almost every answer to the question, she brought up President Trump and something negative about him. And one of the things she said was how many lies he tells per minute. She said, "We actually had a team that calculated the number of lies per minute that President Trump told and here's yada-yada." And I said, the obvious question, "Well, what was that compared to Hillary's supposed lies per minute?" And she actually said, "Oh, we didn't have the staffing to do Hillary too." Can you imagine a national news organization that purports to cover something fairly and we'll fact-check the lies per minute of one candidate and not the opposing candidate and pretend that that qualifies as fair news?

Sharyl Attkisson:

And then you saw in the book, I also interviewed some noted liberals who have noticed the same thing. That they look at things from a fair minded viewpoint and are no fan of President Trump, and yet are appalled at how the media has dishonestly treated certain topics and information, which should make everybody wonder, "Are we getting the truth when it comes to things that don't have to do with President Trump? If the media can report so many things out of context and incorrectly when it comes to somebody they don't like, what else are we getting that's not in context or that's not fully true?"

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. And this is such an important issue because it's probably on par with COVID-19 as being the most prominent story in the news, is the election and the COVID-19. I mean, that's probably consumes over 80% of the content that's being distributed. So it's a real issue. And you had talked about, along the lies, I like you to go more deeply into that, because this is something that

did not really happen before Trump at all. I mean, the standard was to question it but never call it a lie. Because it's easy to get confused on specifics. And if you're off by 20% or something, it's – a lie is a very specific allegation that implies intentionally deceiving. And just because you misremember a fact doesn't mean it's a lie. So why don't you go that more then, maybe discuss the PBS distortion of how they called it without evidence, instead of calling it a lie to make it, I guess, a little more professional.

Sharyl Attkisson:

I talk about the fact that, of all the information I've covered, and the stories that I've broken, and the scandals that I've covered. And I know I've probably been lied to many times, but I don't believe I've ever reported that somebody lied to me in a hard news report. And the question is why? Well, as you said, a lie is a specific thing that requires you to know the mind of the person. And you, as a journalist, have to withhold even if you think something is true without the evidence, you really can't say it's true. So if you tell me something – I'll use the example I used in the book, Ford and Firestone tires.

Sharyl Attkisson:

The executives consistently said there was no evidence that these tires were dangerous prior to the scandal around the 2000 time period, where there were a lot of deaths. I had documents from a source that showed, they discussed this very danger many years before. It appeared that they were lying, but I didn't call it a lie because there are many other explanations someone could give. They could say, "Well, these guys weren't there at the time. So they didn't know that these discussions had been had. They didn't have access to the emails, their subordinates didn't tell them." So you don't know whether they're mistaken or lying.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And from a journalistic standpoint, we used to always just take the objective road and say something like, "Their testimony contradicts the documentary record." That's good enough. People at home can make up their own mind. But as you said, there was a turn taken, specifically, to target President Trump, whereby, the media started frequently calling things that he said, lies. Even when there was simply something that was a matter of opinion, or could not be proven or a mistake, none of which are lies. And The New York Times was proud of this when it did it. And I recount in the book, the first time they made a headline where they talked about President Trump lying and how that was cheered on by others in the media who then followed suit and even cheered on by a journalism professor who wrote a big op-ed about how it was time to stop doing this objective reporting and that we needed to call out President Trump's lies frequently and often. It's just, again, from a journalistic standpoint, ridiculous.

Sharyl Attkisson:

You go back to President Trump making a mistake and saying, "There's 57 States." Or something like that. Nobody calls that a lie. That's not a lie. That's a slip of the tongue. But when President Trump says something and I have a whole list of examples in there where he said, I can't remember the exact stat, but something like, "Hey, Republicans won seven seats last night." And it turns out only six seats were won. And the media declares that a lie rather than, "Hey, he just used the mistaken number." It's only a lie if he intended to deceive because he knew the

number was seven, but only seven number was six. So that's getting a little arcane, but you're right. I think that this is a new and dangerous tact that has really destroyed our objectivity in the eyes of the public. And rightly so.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. And then how PBS, seeking to appear a bit more professional, doesn't use the term lie, but they use, "Without evidence." And they use it frequently when it comes to Trump.

