

BEHAVIOR DETECTION

There are two things that "always" happen to me when I fly to DC. I "always" (often, rather) sit next to MI's Republican Congressmen in First Class. And I "always" (almost always, probably) get pulled into secondary when I'm flying out of Reagan National Airport. I know why the latter occurs: my driver's license says, "Margaret" while my Northwest frequent flier number is under the name "Marcy," so they have to pull me into secondary to quiz me about my family's weird nicknaming habits.

But the day after the Libby sentencing, I got the full-fledged treatment, including what I believe to be behavior detection.

Specially trained security personnel are watching body language and facial cues of passengers for signs of bad intentions. The watcher could be the attendant who hands you the tray for your laptop or the one standing behind the ticket-checker. Or the one next to the curbside baggage attendant.

They're called Behavior Detection Officers, and they're part of several recent security upgrades, Transportation Security Administrator Kip Hawley told an aviation industry group in Washington last month. He described them as "a wonderful tool to be able to identify and do risk management prior to somebody coming into the airport or approaching the crowded checkpoint."

[snip]

At the heart of the new screening system is a theory that when people try to conceal their emotions, they reveal their feelings in flashes that Ekman, a pioneer in the field, calls "micro-expressions." Fear and disgust are the key ones, he said, because they're associated with

deception.

Behavior detection officers work in pairs. Typically, one officer sizes up passengers openly while the other seems to be performing a routine security duty. A passenger who arouses suspicion, whether by micro-expressions, social interaction or body language gets subtle but more serious scrutiny.

A behavior specialist may decide to move in to help the suspicious passenger recover belongings that have passed through the baggage X-ray. Or he may ask where the traveler's going. If more alarms go off, officers will "refer" the person to law enforcement officials for further questioning.

It worked like this: rather than mark my boarding pass for the "quiz about family's weird nicknaming habits" treatment, they put a big red X on it. A fellow who was clearly either supervising or waiting for some liberal schmo like me then met me after the metal detector and asked to search my bags. Which he did. So thoroughly that he read every single business card in my knapsack. Every single one.

Meanwhile, a female TSA employee made like she was making small talk with me, asking why I was in DC, whether Libby was really guilty, what it was like to cover the trial, and so on. I could tell her job was, at least partly, to see whether my story accorded with the contents the male TSA guy was finding in my bag—but she was also, clearly, giving me some kind of psychological profile.

I must have passed with flying (punny!) colors, because after about 15 minutes they let me go on my way. They almost got me though. Somehow, the male TSA guy identified that my Anatomy of Deceit business cards were for a book (this is the part I find most suspicious, since I didn't actually have any copies of the book on me—how did he

know the card was for a book and not, say, a movie?). So he asked me how well the book was selling. "Heck if I know," I responded, answering the same way I always have. Which didn't sound too credible to the TSA guy, pretty clearly.

Will, if I get arrested because I don't know how many books have sold, I'll be cross!!!!