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Airport Profiling



Kuntzel & Deygas

From January 2007

By Hannah Wallace

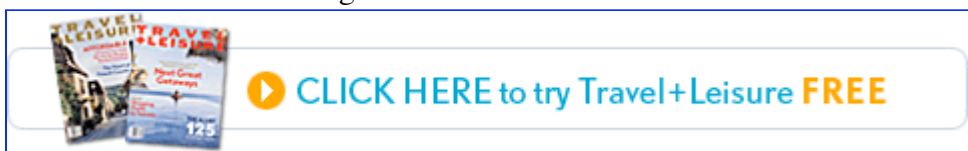
Feel as if you're being watched? You probably are. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) recently began rolling out a new security program, Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT), at dozens of airports around the country. Using behavioral profiling, SPOT aims to identify "high-risk individuals" by monitoring passengers' body language. Under the initiative, "behavior detection officers" are trained to recognize involuntary gestures, subtle facial twitches, and changes in vocal pitch that signal stress or deceit. A passenger displaying suspicious behavior is taken aside for additional screening.

But do such programs work? In Israel, where airport security personnel get nine weeks of training, behavioral screening is considered effective. But most TSA screeners receive only four days'

instruction; the idea that they will be able to master the art of behavior recognition with such meager training is "preposterous," says Bernard Harcourt, a University of Chicago law professor and critic of such profiling.

Meanwhile, the Department of Homeland Security just finished testing an automated version of SPOT using a device called Cogito, which works in a manner similar to a polygraph device. Passengers answer a set of simple questions displayed on a touch screen while inserting one hand into a sensor that measures biometric responses, such as sweat levels and blood pressure. According to Shabtai Shoval, CEO of the Israeli company behind Cogito, the machines have been tested at the Knoxville, Tennessee, airport. (TSA spokeswoman Ann Davis says the agency is still evaluating Cogito.)

The information in this story was accurate at the time it was published in January 2007 but we suggest you confirm all details and prices directly with any establishments mentioned. The quality of offerings and services tends to change over time.



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