Sharyl Attkisson:

So "without evidence" is the flip side of the same coin where the media will pretty much only when it comes to Trump or sometimes other Republicans, but almost never the other side. Say that almost anything he is citing or claiming is without evidence as to disparage it or say that it probably isn't true. But meantime, the other side doesn't get given that same kind of scrutiny. And historically, when we make claims and give opinions in the news, when news subjects do, they don't cite footnotes and give evidence, that's just not how it works. So to point it out is really to cast aspersions on something unfairly in a non-objective way. And I tweeted this yesterday because there was an example of someone who said that, "Justice Ginsburg had a dying wish on her deathbed."

Sharyl Attkisson:

And whether true or not, I don't doubt that's true, but that was without evidence, if you want to be technical about it. But the press reported that as though it was some magical fairytale wish that must be fulfilled. And then on the other hand, when President Trump said, he wasn't so sure that actually happened, that was reported as President Trump's claim or questioning of the dying wish was made without evidence. In other words, they're saying, "He's making a claim without evidence." But the whole dying wish was presented and nobody pointed out that was without evidence. And again, it's this unfair application of a term to one side only that gives away what the motivation is here.

Dr. Mercola:

Well, thank you for expanding on that. And it seems like it's been a bit more than a year since we had the accelerated decline of The New York Times, which was, I think in your opinion, many, the most respected news organization on the planet. And it is just almost comical how they deteriorated. You opened my eyes a little bit more to it. But I mean, every time you just need to know. I mean, it's interesting because they have very good reporters and very good writers, and they're very clever at their wording. But you know it's coming from a very fixed narrative that's biased and prejudiced to the hilt. So what do you think was catalyzed at acceleration about a year ago? Because it is just terrible. I mean, if you want to know what's exactly – I'm going to go in a few examples after you give your answer of this, specifically, with respect to COVID-19 and what they're doing. And not only them, but others. But they're the leaders. They are clearly the leaders.

Sharyl Attkisson:

I think the way it was paved and part when they fired their, I think it was called the public editor, the ombudsman, who at least was their effort after some major scandals where they had top

reporters found plagiarizing or faking news. They have this public editor who is supposed to look objectively at complaints that came in from members of the public and at some of the reporting. And they did away with that position. They abolished it. The public editor became controversial within our own organization because she was calling out some of the practices, and some of the stories. Nobody ever likes that, but that's the role of the ombudsman. But they did away with her and they said, the editor at the time said the reason they did that was, "Well, social media and the people in general can act as our public editor."

Sharyl Attkisson:

And don't you know that's exactly what's happened. And that's the danger and the risk because social media is so highly manipulated. It's not an honest projection of what's out there in the public. And you see in my book and The New York Times devolution chapter, how they respond to crazy tweets from activists and propagandists. That The New York Times has become almost entirely beholden to the critiquing that it gets on Twitter. And because of that, of course, propagandists and power brokers know that they can simply organize a campaign on Twitter or make a few carefully placed tweets and influence what The New York Times does with its news coverage. And that's sadly where we are today. And interestingly, there was a comment made, a quote by someone in The New York Times, in the chapter about The New York Times, where he specifically said, "We are not going to be beholden to social media's whims." And then there's one example after another of them doing exactly that. So I think that's the genesis of this problem.

Dr. Mercola:

Well, thank you for sharing that. And social media as many people reading our site would know and others, of course, is that it's highly manipulated through the tech giants, primarily Google, but Facebook and certainly Twitter. And Google is the leader in this surveillance capitalism, where they're essentially capturing your personal information and putting it into their massive artificial intelligence, supercomputers, and calculating information on how they can manipulate and change behavior. And part of that change of behavior is molding what you believe on the platform. So the input that's coming from the social media platforms is in large part directed by the platforms themselves, by the way they manipulate it. And this is all very clever and for the most part under the radar. It's done in a way that is hard to understand or even be aware that it's happening to you. So it's a very clever system. It really is.

