

COVID censorship at ResearchGate: Things scientists cannot say

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5 June 2020

My April 2020 article entitled “Masks Don’t Work: A review of science relevant to COVID-19 social policy” was banned from ResearchGate on 3 June 2020, after it had reached an unprecedented 400 K reads on the site.

One reader archived the page on 31 May 2020, prior to ResearchGate’s censorship:
<http://archive.is/RuA5z>



archive.today Saved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340570735_Masks_Don't_Work_A_review_of 31 May 2020 16:17:11 UTC
webpage capture All snapshots from host www.researchgate.net
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Masks Don't Work: A review of science relevant to COVID-19 social policy

Technical Report (PDF Available) · April 2020 with 284,132 Reads ⓘ
DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14320.40967/1
[Cite this publication](#)

 **D. G. Rancourt**
1136.72 · Ontario Civil Liberties Association

The summary/abstract of the article reads:

Masks and respirators do not work.

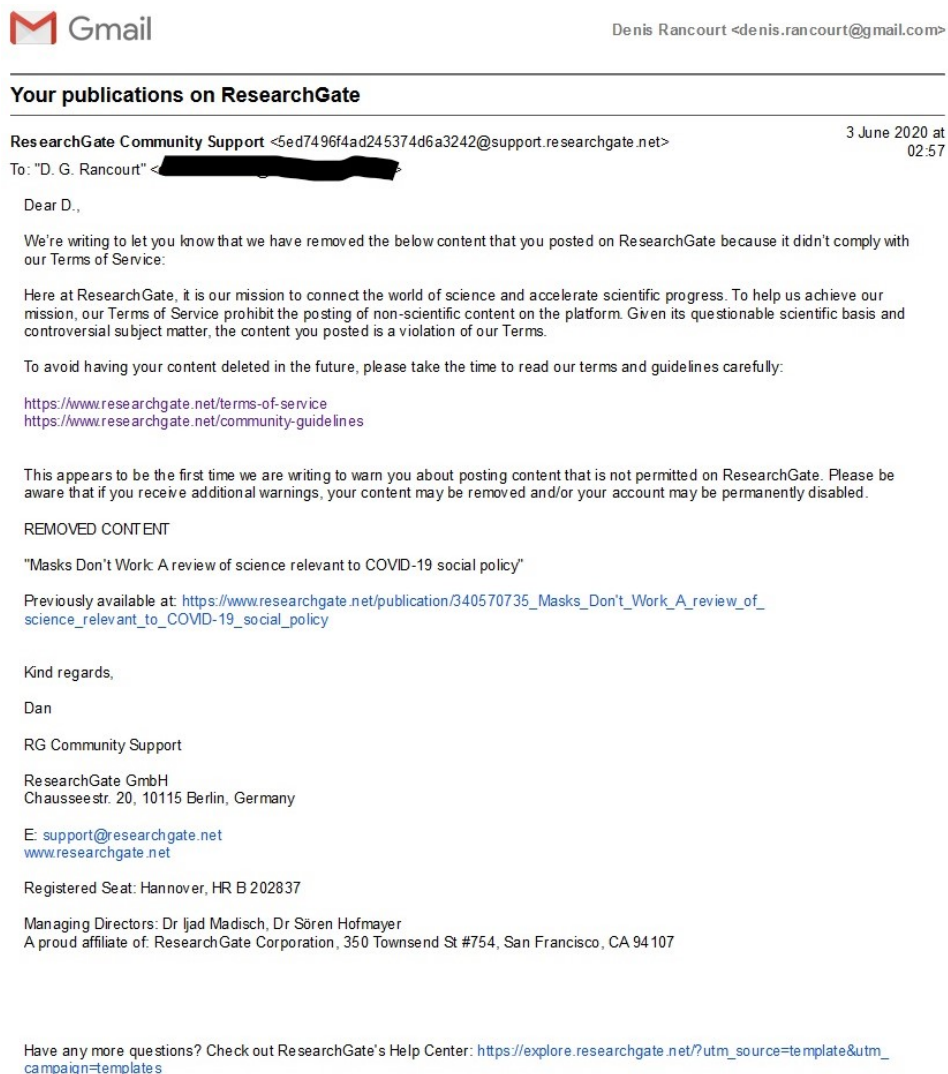
There have been extensive randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies, and meta-analysis reviews of RCT studies, which all show that masks and respirators do not work to prevent respiratory influenza-like

illnesses, or respiratory illnesses believed to be transmitted by droplets and aerosol particles.

Furthermore, the relevant known physics and biology, which I review, are such that masks and respirators should not work. It would be a paradox if masks and respirators worked, given what we know about viral respiratory diseases: The main transmission path is long-residence-time aerosol particles ($< 2.5 \mu\text{m}$), which are too fine to be blocked, and the minimum-infective-dose is smaller than one aerosol particle.

The present paper about masks illustrates the degree to which governments, the mainstream media, and institutional propagandists can decide to operate in a science vacuum, or select only incomplete science that serves their interests. Such recklessness is also certainly the case with the current global lockdown of over 1 billion people, an unprecedented experiment in medical and political history.

