

The TSA (and Other Experiments in Evil)

by James Corbett

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In 1961, a psychologist conducted an experiment demonstrating how ordinary men and women could be induced to inflict torture on complete strangers merely because an authority figure had ordered them to do so. In 2001, the United States government formed the Transportation Security Administration to subject hundreds of millions of air travelers to increasingly humiliating and invasive searches and pat downs. These two phenomena are not as disconnected as they may seem. Join us today on The Corbett Report as we explore **The TSA (and other experiments in evil)**.

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TRANSCRIPT

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In the midst of this year's government shutdown, a story began to emerge: the safety of the skies was being threatened by the effect that the shutdown was having on workers of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

***VICTOR OQUENDO:** Good morning Robin, this place is a ghost town. For the second day in a row the security checkpoint here at Terminal B inside of Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport is shut down. Those are the ticket counters right there behind me, they are empty as well.*

SOURCE: [Airport security checkpoints close amid shutdown](#)

***JAKE TAPPER:** Hundreds of TSA employees, who are working without pay right now, have called out from work this week. At Dallas-Fort Worth alone sick calls are up almost 300%.*

SOURCE: [Hundreds of TSA employees are calling out sick amid shutdown](#)

***DAGEN MCDOWELL:** Also, the busiest airport in the world by passenger traffic, the Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson Airport, reported delays of more than an hour at checkpoints at times on Monday.*

SOURCE: [TSA staffing shortages hit airports amid partial government shutdown](#)

ADRIENNE BAILON: "I was in JFK at 6:30am the other day and they were playing that poopty scoop Kanye song and I felt like I was in the Twilight Zone." So ladies, what do you think about these agents going from TSA to TS-heeeeey? I feel like whistle while you work. OK, you know what I'm saying? You're working without getting paid, at least have a good time doing it but as long as it doesn't get in the way of a very significant and important job, which is the safety of our air.

SOURCE: [Government Shutdown: TSA Turns to... Explicit Rap Music?](#)

While the TSA has been sold to the public as a valiant squad of dedicated operatives working diligently to protect "the safety of the air," this public image could not be further from the truth.

The Transportation Security Administration was formally established in November 2001 under the pretext of "fixing" the system that had "somehow" allowed 19 men with box cutters to supposedly commit the most egregious violation of American airspace in history (aided in no small part by the simultaneous "failure" of the entire American intelligence establishment and the most sophisticated air defense in the world). Originally placed under the Department of Transportation, it was just a matter of months before the administration was transitioned into the newly-created Department of Homeland Security and began turning the relatively benign airport security procedures into an ordeal that traumatizes and humiliates virtually everyone who has to endure it.

FATHER: Rocco, they just gotta check you, OK? It's no big deal.

ROCCO: But I want to go with Mom.

FATHER: Yeah we're going to go there and eat in a minute. I know. It's kinda weird, but it's no big deal.

SOURCE: [TSA Nabs Suspected Al Queda Terrorist At Chicago Airport, A toddler in a wheelchair](#)

GIO BENITEZ: Listen as little Lucy says something it's hard to imagine any 3 year old saying.

LUCY FORCK: I don't want to go to Disney World.

BENITEZ: What made the toddler so distraught her parents say, was this:

TSA AGENT: It is illegal to do that.

BENITEZ: A run in with TSA screeners at Missouri's Lambert St. Louis International Airport.

SOURCE: [Girl in Wheelchair, 3, Detained by TSA: Caught on Tape](#)

TSA AGENT: I'm also going to be doing a groin check, which means that I'm going to place my hand on your hip and one on your inner thigh, slowly go up and slide down.

JOHN TYNER: OK.

TSA AGENT: I'm going to do that two times in the front and two times in the back.

TYNER: We can do that out here, but if you touch my junk I'm going to have you arrested.

SOURCE: [If You Touch My Junk, I'll Have You Arrested – US Airport security](#)

MELISSA DYKES: I mean, I'm sitting here right now, I'm staring out the window and there's an American flag flying on

this entry border thing for the airplane and it's just such a joke. It's just . . . what exactly are we? What has America become?

SOURCE: [Why I Hate Flying in America...](#)

If we are to take the establishment of the sprawling TSA bureaucracy and the invasive, degrading airport security procedures it has implemented at face value—that is, even if we accept that the administration was set up to “fix” the holes in airport security—then the entire experiment can be written off as a colossal failure.

Reports of TSA failures to find [knives](#), massive shipments of [narcotics](#), loaded [guns](#), and even the very types of [box cutters](#) we are told were used on 9/11 have been so numerous over the years that it would be impossible to enumerate them all. Even just this past month, a passenger was [able to sneak a gun](#) onto a Delta flight bound for Tokyo, but the TSA [insisted](#) that the security failure had nothing to do with the shutdown; it was just standard TSA incompetence.