Dr. Mercola:

And it just seems like the implementation of these strategies has just accelerated nearly exponentially. And I think this COVID-19 pandemic is a great example of that. A few weeks prior to our interview today, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released information that, was either 94 and 96% of the people who died with COVID, "with COVID" notice that's an interesting preposition, "With COVID" had existing comorbidities, which in large part could have been the real reason they died. I mean, in some cases it was so ridiculous. There are loads of people identify now as "dying from" the other preposition from COVID, who simply had terminal cancer or in a motor vehicle accident, and they died with the infection, not from the infection. So that's a really important distinction.

Dr. Mercola:

And I just read The New York Times yesterday. I mean, at the time of this interview, we were approaching 200,000 deaths in the United States. And how does The New York Times report it? They reported as "From COVID." Which is technically inaccurate. It should be "With COVID." And the percentage might only be 12,000 or 15,000 who actually died from COVID. So I think that's a great illustration of how they're manipulating the data to convey their message and narrative of creating fear within the population to control it.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Agreed. And I think that it would be really helpful if health departments or journalists – certainly, if I had the manpower or the ability to do it, what I would like to do is look at every death certificate and to separate out those. I think it's worth seeing how many people and who died with COVID, but I think it's worth separating that out from those who arguably are undeniably died from COVID. I think we need both numbers in a separate sense to have perspective and understanding of what's really happening. And it's something that very few people have shown interest in. In the beginning when the deaths were so low in number, I did try to look with some granularity at these deaths to the extent that the details were reported, and I could get at some of those numbers and statistics early on, but it quickly became overwhelming.

Sharyl Attkisson:

But early on, it was clear as everybody does know now that the primary victims were those with the comorbidities and the elderly population and in nursing homes and so on. But then we sort of lost track of that. And then there seemed to be a propaganda effort to at least in my view, convince people that initially after understanding young people were at very little risk of serious illness and death, there seemed to be an effort to convince people that really that's not the case, that the youth must be very careful, that more young people are dying and getting sick. And I can only guess as to why that's important to some interest, but I suspect it has something to do with the fact that when the vaccine comes out, the market needs to be aimed. "You can't rule out young people, you must make them believe they need it, or else you've ruled out a huge section of the vaccine market." And they certainly don't want to make a vaccine that's not used by a giant percentage of the population.

Sharyl Attkisson:

We saw that, I think, with other vaccination programs and with the swine flu efforts, as you're familiar with. I think they have to create a market. And why do I think this? Well, I was actually told by a top immunization official for the government, during the time of flu shots, when the government learned flu shots are ineffective in the elderly, the biggest study that they commissioned that they thought would prove, finally, that flu shots work in the elderly did the opposite. And this official told me that the way around that was not to take flu shots away from the elderly who would think that that was something dishonest because we've been pushing them on and telling it was necessary for so many years, but to convince parents, to get their children and babies flu shots so that they wouldn't carry flu to the elderly.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And I remember him saying to me, "But the trick is going to be to convince parents to give a vaccine to their children who don't really need it themselves." In other words, for a secondary

supposed benefit for the elderly, and darn it, if you just didn't see in the next season, they recommended flu shots for babies and children. And they didn't tell anybody at the time, this was why they were doing it because flu shots don't work in the elderly. They just started telling people that your kids need flu shots.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. Unfortunately, it's one of the real risks that we eventually may have is these mandatory COVID vaccines, which, there's a whole other issue. And I don't want to really go down that path, because it's an unproven vaccine, it's just being accelerated and eliminated virtually every safety study. And fortunately the public is smart enough. They haven't been able to fool them. The 50% of the population is going to refuse to take it. And they don't even have enough.

Dr. Mercola:

So that's not a problem in the near future, but it is maybe next year or the following year when they ramp up the programs. I want to go back to swine flu vaccine that you mentioned, because it reminds me, that was the one that actually, you interviewed me for when you were with CBS. And I forget what aspect of it, but that was like 2009 or so, but prior that, there was a swine flu in the '70s. And interestingly, that was just a devastating, miserable failure where the government prematurely had recommended every mass vaccination with the swine flu. And this is before they had the indemnification program from the Vaccine Injury Act in 1986.

