

How Discourses Cast Airport Security Characters:  
A Discourse Tracing and Qualitative Analysis of Identity  
and Emotional Performances

by

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## ABSTRACT

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and subsequent creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), airport security has become an increasingly invasive, cumbersome, and expensive process. Fraught with tension and discomfort, “airport security” is a dirty phrase in the popular imagination, synonymous with long lines, unimpressive employees, and indignity. In fact, the TSA and its employees have featured as topic and punch line of news and popular culture stories. This image complicates the TSA’s mission to ensure the nation’s air travel safety and the ways that its officers interact with passengers.

Every day, nearly two million people fly domestically in the United States. Each passenger must interact with many of the approximately 50,000 agents in airports. How employees and travelers make sense of interactions in airport security contexts can have significant implications for individual wellbeing, personal and professional relationships, and organizational policies and practices. Furthermore, the meaning making of travelers and employees is complexly connected to broad social discourses and issues of identity.

In this study, I focus on the communication implications of identity and emotional performances in airport security in light of discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels. Using discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009), I construct the historical and discursive landscape of airport security, and via participant observation and various types of interviews, demonstrate how officers and passengers develop and perform identity, and the resulting interactional consequences.

My analysis suggests that passengers and Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) perform three main types of identities in airport security contexts—what I call Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful—which reflect different types and levels of discourse. Identity

performances are intricately related to emotional processes and occur dynamically, in relation to the identity and emotional performances of others.

Theoretical implications direct attention to the ways that identity and emotional performances structure interactions, cause burdensome emotion management, and present organizational actors with tension, contradiction, and paradox to manage. Practical implications suggest consideration of passenger and TSO emotional wellbeing, policy framing, passenger agency, and preferred identities. Methodologically, this dissertation offers insight into discourse tracing and challenges of embodied “undercover” research in public spaces.

## DEDICATION

For my Marm. Mom, thank you for teaching me about faith, hard work, creativity and that no matter whether I succeed or fail, I am always loved. I promise to drink water, take my vitamins, and always call you when I land. Love you!

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION: IDENTITY AND EMOTION IN AIRPORT SECURITY

“Now this is how I serve my country, and I really feel very proud that I do this. And maybe not for the people, but for my country that I care about, that I do what’s right.” –Carrie, Transportation Security Officer

“They aren’t trained nearly as well as most police officers to deal with [complaints]. Now I have someone that’s going to be reacting off emotions, based on my emotions. . . . If I can avert that before it ever becomes an issue, then it behooves me to do so. If that means hiding how I feel about them and not looking them in the eye and going, ‘I think your presence here is utterly unwarranted,’ I don’t see how telling them or showing them would help. They are powerless to change their position or their job. . . . I feel as though it would be the same thing as being upset at Best Buy’s return policy and yelling at the cashier. Well, the cashier can’t change that. A manager or a president or someone in a position of authority is the one that needs to be able to hear that, understand it, and move on it.” Dirk, passenger

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Arms outstretched, palms up. Legs spread-eagle. Bare feet gripping a grimy tile floor.

I stare defiantly at the onlookers as hands caress my shoulders, back, arms, legs, buttocks, thighs, breasts. The hands of a stranger.

I wonder: *Is this really making anyone safer?*

\*\*\*

*Research Journal, April 13, 2011*

I barely slept the night before my flight. National Opt Out day was hours away and I wondered what it would be like to stand in line with hundreds of people trying to get home for Thanksgiving in 2010 and declare “I opt out.” Opt out of the backscatter scanner screening technology that captures a full-body naked picture of passengers, that is. Opt out of the potentially harmful and definitely un-monitored radiation. Opt out of mindlessly letting the government conduct a search of my person and property without cause. And opt in to having my body groped by a stranger, all in the name of national security.

Turns out, I escaped that moment for another five months due to scanners being slow to appear in my home airports. But the possibility of opting out never left my flying frame of reference. With every flight out—a bi-weekly event for me, at the time—I wondered if my next trip would be “the one” where I would face an enhanced pat-down. Would it be like the horror stories I’d read in the news and heard from passengers? Would, like so many others in the public sphere, I feel humiliated, violated, angry?

It was a Southern California Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employee who first molested me. I say “molested” to reflect Merriam’s first definition “to annoy, disturb or persecute.” I told my husband, who I called immediately after my first enhanced pat-down, that it “wasn’t that bad.” I reported how the woman officer acted professionally, used humor, worked quickly, communicated well, and did not “meet resistance,” a vague term that the TSA uses to refer to making contact with genitalia. It wasn’t fun, but it wasn’t the horrific experience I had envisioned for five months.

It did get me thinking about the processes of security—the idea that we as an American people give up basic freedoms and allow invasive searches largely without question. That we must choose between molestation and naked scanning as a condition of travel. That the hassles—the time, money, emotional energy—don’t appear worth the reward. The hassles seem like a *production* of security, a performance that we all—passengers and employees—willingly take part in while knowing it is just a charade.

\*\*\*

I start this dissertation with a story from my research journal—a reflection on the first of what would later be more than 100 pat-downs as I accomplished fieldwork in airports across the country. I offer this story in particular because it gets at the central

concerns of this study—identity, discourse, emotion, and interactions between airline passengers and Transportation Security Officers (TSOs).

Every day nearly two million people in the United States utilize commercial air travel (TSA, 2010). Each of these fliers must interact with a number of the approximately 50,000 TSOs working in airports across the country. Since its inception after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the TSA has been a controversial organization with its purpose, funding, employees, efficiency, and efficacy under constant scrutiny and debate (Schneier, 2012). Adding a layer to the already emotion-laden airport environment, “airport security” invokes stress and consternation for travelers and employees alike, prompting interpersonal conflict and emotion management (Malvini Redden, 2013). Consequently, how employees and travelers make sense of their interactions in the airport security context can have significant implications for individual wellbeing (Tracy, 2005), personal and professional relationships (Waldron & Krone, 1991; Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006), as well as organizational policies and practices. Understanding this context is especially important from a scholarly perspective as the meaning making of travelers and employees is complexly connected to broad social discourses and issues of identity.

In this study, I focus on the communication implications of identity and emotional performance in airport security, in light of discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels. It is important to recognize that people’s emotional experiences do not take place within a vacuum, but rather are constructed, shaped, and constrained by the environment and discourses in which they are situated (Foucault, 1979, 1980). For instance, research among cruise ship employees and 911 call takers suggests that employees and customers co-construct emotional performances in light of historical and social forces that shape the experience and expression of emotion, and development of individual identity (Tracy &

Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2000). As Foucault points out (1979), these forces are often normalized and taken for granted over time such that they influence behavior and thought in unquestioned and often uncontested ways. An example of this in the airport security context is how U.S. conceptions and assumptions of customer service impact how passengers interpret and express their emotions.

Traditional understandings of service imply the “customer is always right” and individuals have become used to certain levels of agency and control in service situations (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Those assumptions are interrupted in airport security as passengers give up control and status once they enter a security line, submit to invasive scrutiny of identity, belongings, and person, and face competing broad discourses of security, power, and authority. Whereas in typical service situations, customers can draw upon their past experiences to make sense more or less automatically, the unfamiliar structure and foreign practices of airport security generate an opportunity for more purposeful meaning making (Weick, 1995). Security structure, procedures, and communication with security personnel can potentially trigger negative feelings including stress, uncertainty, and anxiety.

For employees, discourses not only help to construct their emotions and influence emotion management, but also shape their identities within and in relation to the organization. For instance, although the TSA and its agents are often portrayed negatively in the popular press, especially in light of security measures that include invasive screening techniques, agents seem to highly identify with the organization and its goals. The disparate beliefs of agents and representations by media can necessitate work for employees as they negotiate identity challenges. Dealing with identity threats can be an emotional process. How employees make sense of identity and manage their emotions may depend upon which discursive resources they invoke (Kuhn, 2009). For example, like Tracy’s (2005) study of

correctional officers, agents who highly identify with their roles as security agents and the publicly stated goals of TSA may find it more difficult to manage and make sense of their emotions in the airport when confronted with passengers who enact negative manifestations of social discourse about airport security (e.g. act negatively, complain, make rude comments, etc.). Understanding the identity work and emotional performances of employees and passengers is critical as behavior in airport security is overtly scrutinized and can have serious material and relational consequences for security processes and interpersonal interactions, not to mention personal wellbeing (Malvini Redden, 2013).

A central concern of this study is identity construction and performance as a result of and via macro, meso, and micro discourses. Scholars across disciplines have long been interested in identity, theorizing, for instance, the formation of personal identity (Giddens, 1979) and types of identity performances (Goffman, 1959). Organizational scholars in particular have extensively investigated the ways that identities are constructed in relation to organizational attributes, for example via organizational training (Pratt, 2000), socialization with peers (Tajfel, 1978), and various discourses (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003; Kuhn, 2009). Whereas a good deal is known about how identity is developed and shaped by organizations, most identity research focuses on “accounts” of identity construction and less on how it is enacted in organizational settings (Wieland, 2010, p. 509). One goal of this research is to examine the discourses that influence identity development for employees and passengers, and also how identities are performed and shaped during security encounters. More specifically, I focus on how people use discourses at macro-societal, meso-organizational, and micro-individual levels to construct and perform identities as well as the identities of others. In doing so, I demonstrate how discourses influence interactions and emotion management in airport security, prompt meaning making activities

(Weick, 1995), and exact significant potential consequences for individuals and organizations.

This work is important for several reasons. First, it provides insight regarding structure and processes that affect millions of people each year with practical suggestions for reducing interpersonal conflict and troublesome emotion management. Second, it provides theoretical contributions for organizational scholars interested in multi-level discursive analysis and discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) as well as identity construction and enactment (Wieland, 2010). Third, it investigates the experiences of organizational members *and* organizational patrons, examining the complex relationships of each group's emotion and identity performances.

### **Dissertation Preview**

Broadly, the purposes of this study are to provide a discourse tracing of modern airport security and the TSA, to examine the emotional experiences of passengers and employees, to explore how identities are constructed by and through discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels, and to understand the implications of identity performances in organizations. To understand these phenomena within the airport security context, I conducted ethnographic investigations within several U.S. international airports over the course of 30 months using participant observation, formal and informal interviews, autoethnographic reflections, and elements of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). To give a sense of multi-vocality, as well as the movement of travel, each chapter starts out with participant quotes and a fieldnote exemplar.

I now turn to relevant literature related to the study including past research on emotional experience and management, identity and identification, organizational sensemaking, and post-structural notions of discourse. Within the literature review, I discuss

specific research questions that guided the study. Following the literature and theory review, I outline methods and procedures, including sites of study, participants, protocol, and logistics of data collection, as well as data analysis techniques. With this foundation in place, I next share findings from the study including a brief review and discourse tracing of airport security history, and typologies of TSO and passenger identity performances. Then I explain analytic implications and contributions, theoretical, practical, and methodological. Finally, I offer concluding remarks, limitations, and directions for future research.



## Chapter 2

### CONTEXTUALIZING AIRPORT SECURITY INTERACTIONS WITHIN DISCOURSE, EMOTION, AND IDENTITY THEORY

“I walk up there and say hello. I’m always friendly with them. I think there is this thought in the back of my head that if I act suspicious in some way, or if I’m not friendly, that’s just more reason for them to pull you aside. So I’m extra friendly to them. I say hello. I hand them my boarding pass, my driver’s license. I say ‘thank you’ when they give it back to me. Sometimes they ask questions, sometimes they don’t. I walk through, and then usually one will start scanning your bag and they’re kind of in a rush, moving you along and barking orders at you.” –Alice, frequent business traveler

“You also greet them, inform them what to do. Especially people who need help, I can call for help and they will be assisted in some way. [I] try to talk to them before they go in. Make sure they are following the policies and make sure they are having a very enjoyable time, a very good experience going through the checkpoint. It helps a lot. If you treat them like people, you will get a good reaction and they would have a pleasant experience and they will always remember that.” –TSO Roger, discussing his favorite checkpoint position.

\*\*\*

“FEMALE ASSIST!”

The cry comes from deep inside the checkpoint but I can hear it all the way in the main security line. Inexplicably, the line barely slugs along. A dozen people stand waiting, hands-on-hips or clutching boarding passes, faces set into tense masks. The ID checker, a 60-something man with shaggy dishwater blond locks framing a weathered face, quietly jokes with each passenger in turn. He smiles slightly and chuckles, teasing a young boy apparently traveling alone. Edging up from the VIP traveler line, I ask, “How’s it going?”

“Pretty good,” he replies, murmuring something about having “as much fun as my psychiatrist will allow.”

It took me a beat to realize he was joking.

The line into the checkpoint now backing up, I notice the baggage screener scrutinizing every single piece of luggage, staring intently at the computer monitor with squinted eyes and furrowed brows.

A woman ahead of me “opts out” of the advanced imaging screening, choosing instead a pat-down. I tell the young officer with painted-on eyebrows, “I’d like to opt out, too, please.”

“FEMALE ASSIST!” she shouts.

Minutes pass. Blood starts to pound in my ears as I watch my bags sitting at the end of the conveyor belt, unattended. I crane to keep my purse and laptop in view.

Finally, a young officer in her late teens/early 20s strides over. Standing 5’11, with strong-looking shoulders, her eyes, bright smile, and bejeweled watch sparkle. Immediately, she rattles off the canned spiel about pat-down procedures, asking if I have any sore or sensitive areas, if I have any internal or external medical devices, and if I want a private screening.

“No, no, and, no,” I reply, shaking my head.

She sets to work, gloved fingers caressing flesh. As she winds around my body, crouching low behind me, I ask, “How’s your day going?”

She guffaws, “HAH!”

And we both laugh—her at her day, and me at the silliness of asking a woman who is patting another woman’s buttocks how her day is going.

Coming around to face me, the officer hesitates before saying her day was “*Fine.*” The intonation suggests it was anything but.

She confesses that sometimes, “People can be so mean.”

Apparently people yell at her and get angry. She tells me how one woman recently threw her belongings. “At the table, but I knew she was aiming for me,” the officer says.

“Why?” I inquire, stunned.

Because she made the woman throw away her water bottle.

“Seriously?!” I marvel.

We laugh at the ludicrous image of a grown woman throwing a tantrum over a *water bottle*.

I ask how many irate people she sees during the day-to-day but she can’t quantify off the top of her head. Instead, she admits, “I hate it when I make the nice ones cry though.”

*Wow*, I think to myself.

She continues, telling me people think she’s “So mean,” but she doesn’t know why.

“People seem to be stressed in security,” I remark, not knowing what else to say.

The pat-down concludes. I dig my shoes out of a grey bin, pondering how the officer attributed passenger behavior to her manner *personally*, and not the organization and rules she represents and enforces.

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On the surface, this fieldnote excerpt shows a trip through airport security with brief interactions between passengers and TSOs. The preceding quotations provide insight into the experiences of TSOs and flying passengers. Viewed with theoretical lenses, however, the data become a much more powerful tale that demonstrates the intersections of discourse, emotion, identity, and meaning making in airport security. What does it mean to be a “mean” TSO or an aggressive passenger? How do people manage feelings of insecurity, anger, fear, boredom, or humor in the security checkpoint? How are security interactions

influenced by broad systems of thought such as power, authority, and “the rules”? How might passengers and TSOs make meaning when security interactions go poorly?

To address these general topics and set up a foundation for the specific questions and phenomena of interest in this study, I now turn to relevant theory and literature. I start broadly by discussing discourses and discursive analysis which guided data gathering and analysis. I continue with an exploration of emotion theory which identifies and explains theoretical concepts at work in the opening quotes and fieldnote excerpt. Finally, I provide an overview of literature on identity research in organizational studies. In this chapter, I provide context and rationale for my study as well as a vocabulary to interpret the findings and subsequent analysis. At the end of the chapter, I offer three specific research questions that guided the study.

### **Discursive analysis and the discursive construction of identity**

In this project, I am concerned with a variety of discourses that surround and suffuse the airport security context. Following Alvesson and Kärreman (2000), and Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), I differentiate between *discourses* as local talk and text in social practices, and *Discourses* which are broader, more enduring systems of thought. In organizations, discourse is the “medium” for social interaction (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) and may be conceived of as conversation or interaction (Boden, 1994), or completed texts (e.g. emails, memos, web sites) (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). On a larger scale, Discourses reflect broad societal-level thoughts and assumptions that are historically situated and evident through knowledge/power relationships (Foucault, 1980). From this perspective, Discourses are “formed by constellations of talk, ideas, logics, and assumptions that constitutes objects and subjects” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 8) while ordering and naturalizing societies (Foucault, 1979, 1980).

Considering the relationships between local discourse in organizations and broader social Discourses is important as organizational talk and text are reflective of, and informed and shaped by broader societal discourses (Alvesson, 2011; Taylor, Irvin, & Wieland, 2006). For instance, an analysis of cruise ships demonstrated that employees discursively constructed their identities in relation to historically situated emotional labor norms (Tracy, 2000). In the study, local talk and practices were positioned within a post-structural framework (Foucault, 1979; 1980) that showed how Discourses of “the customer is always right” led to micro-level struggles about dealing with sexual overtures from passengers. Similarly, by examining how male executives replicated gendered scripts that frame women’s work as a choice, Tracy and Rivera (2010) demonstrated how talk perpetuates aversive sexism that challenges women as they accomplish work/life goals. Both of these studies explicitly examined local talk and discourse, identified the influences of situated local interaction within the context of broader social Discourses or cultural influences, and suggested how the two types of discourses interact. Importantly, these studies also demonstrate how certain types of talk can resist discourses and evidence what Tracy and Rivera (2010) call “flickers of transformation.”