Even the government's own testing of TSA procedures has confirmed time and again that the agency fails in providing even the most basic level of security for airline passengers.

In 2006, government investigators [found](#) that they were able to slip 75 percent of their fake bombs through checkpoints at LAX, one of the busiest airports in America, and 60% through Chicago O'Hare, one of the busiest airports in the world. A [2008 report](#) from the Government Accountability Office blasted a government program to test for “gaps” in airport security because it failed to follow up on *why* these failures were occurring. In November of 2011 Congressional investigators issued their own [blistering report](#) on the agency, calling it an “enormous, inflexible and distracted bureaucracy” and pointing out that Americans “are no safer today than they were before 9/11” despite the 60 billion dollars that had been

wasted on the administration up to that point.

But if we attack the TSA on grounds of incompetence, we risk falling into a carefully-laid trap. Proponents of this governmental monstrosity will argue that what is needed is more money to help the valiant guardians of the sky do their job properly. They will point to the shutdown and the resulting mess at the airports as an example of how vital the administration really is, and how important it is to continue [increasing its budget](#) so it can add ever more expensive weaponry to its arsenal of harassment.

No, it is not because of “incompetence” that we must condemn the Orwellian nightmare unfolding at the airports every single day. It is because this security theatre was never meant to keep us safe in the first place. The TSA is not a well-intentioned agency in need of better management or more funding or more highly-trained agents. On the contrary. It is doing *precisely* what it was created to do. The problem is that most people do not know what it was created to do.

In order to understand the real purpose of this spectacularly *successful* government agency, we need to revisit the Milgram experiment.

In 1961, psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a now-famous experiment into the public’s propensity to obey perceived authority figures. In the experiment, ordinary men and women were tricked into administering what they believed to be painful and even fatal electric shocks to complete strangers on the pretense that they were helping a scientist conducting research into memory and learning.

***RESEARCHER:** We want to find out just what effect different people have on each other as teachers and learners and also what effects punishment will have on learning in this situation.*

SOURCE: [Obedience \(Dr. Stanley Milgram, 1962\)](#)

But that “memory research” was just a cover story. In fact, both the scientist and the strangers were actors. The only one not in on the sham was the one delivering the shocks. The real experiment was designed to see how far those ordinary men and women would go in inflicting torture on others when commanded by a perceived authority figure.

SUBJECT A: *Incorrect. You will now get a shock of 75 volts. [Applies shock] Soft hair, he kinda did some yelling in there.*

RESEARCHER: *Continue please.*

SOURCE: [Obedience \(Dr. Stanley Milgram, 1962\)](#)

The study is famous in the annals of psychology because the results were so completely unexpected. Most psychologists predicted that only a very small percentage of the participants in the study would continue delivering shocks past the point where those shocks could be fatal. Instead, a staggering 65% of the test participants proceeded all the way to the maximum (supposedly lethal) voltage.

SUBJECT B: *That is incorrect. This will be 195 volts. [Applies shock] The correct one was...*

VICTIM: *Let me out of here!*

SUBJECT B: *Slow dance.*

VICTIM: *Let me out of here my hearts bothering me. Let me out of here, you have no right to keep me here. Let me out. Let me out of here. Let me out my hearts bothering me!*

RESEARCHER: *Continue, please. Go on.*

SUBJECT B: *[Inaudible]*

SOURCE: [Obedience \(Dr. Stanley Milgram, 1962\)](#)

Let's repeat that. 65% of participants—ordinary men and women who thought they were volunteering for a simple experiment about memory and learning—were willing to deliver what they sincerely believed to be potentially fatal doses of electricity to random strangers simply because an authority figure assured them that it was necessary to continue with the experiment.

VICTIM: You have no right to hold me here!

SUBJECT B: The next phrase is 'Fast' ...

VICTIM: Let me out, let me out, let me out of here!

SUBJECT B: Bird. Car. Train. Plane.

[Silence]

RESEARCHER: Continue, teacher.

SUBJECT B: That is incorrect. This will be 345 [volts]. The correct answer is 'Fast Bird.'

SOURCE: [Obedience \(Dr. Stanley Milgram, 1962\)](#)

So now let's look at the TSA's *real* role. No, they are not there to keep us safe from the scary, turban-wearing Al-CIA-da goblins. But they *are* running a giant, society-wide, real-world Milgram experiment in obedience training. In this case, though, there are no actors. Real people are really being tortured, molested, degraded and subjected to the most demeaning public humiliation at the hands of badge-wearing authority figures. And this time the subjects of the experiment (the general public) are not being asked to deliver a shock. They are not being asked to participate in the torture, aid in the pat-downs, or help run the body scanners.

