

Film "COVID Collateral" Exposes Pandemic Policy Errors and Science Censorship

Interview with documentary film producer Vanessa Dyllyn, on her career, and the struggle to get intelligent, well-researched programs to viewers.



[PAUL D. THACKER](#)

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President Biden ended the pandemic national emergency a little over a year ago, and one of the first films documenting policy mistakes made during COVID debuts this week in Toronto. The film "[COVID Collateral](#)" takes a skeptical view of government policies that, in retrospect, caused more harm than the virus itself, and exposes the political suppression of science that led to lockdowns.

Last October, I flew out to Toronto [to sit for an interview for this film](#) with producer Vanessa Dyllyn and spent several days talking to her and her crew.

Vanessa Dyllyn is an [award-winning and Emmy-nominated producer](#) of several documentaries for Netflix, CBC, National Geographic, Sky Vision, and ARTE. Across her career, Dyllyn has worked with leading performing artists including Sting and Michael Buble, and her films have featured several world-renowned scientists.

"The potential health risks associated with plastic pollution are becoming hard to ignore," [wrote the New York Times](#) in a report on "[Plastic People](#)," a film that Dyllyn recently produced for White Pine Pictures.

I caught up with Vanessa Dyllyn over the last week to discuss her career in film, how she navigated the troubled waters of pandemic politics, and recurring problems with censorship that started with the pandemic and are affecting her own documentary.

From her home office in the leafy west Toronto neighborhood where she has lived the past 20 years, Dyllyn explained that censorship is a central theme in her COVID documentary, because business interests shut down independent voices. "I don't see the kind of

investigative shows that were done 30 years ago. Corporate bodies like Big Pharma are too powerful,” Dyllyn said.

“Big broadcasters should have not have ramped up fear, broadcasting COVID numbers without context,” Dyllyn added. “I know of five or six reporters who resigned because their news outlets were either out-and-out lying, or were hiding more nuanced data that would have lessened panic.”

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

THACKER: You’ve been in films for several decades, but it’s not an easy industry. You have to have both talent and an ability to manage the finances and fundraising. How did you start out and navigate your way to the top?

DYLYN: Oh my, am I at the top? That’s very kind of you. Hardly, I think.

I have made some big international films, but they’ve been made largely with small budgets. I started out in the documentary field about 20 years ago as a researcher in a production company. I had a background in arts and a high school teaching career. I had also produced and adapted works for the theatre.

I had always been interested in documentaries, so I decided to leave a stable career, start over, and learn both how the creative collaboration happened in a documentary and where to go for financing. I formed my own production company 15 years ago and created my own concepts—I would then go in search of a good director and writer to form the team.

I was unknown in the industry, so I made sure I chose the best creative collaborators I could find, so we could get into the broadcaster’s door. I began with films about innovators in neuroscience, which no one was doing at the time. For example, one of my early films was “[The Musical Brain](#)”, featuring Sting. I brought on the author of the best-seller [This is Your Brain on Music](#) as part of the team. And I strategized how to invite Sting to participate in the film.

In short, I’ve had to live on my wits and sheer pig-headedness. I’ve had no investment in my company, so every production has been quite a struggle. I would not advise anyone to start a business without investment partners.

THACKER: One of the biggest stumbling blocks in documentary films is financing, which is why there's so many rich kids in the business. You can have a great idea, but you have to find the money to get something on video, and then more money to get it in theaters, or some other venue with viewers.

How has the documentary business changed over the course of your career?

DYLYN: I have met people with rich parents in this business but you're not going to get anywhere without a good project. I've seen well-financed, privately-funded projects implode because they were not marketable.

There are far more people competing for fewer funding outlets, today. Because of dwindling advertising revenues, broadcasters will offer smaller license fees to producers, so we have to raise financing from many more partners.

There are now Fast Channels which are owned by the large media companies. These Fast channels will pay a much smaller license fee. If you are making a "big issue" documentary, which I tend to do, you need to source private financing or foundation funding. This takes a lot of time and effort, and a producer needs someone on board who is savvy about where to find financing.

I have rarely been able to raise all my financing in Canada and have produced films under official "treat co-productions" with France and the UK. Also, unlike years ago, a big issue documentary requires financing to promote the film properly and run an impact campaign.

The lone documentary filmmaker of years ago is gone—that person makes films as a hobby.

