

MIT Researchers Admit Anti-Maskers Are More Scientifically Rigorous

Upon recounting my bout with COVID to an acquaintance, I was asked if I knew where I might have picked up the virus. When I mentioned my hunch about the source, my acquaintance gasped, then inferred that I and those I caught it from must not have been wearing masks since the virus had spread.

“No,” I responded, much to her surprise, “we were wearing masks.”

Such a comment demonstrates the great confidence which many have placed in measures such as lockdowns and mask mandates in recent months. “Science confirms that these measures work!” many exclaim, arguing that those who question masks or other allegedly helpful restrictions are anti-science.

Yet new research from several MIT academics casts some doubt on the anti-science nature of COVID skeptics. In their paper, [“Viral Visualizations: How Coronavirus Skeptics Use Orthodox Data Practices to Promote Unorthodox Science Online,”](#) the academics show some curious cognitive dissonance, making anti-mask proponents out to be clever propagandists who create easily understandable charts and graphs to sway the public away from the authoritative opinions of experts.

At the same time the academics admit, almost in a puzzled fashion, that these “anti-maskers” do their investigations in a very scientific manner. “Indeed,” the paper claims, “anti-maskers often reveal themselves to be more sophisticated in their understanding of how scientific knowledge is socially constructed than their ideological adversaries, who espouse naive realism about the ‘objective’ truth of public health data.”

The MIT academics go on to admit that those opposed to masks are not afraid to get down and dirty in looking at statistics, nor are they afraid to increasingly question the media and government authorities, a trait MIT researchers call “a weaponization of critical thinking.” Even more surprising is the revelation that anti-maskers’ “approach to the pandemic is grounded in a *more* scientific rigor, not less.”

People can bicker all day long about which side is right on this issue, but in this instance, these straightforward, honest comments from the MIT researchers should give us pause. They are clearly opposed to the ideas of the anti-maskers, yet they can’t help but begrudgingly respect the scientific methods of their opponents.

So how do we cut through the obvious politics of this issue and discern between science and propaganda? American philosopher James Burnham offered some insight into this question in his 1941 book, [*The Managerial Revolution*](#), writing:

The aim of propaganda is to persuade people to accept certain ideas or feelings or attitudes. The aim of science is to discover the truth about the world. The propagandistic aim is usually best served by being thoroughly one-sided, by presenting only what is favorable to your case and suppressing all that might weaken it and bolster your opponent.

One could say that both the anti-maskers and the MIT researchers are engaging in propaganda, anxious to present only evidence favorable to their side. But in another sense, one could argue that they are only parroting the narrative promoted by the mainstream media and our politicians, while anti-maskers are actually approaching the data critically.

Burnham expands upon this thought by noting, “In the case of any hypothesis which is under consideration, science, in contrast to propaganda, is always anxious to present all the

evidence, for and against. **The scientific aim is just as well served by proving a hypothesis false as by proving it true.**"
[Emphasis added.]

Given these facts, why is it that nearly every media source, politician, and even the average Joe is so eager to squelch "unorthodox" opinions like those explored in this MIT paper? If they refuse to allow their hypotheses to be tested, then they are the ones who are truly anti-science.

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