Dr. Mercola:

And the only way they were able to do it is that they had a specific Indemnity Act for the vaccine manufacturers to make this vaccine, which wound up killing a large number of people and others who had come down with, I think, transverse myelitis and Guillain-Barre syndrome, and wound up paying over \$3 billion. But the reason I'm mentioning this is that, Mike Wallace – I mean, you could still find it today. We've listed the original. It's a recording of a recording so the video is kind of grainy, but it's really clear where he does this incredible interview with the Director of the CDC at the time. And he's just grilling them over the fires. And the reason I mentioned that is I had enormous respect for 60 Minutes on CBS News with – in the '70s, I used to think, I don't know when it first started was – I think Don Hewitt started 50, 60 years ago. It might've been '70s or '60s. I don't know. But they had the best investigative reporting, bar none. I mean, they would just expose these instances, very similar to what you're doing.

Dr. Mercola:

And I'm wondering if you could comment, because you worked at CBS News. And I believe Mike Wallace was still alive when you were there. If he was controlled by this like Operation Mockingbird or some other influences, narratives, but it seemed like it was objective reporting. There was no, I guess, conflicts there, but it's hard to tell. Because I know his follow-up, the person who's in charge Brian Peskin – no, not Peskin. I think is Brian, the main guy there. Anyway, I know you've had some run-ins with him, and he stopped a few of your stories. And he's clearly controlled. But what was your take on Mike Wallace and 60 Minutes in general?

Sharyl Attkisson:

Well, there's always been issues and conflicts. In between, we have managed to do great reporting over the years at CBS. So much wonderful news because by and large, a lot of great journalists and editors who want the best stories now. But even back in the day, there were conflicts. And if you watch, I can't remember the name of the movie, but about the tobacco industry with 60 Minutes and other networks trying to report the fact of cigarettes and cancer and information that had been covered up, you will see the torturous debates and discussions that took place all the way to the corporate level to try to stop stories, sometimes successfully. So there's always been an element of that. But I think the pharmaceutical industry got so involved in the 2000s that it's reached a point of almost self-censorship, because you know as a journalist, you learn very quickly that when I propose these certain stories, they no longer are going to air them.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And nobody typically tells you, "We're not going to air that story because it goes after one of our advertisers." Or, "Our advertiser's calling and doesn't like your story about statin side effects." Or whatnot. They don't tell you that. They simply say, "Oh, great story. Maybe we'll schedule it tomorrow. We don't have time for it today." And ultimately, you see the writings on the wall, those stories don't get aired. And so you move on to something else. So I call that a form of self-censorship, which I think is far more common than this overt kind of censorship, where somebody has to step in and tell you they're stopping a story. Although that has happened to me as well. But primarily, you know what stories will make air and what stories won't make air. So you quit going for the ones they don't want.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. I remember the person who replaced Mike Wallace after his death was a Scott Pelley [inaudible 00:41:49] Brian, but I know you had some run-ins with him. He essentially censored a few of your great stories that you had.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Yeah. I don't think he was an honest player when it comes to objective news. And certainly I wasn't the only one who had the issue with him. I may have been the least of the people who had issues with what he was doing with the reporting, but I was in a position to speak out and ultimately leave and maybe my problems to a larger, because I was doing investigative reporting. Specifically, I was the only reporter at the time doing full-time investigative reporting there. So maybe, to me, it felt magnified because so much of the changes that he wanted to make or the things that happened with almost every story that I proposed since I wasn't on a regular beat doing ordinary stories in-between. So many of the stories that I was breaking or that were, I thought very important, that were being tampered with, I think that just accelerated my vision of what was happening to the news. And then it turns out this was a trend that was happening throughout the industry. And that's what really made me feel disheartened around the 2014 time period. I was hearing the same stories from my colleagues at the other networks, and from my friends at The New York Times and The Washington Post. And I came to understand that this was an industry-wide change or evolution that was happening.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. If you can pinpoint it to one year, what year would you say would be? Obviously, it's a spectrum and it didn't happen at one specific point of time, it evolved over time. But when would you say it really started accelerating?

