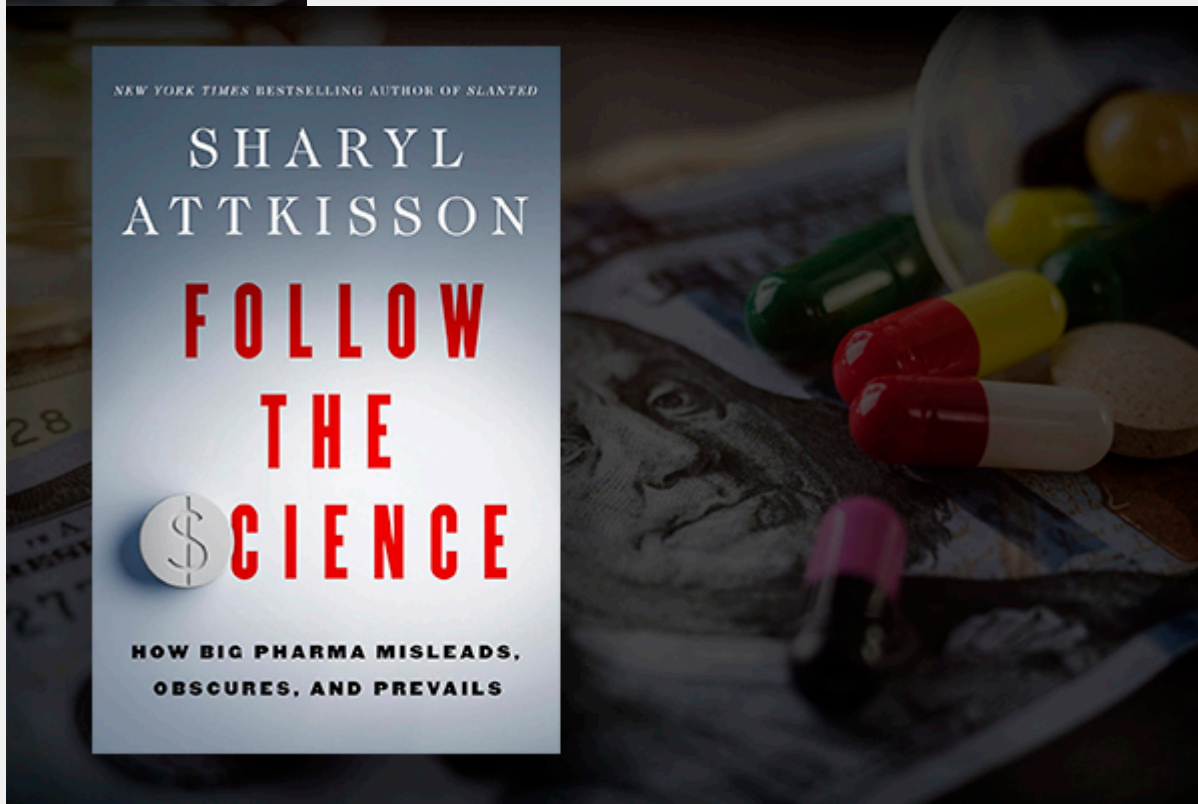
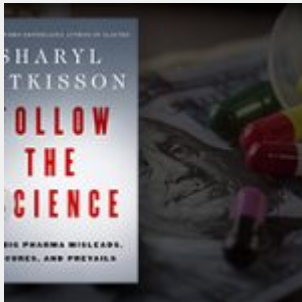


Book Review—Follow the Science: How Big Pharma Misleads, Obscures, and Prevails by Sharyl Attkisson



I recently had the opportunity to interview Sharyl Attkisson about her new book *Follow the Science*. Attkisson is a five-time Emmy Award winner, and recipient of the Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative reporting. She is the New York Times bestselling author of *Slanted: How the News Media Taught Us to Love Censorship and Hate Journalism*; *The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives and Fake News Control What You See, What You Think and How You Vote*; and *Stonewalled*. For thirty years, Attkisson was a correspondent and anchor at CBS News, PBS, CNN and in local news; recently, disenchanted with the constraints of mainstream media, she became a nonpartisan investigative journalist, launching a Sunday morning national TV news program, Sinclair's "Full Measure with Sharyl Attkisson"

Attkisson is no newcomer to controversy; her investigative reporting about vaccine harms earned her a firestorm of criticism. Some consider her a pariah.

The epigraph she selected as a prelude to the book's text is: *"No legitimate scientist ever declared science to be 'settled'."*

The ironic title of the book mirrors Americans' burgeoning disenchantment with the scientific establishment:

"A new Pew Research Center survey finds the share of Americans who say science has had a mostly positive effect on society has fallen and there's been a continued decline in public trust in scientists."

Attkisson doesn't mince words in the book's introduction:

"We're deeply mired in a serious crisis touching all of us and growing worse. It is virtually ignored by our elected officials and popular media—but for their efforts to bury it. It's a health crisis that encompasses an epidemic of chronic and acute diseases, an explosion of disorders related to Covid and Covid vaccines, historic levels of mental illness, and more young people than ever afflicted by brand new diseases or those previously unheard of in children. We could fix these emergencies, but they are nowhere to be found on the national agenda set by our health agencies and major political figures. They're too busy spending your tax dollars on their own priorities. Their priorities include deflecting from the crisis by feeding us a steady stream of propaganda and misinformation. Creating a market for, selling, and defending medicine. And smearing anyone who stands in the way. Why they do this, contrary to all of our best interests, is at the heart of this book."