Discourses influence the ways that people construct their identities across organizational contexts. For instance, within formal organizational environments, a critical feminist perspective helped show how women constructed their identities in the face of competing and incongruous discourses of motherhood and corporate success (Medved & Kirby, 2005). As reflected in an investigation of popular press sources, individuals’ constructions of self were highly influenced by corporate discourses and notions of “personal branding” (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005, p. 308). Spanning organizational settings, discourses of entrepreneurialism influenced how midlife professional women

experience aging by “reproducing and resisting the master narrative of decline” (Trethewey, 2001, p. 183). These essays emphasize the role of Discourse in shaping individual identities which in turn influences how people relate and make meaning in organizational settings, potentially resisting dominant discourses (Ashcraft, 2005; Trethewey, 1997) and/or reproducing them (Kuhn, 2009; Tracy, 2005; Trethewey, 1999).

Conceptions of d/Discourse are important for my research as I believe organizing emerges through discourse (talk/text/interaction) (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004) and is impacted by Discourses which are embedded in systems of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1979, 1980). Namely, organizing happens through talk and action, while talk and action are embedded within and influenced by systems of meaning that may be unacknowledged. Considering that “meaning becomes constituted in discursive acts” (Alvesson, 2011, p. 10) in inherently political processes (Medved, 2009; Mumby, 1987; Trethewey, 1997), it is important to examine meaning-making locally and in relationship to larger structures of influence. For instance, in my previous study of passenger emotion management within airports, I examined performances of emotion and how those performances impacted interaction (Malvini Redden, 2013). To understand more broadly the implications of emotional performances from a passenger perspective, by positioning interactions within the context of broader Discourses of security, terrorism, and discipline (Foucault, 1979), I was able to explain why passengers manage emotion in particular ways. Namely, passengers make sense of their emotional experience in relation to societal-level conversations about airport security and these understandings are reflected in interactions with others.

In this dissertation, I examine the identity construction of airport security employees and passengers, and how they conceive of themselves in relation to various levels of discourse including macro-level societal conversations, meso-level organizational discourses,

and micro-level interpersonal interaction, which are permeated by broader social Discourses. An example of this approach is Kuhn's (2009) study of how lawyers drew upon "discursive resources" to describe and defend their unique subject positions. Kuhn showed how lawyers employed an array of discursive resources such as the discursive "logics" (p. 685) of professionalism and managerialism, in addition to identifications with their profession, organization, individual ethics, and the role of law writ large. By examining the local talk and interaction of agents in airport security with respect to the discursive "logics" that frame their profession, I will, like Kuhn (2009), be able to see how agents "engage with, resist, accommodate, reproduce, and transform the interpretive possibilities and meaning systems that constitute daily organizational life" (Mumby, 2005, p. 22). Further, I hope to connect passenger performances of emotion and related "local" discourses with the identity construction of TSOs and passengers. Comparing the discursive logics of passengers and TSOs could generate insight into why airport security is often filled with tension and negative feelings, and how those emotion processes might be transformed.

In the process of comparing the discursive constructions of passengers and TSOs, my goal is to see how drawing upon discursive resources impacts the ways that TSOs and passengers relate, particularly as they perform emotion management based upon culturally-prescribed and influenced norms that may conflict with the discursive logics that frame the TSA profession. In doing so, the investigation takes into account the relationships of discourse and Discourses for both TSOs and passengers to see what happens when meaning systems collide.

### **Emotional experience, expression and management**

As demonstrated by the opening quotations and fieldnote excerpt, people experience, encounter, manage, perform, react to, and make sense of a host of emotions in

airport security settings. As rich organizational work has demonstrated, these emotion processes also factor into identity construction (Tracy, 2000) and sensemaking (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2005). I build upon this work by examining the explicit links among discourse, emotion, and identity.

To understand how people make sense of emotional interactions and experiences, it is first important to know the psychological, physiological, and communicative properties of emotion. Similarly, it is vital to distinguish between the *experience*, *expression*, and *management* of emotion, as they are closely related but distinct phenomena. In this section, I define and describe various terms and research related to emotional experience, expression, and management.

**Emotional experience and expression.** Emotion is commonly understood as a multi-faceted psychological construct (Scherer, 2005). Emotions may be generated almost automatically—such as anxiety at facing a long security line. Or, emotions can grow gradually after appraising an interaction, not unlike feeling shameful when recalling a public mistake made in the past. Either way, “emotions call forth a coordinated set of behavioral, experiential, and physiological response tendencies that together influence how we respond to perceived challenges and opportunities” (Gross, 2002, p. 281). Response tendencies include the physiological, like increased heart rate in relation to fear or elevated hormone production such as cortisol for anger (Kemeny & Shestyuk, 2008). Physiological actions may trigger behavioral tendencies such as “fight or flight” responses to fear stimuli or attachment after pleasurable stimuli (Hayes & Metts, 2008). Considering emotions when studying communication interactions is important because emotions not only affect the individual experiencing them. Emotional displays can also influence how others respond when particular feelings are communicated. For instance, when TSOs display positive emotions by



smiling at passengers, passengers might feel encouraged to reciprocate the gesture.

Conversely, if TSOs portray negative emotions, such as by glaring at passengers or speaking in clipped tones, passengers may, in turn, bottle emotions, or even mimic the unhappy feelings.

Performances of emotion can be considered strategic or goal directed as they generate behavioral and attributional responses from others (Metts & Planalp, 2003). For instance, expressing sorrow at a recent loss is likely to engender support from friends, and sharing joy may increase attachment with intimate others. However, a key factor in meeting goals of social and material support is *appropriate* emotional expression. If expressed sorrow becomes chronic as in depression, for example, important others may react with avoidance or lack of support (Barney, Griffiths, Christensen, & Jorm, 2009). Understanding appropriate expression is largely context specific and culturally-based.

Although many emotional displays are automatic and engrained patterns of evolutionary history—backing away from danger or sneering at a disgusting image—more common are culturally patterned and symbolic displays of emotion (Hayes & Metts, 2008). Effective emotional displays are highly contextual and ruled by social norms (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Waldron & Krone, 1991). Particular “display rules” regulate which emotional presentations are appropriate for what contexts (Planalp & Fitness, 1999) or cultures (Ekman, 1993). Consider, it is generally appropriate to smile upon greeting a colleague and not pull faces, and to shake hands after making a business agreement, but perhaps not when purchasing fast food. Discerning which emotional displays are permissible, encouraged, or conversely, discouraged, is especially important for people to successfully navigate social situations, including security interactions. However, as air travel is not a frequent activity for most people, understanding display rules and norms of the

context, and in turn, performing well, may be difficult. Communicating emotion appropriately in a given context is often a matter of emotion management.

**Emotion management.** People use different strategies to manage their felt and expressed emotions. Ekman and Friesen (1975) suggest five distinct emotion management techniques. They include: 1) *Simulation*, or displaying emotions that are not felt, 2) *Inhibition*, or suppression which involves showing no emotion even though emotion may be felt, 3) *Intensification*, or exaggerating a felt emotion, 4) *Deintensification*, or minimizing the display of felt emotions, and 5) *Masking*, or showing one emotion while feeling another. The utilization of a particular approach may be engrained by long-term exposure to the social norms of a specific context—such as working in airport security—or strategically implemented based upon interaction goals—such as wanting to get through airport security as quickly as possible (Buck, Losow, Murphy, & Costanzo, 1992).

Appreciating which emotion management techniques employees and passengers employ, and how the strategies differ, can potentially help explain how employees and passengers experience and make sense of emotion in the airport. Exploring emotion management in this context also contributes to emotion theory as tests of Ekman and Friesen's (1975) display rule typology showed that simulated emotions are most likely to be positively valenced while hidden emotions are considerably more likely to be negatively valenced, indicating a cultural preference for socially cohesive displays (Hayes & Metts, 2008). Cultural emotion norms are important to understand within the context of the current study as an overwhelming amount of expressed emotions in the airport appear to be negative (Malvini Redden, 2013). Perhaps understanding the emotion management strategies of passengers and employees can explain why this context, on its face, fosters more negative emotional displays than positive.

**Emotion in organizational and customer service contexts.** Although emotion has historically been conceptualized as private, feminine, anti-rational (Fineman, 1996), and perhaps out of the purview of organizational studies, a plethora of research indicates the value of understanding and examining the roles of emotion at work (Putnam & Mumby, 1993). Examples include studies that highlight emotion's role in fostering organizational citizenship behaviors (Van Dolen, Lemmink, Mattsson, & Rhoen, 2001) and improved decision-making and increased creativity (Brief & Weiss, 2002) among organizational members. Scholars also describe, however, the disruptive influence of negative emotions at work. With increased stress for employees (Dogan & Vecchio, 2001), decreased job satisfaction (Pugliesi, 1999), and potential burnout (Tracy, 2000), the expression and management of negative emotion may also have a deleterious impact on customer satisfaction (Van Dolen et al., 2001) which can reduce organizational performance.

Emotion is particularly influential in customer service encounters. With slogans like “the customer is always right” and “your way, right away,” the American conception of customer service is wrought with entitlements and high expectations. Customer service literature has historically fed these ideas by portraying service work in primarily rational, transaction-based ways: the customer as king, service workers as docile servants, and profit as primary concern (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). However, some authors call for a more relational representation of customer service (Bolton & Houlihan, 2005; Daunt & Harris, 2012) especially in regard to customer aggression and the potentially dangerous consequences of escalated emotion (Bishop, Korczynski, & Cohen, 2005; Dallimore, Sparks & Butcher, 2007; Tracy, 2000). For instance, increased violence against workers in transportation industries resulting from delay frustrations and passenger intoxication has led scholars to consider a more thorough examination of emotion management in service roles

to understand factors that promote employee tolerance of abuse such as performances of hypermasculinity (Boyd, 2002).

Existing customer service research focusing on employee-customer relationships highlights the repercussions of emotion displays, but not the causes or related processes. Studies taking into account the antecedents of negative emotional interactions, namely customer “misbehavior,” often relies upon theoretical modeling (Daunt & Harris, 2010) and laboratory experiments or simulations (Schuh, Egold, & van Dick, 2012). Without considering context and situated interaction, however, it may be difficult to understand the complexity of employee-customer relationships, especially in dynamic environments. Further research using a communicative lens and ethnographic methods would help demonstrate how emotional expressions are communicated between employees and customers. Within the current study, a close examination of emotional performances between passengers and employees could help demonstrate how people make sense of emotional experiences in complex environments and in relation to various discourses. Moreover, analyzing emotional experiences in this specific context—one that demands compulsory interaction between organizational members and customers—can shed light on the unique ways that emotion is manifested and influences organizing. Emotional performances may also be linked to identities, which I turn to next.

### **Identity in Organizations**

Although prolific in organizational studies, identity research is fraught with tensions that make it difficult to categorize and review succinctly. Scholars disagree about the nature of identity and whether it is a mostly singular, enduring, essential construct (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011), or multiple, faceted, and shifting (Collinson, 2003; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Furthermore, competing viewpoints prompt consideration of how identity

comes to be—whether it is pre-determined, over-determined, negotiated, actively constructed, etc. Conceptualizations along these continuums of durability and agency have serious implications for the way that identity research is accomplished and identity construction is portrayed.

Identity research in organizational studies is further complicated by the array of topics and elements of identities that researchers privilege over others. Consider this collection of recent popular research foci: individual self-identity at work (Trethewey, 2001), social identity (Craig, 2007), gender identity (Ashcraft, 2007), organizational identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Pratt, 2000), organizational identity (Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, & Hatch, 2006), professional identity (Kuhn, 2009), and occupational identity (Ashcraft, 2013). Rather than engaging in historical debates (c.f. Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008), I enter into this diverse conversation viewing this research as a “complex sensing device” (Weick, 2007, p. 16). Employing these rich theoretical tools, I begin by defining various conceptions of identity at individual, group, and organizational levels, emphasizing those with social and communicative underpinnings. Then I discuss how and at what level I conceptualize identity in this study.

**Self, group, and collective identities.** At the most basic level, individual identity is a self-referential construct and answers the question “Who am I?” Identity can be conceived of as the experiences, characteristics, and traits that make people unique and influence how they behave (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth et al., 2008). For travelers, individual identity, including features like ethnicity, gender, age, education, religion, and citizenship, is made salient in the airport. Identity is literally scrutinized—evaluated on paper, via artifacts like luggage and clothing, and even through bodily search. For TSOs, individual identity is

intertwined with and influenced by features including role, occupational, and organizational identification, which I discuss below.

Individual identities are shaped by many factors including interactions with others and memberships in various groups. This is known as *social* identity, which refers to “that part of an individual’s self concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Whereas personal identity focuses on an individual’s “unique sense of self” (Postmes & Jetten, 2006, p. 260), social identity refers to the persona that is shared between people and exists outside of individuals e.g. “Who are we?” (Ashforth et al., 2010) and “Who am I in relation to this group?” Social identities involve people distinguishing between groups with whom they do and do not affiliate and identify. For example, passengers might consider a variety of social categories to emphasize in airport security, such as “paying customer” or “innocent citizen.”

In addition to personal and relational/group conceptualizations, identity is also conceived of at organizational or collective levels. According to Albrecht and Whetten’s (1985) popular definition, organizational identity is the “central, distinctive, and enduring characteristic” of an organization, in other words the essence of what an organization is (“who we are”/ “what it is”) according to its members or stakeholders (Ashforth et al., 2008). More recent scholarship acknowledges that organizational identity is socially constructed and therefore malleable, and emphasizes its *continuous* versus enduring nature, and ability to change quickly (Ashforth et al., 2010). For instance, organizational identity may swiftly change for strategic purposes as in relation to environmental factors (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) or in response to crisis (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

Portraying organizational identity<sup>1</sup> as collectively identifiable and malleable is an oversimplification that obscures the contested and thorny nature of identity. As demonstrated by critical and post-structural scholars (Mumby, 2005), privileging dominant perspectives and definitions silences and maligns voices that fall outside of the norm (out-group, sub-cultures, critics, etc.). What an organization or collective is, then, depends in part upon perspective and subject position. In airport security, definitions of the TSA's identity as an organization may be dramatically different depending upon who is being asked, and who is doing the asking. It is not hard to imagine travelers portraying the TSA as "security theater" or "big brother," while employees see it as "a paycheck" or a vital arm of public safety. From a communicative perspective, member and stakeholder definitions—and how they are constructed—provide insight into meaning making processes. Therefore, it becomes theoretically interesting to examine organizational identities that *seem* stable and orderly, but are at once multiple, contested, and changing (Alvesson, et al., 2008) because they influence the identity construction of members and customers.

How people incorporate the characteristics of an organizational or collective identity into understandings of their own identity is called identification or "the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Identification processes are relevant for employees in particular as how they make sense of emotion in the work context could be linked to how they view themselves in relation to the organization. Furthermore, "identification matters because it is the process by which people come to define themselves, communicate that definition to others, and use that definition to navigate their lives, work-wise or other" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 334). Considering

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<sup>1</sup> Management scholars (Gioia, Schultz, Corley, 2000) might counter that organizational identity—the communicated mission and values of an organization—stay stable, but that member and stakeholder *interpretations* of those constructs diverge and change.

communication specifically, identification is crucial to examine as “Identifying allows people to persuade and be persuaded” (Cheney, 1983, p. 342), which is a key component to successful sensegiving.

People *identify with* social categories (such as “being married” or “being a student”), relationships (“being siblings”) (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), roles (“being a manager” or “being a parent”), occupations (Ashforth, 2013), and professions (Kuhn, 2009). Casual usage presumes a positive valence to identification, but people can also identify with practices (using illicit drugs) and organizations (cults) that can be harmful to them. Moreover, organizational members and stakeholders can also de-identify, dis-identify, and ambivalently identify with organizations (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Pratt, 2000). De-identifying involves not including an organization as a referent in self-identity, whereas dis-identifying “occurs when one identifies oneself in opposition to the organization” (Pratt, 2000, p. 478). Ambivalent identification refers to maintaining conflicting feelings and behaviors about an organization and is characterized by members alternately moving towards, away, and/or against an organization (Pratt, 2000). For TSOs, the extent to which they identify with the TSA, or their role as an officer (or not, as the case may be), can influence how they make sense of their emotions at work, and interact with passengers (Tracy, 2000).

Understanding aspects of identity is important as it relates directly to how people interpret their experiences socially and within organizations. The ways that people conceive of themselves as individuals, team members, or stakeholders can influence how they make meaning of and communicate emotion. Consider that correctional officers who identify with the hypermasculinity promoted within correctional facility contexts may choose to “act tough” and suppress their feelings which can impact how they relate to and empathize with inmates (Tracy, 2004). Likewise, bill collectors who identify with their roles and enact feeling



rules (Hochschild, 1983) set forth by the organization may act in organizationally prescribed ways which are different than how they might act and interact with customers normally (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1989). These implications are especially important in the airport security context where identities are made salient by organizational rules and processes. For passengers, this means literal interrogation of their personal identities—on paper and in the flesh. For employees, organizational and social identifications may be foregrounded. The ways that TSOs embody organizationally preferred aspects of identity can indeed skew how they make sense of the emotions and in turn, communicate and relate to customers.

**Identity construction, regulation, and performance.** Scholars have devoted vast amounts of attention to the ways that identity is constructed, regulated, and performed (Collinson, 2003). Briefly, identity construction refers to the means by which people develop a sense of self. Following social constructionist and post-structuralist scholars, I conceive of identity construction as an ongoing process that is collaborative, political, contested, and shaped by contextual factors, including, as mentioned, discourses. Inspired by Wieland (2010), I also “emphasize the ways that identity construction occurs communicatively, accomplished in and through communicative practices whose meanings are situated within specific locales” (p. 505).