Sharyl Attkisson:

I think the first example was the pharmaceutical industry coverage that I was doing in the early 2000s when I became aware of the propaganda efforts and how they operated behind the scenes to stop stories and to propagandize reporters. And then, I noticed other examples of big corporations and charities and nonprofits pulling strings. And then of course in the 2012, '13, '14 time period, that's when I was breaking some of my biggest stories of my career. And going through this, push me, pull you of, "Hey, that's fantastic." Maybe receiving an Emmy nomination for something and a pat on the back from some people at the office. But then on the other hand, suddenly being told, "Stop doing those stories." By somebody else at the office. And that accelerated 2012, '13, '14, I would say until I left CBS mid-contract in 2014.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. Share an interesting story in the book about how you failed to be nominated for your investigative journalism towards the end of your career. At least the network failed to nominate you. So you essentially nominated yourself, or had others nominate you. But then you had to pay the fee for that, which is nominal, was \$150 or so. But I think you had like four nominations and you actually wound up winning. So why don't you share that story because-

Sharyl Attkisson:

Well, yeah, I just told that as an aside and my publisher thought that was one of the – he said he gets mad every time he reads that part of the book. So the way it works at CBS is, if they come to you, at least used to come to me every year, around the time of the Emmys and say, "Do you have any stories you want to enter?" And then you would give it to CBS, and they would pick among them one or two, and enter them in the Emmys, if they found it worthy. So, one of my last years there, when I was breaking great stories, but they were also killing a lot of stories and there was new management, Scott Pelley was on the evening news. Nobody came to me and my producer for the first time and said, "Hey, do you have anything?" And we had actually done some pretty important reporting that year.

Sharyl Attkisson:

So when we realized they weren't going to ask us to nominate anything, you can enter by yourself. So my producer and I, we entered three bodies of work in the Emmy separately. And I know that doesn't sound like much money to you, but I think it was \$150 or \$250 an entry. That was a lot of money to us. I covered the entry fee at the time. And then I'm hoping to get maybe one recognition, but all three of the entries were nominated for Emmys that year. And we won the investigative Emmy with one of those pieces. But the process of – this was just sort of a point of contention because the rule used to be, if you entered yourself and actually won a nomination, the network would pay you back for the entry fee.

Sharyl Attkisson:

So of course I applied once I got nominated and they said, "Oh, the policies changed. We only pay you back if you win." So once I won, I went back to them again and said, "Okay, pay me back for the one entry fee that we won." And they said, "Oh, the policies changed again, we're not going to pay back." And I think that said so much to me about where things were going at CBS, at least for me. And I think that was one of the things that helped me decide to go out the door.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. Clearly that was a significant amount of money for you, but for the network, I mean, it doesn't come up even in around a year. It was just a philosophical objection to your work, is what it was.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Right. And it was weird because the last few years at CBS, this is just the strange dynamic that goes on when you do the kind of reporting that I was doing. On the one hand, I would receive an Emmy nomination or Award. And then sometimes I would come back and everybody in the newsroom in Washington would be silent and sometimes not say a word. Now, for me, when my colleagues would be recognized with an award, I usually sent an email congratulating them. And the next time I saw them, "Good on you." Because that reflects well on everybody. And when I would get this like cold silence, when I would come back from New York after a ceremony or something, it's just a weird feeling. And yeah, that's how it was.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. So I want to go back to The New York Times just because the other point on the pandemic that they – not only them, but they're certainly the leaders in this. And I'll tell you that your book has really changed the way I read The New York Times and read the news now, because it really provides the framework to understand what the heck is happening. But the other aberration of the truth is that – and that's not just them, it's the entire media. They take enormous delight in producing more fear in the population so they could implement their agenda, which is essentially shut down the businesses, to tell them that we have more cases of COVID. "We're approaching a million cases of COVID." And that is absolutely inaccurate because a case is a symptomatic type of infection. It's not someone who test positive on an antibody test. So they're conflating the two.