There's been a hue and cry about "medical misinformation" lately. Influencers who promulgate information critical of mainstream medicine are being shadow-banned and outright de-platformed, often with government coordination; legislatures are contemplating laws limiting the expression of contrarian views; doctors face professional discipline for non-conformity to the orthodoxy.

Attkisson flips this narrative on its head: She brands the guardians of scientific veracity as the chief disseminators of misinformation:

"Misinformation issued on a grand scale saturates the information landscape and becomes impossible to avoid. The government, federal agencies, doctors, medical associations, and cleverly-disguised nonprofits backed by industry push this misinformation on the public with impunity . . . Even most of your doctors don't know that the medical journals they rely upon are filled with unreliable studies hopelessly tainted by drug industry interests—and that's according to some of the journal editors themselves! Studies are ghostwritten by drug companies, then held out as independent."

Even a former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Marcia Angell, famously declared in 2009: *"It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published."*

As entrenched as misleading health information has become, Attkisson asserts that Covid has served as a teachable moment to empower consumers to resist the BigPharma juggernaut. So obvious were its missteps—mandates, masking, mass firings, quarantines, social distancing, plexiglass barriers, lockdowns, natural immunity denial, Covid origins, suppression of alternative therapies and legacy drugs like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin—so exaggerated were the claims for vaccine efficacy, and so egregiously downplayed were the harms of the vaccines, that the public's wariness over health messaging has been reinvigorated. In Attkisson's words, *"The bad guys finally went too far."*

Attkisson traces her awakening to the aftermath of 9-11, when fears of bioterrorism prompted consideration of resuming smallpox vaccinations. Initially caught up in the panic, as an investigative journalist she probed the risk/benefits of the shot,

long-shelved after smallpox was tamed in the 70s. It turned out, not only was the vaccine unnecessary, but it caused serious side effects in some of the early adopters who were stampeded into getting it.

You know all those drug ads you see on TV? Few realize that it was only in the 90s that fierce drug company lobbying enabled the U.S. to become one of only two countries (with New Zealand) in the world who permit direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medication. Attkisson writes:

“The deluge of TV drug ads began around 1997. By 2020, the pharmaceutical industry accounted for 75% of all televised ad spending in the U.S., adding up to about \$4.58 billion. Written with all of the zeroes, that’s \$4,580,000,000.00.”

This, Attkisson asserts, creates an inevitable conflict of interest, wherein the media is loath to bite the hand that feeds it with appropriately critical reporting on drug limitations or harms—at the same time demeaning inexpensive, practical non-pharmacological fixes. The media has effectively been *bought*.

When facts harmful to drug company interests emerge, the BigPharma spin machine goes into overdrive. Attkisson writes:

“As I wrote in The Smear, there’s an entire cottage industry made up of experts-for-hire, nonprofits, LLCs, Super PACs, websites, foundations, PR companies, global law firms, and crisis management specialists who make their living destroying those who dare to come down on the wrong side.”

According to Attkisson’s meticulous reporting, it’s not just drugs and vaccines, it’s also concerns over EMFs, environmental chemicals, and the efficacy of gender-affirming treatment that are silenced.

Further, Attkisson documents coordination between agribusiness and food conglomerates with public health officials to perpetuate obsolete and inappropriate diet recommendations:

“A five year long investigation by the watchdog group US Right to Know found the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics was taking millions from the very industries blamed for much of our poor diets and chronic diseases: pharmaceutical companies, agribusiness companies, and companies that make sugary sweets and highly-processed foods. They include Conagra, Abbott Nutrition and Laboratories, Pepsi, Coke, Hershey, General Mills, Kellogg, the National Confectioners Association, and Bayer CropScience.”

Attkisson has been derided as an “anti-vaxxer”. But she demurs:

“I’m certainly not anti-vaccine for reporting on vaccine safety issues. My daughter and I have had all the recommended vaccines— and then some. But the phrase is uncannily effective. There’s something about falsely tagging someone as “anti-vaccine” that seems to have a magical effect on others. Logic is tossed aside, reporters reject normal fact-finding practices, minds are tightly shut. Nobody bothers to consider the existence of solid studies exposing vaccine side effects. Instead, they robotically insist any negative facts about vaccination cannot possibly be true. Only those putting out pro-vaccine narratives with cult-like fervor are to be heard or believed. The public and media tsk tsk and nod their heads knowingly about the anti-vaccine ‘nuts’ or ‘crazies’.”

The net result, Attkisson claims, is a looming crisis in confidence by consumers

wary of conventional health messaging:

“Frustrated by their doctors’ responses, they are increasingly going outside their insurers and regular physicians’ groups to find answers and get well—even if they have to find a way to pay out of pocket. It’s leading to a quick expansion in the number of physicians practicing ‘root cause’, ‘functional’, or ‘integrative’ medicine.”

Attkisson concludes with a flourish:

“Americans are increasingly depressed, fat, infertile, unfocused, and medicated. Among comparable developed nations, we’re taking the most pills, paying the most for our medical care, and growing the sickest. Yet it’s as if our health experts don’t notice what’s right in front of their noses. They remain hyper-focused on collaborating with the insurers, hospitals, and pharmaceutical interests that are getting rich off our poor health.”

What to do? Question mainstream sources of information and seek alternative perspectives. In the coda to **Follow the Science**, Attkisson lists resources to help medical consumers make more informed choices:

“As you’ve come to discover your own truths about public health officials, doctors, and the science they produce or rely on, it can be extremely unsettling. But you’re actually on a much better path. You’re taking control of your health and that of your family.”