Identity develops within and in relation to organizations through processes including identity work and identity regulation. Linking self-identity, identity work, and identity regulation in a three-part framework, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) define *identity work* as the process of “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (p. 626). Identity work, which is developing and enacting self-identity, is molded by interactions with others, including organizations, in a process called *identity regulation*. Borrowing concepts from

organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), understanding how organizations try to shape meaning making towards a preferred definition of organizational reality e.g. “sensegiving” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and “sensebreaking” (Pratt, 2000) can be seen as types of identity regulation in that they focus on influencing the identity construction of others.

Sensemaking is about making meaning and identity construction in social environments (Weick, 1995). In organizations, events and individuals have the ability to influence the sensemaking process through the giving and breaking of sense. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) first coined the term “sensegiving” and defined it as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). Organizational leaders often “give sense” to employees based upon organizational mission and goals, attempting to shape employee identities in relation to organizational needs. Research has demonstrated that sensegiving and power are linked, with those in formal positions of power most likely to engage in purposeful sensegiving activities (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). However, stakeholders can also try giving sense back to leaders and other stakeholders (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

Sensegiving is a reciprocal process. As people give sense, they also influence their own meaning making. This process may further change the meanings they are trying to influence, such as when “you hear yourself talk, you see more clearly what matters and what you had hoped to say” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In past research, sensegiving is framed as a purposeful process that attempts to fill perceived gaps in meaning making based upon “discursive ability” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). In this study, I extend the concept to look at sensegiving in practice, and how events and interactions between organizational members and customers can contribute to meaning making.

In order to effectively give sense, the breaking of sense may also occur. Sensebreaking is “the destruction or breaking down of meaning . . . . Just as sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, sensebreaking involves a fundamental questioning of who one is when one’s sense of self is challenged” (Pratt, 2000, p. 464). Sensebreaking may prompt questioning of identity, and be used in conjunction with sensegiving in order to fill the void created by sensebreaking with new, organizationally-approved sense. In a case study of Amway, a direct-marketing company, Pratt (2000) showed how organizational leadership went to great lengths to break the sense of its members by promoting propaganda and activities that required members to redefine who they were in relation to the organization’s identity and goals. In a complementary fashion, sensebreaking occurred between Amway distributors, wherein the senior distributors created motivation in new people to be successful and aspire to greater levels of wealth. In the process, new recruits were led to question and indeed reject significant pieces of their identity such as past pursuits and goals or close familial relationships in search of new, organizationally-preferred ones.

In addition to “strategic sensebreaking” as in the case of Amway (see also Gioia & Thomas, 1996), unplanned events also “break” sense. Well documented are instances of crisis including aviation accidents (Weick, 1990) and wild fire disasters (Weick, 1993) which dramatically break the sense of people involved, demanding meaning making in part by instigating identity threats. More subtle are situations that emerge gradually or are less intense, but no less critical. For instance, identity-threatening external evaluations can break sense as evidenced by how some business schools responded to unfavorable *Business Week* rankings that threatened highly valued aspects of their identities (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996) or how members of a corporate spin-off dealt with identity ambiguity and identity tensions in the wake of organizational transitions (Corley & Gioia, 2004). It is important to note the

intrinsic relationships between sensemaking, sensegiving, and sensebreaking, in that one typically triggers another. When sense is broken, it needs to be re-made and this may involve sensegiving.

Whereas past research has examined sensebreaking and sensegiving between organizational members, and often in terms of purposeful persuasion, the concepts might also be useful for understanding interaction within airport security settings as features of the context (officers, signage, physical structure) “give sense” to passengers, while interactions between passengers and employees can “break” sense. By considering sensegiving and sensebreaking in *action* between organizational members and customers, rather than intention, it may be possible to see how TSOs attempt to orient passengers to a particular version of reality, and how/if passengers attempt to do the same.

In this study, I am especially concerned with identity work and the enactment of identity(ies). To bring theoretical concepts to bear into an applied context, consider the following question: How is it that organizational members and customers make sense of the people they encounter and in turn, know how to respond accordingly? I suggest that they know, in part, based upon the identity performances of others. For instance, when might a TSO know when a passenger is going to cause trouble? Or how does a passenger realize that it is not appropriate to ask questions? The answers to these queries likely lie in how the respective passenger or TSO performs aspects of identity. Accordingly, a TSO might recognize a difficult passenger by the way the passenger enacts a “customer is always right” persona, demanding fast “service” and accommodation. Likewise, a passenger could read a TSO’s performance of an authoritative, aggressive demeanor as an indication that questioning and critiquing are not appropriate for the context.

Examining identity enactment in this manner contributes to organizational literature as “accounts” of identities (e.g., “Who I say I am”) have been privileged over enactments (e.g., “What I do”) (Wieland, 2010). Following a long line of organizational scholars, I suggest that the development, description, and enactment of identity are intricately related to and shaped by discourses. Furthermore, discourses also shape emotional management in particular ways which can influence encounters between passengers and TSOs. To understand better these topics, I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: How are TSO and passenger identities constructed by and through macro, meso, and micro-level discourses of airport security?

RQ2: How are TSO and passenger identities enacted and shaped in airport security contexts?

RQ3: What are the implications of TSO and passenger identity performances?

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I contextualized the phenomena of interest in this study—the emotion and identity processes of TSOs and passengers in airport security. I began by discussing how discourses shape organizations and identity development before exploring relevant emotion theory. Then I presented a brief overview of identity research in organizational studies before offering three research questions that guided the project. In the next chapter, I describe the methodical and analytic procedures I employed to conduct the study.

## Chapter 3

### FLYING, FEELING, AND FIGURING OUT AIRPORT SECURITY:

#### METHODS, PROCEDURES, AND ANALYSIS

“I don’t feel that it’s that degrading really, although I can see how it is just beyond the natural type of deference you’re supposed to give to positions of power, like cops. Kind of a certain nervousness that goes along with that where I can’t be totally comfortable joking around with them.” –Passenger Nate, describing what it’s like to go through airport security

“Why? I chose to go to the TSA after 9/11. I wanted to make a difference. I knew I was not going to go to the military but I could go to the airport and screen passengers, look for IEDs, and prevent another terrorist attack. I thought I could do good in that way.” –TSO Neecie, on why she joined the TSA

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“How’s your day going?” I ask the tall TSO who arrives to give me an enhanced pat-down.

With a surprised tone, she replies, “Good, thank you for asking.”

She asks if my things have come through the X-ray scanner yet as we watch the line of people slowly gathering luggage. When I indicate my bags are just coming out, she barks at the line, “Move it on down, please!” The passengers visibly startle and I’m surprised to hear the commanding tone because she has spoken to me in such a mild manner.

When she asks if I’ve been through the “pat-down thing” before, I confirm with a “Yes,” not mentioning that I’ve passed through both of the security gates in her airport twice already today. As she goes through the rigmarole of “advisements,” she emphasizes that she will be “meeting resistance” and “clearing” the top of my thighs.

“It’s okay,” I respond. *Is it?*

The TSO sets to work, sweeping large gloved palms completely flat against my back and pressing firmly downwards. She continues with a deliberate pace. When she gets to my front, she declares, “You really are used to this, aren’t you?”

I wonder aloud, “How do most people act?”

I don’t know if she heard me or is ignoring the question, as she checks my waistband, telling me that I don’t need to show any skin.

“They act tense, or else giggle,” she reveals, finally.

I chuckle, admitting that I almost laughed when she touched my underarms.

“You take it in stride,” she continues.

Interpreting her comment as a compliment, I bemoan the fact that I fly all the time.

“It’s not fun to fly anymore,” she observes.

I ask if she flies much, and she says, “I never get to fly. I’m always *here*.” I smile.

When the beep signals that I’m free to go, I wish her a good day—remembering not to automatically say “thank you” as I am wont to do in most service encounters. It’s a personal act of micro-resistance because I am not, in fact, thankful for pat-downs. I gather my things as she lopes back to the checkpoint.

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As a frequent flier, I am particularly invested in the experiences and consequences of emotional management in the airport and how people construct meaning socially. To better understand the implications of discourse, emotion, and identity from a scholarly perspective, I spent 30 months collecting data in international airports, primarily on the West Coast. I used an interpretive, inductive approach (Charmaz, 2006), taking inspiration from post-structural voices that encourage the consideration of multiplicity, poly-vocality, and crystallization in qualitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellingson, 2009;

Tracy, 2013). To situate my research within a broader historical context, I incorporated some aspects of *discourse tracing* (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009), a method which involves analyzing the “formation, interpretation and appropriation of discursive practices across micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis” (p. 1518).

As a participant observer, I flew frequently, taking 133 one-way trips and often passing through security screenings multiple times per trip. I conducted ethnographic observations and interviews, and analyzed public documents and accounts of airport interactions online. I acted as a full participant (Spradley, 1980) in the activity of travel, taking an empathetic approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by which I endeavored to understand the process of travel from a passenger point of view, and learn more about what it is like to work within the airport.

Cognizant of the danger of being blind to important aspects of an overly-familiar scene, I made an effort to maintain a critical, self-reflexive stance during the processes of data gathering and analysis, contemplating my dual role as participant/traveler and human research instrument (Gonzalez, 2000; Tracy, 2013). By consciously considering my subject position, I endeavored to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Hawkes, 1977) by visiting the airports during non-routine times, and traveling to unfamiliar airports as points of comparison. My research process began with participant observations and interviews, and continued with elements of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) and focused data analysis.

### **Contexts and Participants**

I conducted research across multiple sites and in conjunction with different types of participants. I will briefly describe my main sites of study and the categories of participants I



included in the project before offering more specific details about observation and interview activities.

**Sites of Study.** As airports are public spaces, I did not receive written permission from the organizations but rather made observations and contacts with participants in non-obtrusive ways, observing only in public spaces, after receiving Institutional Review Board approval from the Arizona State University Human Subjects Committee (see Appendix A). Being unable to secure access was not for lack of trying, however. In an effort to become more embedded in the scene, I applied to volunteer at one airport, I applied to work as a Transportation Security Officer, and I submitted full research proposals to two Federal Security Directors, all of which were unfortunately denied.

The majority of participant observations took place in two international airports on the West Coast, one in California and one in Arizona. By concentrating my observations in two primary locations over a lengthy period of time, I was able to get to know the culture of each airport and see how routine interpersonal processes contributed to meaning making over time. Visiting other airport contexts helped me to complicate my assumptions and also see how airport security processes are applied across the country and enacted at meso-levels.

Although I paid attention to events during all points of my travel, I concentrated my observation efforts in the security areas, lingering when possible, asking questions, submitting to multiple security screenings per trip, etc. All told, I observed in 18 international airports during travels to or from Albuquerque, Anchorage, Chicago, Frankfurt, Honolulu, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma City, Orlando, Phoenix, Portland, Sacramento, Seattle, Sacramento, and Vancouver.

**Participants.** Research participants included airport passengers and airport security employees. My sampling strategy was purposive in that I sought out specific types of people

to speak with based upon their roles (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This strategy was consistent with Berg's (1989) description of purposive sampling where "Researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population" (p. 110). For instance, I focused a portion of my respondent interviews on passengers. I sought individuals with varying degrees of flying experience, which I inferred from the security lines individuals chose—general boarding or VIP frequent flier. I also struck up conversations with passengers in lines, at boarding gates, and on airplanes, and asked them to participate in my study. Additionally, I spoke with security agents with various tenures in the organization, engaging them in areas outside of the security checkpoint including in the food court, on airport shuttles, and via professional social networking sites such as LinkedIn. I also spoke with aircrew, gate agents, and police officers informally.

### **Data Gathering**

I engaged in data gathering via formal and informal interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis following the method of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). Having a variety of data sources provided a multi-textured understanding of the scene and allowed me to engage in a process of "crystallization" by which I used multiple types of data and analytic strategies to demonstrate "situated, partial, constructed, multiple, and embodied" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 13) nature of knowledge in my research context.

**Interviews.** To include as many voices and perspectives in my project as possible, I participated in three types of interviews: formal/respondent, informal/ethnographic, and key informant. I approached all participants, formal and informal, with an "ethic of care" (Ellis, 2007, p. 25), and practiced active listening, endeavoring to "hear meaning" as participants described their experiences and social worlds (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I conducted approximately 200 informal ethnographic interviews or short, informal conversations about

events and observations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and 44 formal interviews with passengers and employees. Additionally, I participated in multiple unstructured conversations with four “encultured informants” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), two TSA employees who knew the culture of the organization well and were willing to share “insider knowledge” about the scene (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and two passenger interviewees who seemed engaged with the project and were willing to answer ongoing questions. Informants were people who I had interviewed formally, and then spoke with from time to time to get explanations about how things worked, ask questions, and float preliminary analytic ideas.

All formal and informant interviewees read a Participant Information Letter explaining their voluntary participation and rights, chose pseudonyms, and agreed to be digitally recorded (see Appendix B). For formal interviews, I used a semi-structured, conversational format with an interview guide that helped to direct the discussion (See Appendices C and D). A number of interviewees (two officers and six passengers) chose to participate via email.

Interview questions were based upon my review of relevant literature and preliminary participant observation. The questions focused on the participants’ experiences either working in or traveling through airports. I asked questions including: “What types of emotions do you experience at the airport?” “Please describe a memorable air travel/work experience.” “How do you interact with other passengers?” “What does going through security feel like?” I also invited participants to direct the conversation and add detail. At various points, I asked follow-up questions to probe for explanation or specific examples. As I describe below, I analyzed interviews throughout the data gathering process. Thereby, I was able to adjust interview questions as the goals of the analysis shifted, for instance, focusing more specifically on issues of identity.

Although not specifically using a narrative format, I borrowed the “conversational give-and-take” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 181) style of the genre and was open to new directions and ideas offered by participants. Respondent interviews were valuable to understand and clarify the experiences, motivations, and underlying attitudes of individuals (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I conducted two rounds of interviews, the first from a pilot study wherein I concentrated on passenger experiences. In the first round, I spoke with 19 passengers, 10 women and 9 men, ages approximately 25 to 60. After revising the interview guides based upon what I learned in the first round, I spoke with 11 more passengers, 7 women and 4 men, and 14 Transportation Security Officers, 10 men and 4 women, ranging in age from approximately 20 to 60.

Table 1.

*Summary of Research Hours*

<b>Type of Data</b>	<b>Number of Hours/Interviews</b>	<b>Single Spaced Typed Pages</b>
Participant observation/Ethnographic Interview Records	115	327
Formal Passenger Interviews	30 Interviews, ~60 min/each	352
Formal TSO Interviewees	15 Interviews, ~58 min/each	225

*Note.* Two TSO interviews and six passenger interviews were conducted via email due to participant preference.

I also conducted informal interviews along my “natural” path of travel through the airport from arrival to check-in, security, gate area, boarding, and disembarking. I talked to people in line about their travel experiences, made conversation with security agents, and asked questions during flights when appropriate. Formal interviews were derived in the same manner, and also through snowball sampling, professional social networking sites like

LinkedIn, and personal networks. When I met someone along my course of travel or observed an interesting interaction, I would strike up a conversation and then invite participation in my study. In some instances, I used personal social networks to interview recent travelers from other areas of the country. Formal interviews were confidential and conducted face-to-face or over the phone, always outside of the airport.

I used several strategies to recruit formal interview participants. Primarily, I flew frequently and made contacts with TSOs and passengers during my normal course of travel. I took advantage of participant-observation time in gate areas and eateries to approach passengers killing time and TSOs who were on break, introduce myself, and invite them to be part of my study. While this strategy was effective for recruiting passengers, it was largely unsuccessful for TSOs. In fact, out of the 50 or 60 business cards I handed out to TSOs, only *one* resulted in an interview and that one took nearly four months to schedule. Most TSOs told me that they would have to ask permission of their supervisor or that they were not allowed to talk about their work at all. Many acted skeptical and suspicious of me and my intentions. After trying this method of recruitment for several months, I turned to personal and professional social networks inquiring of friends, family, and acquaintances if they knew any TSOs. Additionally, several friends also tapped into their social networks to generate referrals. These methods resulted in three TSO interviews.

Unfortunately, attempts to snowball sample from my TSO interviews did not produce any additional interviews. Although several participants confirmed passing along my interview request to colleagues, none of their coworkers contacted me, citing either disinterest or discomfort. At that point, I crafted a message for the National Communication Association “CRTNET” online listserv asking colleagues across the country if they could make any introductions. This query resulted in zero interviews.

Subsequently, I investigated online TSO groups and forums including Yahoo Groups, Google Groups, LinkedIn, and homegrown websites for TSOs. I submitted an interview request message to the three available airport-based TSO forums and four TSA-related Yahoo Groups listservs. Despite sending several messages, none of the listserv leaders responded to my queries. At the same time, I joined two TSA professional groups on LinkedIn. I posted my recruitment message to the forums, replied to individual posts with interview requests, and sent “InMails” to certain people who listed their occupation as a TSO with the TSA. As LinkedIn limits the amount of direct email messages between strangers, I chose to contact only individuals who had complete profiles, prioritizing those who had more than a handful of connections.

Using LinkedIn, I generated 10 interviews, two of which were conducted by email due to participant preference. (Seven other people opted to participate by email but never returned the interview guide.) Of the 100 people I contacted directly via “InMail,” 25 agreed to participate, 10 actually participated, 59 did not respond, and six actively declined to participate. Of the six who declined, four cited TSA policies that prohibited their participation without explicit permission from supervisors and several indicated skepticism about how their information would be used. A number of TSOs directed me to contact the national TSA offices or local PR departments.

All TSO participants cited the need for their information to be kept confidential and several expressed concern about how their comments were going to be used. I reassured participants that their identities (including home airports) would be kept confidential and offered them copies of their interview transcripts for review.