Dr. Mercola:

And there're many people don't understand this. And they're just assuming these are sick people in the hospital and nothing could be further from the truth. And you look at the number of deaths are coming down, the cases are going up. But the cases are irrelevant, almost. And in fact, may actually be a good sign because they could be a reflection of herd immunity that's occurring and providing pervasive antibody support within the population, which is what we need. That's the natural way to treat infection, not a vaccine program. So I'm wondering if you have any comments on that, because I'm sure you've looked at this and understand that it's not just New York Times, it's CNN, it's all of them are doing this.

Sharyl Attkisson:

There is just so much misreporting and I didn't know much about COVID-19 initially, but I try to make it my business after the first month or so to develop some good sources among government scientists, academic scientists, and so on. And it turns out all of my common sense thoughts, they validated when I asked them about. For example, when they were saying that the death rate was very high. On the one hand, by the way, Dr. Fauci was saying it was 10 times worse than flu in Congressional Testimony, but I found a published peer-reviewed article in which he said it was probably going to be similar to the flu, the death rate. And there were all these contradictions the press was not reporting about. But also, they were giving a fatality rate that was crazily elevated because they weren't calculating, or weren't using the proper denominator.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And I blame other public health officials who were doing the same thing. They were acting like the death rate was one in 10 or three and 10 simply because they were going by the number of people diagnosed, the number of people who were sick rather than those who died among them, not counting the notion that most people hadn't been tested, the most people who had it, we didn't know if they had it. And so the true rate, as I confirmed when you use the right denominator, the number of people who actually have, or had coronavirus versus those among them who will die, was very, very tiny. And of course, tiniest among the young population, almost nonexistent.

Sharyl Attkisson:

But there were just so many things that were misreported. But if you try to report them accurately and factually you or I got called out by those in the media who either didn't understand or were simply so blinded by the propaganda narrative that they were trying to further. And The New York Times did this, they actually called me and several other people out as coronavirus doubters. Although, I had never said anything or written anything that even remotely denies coronavirus or denies the risk of them. But they were working very hard to silence voices who were simply reporting more accurately and with context on what was really happening.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. It's just sad they're getting away with this and they're able to confuse, and manipulate, and essentially brainwash a large percentage of population with this misinformation.

Sharyl Attkisson:

By the way, when I spoke to some scientists, including a couple who are in pretty prominent positions and agreed with some of the things we were discussing off-camera about the misreporting, sometimes even by Dr. Fauci. And I said, "Why don't you speak out or correct what you think is the misconception?" And separately, several of them told me that they feared speaking out publicly because they were afraid they would be labeled a coronavirus doubter. And number two, for fear of looking to contradict Dr. Fauci. So I said, "We're at a pretty scary time when scientists who are experts on these issues, fear speaking what they believe is the scientific truth, because there'll be controversialized."

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. So I want to go now to the video equivalent does the New York Times, which would probably be CNN, which interestingly was established in our lifetime by Ted Turner and it was really novel, innovative strategy because a network like that never existed, 24-Hour News, he was the first and it really took off, exploded and became the dominant, the world reporting on the news. But then things changed. And I didn't understand the change about it because I don't really follow the regular media too much. But I didn't realize how much it generates, very similar to what The New York Times have. But the process started, I guess, when AOL purchased them. And that was a fiasco. My God, it was just, how that ever happened. I think AOL purchased Time Warner and Time Warner own CNN.

Dr. Mercola:

But anyway, that's when this changed, but then it accelerated. It really had nothing to do with Ted Turner who was an admitted liberal at the time, but pretty good on being objective and committed to journalistic standards of being fair. But that changed when AOL bought them, and they changed on steroids when [Jeff] Zucker got involved, which I think 2013. I think you wanted to go into some of the details with him and requested an interview with him, but he refused per your book. So perhaps you can expand on that and tell us more of the story.