THACKER: I was talking with a producer about making a film on Avandia, a drug I investigated while working in the Senate. We have great documents showing that GlaxoSmithKline knew the drug was bad and sold it anyways, and then lied to Congress and the FDA. And the company attacked independent physicians who spoke out.

The producer came back and told me that nobody at Netflix was interested in a documentary on the drug industry, because Big Pharma saved us from the pandemic with the vaccines. What were the problems you ran into calling into question public health experts?

DYLYN: By nature, big streamers like Netflix and major broadcasters are risk-averse in their programming. It makes perfect sense to me that Netflix would not want to deal with a

bona-fide investigative documentary. I don't see the kind of investigative shows that were done 30 years ago. Corporate bodies like Big Pharma are too powerful.

Media outlets all want true crime series because those types of programs will appeal to the viewers. Anything truly investigative or controversial they will steer away from.

The problems we had in making the film, was that no broadcaster would touch this subject.

I was met with a wall of polite silence across Canada. Let's face it, potential broadcasters don't know enough about what happened during the pandemic, to discern a good film from a bad one, in spite of my experience and reputation.

But what was worse, I was met with hostility from my own colleagues. Outside of the key creatives, it was very hard to get production accountants, or business affairs people to work on the film. Even a closed-captioning technician turned it down. A publicist in Canada won't touch this.

Plus, theatres in the province of Alberta were approached for screenings and they turned us down, without watching the film. This is the Conservative heartland of Canada, but the subject was enough to shut the door in our face.

Finally, April of 2022, I met with the Canadian broadcaster New Tang Dynasty about this topic as a possible documentary film. The commissioning editor, Joe Wang, was enthusiastic. He was a scientist by training – a vaccinologist who had worked on the first SARS vaccine 20 years ago and he was already well-informed about the suppression of science during COVID.

That's how we got started.

THACKER: There's a segment in "[COVID Collateral](#)", where several Canadian public health and medical experts talk about getting fired from their jobs for speaking up and explaining their experiences with patients. One physician, who was fired, says that he was told, "You can't argue with public health."

What happened?

DYLYN: There are many similar stories about doctors being fired across Canada.

The doctor in question in our film, Dr Chris Milburn, was the top ER doctor in Cape Breton.

He had made public comments criticizing the lockdown policies and advocated for personal choice regarding vaccines. His statements were deemed to be against public health so he was dismissed from his position.

THACKER: You have a segment where Anthony Fauci is testifying before Congress and denies that he ever used the phrase “conspiracy theory” to describe people who say the pandemic started in lab in Wuhan, China. I missed this at the time when Fauci testified, but this is false and Fauci perjured himself.

As I reported, [Fauci stated early in the pandemic](#) that people wondering if the pandemic started in a lab were spreading a conspiracy theory. How did you deal with the reality that—despite the facts—some experts just lied to the public?

DYLYN: I was surprised that experts seemed to lie to the extent that they did. Meaning, we all know that people in positions of responsibility use circuitous language to hide their mistakes. But one doesn’t expect them to out and out LIE. Especially when their lies are easily traceable.

So that was surprising to me.

But what was even more shocking is hearing one of our scientists suggest that some scientists would hide information if it helped their political side gain the upper hand. We saw this in the infamous Sam Harris podcast, [when he confessed that he would do anything](#), including changing information, to prevent Trump from being elected.

That’s when the penny dropped for me about scientific integrity.

THACKER: Roman Baber was kicked out of Canada’s Progressive Conservative caucus for sending an open letter that calls for the province's lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions to end. He was accused of spreading “misinformation” because he disagreed with government policies.

Calling people “conspiracy theorists” or accusing them of “misinformation” was how the government shut down critics. And the media lined up to support that censorship.

DYLYN: In the case of Roman Baber, he was distraught to see how his constituents were suffering during lockdowns. He stuck his neck out because he was witnessing so much collateral devastation in his community due to lockdowns. But there was hostility towards him from the media. In the end, he ran as an independent.

The media in North America, as you know, parroted the government narrative.

We know that we don't have the budgets for investigative journalists that we had years ago. But big broadcasters should have not have ramped up fear, broadcasting COVID numbers without context. I know of five or six reporters who resigned because their news outlets were either out-and-out lying, or were hiding more nuanced data that would have lessened panic.