In addition to formal and informal interviews, I relied upon the experience of two key “informants” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 11), one who I befriended during my travels and

one who I met in an online TSA discussion forum on LinkedIn. These individuals provided context about the airport scene, explaining how things worked in the setting and providing insight about my observations. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that “the success of an ethnographic project often hinges on the effective use of informants” (p. 177), which was especially true for me as I remained a traveler, and was not embedded in the organizations formally. Developing special relationships with these individuals allowed me to also ask questions, float emerging ideas, and get feedback about the research in progress. I spoke with two individuals several times each, though after initial interviews, the conversations were more informal and sometimes took place via email.

With the exception of eight written interviews (six passenger, two TSO), all formal interviews were digitally recorded, ranged between 30 and 124 minutes, averaging 59 minutes in length (see Appendix E and F for participant pseudonyms and descriptive statistics). Recordings were professionally transcribed and then fact-checked by me. Following the techniques of Tracy and Baratz (1993), transcription and analysis focused on content rather than the details of interaction, e.g., pauses, verbal fillers. The interview transcripts resulted in 577 single-spaced pages. To safeguard participant confidentiality, all identifying information was changed including names, specific titles or departments, or locations, where appropriate.

**Observations.** A significant aspect of data collection was conducting fieldwork and observations. I spent approximately 110 hours observing in the field, not including travel time, writing thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the various scenes, and detailing interactions, sights, smells, and sounds in order to create vivid pictures of the sites of study (Spradley, 1980). Approximately 50 hours of observation involved getting to know the airport generally, paying attention to specific points of interaction that passengers would take from arrival to check-in to security and boarding. The remainder of my observation hours

involved going through and observing security checkpoints, and watching security procedures in other parts of the terminal including in gate areas and boarding lines. In particular, I made a point to illuminate and interrogate underlying assumptions, what Tracy (2013) describes as “tacit knowledge” or “cultural knowledge that is never explicitly articulated, but is revealed through subtleties of shared cultural meaning such as eye rolls, smirks and stolen glances” (p. 119). To unpack this tacit knowledge, I spent time experiencing and observing key sites of interaction for passengers and employees, focusing on security lines and checkpoints, but also gate waiting areas, boarding areas, and airplanes.

In addition to making observations during the activity of travel (as in when I was flying for a specific purpose), I conducted five “research trips” which involved flying to an airport for the day, going through security multiple times per trip, soliciting interviews, making observations, and then flying home.

To record observations, I made extensive “raw records” (Tracy, 2013, p. 114) or hand-written notes of my observations, thoughts, and feelings in the scene. As a complete participant, I took care to keep my note-taking discrete, at times utilizing a laptop or smartphone, devices which seem more familiar and acceptable in the airport setting than note pads. The practice of writing notes covertly emerged as important early in my fieldwork when during a security line observation period where I was not traveling, passengers deemed my note-taking behavior strange enough to report me to the TSOs checking tickets. Shortly afterwards, a team of three TSOs surrounded me—one from each direction so that I could not walk out of the line area—to inquire about my purpose. They escorted me out of security and although relieved to find I was a student conducting research, suggested that I should leave the security area immediately. Tellingly, they would not let me talk to their



supervisors to ask for permission. As handwriting notes often drew attention from passengers and TSOs alike, I switched to electronic methods not long into my fieldwork.

During highly interactive experiences like walking through security screenings, I made “head notes” which Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe as “focused memories of specific events, as well as impressions and evaluations of the unfolding project” (p. 159). I translated head notes into written form immediately after an interaction, often using my smartphone to text or email myself direct quotations or important details of interaction. Raw records and head notes were transformed into formal fieldnotes as soon as was possible after fieldwork—typically in gate areas or during subsequent flights—resulting in 327 pages of single spaced fieldnotes.

**Texts.** In addition to in-person observations and interviews, I collected data texts at various levels of analysis including news articles about airport security, photos of airport signage, and TSA policies and procedures which resulted in approximately 500 pages and 100 personal photographs. These are summarized in Table 2, and described below in the section on discourse tracing.

## **Data Analysis**

In keeping with my goal of incorporating crystallization in my research (Ellingson, 2009), I used several analytic strategies including discourse tracing, coding and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), self-reflexivity, and peer debriefing.

**Discourse Tracing.** I began data analysis by engaging in elements of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). The method of discourse tracing is built upon critical-interpretive theory and method, and concepts of discursive formations (Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1978) and discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995). It involves defining a case based

upon a turning or rupture point, reviewing relevant literature, gathering data across levels of analysis, ordering and closely reading data, applying structured questions, writing cases based upon the data and then theorizing.

Discourse tracing consists of attending to micro-level data such as participant observation and interviews to explicate “local uses of text and language within a specific context” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1519) but also keeping in mind meso-level information such as policies and procedures that span organizational contexts, and macro-level discourses evident in media and popular culture texts that emphasize larger social narratives (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). By comparing “local” observations and interviews to macro discourses, scholars can understand how local narratives and interactions align or conflict with popular thought or constructions of popular thought in the media, for instance. Additionally, by examining the meso level, it is possible to trace the influences of micro and macro discourse on interaction and call “attention to the mesostructure as a space where social processes and practices are made meaningful through a dialectical play of action and context” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1520), an often-neglected space in organization research (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Importantly, discourse tracing moves analysis beyond interpretive understandings of “what is going on?” to asking “how and why” phenomena occur, and in particular, “how various levels of discourse play a role in their creation and transformation over time” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1522).

To incorporate concepts of discourse tracing, I first defined the case in terms of an obvious rupture point—the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Almost immediately after the events, the Transportation Security Administration was created, and airport security became a federal initiative rather than a service provided by airlines. Accordingly, the process of domestic air travel changed dramatically with the implementation of many now taken for

granted procedures such as the policy that only ticketed passengers are allowed in gate areas, the limitation of liquids and gels in carry-on luggage, and the removal of shoes for screening. After defining this rupture point, I gathered relevant literature about airport contexts, emotional management, and identity in organizations. Second, I gathered data across macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis, which I then ordered chronologically and read closely. I used this ordering and close reading to “trace out” and “follow the use of language and text across time and context” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1531).

Policy and practices within airports have been significantly impacted by identifiable national events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and accompanying changes to airport security in light of subsequent security threats such as the “shoe bomber” (Elliott, 2002), the “underwear bomber” (CBS/Associated Press, 2011), and terrorists attempting to blow up cargo planes using ink cartridges (Williams & Camber, 2010). Discourse tracing allowed me to illuminate the tacit ways that social discourses structure interaction in the airport. Using September 11, 2001 as a starting point, I gathered and compared information at macro, meso and micro levels (see Table 2 for a chart of data sources) to see transformations and changes over time, and especially how meso and macro-level data informed and influenced micro-interactions, and vice versa. I continue this discussion in more detail in Chapter Four’s discourse tracing.

I collected participant observations, interviews, and local policies/signage as micro-level data, participant observations of security procedures and the implementation of Transportation Security Administration policies across airports as meso-level data, and formal texts such as national directives from the Department of Homeland Security and media representations of airport and security policies as macro-level data. I collected historical references in the popular press initially from *The New York Times* using the Lexis

Nexis database to review every reference to the “Transportation Security Administration” for a 12-year period, and noting where articles mentioned changes in airport security protocol or major controversies related to airport security. From there, I used an Internet search engine to find more coverage of specific events and turning points (e.g. the “shoe bomber,” changes to airport security procedures, lawsuits, etc.), pulling from respected national and international news outlets and magazines.

**Coding and Constant Comparison.** In addition to ordering and closely reading my data following the practice of discourse tracing, I performed in-depth analyses of fieldnotes and interviews. To analyze data, I used a multi-step coding process featuring the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), including open, focused, and theoretical coding. My process initially involved close reading, self-reflection, constant comparison, and elements of discourse tracing. I began analysis midway through data collection, after I had conducted more than a year of fieldwork, completed a pilot study (Malvini Redden, 2013), and completed several interviews with TSOs and passengers. I began by listening to and reading my data through twice. I then chose 10 fieldnotes and four interviews (half passenger, half TSO) using the criteria of requisite variety (Weick, 2007). I read this data through once without making notes. Then in a second reading, I made margin notes using the general question of “what is happening here?” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 153). During open coding (Charmaz, 2006), I noted emergent themes and issues, focusing primarily on processes and actions such as “processing passengers,” “giving pat-downs,” and “paranoia.”

After reviewing preliminary open codes from the collection of documents, I constructed a codebook making codes for actions and themes that emerged frequently across the data and sensitizing theoretical concepts of interest (see Appendix G). This process “marks the overt emergence of a theoretical sensibility” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 223). For

instance, I created codes that pertained to areas of the airport security process (e.g. lines, ID checks, checkpoints, pat-downs), emotion processes (TSO and passenger positive, negative and neutral emotions, emotion management), discourses, identity processes, and sensemaking processes. For each code, I wrote a brief description and gave data examples. For example, codes included: “EmoRules” which refers to references regarding “rules” for expressing emotion in airport security; “Suspicion” which refers to descriptions or actions demonstrating suspicion, distrust or doubt about passengers or TSOs; and “Persp-Change” which refers to discussions of changing perspectives regarding airport security or TSOs.

To refine the document, I asked my advisor and peer debriefing partner to review, make observations about particularly “interesting” and important codes, and ask questions. Based upon these discussions, I refined the document and “road tested” it on a subsequent data set. After this process, I further refined the codes, changing or deleting them as necessary. At the same time, I “played jeopardy” (Tracy, 2013, p. 268) with my codes and engaged in a “creative analytic process” (Richardson, 2000) by which I generated a list of questions that my data could answer. Following this process, I then organized all textual files into Nvivo qualitative data analysis software and uploaded the codebook into a digital format. I began the process of coding while at the same time as collecting data, analyzing, and refining data gathering and analysis strategies.

Table 2.

*Macro, Meso, and Micro Data Sources*

<b>Level of Analysis</b>	<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Hours/Pages</b>
Macro	Formal Texts	TSA Policies	+100 pages
		Congressional Reports/Hearing Minutes	+100 pages
	Media Sources	<i>New York Times, Associated Press, CNN articles, etc.</i>	+300 pages
	Popular Culture Texts	Editorials, <i>Flying with Fish</i> travel blog, <i>Saturday Night Live</i> , <i>South Park</i>	+50 pages
Meso	Formal Texts	TSA Policies	+100 pages
		TSA Signage/Directives	~15
	Participant Observation	Security procedures in practice	~110 hours
Micro	Formal Texts	Individual Airport Policies/Signage	~100 pages/signs
	Supplemental Texts	Photos of local airports	~100
	Participant Observation	Observations of Security Checkpoint Interactions	~110 hours
	Formal Interviews	Interviews with TSOs and Passengers	45 interviews, average 59 minutes each
	Ethnographic Interviews	Informal conversations with TSOs and Passengers	Approximately 200 short, informal conversations

The original goals of the project were organized around emotional expression and management, and the relationships of passenger and TSO sensemaking. During initial analysis, I realized that discourses strongly shaped the ways that passengers and TSOs made sense of their experiences, and that furthermore, TSOs and passengers drew upon the same discourses, but in different ways. At that point, I recognized that my data did not allow me to readily access the *process* of sensemaking, but rather the content and effects of meaning making. Put a different way, by conducting interviews and observing snapshots in time, I could assess the *substance* of sensemaking (i.e., various discourses) and the repercussions (emotion management, interpersonal interaction), but not the *process* of it.

After discussing these theoretical insights and quandaries with my advisor and two committee members, I spent time reflecting and considering new directions for analysis. Specifically, I considered aspects of the data that I found most interesting/puzzling, and I pondered the identity resources that passengers and TSOs drew upon in airport security. I also considered questions that my data could sufficiently answer, and answers that would make significant theoretical and practical contributions to the communication discipline and organizational research. I shifted my research focus from sensemaking writ large to a foundational component—the enactment of identity. Specifically, I chose to focus on the ways that TSOs and passengers enact and resist identities in the airport. After brainstorming on this topic, discussing it with two committee members and my peer debriefing partner, I delineated research questions specific to identity enactment and the discourses that shape identity performance and construction in the airport. With this focus in mind, I coded the data for a third time, honing in on a small subset of codes focused on identity positions of passengers and TSOs, categorizing the “discourses” data into macro, meso, and micro levels, as well as identifying various types of discourses e.g. nationalism, security, fear, production.

The procedure of interpreting data and refining coding schemes ceased when theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) or when new incidents added little fresh insight.

As coding is an “emergent process” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 59), ideas surfaced throughout coding and analysis. To capture thoughts, I wrote memos during each phase of coding to analyze the data more completely. Throughout the process, I kept what Charmaz (2006) called an “examined stance” about my coding and categories (p. 69) taking care to keep my codes grounded in the data. From these codes and conceptual categories, I constructed a typology of passenger and TSO identity performances. Typologies are useful for explaining ways of doing something and with “interpretive creativity” (Tracy, 2013, p. 211) can provide insight into complex environments or projects. For example, see Alvesson’s (2010) typology of the “images” of self-identities in organizational studies or Collinson’s (2003) typology of workplace selves in surveillance organizations.

Additionally, I kept a research journal throughout data gathering and analysis, detailing the process of research, the steps I took during analysis, and my thoughts and feelings throughout the journey. It is important to mention that this analytic process took place during ongoing data collection, meaning that I began open coding and analysis while still making observations and conducting interviews. Thus, while I present an accounting of analysis activities in terms of ordered steps, the process was more complex and iterative than it might seem in this rendering.

### **Peer Debriefing and Member Reflections**

In addition to taking a self-reflexive stance on data gathering, I also solicited the advice of participants, mentors, and colleagues during points of data collection and analysis in order to strengthen the quality and credibility of my project (Ellingson, 2009;



Tracy, 2010). I employed member reflection (Tracy, 2010) activities whereby I asked several participants to provide feedback on my data gathering and analysis. This strategy allowed me to critically reflect on the research process, entertain questions and critiques, inject an element of collaboration with participants, observe multiple meanings of the project, and see how meaningful my research contributions were outside of the scholarly community.

I also invited individuals not connected with my project to review my findings and discuss them with me. This specifically involved “peer debriefing,” a strategy for validating findings in qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spall, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). These processes help to enhance the credibility of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003).

## Chapter 4

### THE HISTORICAL AND DISCURSIVE CONTEXT OF AIRPORT SECURITY

“I seriously dislike the way that the public sees each officer as ‘wanting’ to search everyone and enjoying it. I really dislike how the media jumps all over the agency for the smallest negative things but absolutely FAILS at reporting the daily deeds that really show where the hearts of the officers are.” –Rick, TSA Screening Manager

“The media portray TSA, I think, in such a negative light but I feel like that reflects my experiences. I don’t see them mistreated but I’m sure they are. I’m sure they’re not reporting on the average individual’s experiences which I’m sure are normal and not negative encounters with TSA.” –Sue, frequent traveler

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“Get everything out yah pockets. Cell phones, billfolds, paper, even lint. Get the *lint* out yah pockets!” the young Latino TSA agent intones to the now growing security checkpoint line. Today, he’s playing the Divestiture Officer role, giving advisements and reminders to passengers.

Nearby, the TSO working the x-ray machine scrutinizes every picture on his monitors, lips pursed.

We stand still for five long minutes. I feel the passengers behind me growing restless—shifting in stocking feet, huffing and sighing, repeatedly checking the time.

With his dark, slicked back hair, perfectly manicured sideburns and an easy smile, the Divestiture Officer weaves between imaging machines, almost as if dancing. He paces, bantering with coworkers and addressing passengers—audience members of his one-man show.

Noticing the women behind me acting annoyed, he jokes, “We want to get a good look at yah.” He wasn’t exactly menacing, his Brooklyn accent lending a comic air to the performance.

More minutes tick by.

“The good news?” he asks rhetorically, pointing. “This new line is opening up.”

“The bad news?” he leans towards us, whispering. “If you have liquids in your bags, I’m gonna kill yah!”

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Passenger after passenger continues, conveyor-belt-like, into the machine. Hands up, legs apart, like someone yelled “Freeze!”

The young officer standing, almost leaning out of the metal detector, directs me to the towering grey box that, in exchange for a small zip of radiation, will provide evidence that I am not, in fact, a terrorist.

“I’d like to opt out,” I say.

Eye flicking up, he sighs, then barks into his walkie talkie: “Female assist on B! Female assist on B!”

After a moment, a female officer opens the side gate next to the metal detector and waves me through.

“What side are your belongings on?” she inquires.

I gesture to the left.

“Which ones are yours? Point. Don’t touch them. I’ll get them,” she warns.

I keep pointing left and must appear quizzical because she adds, “Your items are clear but you are not.”

*Clear?*

I motion to the frayed leatherette valise and two plastic rectangular bins as they emerge from the x-ray scanner. The agent gathers them, then walks me to a set of two black chairs. A sign posted above them warns me not to sit unless directed by a TSA officer.

The agent drops my belongings unceremoniously onto one chair and walks away. When she shuffles back a minute later, I watch her trade one pair of light blue latex gloves for another.

“Have you had a pat-down before?” she asks, neutrally.

“Yes.” I find myself nodding as if by doing so, she will speed up her “advisements.” She doesn’t.

“Do you have any sore or sensitive areas?”

“No.”

“Do you have any external medical devices?”

“No.”

“Would you like a private screening?”

“No.”

“Please stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms out.”

Latex gloves pat my skull.

“I’m just going to clear your collar.” I feel fingers sweep a line across my neck, through my hair. The same hands trace down my back, pressing swiftly along my spine and torso.

“Can you please lift your shirt? I need to clear your waistband.” I hitch up soft rayon to reveal the top of my pants. Deft fingers pull the fabric away from the skin of my backside.

She warns that she will now “clear” my buttocks using the back of her hands.