This is the email I received:



In particular, the email states:

“[O]ur Terms of Service prohibit the posting of non-scientific content on the platform. Given its questionable scientific basis and controversial subject matter, the content you posted is a violation of our Terms.”

I sent the following response to the two Managing Directors of ResearchGate:

RE:

RG decision (attached below) to remove my article entitled "Masks Don't Work: A review of science relevant to COVID-19 social policy"

Dear Sirs,

I respectfully request that you review and amend the decision referenced above.

I have read the Terms of Service (TOS), and the Community Guidelines, carefully, and I fail to see how any provision in these documents could apply to my article.

It is inconceivable to me how the article could have been judged to be "non-scientific content", and I find nothing in the TOS about "questionable scientific basis" (I would hope that all submissions are "questionable") or "controversial subject matter" (I would hope that some science communications are about "controversial subject matter").

On its face, the decision (according to the reasons provided by support officer "Dan") appears to be contrary to the TOS, in that it involves an evaluation of the scientific basis or conclusions of the article, rather than a valid breach of the TOS.

Please acknowledge this email.

Sincerely,

DR

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **ResearchGate Community Support** <5ed7496f4ad245374d6a3242@support.researchgate.net>

Date: Wed, 3 Jun 2020 at 02:57

Subject: Your publications on ResearchGate

In particular, I said:

“It is inconceivable to me how the article could have been judged to be "non-scientific content", and I find nothing in the TOS about "questionable scientific basis" (I would hope that all submissions are "questionable") or "controversial subject matter" (I would

hope that some science communications are about "controversial subject matter")."

I received this remarkable response from Drs. Madisch and Hofmayer, which is contrary to ResearchGate's earlier pretext for banning the article:



Denis Rancourt <denis.rancourt@gmail.com>

[5ed8363ad38b7c4d697953f2] Response to your inquiry

ResearchGate Community Support
<5ed8363ad38b7c4d697953f2@support.researchgate.net>
To: "D. G. Rancourt" <denis.rancourt@gmail.com>

4 June 2020
at 13:55

Dear Denis,

Thanks for your message.

Discussion and scrutiny ultimately advance science. Generally, at ResearchGate, we err on the side of supporting freedom of expression. However, if we have any reason to believe that content on our platform has the potential to cause harm, then we reserve the right to remove it. In this case, your report was advocating that face masks are not effective and, in effect, discouraging their use. This goes against the public health advice and/or requirements of credible agencies and governments. As content which did not appear to have undergone quality control processes by the scientific community, but which was broadly linked to from a variety of social media accounts, we thought it had the potential to cause harm.

Kind regards,

RG Community Support

ResearchGate GmbH
Chausseestr. 20, 10115 Berlin, Germany

E: support@researchgate.net
www.researchgate.net

Registered Seat: Hannover, HR B 202837

Managing Directors: Dr Ijad Madisch, Dr Sören Hofmayer
A proud affiliate of: ResearchGate Corporation, 350 Townsend St #754, San Francisco, CA 94107

To be clear, they state:

“However, if we have any reason to believe that content on our platform has the potential to cause harm, then we reserve the right to remove it. In this case, your report was advocating that face masks are not effective and, in effect, discouraging their use. This goes against the public health advice and/or requirements of credible agencies and governments. As content which did not appear to have undergone quality control processes by the scientific community, but which was broadly linked to from a variety of social media accounts, we thought it had the potential to cause harm.”

This means that they are stating that they judge my article — which argues that there is no scientific basis for public use of masks, a position in line with express longstanding statements made by the WHO¹ — to be a threat to human safety because it “was broadly linked to from a variety of social media accounts”.

In my opinion, their statement is a strategic statement to deflect a possible litigation, and to attempt to secure popular support. Their action is a violation of the Terms of Service (TOS), but they don't care.

This is censorship of my scientific work like I have never experienced before. It deprives me of the advantages of the ResearchGate platform. It also kills the many links to the article, from a multitude of media and social-media venues. As such, it infringes on the public's right to freely access information in a democracy, without undue or illegal interference.

The actions of ResearchGate are contrary to science, freedom, and democracy. In my opinion, ResearchGate is using the public internet infrastructure, while actuating an apparent bias aligned with its funding sources.²

¹ See: “Can masks protect against the new coronavirus infection?”, WHO, https://youtu.be/Ded_AxFfJoQ

² “ResearchGate raises \$52.6M for its social research network for scientists”, *TechCrunch*, <https://techcrunch.com/2017/02/28/researchgate-raises-52-6m-for-its-social-research-network-for-scientists/> : “This latest tranche of money comes from an impressive list of strategic and financial investors that include the Wellcome Trust, Goldman Sachs Investment Partners, and Four Rivers Group, Ashton Kutcher, LVMH, Xavier Niel, Bill Gates, Benchmark, and Founders Fund, some of whom (like Gates, Benchmark and Founders Fund) were investors in previous rounds.”