Sharyl Attkisson:

CNN is a topic near and dear to my heart because I worked there during its heyday in '90 to '93, when we were just the facts news organization. No one had to tell us that as the anchors and reporters, we just knew that's how news is conducted. And I give Ted Turner a great deal of credit. As I say, in the book, a liberal billionaire activist who did not, to my knowledge, tamper with the news, at least certainly not on a daily basis and not to my level. We were never told what to report and how to report it. And again, it would be tempting, I would think if you were Ted Turner and had a news organization to try to influence it, but it was surprisingly free from my viewpoint of that sort of influence. Fast forward to today, people who are young, probably know no other CNN other than the one that pushes agendas and is very biased and largely seen as the left-hand side of Fox News.

Sharyl Attkisson:

And I think that's sad because it used to be a place people could turn to, even if you wanted to watch left news or right news, but you could just get more of the truth or more of an objective take on a given topic that you care about at CNN. And certainly now, I think it's just as notorious as the worst sort of propaganda news outlet you can name. And I did ask Zucker for an interview because in the book, you can see that I spoke to my colleagues who worked with me back in the day, and also some who've worked there since then to try to get their views on the devolution of the news in general, and CNN in particular, and almost all of the executives I interviewed and reporters and producers described themselves, if they described themselves at all, politically, as on the political left. And yet they were all fairly universally appalled by the turn that CNN has taken. And I really think it's a huge mistake and it's bad for our industry. So you'll hear from a lot of people in the book, "Slanted," inside our own industry. And I don't think there's another book that's talked to people who used to head major network news divisions, work, or worked at CNN, NBC, ABC, New York Times and so on.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. So it's a very helpful perspective. So the clear message, at least the message I got, and I think most will get after reading the book, that there is a profoundly serious problem with most mainstream conventional media. So the obvious answer, and I was so hoping you would discuss it in the book, but I'm nearing the end of the book and there's nothing there, and then at the very end, you expose it. "Where can I go to get the truth?" Which is really what you want to know, because who wants to be listening to biased information all the time? Now, I still read The New York Times because they have really good reporting. It's just biased. And if you know that going in, is fine. You know it's all twisted, but at least I can get some facts in there if you put your filter on and target-remove that. But there are other people who are straight shooters like you in Full Measure. But you've list a whole variety of others at the end.

Dr. Mercola:

And I think that it's worth getting the book just for that. One that did you didn't mention – maybe you did mention, I don't remember seeing. There was Matt Taibbi, who reminds me a lot of you in some ways. He never worked for major media like you, he was a writer for Rolling Stone, but he really did a lot of great investigative journalism and just tells it like it is, and just basically lays it out for you. The bare truth. Really, really love reading his work.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Yeah. He should be in there if he's not. And I tried to say, I didn't make a comprehensive list. I'm sure I left so many people out, but I tried to point to a few outlets and people, and I consulted some of my colleagues for their recommendations. And the trick is, it's not an easy answer. People are always asking me, "Where can I go where do you go?" There isn't a place you can go. I can't say, "Watch this news every day or read this publication." It's more granular than that. You have to find a reporter that you trust on a topic and then chase that reporter around to wherever the reporter is writing on that topic. And that's where I think you can find a segment of truth. And it's not always, sadly, going to be objective truth because some of the reporters I name are coming from the left viewpoint or coming from a right viewpoint, but have proven themselves to be brave reporters of a particular topic or controversy that I think you can rely on. But it's just not so simple as it used to be where you could just point to a person or an outlet and say, "Watch that." And you'll get your fair shake at the news.

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. I really enjoy one of the ones you recommended, was The Intercept, primarily with Glen Greenwald. I mean, that guy is such an eloquent speaker and really articulates these challenging issues very carefully in detailed method. So I really enjoy his. But he doesn't talk about too many things and has like one episode a week or so, but you list a whole variety of others, like The Epoch Times and The Hill, even The Wall Street Journal, which I was surprised to see in there because that's owned by Rupert Murdoch, isn't it?