Fingers sweep down the fabric of my Bermudas and then back up my inner thighs to “meet resistance” although today, this is a symbolic gesture. Her hands do not actually meet with my groin. The officer’s knees creak as she dips down.

Rising, she tells me to lower my arms as she turns to face me.

“I’ll be using the back of my hand in a sweeping motion,” she gestures towards my breasts.

With her breath warm on my face, I watch blue hands slice quickly between my breasts like blades. They follow up by “clearing” the collar of my skintight black tank top. *Sweeping away potential threats? Acquitting me of suspicion? Rendering me and my body transparent?*

As she traces my torso downward, I ask how her day is going and how long she’s worked at the airport. She mumbles a reply, looking past me, into the checkpoint.

She repeats the “clearing” process on the front of my body.

I am now safe to board my aircraft.

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In this chapter, I narrate the historical and discursive context of airport security using the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as a “rupture point” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) before briefly tracing through turning points and changes in airport security practices. Throughout this case study narrative and discursive landscaping, I weave in ethnographic observations, results of textual analysis, and interview data to construct a layered picture of the airport security context. My primary goal is to demonstrate the discourses that construct and are constructed in the airport milieu. To that end, I delineate levels of discourse—macro, meso, and micro—providing definitions and examples of each from the case study. Finally, I make connections between the autoethnographic account offered above and levels of discourse to foreshadow the identity implications that will be discussed throughout the rest of the analysis. I begin with a brief history of the TSA as portrayed by mass media and government directives. This review is not exhaustive but illuminates many of the important changes and controversies that make air travel what it is today.

## Airport Security: Historical Context



*Photograph 1.* The World Trade Center towers collapsed and burning after being hit by two hijacked passenger jets on September 11, 2001. Following these terrorist attacks, the Transportation Security Administration was created by the United States Federal government to oversee airport security. “September 11, 2001” by W. Gobetz. Copyright 2011 by W. Gobetz. Reprinted with permission.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks dramatically changed the face of commercial air travel in the United States. Not only did the assaults devastate the aviation industry with multi-billion dollar financial losses, the events spawned the creation of the TSA, impacting forever what it means to fly in this country (International Air Transport Association, 2013).

With the advent of the TSA, airports abruptly transitioned from maintaining their own private security forces (contracted for by the airlines) to integrating federal officers into their domains. Enacted by Congress and signed into law by President G.W. Bush in November 2001, the newly minted TSA began hiring thousands of officers to staff airports and systematize security screening across the country (Pear, 2001). Many but not all



*Photograph 2.* Prior to the TSA, airport security procedures were minimal, consisting primarily of metal detector screening and the occasional baggage check. Up until the creation of TSA rules and regulations, anyone could pass through security, with or without a boarding pass. “Airport security (1973)” by H. Desportes. Copyright 1973 by H. Desportes. Reprinted with permission.

officers came from the pool of 28,000 private security guards already in place.

Although it took the TSA a year to hire the

approximately 45,000<sup>2</sup> people necessary to staff airports

and meet White House

mandates (NYT, November

19, 2002), immediately, new

regulations made it clear that air travel as America knew it would never be the same.

In the months following 9/11, security lines that had once been but brief formalities blossomed into lengthy queues that moved by the inch. Airlines cautioned passengers to arrive at least two hours prior to domestic flights and prepare for heretofore unheard of scrutiny of bodies and baggage. The lists of prohibited carry-on items grew steadily. Scissors, razors, tweezers—just about anything sharp—became *verboden*, along with any type of weapon or firearm<sup>3</sup> (TSA, 2002). However, in order to make lines move faster, tweezers, razors, and eyelash curlers, among other small personal items, were re-allowed six months later (NYT, May 19, 2002). Small scissors (blades 4-inches or less) and certain tools 7-inches long or less became acceptable a few years later (Reid, 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> Approximations of the TSA workforce fluctuate between 45,000 and 60,000, but were generally lower during the TSA’s formative years.

<sup>3</sup> The weapon restriction included toy weapons, and any toys that could be shaped as weapons such as certain Transformers robots (TSA, 2002). This policy was later adjusted to focus on toys that look like reasonable facsimiles of actual weapons (TSA, 2013).



*Photograph 3.* Following 9/11, security screenings increased in complexity, duration, and technological sophistication. “Security Screening at Denver Airport” by I.L. Hale. Copyright 2009 I.L. Hale. Reprinted with permission.

Constantly changing<sup>4</sup>, the carry-on rules appeared somewhat capricious with toy weapons and most sporting equipment banned, but items like ice skates and knitting needles allowed. In response to outrageously long lines, airlines established VIP security queues for frequent fliers, but these were abolished by the TSA in 2002 (Crawley, 2002) before again being reinstated years later.

In the year post-9/11, passengers learned they could no longer walk into the terminal area without having a boarding pass (Wald, 2002). Something that modern travelers now take for granted, this restriction of non-ticketed passengers dramatically changed the culture of going to the airport. No longer could tearful reunions or goodbyes take place near the

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<sup>4</sup> In March 2013, the TSA announced that small pocket knives with blades less than 2.36 inches or less will be allowed on flights, along with certain types of sporting equipment like hockey sticks, billiard cues, and up to two golf clubs (Sbraccia, 2013). However, in April 2013, the TSA announced delays in the implantation of the new rules, perhaps in light of vociferous complaints by flight attendants.



gate. “People watching” for pleasure soon morphed into “terrorist spotting” with passengers being continually admonished to keep their eyes open for suspicious happenings. These directives, which still play on recorded loops over airport public address systems, served as an early iteration of the Department of Homeland Security’s “If you see something, say something” campaign wherein passengers in all transportation settings are formally encouraged to report any suspicious people or packages (DHS, n.d.).

During the early aftermath of 9/11, new security measures were met with acceptance by a terrified flying public who demanded that the government do something to restore confidence in commercial aviation (Pear, 2001). As I will argue, acceptance of these processes also set the stage for the important identity performances that are of interest in this analysis.



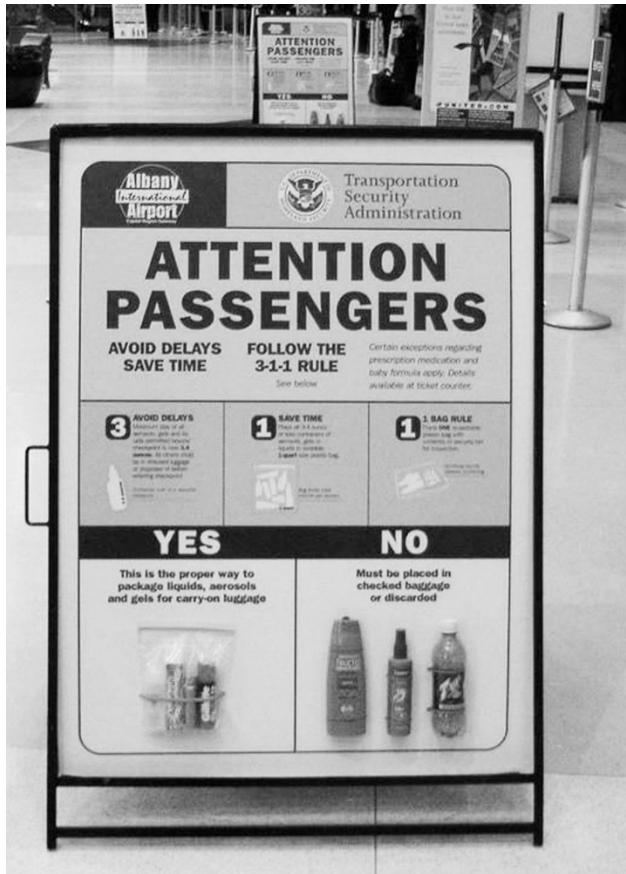
*Photograph 4.* Passengers learned how to send personal property through x-ray scanners using plastic bins as pictured here. “Airport security. Get ready to de-shoe” by “Redjar.” Copyright 2005 “Redjar.” Reprinted with permission.

Although 9/11 remains the major rupture point in this story, several significant turning points influence the ways that security is implemented today. Just a few months after 9/11, Richard Reid, a British passenger flying from Paris to Miami, attempted to blow up American Airlines Flight 63 using a homemade “shoe bomb” (Elliott,

2002). Following this failed terrorist attempt (nearby passengers subdued Reid after a flight attendant noticed he was trying to light a fuse in his shoe), the TSA implemented rules regarding the screening of footwear. Passengers reacted to this security change with ire,

complaining vociferously (Sharkey, 2003), and causing some airports to react by providing complimentary socks for a time (Johnson City Press, 2003).

Like the ever-changing carry-on restriction list, shoe removal rules caused great confusion. Initially, not all shoes needed to be doffed, just those with thick soles or metal inserts that might trigger the metal detector and prompt further passenger screening (Clark



*Photograph 5.* Discerning the sizing of acceptable carry-on liquids and gels provokes consternation for passengers even six years after the implementation of the “3-1-1” rule. Many TSO “passenger stories” involved outrageous passenger reactions to having belongings such as oversized shampoo or cologne confiscated. “TSA allowed liquids” by P. Johnson. Copyright 2007 by P. Johnson. Reprinted with permission.

& Schaeffer, 2003). Frequent and savvy fliers took to wearing sneakers or flimsy sandals to avoid triggering alarms (Yancey, 2003). Further confounding passengers, shoe-removal practices differed by airport or at the whims of individual TSOs, despite TSA insistence that passenger compliance was not absolutely required (Alexander, 2004).

Eventually, in response to a raised “threat level for the aviation sector”

on August 10, 2006, the TSA ruled that all shoes must be removed during security screening and passed through the x-ray scanner (Anderson &

DeYoung, 2006). As shoe removal remains a continual source of passenger frustration, the TSA recently spent millions of dollars testing a shoe scanner that would allow passengers to stay shod in security (Nixon, 2012). Unfortunately, none of the machines have met muster.

At the same time that the shoe rule became mandatory, the TSA banned liquids and gels from commercial aircraft cabins (Wilber, 2006). The provision came in response to a foiled terrorist plot out of the United Kingdom, in which 24 British citizens of Pakistani origin planned to smuggle liquid explosives in their carry-on luggage to blow up 10 U.S.-bound planes (Anderson & DeYoung, 2006). A month later, the TSA's "3-1-1" rule was born (Yu, 2006). The new measure limited carry-on liquids to one quart-sized plastic bag, per passenger, filled with containers of liquids, gels, and aerosols no more than 3.4 ounces each (TSA, 2012).

The 3-1-1 regulation sparked considerable debate from consumers and pundits alike who questioned the voracity of the measure (Sharkey, 2007a). No public information from the TSA addresses, for instance, why 3.4 ounces is safe, but 3.5 is not. Neither does public messaging<sup>5</sup> address concerns that miniscule amounts of some materials would be enough to cause serious damage to public safety. Furthermore, the rules seem to privilege the prevention of explosives coming through security (an acknowledged priority of the TSA) but say nothing regarding chemical or biological weapons. When the rule was implemented, then-TSA Director Kip Hawley suggested that the regulations were scientifically valid and too complex to describe in a "sound bite" (Sharkey, 2007b). Although the 3-1-1 rule is still in full effect for most passengers, certain liquids are permissible in larger quantities including medication, contact solution, and breast milk, although these liquids must pass a special screening before they can be carried through security (TSA, 2012).

Perhaps the most significant recent changes came in the wake of the unsuccessful "underwear bomber" in 2009. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian citizen, smuggled a

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<sup>5</sup> The TSA's 2007 3-1-1 web site tells passengers to "Please keep in mind that these rules were developed after extensive research and understanding of current threats" but offers no actual explanation of what that research entailed (TSA, 2007). The most current 3-1-1 rules as of December 2012 offer no such comments (TSA, 2012)

bomb in his undergarments onto Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009 (Bunkley, 2012). The bomb malfunctioned, saving the lives of the 290 people on board. After pleading guilty to eight criminal counts, Abdulmutallab was sentenced to life in prison (Bunkley, 2012). In response to the underwear bombing attempt, the TSA implemented new screening techniques, including “enhanced pat-downs,” and “Advanced Imaging Technology” in the form of backscatter and later, millimeter wave scanners.



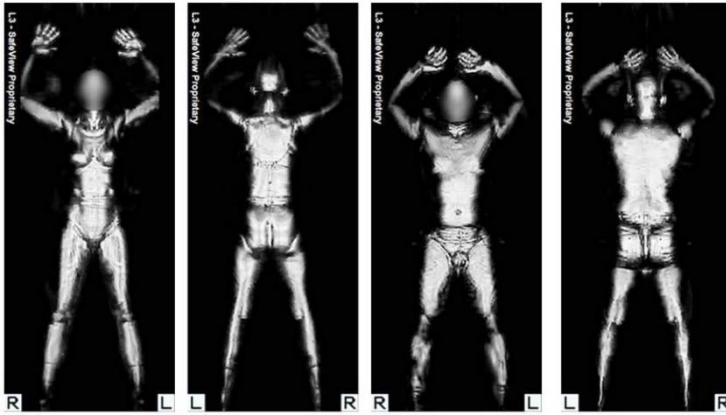
*Photograph 6.* Advanced imaging machines, such as the millimeter wave scanner depicted above, use low level radiation to take images of passengers underneath clothing. Copyright 2011 by S. Malvini Redden.

Advanced imaging devices—now deployed at approximately 200 airports throughout the country (TSA, 2013a)—take images of passengers through clothing to reveal their naked forms and “non-metallic threats” that metal detectors might miss

(The TSA Blog, 2010b). The use of advanced imaging, especially backscatter machines which emits potentially harmful ionizing<sup>6</sup> radiation, embroiled the TSA in controversy related to passenger privacy and safety.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Council on Radiation Protection recommends limiting lifetime exposure to ionizing radiation which can potentially cause cancer and other physiological damage (Moulder, 2012).



*Photograph 7.* Advanced imaging machines produce incredibly detailed images which brought intense criticism down on the TSA, especially after a number of pictures from a backscatter scanner were leaked online in 2010. “Millimeter wave images” by M. Sauer. Copyright 2008 by M. Sauer. Reprinted with permission.

Dubbed “naked scanners” in the popular imagination, the advanced imaging machines first came under fire for producing detailed images of passengers that TSA officers viewed in the security checkpoint to assess for danger. Privacy advocates

and passengers complained enough so that eventually the employee viewing the images was moved to a separate room as the passenger receiving the scan. This shift seemed to come in the wake of allegations that attractive passengers, especially young women, were chosen more often for advanced screening<sup>7</sup> (Allen, 2012). Also, despite protestations from the TSA that the machines were calibrated not to store images, 100 nude pictures from a Florida courthouse millimeter wave machine were leaked online in 2010 (Bosker, 2010). Editors at *Gizmodo*, a technology weblog, released 100 of the 35,000 images they obtained via the Freedom of Information Act to demonstrate the security limitations of advanced imaging in the public sphere, especially in airports (Johnson, 2010).

At the same time, questions surfaced about the safety of advanced imaging machines. The TSA has continually asserted that advanced imaging is “safe for all passengers and the technology meets national health and safety standards,” (TSA, 2013a) including, specifically,

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<sup>7</sup> Since the inception of the TSA, female passengers have complained about being singled out for more pat-downs and scans than their male counterparts (Frischling, 2012).

pregnant women and children. Yet, medical professionals concede the health risks<sup>8</sup> of this type of technology are still unknown. Part of the controversy stems from uncertainty about the health and safety testing conducted prior to deploying the machines, and the lack of peer reviewed studies of the technology (Moulder, 2012). Because the machines are used for security assessment and not medical testing, they are not classified as medical devices and are therefore not subject to the strenuous testing or oversight normally required by the Federal Drug Administration. As such, the machines fall into something of a grey area which is problematic because they are not monitored in the same manner as medical devices or by agencies unaffiliated with the TSA (EPIC, 2010).

To put this into perspective, there does not appear to be any procedures in place for reporting equipment malfunctions—such as releasing too much radiation—or mechanisms for contacting passengers who may have been exposed (Moulder, 2012). Furthermore, the research upon which the TSA bases its claims of safety suggests that the machines pose a negligible risk, not that they are “safe” per se (Mehta & Smith-Bindman, 2011). Medical researchers and politicians have called for independent review and regulation, as well as “publicly accessible, and preferably peer-reviewed evidence” on deployed scanners rather than just factory prototypes (Moulder, 2012 p. 726).

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<sup>8</sup> Colloquial evidence that is often repeated by TSOs suggests that going through the advanced imaging scanners exposes passengers to less radiation than a cell phone call, or a few minutes at altitude. While this may be true, far greater are the potential dangers to TSOs who work around the machines day in and day out.



*Photograph 8.* Passengers can choose to “opt out” of advanced imaging and instead receive a full body pat-down which includes TSOs “clearing” every part of the body include sensitive areas such as breasts, groin, buttocks, and genitals. “ORD/Chicago—20110719 TSA Grope” by M. Lyon. Copyright 2011 by M. Lyon. Reprinted with permission.

Prior to the wide scale deployment of advanced imaging technology, the TSA also introduced the country to “enhanced pat-downs,” which are head-to-toe examinations of a passenger’s body wherein TSOs “clear” the passenger for entry into the “sterile area” (aka terminal/gate areas) by manually checking for

contraband. Unlike previous “standard” pat-downs, the “enhanced pat-down” requires TSOs to use the palms of their hands to touch passengers, except on “sensitive” areas such as genitals, buttocks, or breasts where the back of the hand is used. A hallmark of the enhanced pat-down (now referred to as a “plain pat-down” on TSA websites) is “meeting resistance” (Goldberg, 2010) which occurs when TSOs’ hands slide up either side of a passenger’s legs towards the genitals and make contact with the groin on one side and the outer thigh on the other. When faced with advanced imaging, passengers<sup>9</sup> have two options—to go through the screening or “opt out” and receive an enhanced pat-down.