THACKER: I had a couple conversations with your film crew, and it was clear to them that the Canadian government screwed up. Your crew members came across to me as these typical liberals you find in the media, but I could tell they felt weird realizing that the government was wrong, and all their like-minded friends still haven't figured that out.

What happened with the politics where the typical liberal perspective of questioning the government just ceased?

DYLYN: Like my crew members, who had begun to question health policies because of the information in the film, I believe that many classical liberals are now questioning how our governments dealt with COVID. Especially since even the mainstream media is now becoming aware of the real issue of vaccine injuries.

Though we don't deal with vaccines in the film, I believe this is the health issue where the gap between the liberal disdain for 'anti-vaxxers' and the vaccine-choice side will narrow. There's just too much evidence out there now about the potential harms of vaccines, especially for a younger population that was not at significant risk from COVID itself.

THACKER: As I was previewing "COVID Collateral", a member of Congress [tweeted an internal Mark Zuckerberg text](#) where Zuckeberg wrote that "the [Biden] WH put pressure on us to censor the lab leak theory."

I feel like censorship is a major theme for the pandemic. And this censorship continues.

DYLYN: This is the major theme of the film. What does the censorship of science mean in a free society?

I agree that the censorship is continuing. Just consider all the revelations of collusion between government and Big Tech and media that have come out of the Senate Subcommittee Hearings on the origin of the virus. Where is this being reported in the mainstream media outlets?

The average citizen would have to dig hard for this information.

As long as the politics and the profit motive are more powerful than truth in science, we're going to suffer as a society. For example, will we ever know how many people actually died of COVID? If we know that many people who died from illnesses such as cancer but who happened to have COVID, were counted as COVID fatalities by hospitals, because they got increased funding for every COVID patient, where do the real numbers lie?

THACKER: You've also run into some censorship getting this film out. What happened to you in Calgary?

DYLYN: Well, I was shocked when my theatre rep got a note from the owner of a large multiplex in Calgary. She and her staff had been brutally intimidated some weeks before because they were hosting an event for Danielle Smith's, United Conservative Party. This is not some fringe political group—UCP is party in power in the province of Alberta.

But the theater owner sent this note:

We took a hard hit hosting the UCP town hall event and we lost many advertisers and years of social media relationships with many communities. The haters hit us so hard this time that my managers are worn out, discouraged, and have asked management to not host political...

I don't blame the theatre owner—she is a victim and I'm just collateral damage. Since then, we were turned down again in Alberta, sight unseen—the subject of the film is enough to shut doors.

THACKER: So any film about the pandemic that doesn't toe the government line is now “political.”

I've been telling friends that the public's attitude to the pandemic reminds me of what happened after Vietnam. Nobody wanted to talk about the Vietnam War, until around 1980, when Tom Selleck starred in *Magnum, P.I.*—as a Vietnam veteran.

Suddenly, it was okay to talk about the Vietnam War. It was like America needed some time and distance from the horrors of all our war mistakes before this was allowed.

I think the same will happen with the COVID pandemic. People are embarrassed by decisions they made and are still trying to cover them up. But eventually, we'll be ready to have an honest assessment.

Do you think your film might be too early for people to watch?

DYLYN: Actually, I think the film is landing at the perfect time. The general public has begun to ask questions about what happened. It's not a threatening film; it just allows experts to recount what happened to them. It has no extremists in it. It shows revelatory clips of the Senate hearings.

The film has been lawyered up and down by an American law firm and it's clean. I believe the tone and information in the film will draw the reasonable left to right-of-center viewer.

THACKER: What do you hope people take away from the film?

DYLYN: I hope the film will encourage dialogue within families and friends that have been torn apart by different views of COVID policies. We need to have an honest discussion with each other about what happened to us. We need to demand accurate information from our institutions and mainstream media. Because we need to be prepared for another pandemic or public crisis. We need to demand good leadership in our countries and we need schools that teach facts and critical thinking, not indoctrination. Otherwise, we're finished as a society.

And of course, we need the help of independent media like yours.

In some ways, the film is a warning. What is going to happen next time? There is a pandemic treaty being proposed by the WHO, the same organization that advocated lockdowns. Are we going to allow ourselves to be controlled in the same way?

Let us think about how we wish to be governed in the future and how we wish to live.