Sharyl Attkisson:

Yeah, I think so. I mentioned a particular reporter or two, and some of those, again, came from colleagues of mine when I was asking for recommendations. I'm not saying, really, any publication on every topic, but there's definitely good stuff to be found-

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah. So I think that your book, “Slanted,” is just excellent and really worth the price of book just to get those recommendations. Because that really is a challenge that we all have is to really – we want to be informed but we want the truth. We don't have time to waste, to be brainwashed by propaganda. So how do we sort through this? How do we filter through it? I think we do a pretty good job of helping people understand truth about health and medicine. And it's obviously this year, it's been a lot about COVID-19 because that's been the biggest challenge we've had, but by doing that we expose all these other issues, like the Gates Foundation and this connection to the World Health Organization and how they really have an agenda that's not for your good long-term health or liberty or personal freedom. So it's a big issue. We touched on a lot of different areas in the book, but did I miss some important ones that you like to go in more detail?

Sharyl Attkisson:

No, but I would just say in closing that I do think a new paradigm will develop when it comes to news reporting. There are people looking at how can news be reported and information in a way it cannot be censored by these big tech giants and by political figures and nonprofits and so on. And there are technical ways using, kind of beyond my understanding, but using blockchain technology and the same technology used with blogs that could be applied to social media whereby they would not have the ability to take down... Just like no one can take down your blog. They could simply keep you from social media or keep it out of a search engine. But I'm told there's a way to develop a social media platform where you can post freely and also not be subject to censorship. I think things will evolve because there's a thirst for – people are tired of what they're seeing, these trends that we're talking about today. And I hope something really positive, being an optimist, develops out of all of this down the road.

Dr. Mercola:

Well, technology is one of my passions, which is one of the reasons I got into the web early and started my website before Google started theirs, and we became so popular. Not so much nowadays because we've been censored, but what you're referring to is not necessarily blockchain, but it's a decentralization of the information. And by that, I mean, that the information typically is centralized. The current rendition of the internet is a centralized internet. That there's specific service that you can shut off and that's how countries can control information. But when it's decentralized, when it's posted on tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of servers on people's cell phones all over the world they're serving the content, you cannot shut that down. That's essentially what Bitcoin is. It's a decentralized money is what it is, and a store of value. 100% cannot be shut down unless you turn off the internet, who's going to be doing that? So that's coming.

Dr. Mercola:

But the problem with that, is that you have to make people aware of it. And they've got clearly the edge. I mean, Google controls 92% of the searches on the internet. Facebook probably has a pretty comparable region with respect to social media and Twitter. So they've got the first leader's advantage or first initiative bit. I forget what it's called, but the first starter advantage. And even though these other platforms would exist under the centralized web, you still have

people have to know about them. They have to go to it. So popularizing that is a challenge, but as people become more aware of the problems here and, see, they really haven't shut down sites yet.

Dr. Mercola:

So when we talk about censoring, we're just talking about on listing sites from their search algorithms, which is essentially almost removing them on a pragmatic perspective, because if you don't know they're there, how are you going to find it? But technically they still exist. They're on the internet. That they do have the power to shut off a site. To the best of my knowledge, that rarely is ever done. But they can shut your site down. And the decentralized web, that will not occur. And there are actually, if someone's interested in this, the best company for doing this is a company called Unstoppable Domains and the domain they have is .crypto. We actually purchased drmercola.crypto. I'm probably going to build a platform on for this contingency that they do shut things down because then that's a whole new game. But that's probably the next generation of the internet, will be decentralization.

Sharyl Attkisson:

I always learn a lot from you. That's fascinating-

Dr. Mercola:

Yeah, I'm just passionate about technology. There's a solution for it because there's one thing I'm sure of, you can definitely count on change. I mean, it looks really bad now, but sometimes you have to go through pain to catalyze the change is going to be beneficial.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Right.

Dr. Mercola:

All right. So the book is "Slanted." If you have any interest in objective journalism and why it needs to remain that way, and how to find true sources and access it, then you'd be out of your mind, crazy, not to pick up "Slanted." So highly recommended it. It's a great read. It really changed my views on so many important issues. And I really thank you so much for writing it.

Sharyl Attkisson:

Thank you so much for having me on to talk about it, I appreciate it.

Dr. Mercola:

Okay.