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<sup>9</sup> After several highly publicized pat-downs of children, including an infant in diapers (Tanglao, 2011), the TSA instituted “Modified Pat-downs” for youngsters but actively tries to avoid having officers touch children (TSA, 2013).



*Photograph 9.* With the implementation of enhanced full-body pat-downs, the TSA became the subject of many sexually-themed jokes and novelties such as this play on a “caution” sign. The original sign is bright yellow. “TSA” by G. Van der Leun. Copyright 2011 by G. Van der Leun. Reprinted with permission.

In the wake of advanced imaging scanners being deployed throughout the country’s busiest airports, consumer concern and popular culture commentary reached a fever pitch in the Fall of 2010. As passengers

underwent enhanced pat-downs, activist groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Pennsylvania

Coalition Against Rape (PCAR, 2010) claimed the searches constituted an invasion of privacy and could potentially re-traumatize past victims of sexual assault (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010).

In fact, Claire Hirschkind, a rape survivor who could not go through advanced imaging machines because of a pacemaker, refused to allow a TSO to touch her breasts or groin, although she did consent to the pat-down initially (Portnoy, 2010). Hirschkind was presented with two options—to consent to the screening or leave the airport. When Hirschkind declined to leave the security area (and miss her flight), she was arrested and later found guilty of “knowingly failing to obey a lawful order from airport security” (Bumgardner, 2011). Her lawsuit against the TSA is still pending. In the same vein, a San Diego passenger’s recorded interactions with the TSA turned into a rallying cry of sorts for those not in favor of the TSA’s new practices. After opting out of advanced imaging, John Tyner consented to a pat-down but did not want his groin touched. His comment “If you touch my junk, I’m going to have you arrested,” turned into the slogan “Don’t touch my junk” as his recording of the conversation went “viral” online (Krauthammer, 2010).



At the same time, civil protesters questioned the ability to search without probable cause and the TSA's use of what some call a loophole in law—that pat-downs, baggage searching, and advanced imaging procedures constitute administrative searches and not criminal (Frischling, 2010). It bears mentioning that the liberties taken by TSOs are not legal for police officers. Taking issue with invasion of privacy concerns and potential health risks, the Electronic Privacy Information Center launched several lawsuits against the Department of Homeland Security which oversees the TSA, the first of which called for a halt in the use of scanners until appropriate health testing could be done (EPIC, 2010). On a grassroots level, a group called “We Won’t Fly” staged National Opt Out Day on November 24, 2010, the day before Thanksgiving, which is typically the busiest traveling day of the year (We Won’t Fly, 2010). The group encouraged fliers to protest advanced imaging by opting out, requesting pat-downs, and causing congestion within airports.

Despite garnering national news attention, the first Opt Out day was considered a failure by the TSA which reported on its blog that “opt out day turned into a TSA appreciation day” (The TSA Blog, 2010). The TSA cited extensive nationwide news coverage that showed an absence of protestors and smooth airport screening experiences. However, media pundits were quick to insinuate that the TSA prevented an Opt Out Day debacle by simply shutting down advanced imaging machines for the day (Leslie, 2010). On its blog, the TSA refuted claims and acknowledged that at the time, only 70 airports currently had advanced imaging, that advanced imaging machines were not active in all checkpoint lanes, and newly-arrived machines may not have been in service<sup>10</sup> yet, but were not shut down on purpose (The TSA Blog, 2010). Voices critiquing Opt Out Day lambasted organizers for an

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<sup>10</sup> I flew on the first Opt Out Day in 2010, and in Phoenix Sky Harbor, the advanced imaging machines had just arrived the previous week. They remained unused and therefore out of controversy that day.

ineffectual plan that would only serve to punish passengers instead of prompting the government to change its policies (Saletan, 2010).



*Photograph 10.* The TSA has instituted age-related concessions for the elderly and young children which allows for easier traveling. However, as with the liquids and gels rules, the TSA does not address specifically why passengers 75 and over are “safe.” “Passengers 75 and older” by S. Beale. Copyright 2013 by S. Beale. Reprinted with permission.

who meet the age criteria can keep their shoes, light jackets, and belts on during screenings in order to ease the burden of going through security checkpoints (Costello, 2012).

More recently, the TSA started quietly moving backscatter machines out of many major airports and into smaller regional facilities in 2012 (Blackman & Huus, 2013). At the time, officials suggested that the move was to speed up security screenings at busier airports. However, as of early 2013, the TSA announced it will remove all backscatter scanners due to the machine manufacturer’s inability to meet Congressional mandates for increased passenger privacy. Namely, that meant upgrading software so that a passenger’s unique image is not seen, but rather a generic figure with a green “pass” light or a red “fail” light that would signal a need for further screening. Left in place are the millimeter wave scanners

Since the installation of advanced imaging machines and enhanced pat-downs in 2010, the TSA and DHS have fielded several lawsuits regarding safety, privacy, and inappropriate behaviors during screening, but made no formal policy changes except to ease restrictions on children and the elderly (Tanglao, 2011). In what seems a reaction to public outcry regarding upsetting screenings of young children and elderly, the TSA developed certain screening exemptions for those under 12, and 75 and older. People

which have the privacy software enabled and do not emit *ionizing* radiation, although that fact has not been highlighted by the TSA or major media reports.

One of the major criticisms of TSA policies is that one-size-fit-all security procedures are not efficient or an efficacious use of resources. Accordingly, the TSA has moved towards “risk-based security” which takes the assumption that most travelers, especially frequent fliers, are low-risk and that with more “intelligence-driven” screening procedures, passenger experiences in security can be improved (TSA, 2013b). Movements towards “risk-based security” include the TSA introducing its own “trusted traveler” program (The TSA Blog, 2011). Essentially a “fast pass” for frequent flyers, TSA PreCheck involves passengers applying, paying a \$100 fee, and submitting to a background check. In return for being deemed low-risk, Pre-Check passengers can enjoy a designated line where they do not have to remove shoes/belts/jackets before screening, or take out laptops or liquids and gels from carry-ons. Passengers still must comply with the 3-1-1 rule in terms of liquid amounts/types, and also advanced imaging or pat-down procedures where appropriate. So far, the program is only available on certain airlines and at some airports.

A related criticism, heard most profoundly from security professionals, is that the TSA programs focus too heavily on finding dangerous *items* and not dangerous *people* (Mann, 2011). Although the TSA seems to reinforce this image by advertising the plentiful and often outrageous weapons they confiscate during screenings of carry-on luggage (The TSA blog, 2012), initiatives focused on observing passenger behavior started to address the concern. The TSA quietly introduced Behavior Detection Officers in July 2007. Using behavioral analysis training designed by psychologist Paul Ekman, Behavior Detection Officers look for “suspicious facial expressions of tension, fear or deception” (TSA, 2011). Essentially, this

means that specially trained officers stand near lines and watch crowds, occasionally interacting with people they deem suspicious.

In late 2011, behavior detection efforts became more formalized in pilot airports Boston Logan and Detroit International. The new program features more focused interaction between Behavior Detection Officers and passengers. Dubbed “TSA chat-downs” in the media (Smith, 2011), the interactions occur between TSA officers and *all* passengers, not just those found to be acting suspicious or abnormally. Modeled after the highly lauded Israeli model of behavioral profiling, the chat-down involves passengers being asked simple questions to probe for hostility or deception that would prompt further investigation (Smith, 2011).



*Photograph 11.* A pervasive critique of the TSA is that its officers resort to unwarranted racial/ethnic profiling. “Airport profiling at work” by “eruditebaboon.” Copyright 2010 by “eruditebaboon.” Reprinted with permission.

The behavior detection program has drawn fierce criticism both for suspected racial/ethnic profiling, and feasibility issues. In fact, 32 TSA agents at Boston Logan reported complaints to the Department of Homeland Security about coworkers singling out people of color for additional screening. Since then, the TSA has promised to retrain all behavior detection officers at that facility (Jansen, 2012).

Additionally, the behavior detection program has met scrutiny from security professionals who question the level of training

required for behavior detection officers to master behavioral profiling which demands a sophisticated understanding of emotional management and micro facial expressions (CNN,

2012). Furthermore, skeptics point out that a program that works well in Israel—with its seven primary airports and 11 million annual fliers—is not scalable to the U.S. where 700 million people fly in and out of 400 primary airports (Schneier, 2007).

Complaints about behavioral profiling, advanced imaging, and enhanced pat-downs, among other TSA policies, do not just play across media headlines. Rather, these issues are taken up in the halls of Congress where Representatives investigate concerns and help shape TSA policies. Most recently, Congressman John L. Mica, Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, convened a hearing focused on improving the nation’s passenger security system through “common sense solutions” on November 29, 2012. TSA director John Pistole declined to give testimony, although he pointed out to the media that TSA representatives have provided 425 briefings for Congressional members and participated in 38 hearings previously (Barnett, 2012). Ironically, Mica helped create the TSA in 2001 but in recent years has turned into a virulent opponent, calling for dismantling of the TSA and budget reductions (Matthews, 2012).

Before 9/11, airport security costs were measured in the millions. Today, the costs factor in the billions. In 2000<sup>11</sup>, the Government Accountability Office estimated that U.S. airlines spent \$448 million on security, which equates to \$0.75 to screen each passenger and accompanying luggage (Landrieu, 2011). A decade later, airlines paid \$7.4 billion for security, not including \$2.1 billion in September 11 Security Fees paid directly by consumers (Dickler, 2011). Together, these equate to \$15.09 per passenger. Not adjusting for inflation, these figures suggest it is 20 times more expensive to administer security via the TSA. Despite critiques, TSA officials reckon 11 years of safe skies worth the costs (Schneier, 2012).

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<sup>11</sup> In 2000, 599,563,678 passengers flew domestically in the United States; In 2010, 629,537,593 people flew domestically (Research and Innovation Technology Administration Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2013)

However, opposing viewpoints cite the historical rarity of terrorist attacks and the vast TSA expenditures that have netted *zero* terrorist plots foiled (Kenny, 2012). For instance, scholars of foreign and defense policy estimate the risk of a U.S. citizen dying in a terrorist attack at one in 3.5 million (Kenny, 2012), and that deaths by Islamic extremists (outside of war zones) account for 200-400 deaths annually *worldwide*, which coincidentally is the same number of people who die in bathtubs in the U.S. every year (Mueller, 2011). Furthermore, the TSA Blog's annual "Top Good Catches" and "Week in Review" blog posts feature many weapons and contraband such as live animals, but not, to date, any terrorists (The TSA Blog, 2012).

Love or hate the TSA, airport security is a highly publicized, hotly contested subject that impacts millions of travelers. From a communicative perspective, airport security also offers a unique context in which to analyze meaning making at individual, organizational, and societal levels. One approach is to identify the discourses that emerge across contexts and analyze how they come to life in airport security settings.

### **Identifying discourses**

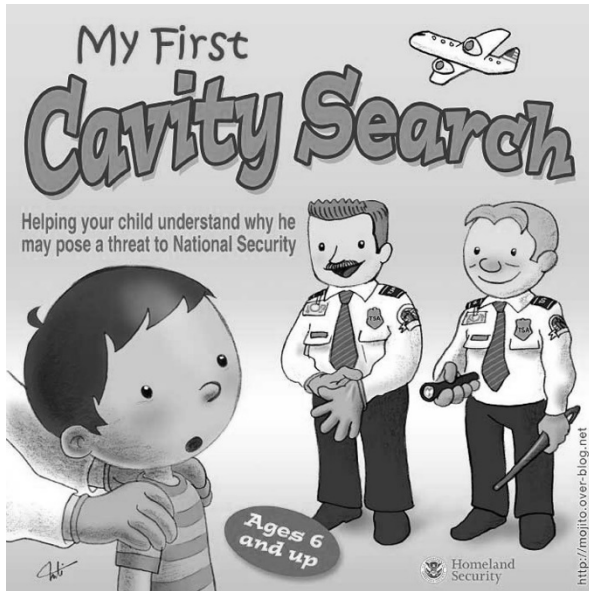
The airport security context is suffused with discourses operating at macro, meso, and micro levels. As scholars have noted previously, isolating specific levels of discourse—although messy and somewhat arbitrary—is helpful for analysis and demonstrating how discourses work in concert with each other (Way, 2012). To that end, I identify and briefly analyze discourses that construct and emerge in relation to airport security. In doing so, I show how discourses serve as resources (Kuhn, 2009) for identity construction and performance as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

## Macro-level discourses

As I mentioned in the literature review, macro discourses refer to “enduring and broad systems of thought” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7) that shape cultural meanings and interactions at various levels. Discourses permeate everyday talk and action in ways that are often taken for granted and uncontested. For instance, discourses of “discipline,” “authority,” and “power” have culminated to make airport security seem “normal” and a “natural” part of air travel. From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses *produce* certain ways of being and shape available meanings and interpretations. Critically, discourses also denote what meanings are *preferable*. In airport security, macro discourses manifest in policies, practices, and social norms that “discipline” passengers and officers, compelling them to “follow the rules,” “obey authority,” and make personal and civil sacrifices for “safety.”

Macro-level discourses appeared most obviously in security directives from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the parent organization of the TSA, and national-level policies set forth by the TSA which structure airport interactions across the country. Subtly, macro-level discourses manifest in the attire of officers—identical, royal blue uniforms designed to evoke law enforcement’s clout, complete with insignia and brass badges. Borrowing from military regalia, TSO uniforms, while mostly alike, use understated cues such as shoulder chevrons to indicate rank. TSOs referred to these colloquially as “stripes” and differentiate between levels of TSO as one-stripers (TSO), two-stripers (Lead TSO), and three-stripers (Manager TSO). The TSA transitioned from white to royal blue uniforms in 2008 in order to visibly signal to passengers a distinction between the previous white-shirted private security guards of old, and new federal *officers* who should be treated with respect and deference (Ripley, 2008). As persuasion literature suggests, people often attribute credibility to those in uniform, even if their actual authority is illegitimate (Cialdini,

2009). TSOs, though technically federal officers, are not trained in law enforcement, carry no weapons, and have no legitimate authority<sup>12</sup> to arrest or subdue passengers. However, the uniforms connote macro discourses of authority and power that as flyer Kristine described in an interview, passengers “click into” and “fall in line” around.



*Photograph 12.* In popular culture commentary, TSA officers are frequently portrayed as sexually deviant and power hungry as in this fictitious children’s book cover. “My first cavity search” by A. Curry. Copyright 2010 by A. Curry. Reprinted with permission.

Reflecting and critiquing official discourses, popular culture and news media construct macro-level discourses regarding the TSA and its policies and practices. As portrayed in the popular press and echoed in participant quotes like the ones that opened this chapter, airport security is cumbersome, irritating, expensive, time-consuming, and invasive. As demonstrated in the historical narrative, the TSA is heavily scrutinized,

especially regarding its use of technology, the behavior of its employees, and the efficacy of screening procedures. When the media highlight stories that show TSA officers as committing crimes outside of work (Tennant, 2012), stealing from passengers (Kreider & Chuchman, 2012), “groping” passengers (CBS, 2011), performing “gate rape” and “freedom frisks” (Peters, 2010), harassing children (Associated Press, 2012), and arbitrarily enforcing policies (Leocha, 2010), TSA officers appear unintelligent, untrustworthy, inhuman, and lacking in compassion.

<sup>12</sup> Concerns about TSOs abusing their authority with passengers surfaced in Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn’s proposal to strip TSOs of their police-esque uniforms in 2009, although it was ultimately rejected by the House (Kasperowicz, 2009).



The TSA and its employees often appear as caricatures in the popular imagination which reinforces the media stereotypes mentioned above. Some conceptualizations seem lighthearted or innocuous. Aimed primarily at younger audiences, Disneyland’s “Star Tours” ride features TSA-style luggage and passenger x-ray screenings before visitors get to the *Star Wars*-themed ride. Likewise, the Play Mobil toy company generated a TSA checkpoint toy set featuring officers with weapons and one smiling passenger. Bruce Schneier, a TSA critic, called the Star Tours example a “normalization of security” (Doctorow, 2011) which is an apt description of how macro-level discourses cross boundaries to become the normalized, taken for granted Discourses that shape systems of thought.



*Photograph 13.* In a *Saturday Night Live* comedy show, TSOs were portrayed as sexually deviant in a sketch which positioned officers in a late-night commercial for escort services. Image from “It’s Our Business to Touch Yours” sketch. Copyright 2010 by NBC. Reprinted with permission under Fair Use guidelines.

Adult satire offers more critical and pointed commentary on TSA policies and procedures. On the adult comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, TSA officers appeared as idiots with one character who cannot correctly identify liquids and gels. In the 2007 sketch, two instructor

characters provide a “refresher” course about liquids and gels in response to changes to TSA rules. When asked for examples of liquids and gels, one TSO replies “A turkey sandwich” on account that “Turkey is wet sometimes.” The characters go on to debate when a turkey sandwich might be considered a liquid, e.g. when it’s blended or has 3.4 ounces of mustard on it. Three years later, *Saturday Night Live* took on the TSA again, this time in a style

parodying late-night phone sex commercials. The skit poked fun at enhanced pat-downs with the tag line “It’s our business to touch yours” (Roberts, 2010).

In an even more outrageous tone, the creators of the adult cartoon *South Park* ridiculed the TSA in an episode titled, “Reverse Cowgirl,” which features gendered battles



*Photograph 14.* The creators of the adult cartoon *South Park* reimagined the TSA as the “Toilet Security Administration” and portrayed officers as conducting invasive security inspections in every public and private restroom. Copyright 2012 Comedy Central. Reprinted with permission under Fair Use guidelines.

about leaving the toilet seat up.