Instead, they are being asked *not* to participate. To sit. To watch. To learn. This is what happens to those who resist.

This is what happens to random people who do not resist. This is what happens to [96-year-old WWII veterans](#). This is what happens to [4-year-olds](#). This is what happens to [pregnant mothers](#). One day it will probably happen to you. And you, the ordinary men and women who are made to watch these torture sessions from the lengthy line up at the security gate, are expected to do nothing. There is nothing you can do. Nothing you *will* do.

If the TSA is not an attempt to “keep the skies safe” after all, but a nearly two-decade-long experiment in obedience training, then it cannot be denied that that experiment has been remarkably successful.

REPORTER: *The YouTube user who posted this wrote that the agent subjected his kids to the pat downs because he had been selected as usual for a security check because of his name. We shared the video with TSA, the agency offering no comment but directed me to the section of its pat-down policy that says ‘officers will work with parents to resolve any alarms at the checkpoint.’ TSA has modified screening procedures for children 12 and under that reduces the likelihood of a pat-down.*

PASSENGER: *Well I mean you got to follow the rules but in the same regard I think that I’d probably have some apprehension. I’d be a little bit upset about it.*

ETHAN ROSENBERG: *I have to do what they’re doing.*

REPORTER: *What you see in this video is familiar for 10 year old Ethan Rosenberg.*

ETHAN’S FATHER: *Yes, he has to have a manual pat-down. He has a cochlear implant, a medically implanted device.*

REPORTER: *Ethan’s dad describes his son’s pat-down every time they fly as not a problem. Though Ethan clues us in on what these kids could be feeling.*

ETHAN: Well, sometimes it's uncomfortable.

SOURCE: [TSA search of children causes stir](#)

People watch passively as the molestation and humiliation of strangers unfolds mere steps away from them. No outcry. No protest. No boycotts. No mass movements to stop these scenes from playing out again.

Yes, there was a mass campaign to "[Opt Out](#)" of the TSA's invasive body scanners. A day was set, people were organized, a wave of Thanksgiving flyers were readying themselves to opt out of the procedure and overwhelm the agents with a never-ending stream of people to be patted down. But the TSA, knowing they would have been defeated had such a movement gained ground, chose to [turn off the scanners and wave people through](#) on the planned Opt Out Day, and the public, quickly distracted by the next story in the 24/7 news cycle, moved on.

The next time they have to take a flight, those same people who once protested these procedures will step dutifully into line, take off their belt and shoes, and pray that it won't be them next. And unless and until people stop doing *nothing* and start doing *something* in the face of these obvious injustices, absolutely none of this will change. And, if people continue doing nothing, within a generation no one will even understand that these scenes are objectionable. That they don't have to happen.

But you see, this is the most surprising part of the Milgram experiment. The one that everyone forgets. The experiment wasn't run once or twice. It was run dozens of times, under all types of circumstances, and a remarkable fact was discovered: The way the experiment was set up determined the extent to which the participants obeyed their instructions. Sometimes the experiment was run so that one subject could watch other subjects participate in the study before they did. And in cases where the first subjects obeyed the psychologist and delivered the shocks, the later subjects would, too.

Yet—and here we get to the *real* lesson of the Milgram experiment—if the teacher saw other teachers disobey the psychologist and *refuse* to deliver the shocks, *they* would disobey, too.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: *Now I said he [Milgram] tested 1,000 subjects. In any one study, it's only 50 or 60. But let's look at the other 16 studies.*

In each study, he varies one aspect of the social situation. We call that "experimental variations." So in study 16, the percentage of people going to 450 volts is 91%. Nine out of 10 people go all the way. Why? In study 16, you come in and they say, "We're running a little late. Why don't you sit and wait until the other person finishes?" And you see a confederate looking like you go all the way to the end. In study number 5, only 10 percent go all the way. In study 5, you come in and you see people like you rebel.

That says we are powerful social models for other people. If you model evil behavior, it's gonna spread to others. If you model good behavior, caring behavior, compassionate behavior, it's gonna spread in a positive way.

SOURCE: [*The Lucifer Effect in Action: My Journey from Evil to Heroism*](#)

This is the surprising conclusion that has been scrubbed from most accounts of the Milgram experiment: Disobedience, once modeled, becomes an option in the mind of the public.

Remember this the next time you are at the security checkpoint: When you are asked to step into the body scanner, those behind you *will* be watching. Your choice *will* make a difference. When someone is being molested at a TSA pat-down and you are witnessing it, those around you *will* be taking note of your reaction. Your behavior *will* affect theirs.

So, what choice will you make? Will you pass or fail this real-world Milgram experiment?