After a woman theatrically dies from falling in the commode, the “Toilet Security Administration” is created to monitor the use of toilets in

public and private spaces (Kleinman, 2012). While crass, the episode pointedly condemns the TSA as

frivolous, its officers as sexually deviant, and the public as resigned to government intrusion into their most private of practices. Similarly, homegrown videos on sites like YouTube mock security procedures and frequently highlight actual and constructed negligence, hostility, and inappropriate behavior on the part of TSOs.

In conversation, passengers repeated and resisted some of these discourses, while TSOs acknowledged and challenged them. For instance, Jeff, a TSO from a regional airport in the Pacific Northwest, discussed how his security team caught drug smugglers and credit card thieves as a result of security screenings. He described feeling proud of his actions and that “People in TSA get a bad reputation. . . . They’re catching the drugs. They’re catching the people who are coming through who robbed someone. They’re catching those types of people.” When I responded that I never hear stories like that, Jeff replied, “Right. And that’s one thing that I think people need to hear. They don’t put it on the news. They only put it

on the news if TSA finds a bomb in someone’s crotch.” Passengers acknowledged the tendency for media to portray airport security in a negative light and that some of the more outlandish stories (e.g., “don’t touch my junk”) did not resonate with their personal experiences in the airport.



*Photograph 15.* Critiques of the TSA include that officers are not engaged or responsible, as illustrated in this photo which shows an officer sleeping on the job (far left) and another (far right) leaning casually on an airport sign and disregarding his sleeping colleague. “TSA preparedness” by “TheeErin.” Copyright 2013 by “TheeErin.” Reprinted with permission.

During interviews and informal conversations, most passengers were quick to criticize the TSA and its policies citing concerns about use of fiscal resources and invasions of privacy, as well as the hassle that it brings to travel. The most

colorful description likened the TSA to “Mutt and Jeff,” a cartoon featuring “dimwit” Mutt and his “possibly insane” friend Jeff who together put together “hair brained” and “get-rich-quick” schemes (Comic Vine, n.d.). However, passengers also tended to contextualize “Mutt and Jeff” experiences within the macro Discourses that the TSA operates, namely in relation to ideas like “safety,” “authority,” and “terrorism.” For example, even if a passenger like casual flier Soleil resists macro-level policies like enhanced pat-downs, she might still acknowledge that policies exist to protect her safety because of terrorism, and that she has no choice but to defer to authority. Despite commentary about macro-level discourses, passengers reacted most strongly to the meso-level practices and communication they experienced in airport settings.

### **Meso-level discourses**

Macro-level discourses directly informed meso-level policies and practices across individual airports. For passengers, meso-level discourses became apparent in the application of policies across different airport settings. Although major macro-level policies are said to be uniform such as the 3-1-1 rule, the use of enhanced pat-downs, and the prohibition of certain sharp objects, airport security directors and individual TSOs use discretion with how rules are enacted. Passengers, especially regular fliers, approach so-called established policies such as shoe removal as a given, but other nuanced policies such as liquid/gel limitations, pat-downs, and electronics, with confusion. During my fieldwork, I met a woman who described frustration with how “large electronics” policies were practiced. She said, “I never know if I can take out my laptop or what,” referring to the requirement for certain electronics to be removed from cases and screened separately. Passengers noted that certain airports seemed especially “strict” on policies like liquids/gels but in other airports they can “get away with” things like sneaking contraband through checkpoints.

Making a point to visit many airports to compare how policies were implemented, I noticed that while most policies seemed similarly present and enforced, occasionally, procedures and roles diverged. For instance, in comparably sized airports, the role of Divestiture Officer was enacted differently. The Divestiture Officer often stands between the ticket checking station and baggage/advanced imaging machines, ostensibly to help passengers and give information about how to proceed through security screenings. The officer reminds passengers to separate liquids and gels from carry-on baggage, remove shoes, doff coats, jackets, and belts, and place large electronics in separate bins. Depending on the airport or even local checkpoint, the Divestiture Officer may shout reminders abrasively as did a vigorous officer in Phoenix, prompting a passenger in line near me to liken the calls to

a drill instructor in boot camp. While some Divestiture Officers blanket security lines with reminders, others shout targeted messages to people appearing not to comply with the regulations, for instance, telling specific people to remove their coats, jackets or shoes. Some also inject humor into the job as did a TSO in Northern California who repeated his spiel as a Dr. Seuss rhyme: “One shoe, two shoes, red shoes, blue shoes... laptops, flip flops... they all must come off.”

For employees, meso discourses arose prominently within the training, education, and local policies that structured their work. According to TSO interviewees, after passing a lengthy and often cumbersome application process, every TSO must complete a multi-week training program that includes written/computer-based training, face-to-face coursework, role-playing. Education continues throughout a TSO’s career with weekly and monthly computer training and periodic in-person refreshers. Additionally, TSOs must pass examinations for annual performance reviews as well as sporadic “secret shopper” tests where examiners pretend to be passengers and attempt to smuggle through prohibited items such as weaponry or explosives. To reinforce training, TSOs participate in daily briefings at the start of their shifts wherein managers review security information from across the country which includes briefings on pertinent international incidents (terror alerts, bombings, foiled plans, etc.) as well as news from sister airports including security breaches.

As already illustrated throughout opening vignette, history, and data examples, macro- and meso-level discourses structure and influence one another. Macro-level discourses are evident in meso-level practices that affect TSOs and passengers every day. How policies are enacted on a local level, for instance the inappropriate screening of children and highly personal imaging of passengers, can then prompt changes to meso-level

policies that affect all airports. Together, these discourses heavily shape micro-level discourses which arise within interpersonal interactions between TSOs and passengers.

### **Micro-level discourses**

Passengers participated in micro-level discourse regarding airport security in three specific ways: by talking with friends and family about airport security, commiserating with fellow passengers, and interacting with TSOs. Having witnessed lively discussions about airport security in casual settings, passengers also communicate about security with loved ones before, during, and after security. For example, during my fieldwork, I noticed passengers who would call friends and family immediately upon exiting security, including one woman who called her husband while putting her shoes on and whispered “I got through security, just wanted to let you know.” Similarly, if a security experience went poorly, passengers including interviewees Sue and Bob described posting about it on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook in order to vent and garner social support. In the airport security setting, I watched passengers occasionally interact, usually to commiserate about long lines or cumbersome practices like removing shoes.

Likewise, TSOs participated in micro-level discourse by also talking with family and friends, fellow TSA employees, and passengers. Neece, a TSO in the Midwest, described specifically talking to her aunt about work whenever the TSA and its policies hit the news. Other TSOs also explained how they are often called upon to give advice about going through security to friends and relatives. Some TSOs keep their jobs under wraps, however. TSO Jeff told of a relative who “went off” on him when she found out what he did for a living, “She got this upset look and pointed at me, and said ‘I hate you fuckers.’” Jeff admitted, “Sometimes people have some very negative reactions. I don’t really tell people what I do unless they ask.” Between TSOs, micro-level discourse about airport security often

involved formal communications about job duties and policies, as well as bitching and venting about passengers.

As mentioned, meso and macro-level discourses structure the ways that micro-level interactions between passengers and TSOs take place. National level policies dictate many of the mandatory contacts between passengers and TSOs, such as passengers showing identification and boarding documents to TSOs, listening to TSA “advisements,” and cooperating with extra screenings or bag checks when requested. Skeet, a TSO with four years of experience, described how both he and passengers are aware of surrounding meso-level discourses, specifically “the rules.” In response to angry passengers, Skeet described, “I know they’re yelling at me but it’s not me. Personally, I am not telling them they cannot have this particular thing. I’m there to enforce the rules, not to make the rules.” Passengers, including Nate who discussed the “due deference” he showed to TSOs, acknowledged the presumed authority that TSOs hold in the security checkpoint and often structured their interactions accordingly. Dirk, a frequent flier who is highly critical of the TSA, described how he used to “poke the badger with a spoon” by questioning TSOs who tried to enforce policies arbitrarily. However, as a business traveler, Dirk recognized he could not afford to be detained, so he said that now “With the TSA, I try to be so matter of fact.” As mentioned in the literature review, passengers often shape their emotional performances during interactions with TSOs in relation to meso and macro discourses of security (Malvini Redden, 2013).

### **Discursive Connections**

As alluded to, airport security discourses were steeped within and shaped by important systems of thought. The most impactful and frequent in the data included discourses of security, surveillance, compliance, discipline, authority, knowledge, production,

fear, terrorism, and nationalism. Passengers and TSOs alike referenced the importance of security in “these uncertain times” yet simultaneously chafed at surveillance, with passengers talking about screening technologies and TSOs mentioning the ever-present eyes of managers. Woven throughout observations, interviews, policies, and media accounts were notions of discipline and authority which became especially evident when passengers or TSOs discussed why they chose to follow policies or practices they did not personally agree with, or more pointedly, when they chose *not* to follow the rules.



*Photograph 16.* Some airport signage is designed to evoke emotional and patriot feelings from passengers including this sign which asks passengers if they remember how it felt to feel safe and admonishes them to “Make it a personal challenge” and to be “smart and vigilant.” “Remember how it felt to feel safe” by N. Kocharhook. Copyright 2006 N. Kocharhook Reprinted with permission.

The entire enterprise of the TSA is rooted in discourses of terror, security, surveillance, discipline, and compliance. The success of airport security treads upon the fear of passengers (regarding terrorists) and relies upon passenger and TSO compliance. To accomplish security, the TSA taps into systems that normalize compliance and evoke discipline—namely, through figures of authority and lines that order and control. As Foucault (1977) demonstrates, people are conditioned from childhood to find normal the acts

of deferring to formal authorities, being ordered and regulated, and disciplined systematically.



Passengers cue into these systems almost automatically by sorting themselves into one of several types of passenger lines, and submitting to various officers as they go through ID screening, baggage searches, and person screening. Trained with the mantra “Not on my watch,” which refers to the individual duty of preventing another 9/11 terrorist attack, TSOs also maneuver within deep discourses that structure their work in terms of civic duty, patriotism, and life-and-death choices. For instance, I asked TSO Skeet what happens when he makes a mistake at work. Without missing a beat, he said, “People die.” Although there is potential for that statement to be true, certainly, it may be more likely that TSO training frames the menial, tedious, and often thankless work of a security guard as life-saving in order to gain compliance and commitment from a largely unskilled workforce.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the historical context of airport security as it sprang into frenzied action in Fall 2001 spurred by terror-induced panic and how it evolved over the last 12 years. By tracing through the history and policy changes of the TSA, and describing discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels, it is evident how discourses influence and structure each other. Furthermore, this tracing shows how practices that seem “normal” and “natural” are actually the result of very specific historical and power-laden issues (Foucault, 1977). In particular, discourses have specific consequences for identity construction as “Discourses bear the multiple, historically specific subject positions open to individuals. Individuals act and know in relation to these possibilities for identity—which can be limited by the rules of the discursive formation” (Norander, 2008, p. 103). As I will demonstrate and argue throughout the next several chapters, passengers and TSOs draw upon these discursive resources (Kuhn, 2009) to construct and enact identities within the airport security

context. How these discourses are taken up and embodied can illuminate important aspects of meaning making for individuals and organizations.

## Chapter 5

### PROMINENT IDENTITIES WITHIN AIRPORT SECURITY DISCOURSES

“Being a TSO is a test of strength and perseverance, being able to take abuse from all directions, from within and without. It means flexibility and endurance, to be able to perform a variety of functions at the same time while [being short-staffed]. And, in the middle of all that, being a TSO means being a protector.” –Jonathan, TSO

“I feel like I’m not a customer when I go through airport security. . . . I feel like I’m a suspect in a crime. That’s how I feel. . . . They’re always watching you. You have to take off everything out of your pockets, you have to take your shoes off, and you have to walk through the scanner. You have to do it. Everyone else has to do it, but you don’t feel like you’re a customer. You feel like you’re in school or something like that. Your teacher is demanding you do something and you have to do it. You can’t just say ‘no.’” –Mac, passenger

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“I’d like to opt out.”

The 20-something TSO shrugs, poking his lip out in an exaggerated pout.

“Was it something I said?” he asks, doing an admirable puppy dog expression.

I laugh. “Sorry,” I reply, moving to the side without being asked.

The person behind me gets waved through the advanced imaging machine I am bent on avoiding for health and political reasons. A woman nearby asks to go through the metal detector and the now not-pouting TSO says he needs everyone to go through the millimeter wave scanner. The metal detector is reserved for “overflow, employees, and kids.”

Swiftly, he turns back to me.

“Do I smell?” he inquires.

“I’m sorry,” I say, opting-in to the joke, “I really wasn’t going to say anything.”

We’re both laughing as he shouts, “Female assist, opt out. Female assist, opt out!”

Ahead, I notice TSO “Roger,” an interviewee and familiar character in my travels.

While I wait for my pat-down, he mouths to me and points down over the conveyor belt, “Is

this yours?" I nod yes, grateful that he is keeping an eye on my luggage while I wait for the advanced screening.

Soon a female TSO with dark hair and wide eyes appears. The now-pouting again TSO complains to her, while nodding at me, "She doesn't want to be my friend anymore."

I murmur, "It was never meant to last."

Feigning despair, he clutches a hand to his chest declaring, "I'm hurt!" before turning back to the stream of passengers behind me.

I walk away, chuckling.

Slinking through the gate, the female TSO tells me to point out my belongings. I gesture to Roger, who says hello and asks how I'm doing.

We walk to the screening area, and when she asks if I've done this before, Roger answers for me, "She's a regular. She's here every week."

I remark, "I come to the airport way too much."

They both laugh and I wave goodbye to Roger, whose gaze trails after me as he walks away.

The wide-eyed TSO explains that even though I've been through it before, she needs to review the procedures. She asks the usual questions and then tells me to stand on the yellow line.

I stand, feet apart, palms up as she tugs at my collar, apologizing if she pulls my hair. She tells me exactly what she's doing before she does it, and confirms with "Okay?" repeatedly. She is faster than the TSO I met yesterday who reminded me of Carol Burnette. She appears to be just as thorough, but I am less bothered because it goes by so quickly.

When the woman steps back to test her gloves for explosives, I notice a male TSO patting down an older gentleman clad head-to-toe in tan tweed. The TSO keeps directing the

passenger to “stay” as if he were an unruly puppy. It occurs to me that the traveler may not have a strong command of English, and hence the rudimentary (rude-imentary?) treatment from the TSO.

I pack up. Roger sweeps by to bid me farewell. I wave, saying “See you next week!”

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With airport security discourses positioned as staples of mainstream media, popular culture, organizational practices, and everyday travel experiences, I now turn to a more in-depth examination of how these discourses shape the identity performances of passengers and TSOs. In this chapter, I draw heavily upon observations of airport security settings and formal interviews with passengers and TSOs to answer my first research question: “How are the identities of TSOs and passengers constructed by and through macro, meso, and micro discourses in airport security contexts?”

Like Wieland (2010), I am especially concerned with the “situated practice” of identity which asks not just “who am I?” (p. 507) but “who am I, *here*?” The latter question takes into account the active construction and enactment of identity, while also considering the context in which the identity is performed. In this study, I regard context as not only the physical place, but the multi-layered discursive environment as described in Chapter Four.

As participants discussed their experiences traveling and working within airport security, it became apparent to me just how much macro, meso, and micro discourses structure what it means to be a passenger and what it means to be a TSO. During preliminary analyses, I discovered several identities evident in participant speech, which I name as Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful for the ways that they align with and/or challenge dominant discourses about characters in airport security settings. Drawing upon and reacting to the various discourses illuminated earlier, people performed combinations of these three

primary identities as they worked and traveled through the airport. The ways that passengers and TSOs constructed identities differed dramatically in some cases, and as I will argue, provide insight into the ways people make sense of experiences in airport security.

In this chapter, I describe six primary identities that emerged in discussions and observations of airport security—Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful TSO identities, and Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful passenger identities. Comparing interview and observation data with macro-level discourses, I explain how people develop archetypes of Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful characters in airport security, and importantly, how they position themselves in relation to these constructions. As with levels of discourse, identities are often apparent in combination and tension with each other. In the next chapter, I depict how identities are enacted and what consequences arise from identity performances in terms of emotion management, interpersonal communication, and sensemaking.

It is important to keep in mind that this analysis relies upon a theoretical understanding of identity as multiple, crystallized, and malleable (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005), and that although discourses heavily shape available meanings with which to construct identities, people can be active agents in the task (Wieland, 2010). As such, conceiving of identity in terms of its performance is a helpful heuristic to see how people choose which identity positions to enact at any given time, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with particular identity performances.

### **TSO Identity Positions**

Following the mission of the TSA which is to “Protect the nation’s transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce” (TSA, 2013c), the work of a frontline TSO in the security checkpoint is to screen and assess passengers, and to prevent prohibited and illegal items from passing through the checkpoint. TSO Skeet said, “I

screen passengers and personal property to make sure the flying public is safe to get to their destinations. And yeah, make sure everything is safe.” The job involves showing up to work a few minutes before a shift starts (but no more than seven minutes early, according to TSO Cat) and reporting to the checkpoint.

Every day, TSOs participate in briefings wherein they receive starting assignments and hear about security news from across the country and if pertinent, around the world. TSOs then assume one of eight primary positions in the checkpoint (see Table 3), not including administrative, management, and “downstairs” or off-checkpoint jobs including baggage screening and reviewing advanced imaging monitors. While working in these primary positions, usually in shifts of 30 minutes each, TSOs interact with each other and passengers to varying degrees. TSO Neecie described a typical day as “Short staffed, over worked, chaotic” which resonated throughout many TSO interviewees’ speech. In addition to the technical aspects of the job, which include verifying identification, checking bags, and processing passengers, TSO Jonathan explained how difficult it is to stay healthy and upbeat when dealing with passengers:

Tens of thousands of people transit through my airport. I have to touch them and their stuff. A huge percentage of people are disgusting—dirty, smelly, with absolutely no concept of personal hygiene. It’s also frustrating to watch proof time and time again of people’s complete disregard for others’ welfare, as evidenced by the total lack of simple courtesy and respect for other people.

Despite the frustration, Jonathan and others TSOs like “Lucky” acknowledged enjoying their work more often than not. Lucky insisted, “I’m glad to be at work. I like human interaction. I like being helpful. I like to contribute to something.”

When interviewing participants, I asked passengers to describe what TSOs are like. I initially posed this question to see how passengers made sense of TSOs as people and in relation to the mission of the TSA as an organization. Passengers strove to portray “typical” TSOs—the ones they encountered most often. I also probed for particularly positive and negative interactions with TSOs, hoping that extremes would help me to describe the gamut of TSO encounters. Data regarding identities from TSO interviews emerged as participants described themselves, their coworkers, and in some cases their subordinates and superiors, while answering interview questions on other topics. Many important reflections came as TSOs reflected on how they know when they are doing well at their jobs, and what happens when they make mistakes.

In several of the later interviews I gathered, I asked more specific questions about TSO identities as identity had surfaced as a salient concept during focused analysis. For example, I invited participants to consider “What it means to be a TSO.” In addition to interview data, I also used fieldnotes to construct portraits of identity positions. Through analysis of these conversations and observations, and comparisons to discourses, I created a typology of TSO identities with three main categories—Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful, the first two with sub categories.

### **Stereotypical TSO Identities: “Machines,” “Robots,” “Despots,” “Workers”**

When TSOs are mocked in popular culture or derided by the traveling public, the object of scorn is usually a manifestation of what I refer to as a “Stereotypical” TSO identity. Emergent in interviews with TSOs and passengers, and apparent in observations, descriptions of Stereotypical TSO identities included: authoritative, sometimes aggressive, mechanical/robotic, unfriendly, professional, sometimes punitive, uneducated, apathetic,



Table 3.

*Descriptions of Security Checkpoint Positions and Duties*

<b>Security Checkpoint Transportation Security Officer Stations/Positions and Descriptions</b>	
Travel Document Center- Document checker	Officer who sits or stands at a podium near the front of the passenger line. Officer is responsible for checking that boarding passes and identification documents are legitimate.
Divestiture Officer	Officer who stands in the checkpoint area, typically near or between lines where passengers are depositing items into the x-ray baggage scanner and preparing to go through imaging screening. This officer gives reminders for passengers regarding how to prepare for the screenings, e.g. removing shoes and belts, placing laptops and large electronics in separate bins
Walk-Through Metal Detector	Officer who stands near the metal detector and directs passengers through the metal detector or into the Advanced Imaging Technology. This person also calls for “assists” for passengers wanting to opt out of imaging.
X-ray Baggage Screener	Officer who observes all x-ray screened luggage looking for contraband. This person will occasionally call a “bag check” for suspicious artifacts.
Advanced Imaging Technology Monitor	Officer stands behind the AIT machine and directs passengers inside it. Officer will give directions, get passengers into the correct positions, and then direct them out of the machine and to collect their luggage, or if necessary, more screening.
Floater	Officer who “floats” between positions, refilling stacks of bins, observing security, performing pat-downs when required.
Exit Monitor	Officer who sits where arriving passengers depart the terminal and monitors the exit to make sure that passengers do not double back and that no one sneaks into the terminal without screening
Behavior Detection Officer	Officer specially trained to observe behavior and emotional displays. Behavior Detection Officers observe the line and interactions, typically from the front of the security line near the TDC. These officers are trained to spot difference within crowds.

poor communication skills, lacking empathy, and “just doing a job.” When articulating their own work habits, some TSOs distanced themselves from Stereotypical TSO identities by comparing, for instance, their superior communication skills with the poor ones of “other” TSOs. Peter, who had worked as a TSO for two years after a lengthy career as a commercial pilot said, “In general, passengers are not rude to me because I’m not rude to them. I think that is the biggest difference between me and the rest of the TSOs. That’s 90% of the battle. I have a smile on my face. I treat them as I want to be treated. I treat them with respect.”

A number of TSOs I interacted with spoke with familiarity about TSA policies and goals, and seemed just as likely to identify with the TSA as not. These officers appeared to cultivate “worker” orientations to their jobs, meaning that being a TSO is “just a job” and important for the financial compensation versus pleasure or fulfillment as with a career or calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). TSO Jonathan explained why he wanted to be a TSO initially: “First and foremost, I needed a job. For money, I’ll be honest.” Likewise, Skeet discussed getting involved with the TSA in order to continue his Federal service after retiring from the military, and specifically to continue building towards his retirement.

When describing TSOs, many passengers included references to emotional performances or more explicitly, the *lack* of emotion and apparent inhumanity of TSOs in general. Rachel, a 28-year-old flier, described TSOs, taking into account their emotional performances and repetitive job duties:

OK, so I think of someone that is there to just do their job.... When I think of a TSA agent it’s someone that’s like hard. Like their exterior is hard... There’s only been like, a handful of people that have been more happy. It’s more of a like hard, more like emotionless, kind of robot because they’re always saying the same thing

over and over again, like “Can I see your ID or please roll your bags on the conveyor belt, take off your jacket, take off your shoes.” So it’s kind of like a robotic response to their workplace.

Similarly, Mac, a 22-year old flier, recounted interactions with TSOs, comparing them to experiences with restaurant workers who generally offer more reciprocation during conversations. Saying security is “50/50” as to whether TSOs will respond in conversation, Mac said, “You say ‘Hi, how’re you?’ They either don’t respond or they’ll respond and be nice, but it’s one thing to try to talk to TSA agents because they sometimes aren’t very human. They don’t have a personality or whatever.” Both Rachel and Mac described TSOs that they encountered and met during interpersonal interactions in security checkpoints over time. Their portrayals of TSOs as inhuman and devoid of emotion resonated throughout many passenger interviews and ethnographic interviews during fieldwork. The data suggested to me two main Stereotypical categories, what I label Stereotypical-Tyrannical and Stereotypical-Apathetic to differentiate between negative and more neutral characterizations.

**Stereotypical-Tyrannical TSO identities.** By far, the most outrageous portrayals of TSOs featured officers performing tyrannically, and with a despotic approach to the work environment. Carrie, a TSO from a large airport in the Midwest, described such coworkers as managing “fiefdoms” and exerting undue control over passengers and, if in positions of power, TSO subordinates. For example, Skeet, a TSO with five years of experience, discussed how he “messes with” people to alleviate his own boredom or punish passengers for inappropriate behavior, not unlike how correctional officers describe interacting with prisoners (Tracy, 2005). Skeet said:

I pass the time by joking around with people. And there are even other times where I have to take something away from somebody. Somebody will say something [rude]

and I'll pick up on it. . . . So I make it fun for myself. When somebody is extremely rude or gives me an attitude, I'll take my time.”

Although Skeet described that some passengers respond positively to being “messed with” or joked around with during security screenings, his descriptions of interactions with passengers held a punitive, callous edge.

In media portrayals, TSOs are often cast as thieving (Kreider & Chuchman, 2012), sexually deviant (CBS, 2011), brutish oafs. Most vilifications, including satirical skits from television shows *Saturday Night Live* or *South Park*, emphasize the sexualized aspects of the TSO job, portraying officers as ludicrously controlling, depraved, and concerned with illogical procedures. TSO Jonathan referenced an awareness of these representations, saying, “I do not like the public image we have. Contrary to the average person’s belief, we are not out to touch people. Believe it or not, we hate the pat-downs and bag checks as much as anyone else.” In conceiving of their own identities, TSOs navigated societal level conversations that often did not resonate with their own experiences at work, but certainly framed interactions with passengers. In fact, many TSOs I spoke with presumed that passengers gave the TSA a “bad rap,” believing in line with media portrayals.

Passengers described Stereotypical-Tyrannical TSO behaviors with disdain, including Bob, a frequent traveler who articulated his discomfort with the seemingly arbitrary power of TSOs. Bob discussed knowing “these people don’t want to be there. That one of them could just not like the looks of me and really make my life complicated in a bad way. . . . It’s a very unsettling situation.” With resignation, Bob depicted feeling constrained and that his only choice is to deal with the discomfort or not fly, which is not reasonable given his lifestyle. Dirk, a student pilot, derided TSOs saying, “Some of them couldn’t get a job at McDonald’s.” Comparing TSOs to security guards, Dirk continued, “Security guards are

generally people that really want to be in positions of authority and cannot pass the psychological interviews and cannot pass the intellectual exams or cannot pass the physical to actually become a law enforcement officer.” In these accounts and others, passengers depicted wariness about TSOs’ seemingly limitless but also unearned authority. Pivotal, and as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, passengers bring preconceptions—e.g., Bob’s wariness or Dirk’s derision—with them to the airport, and those feelings influence encounters with TSOs.

In observations, TSOs rarely lived up to the most outrageous or scathing media or passenger representations. Regardless, when enacting Stereotypical-Tyrannical characteristics, some officers came across as harsh and demanding as demonstrated in this fieldnote excerpt:

While waiting, I could feel the grumpiness reverberating from passengers as the line trudged forward. Divestiture Officers from either side shouted directives. These “reminders” came off as threats—“You WILL get a bag check if you don’t put your liquids and gels where we can see them.” “To avoid a bag check, you MUST bring out your liquids and gels.”

When TSOs acted abrasively, passengers usually responded by complying with demands, but showed displeasure nonverbally by rolling their eyes or muttering under their breath.

Although passengers were often careful to keep their negative emotions in check during interactions with TSOs, many complained immediately afterwards, including a woman in my fieldwork who snarled to her friend that the TSO who yelled at her was an “asshole.” A number of passengers described venting about these types of TSOs on social media including Sue who complained via Twitter about several “run-ins with the TSA.”

Stereotypical-Tyrannical TSO behaviors, although referenced often and highly criticized in

passengers interviews and media discourse, appeared infrequently in observations. However, despite the lack of representation in fieldwork, the specter of this type of TSO identity seemed to hang over most discussions of airport security. Far more common in my data was what I call the Stereotypical-Apathetic TSO identity.

**Stereotypical-Apathetic TSO identities.** Another variation of the Stereotypical TSO identity appeared within more disinterested identity performances, embodied by agents who described work as “doing jobs,” “paying rent,” and “putting food on the table.” Engendering some empathy from passengers who cannot fathom the monotony and ignominy of the work, TSOs appeared as stereotypically apathetic in passenger and media descriptions of TSOs as having low education and skills, and performing work mechanistically or robotically. Alice, a business traveler, portrayed people enacting Stereotypical-Apathetic TSO identities in the following manner:

You have these agents who probably aren't very well trained. They probably aren't getting paid very much. They probably don't necessarily believe in the mission of the TSA and are kind of just viewing it as a job. You hear stories all the time about TSA officers falling asleep while they're supposed to be on duty, of them letting people through that they're not supposed to let through, of them just not doing their job. . . . these are people that do this for a job and they don't really care.

When TSOs act impassively, bored, or uncaring, they not only fail to inspire the confidence of passengers and lose sympathy during indifferent interactions, they also reinforce discourses that position TSOs as lazy and uneducated. Despite appearances and the

discursive construction of indolence, TSOs receive extensive on the job training and are highly monitored by supervisors and peers to prevent slacking<sup>13</sup> off.

Often competent in tasks but not highly engaged, I observed officers acting apathetically toward passengers, completing required work with little interaction beyond the bare minimum necessary. This fieldnote excerpt demonstrates indifference in action:

During a pat-down, I asked the TSO: “Worked here long?” She replied, “Five years,” with a heavy sigh. When I inquired, taken aback, “How do you do it?!” almost automatically she said, “I’ve got bills to pay and children to feed.” At no point during our interaction, which extended to more than 10 minutes because of equipment calibration, did she smile or offer any communication beyond what was absolutely necessary, or beyond what I initiated.

In this example, the TSO responded to my expression of surprise by drawing upon working class macro discourses of “putting food on the table” to rationalize her “dirty work,” which refers to jobs that are perceived as physically, socially, or morally tainted, degrading, or disgusting (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Completing that job adequately did not involve performing emotional labor to engage with me, the inquisitive passenger whose surprise insinuated something about her work environment that would make it seem unusual, perhaps, for her to be a long-term employee.

Officers embodying Stereotypical-Apathetic TSO identities tended to defer to “the rules” and figures of authority rather than use discretion to assist passengers. TSO Roger described how he enforces but does not question rules, saying, “There are a lot of policies

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<sup>13</sup> Passengers often complain about the glut of TSOs who seem to be standing around doing nothing. TSO Jeff insisted that everyone in the checkpoint is working at all times: “It may look like they’re standing there not doing a damn thing. . . . That’s what I thought, too, when I was flying. You’ve got a lot of people just standing around, but really, they are standing around, but they’re not. They’re looking at people, they’re assessing what each individual is doing, why they’re doing it, how they’re doing it. Yeah, there’s a lot going on that people don’t see.”

that we do that sometimes we don't agree with, but we can't afford not to follow it because it's our job. We are there to enforce it, not question it or anything else." In keeping with the view of Stereotypical TSO work as "just a job," Roger positioned "the rules" as sacrosanct and untouchable when in fact, as demonstrated by the historical narrative in Chapter Four, the rules change all the time, in part, based upon questioning and critiquing. If Roger and other TSOs of his ilk felt confident or empowered to question practices they do not support without fear of retribution, perhaps rules could be adjusted more readily and make the workplace function better in advance of passenger and media complaints.

With surprising candor, some officers reflected awareness of macro, meso, and micro level discourses about TSOs and the TSA. For instance, a TSO I met during fieldwork in Northern California admitted "I know people hate us" but limited his reasoning about that negativity to the confiscation of contraband. This TSO's talk showed an acknowledgment of macro-level conversations about the TSA that emerged in micro-level interactions with passengers, but he did not consider the broader discourses associated with confiscation of property, for instance, civil rights. Other TSOs acknowledged meso- and micro-level discourses mirrored in communication with coworkers. Framing her work as "just a job," Cat, a TSO from a large metropolitan airport who left a casino position to work for the TSA because the pay and benefits would be better, said:

I enjoy it because you see people from everywhere. I like that you do different things all day. . . . The part about 'doing your part,' some people are real patriotic about the job. Honestly, I don't think I'm that patriotic about it. I don't look at it like, 'my country needs me.'

Cat contrasted her low-key conception of her "just a job" with meso-level ideas about what it means to be a TSO (e.g. a patriot) which emerged in interpersonal interactions with



coworkers. Expecting hatred from passengers and zealotry from co-workers might position people who embrace Stereotypical-Apathetic identities at odds with others in their work environment, especially those who are most different such as Ideal TSO identities which I describe next.

### **Ideal TSO Identities—“Patriots,” “Professionals,” “Protectors,” “Career Climbers”**

Virtually unrepresented in popular culture and passenger interview data, a select group of agents enacted idealized TSO identities in line with prescriptions from organizational training and inculcation. Officers performing what I am labeling as “Ideal” TSO identities demonstrated clear organizational identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), integrating into their conception of self both their role as a TSO and status as a member of the TSA. Following Wieland (2010), I suggest that “a focus on ideal selves draws attention to the social pressures involved in identity construction and considers how identity workers maintain and repair their identities so that they align with these ideals” (p. 512). Officers in this category sometimes likened work in airport security to patriotism and a higher calling. For instance, in this chapter’s opening quotations, Jonathan describes himself as being a “protector” and in other comments, that his work involves service to his country.

Ideal TSO identities involve demonstrating precision and expertise in work, maintaining strict vigilance and situational awareness, projecting an authoritative presence, and staying “calm, cool, and collected” under pressure. TSOs in this category appeared highly trained and completed tasks with dignity. Most talked about the TSA as a career, versus a job, even if they envisioned TSO work as a stepping stone to other roles within the organization or Federal service. Within the “Ideal” category, I delineate a range between those who perform TSO duties with enthusiasm (i.e., Zealots), and those who bring a punitive edge to the position (i.e., Disciplinarians).

**Ideal-Zealot TSO identities.** Embodying TSA ideals in the extreme, the notion that agents should act with zeal emerged firmly within TSA training rhetoric. Identifying as “patriots” on a “mission,” officers drew on discourses of nationalism, “serving one’s country,” and the TSA’s early but still often used catch phrase “Not on my watch.” The latter expression refers to not allowing another 9/11-style terrorist attack. Linking to these discourses, several TSOs I spoke with described initially joining the TSA with hopes of progressing into law enforcement or higher echelons of security.

Passengers and TSOs described disparate perspectives of TSOs who embraced work as a mission or patriotic duty. For example, TSO Carrie said:

I come home every night with the feeling that I know I did my job, that I am not just doing it for a paycheck. That I’m there because I truly want to do something to help my country and this is a way I feel I can help my country—by being a Transportation Security Officer and doing the best job that I can.

Carrie spoke passionately about her former care giving roles and how she brings that nurturing orientation to work at the airport, along with a fastidious approach to the rules. Passengers, however, did not seem completely appreciative of this perspective. Mac complained about TSOs, “They’re taking their jobs too seriously. That’s a good description. They take their job way too seriously. I know it’s a serious matter if there’s a terrorist in the airport, but how often does that happen? Come on.” Indeed, in 12 years of existence, the TSA has yet to catch a terrorist in the airport (Schneier, 2012). As virtually no passenger interview data or observations framed TSO identities with regard to patriotic service or mission, it seems that these specific meso-level organizational constructions are unrecognized, even challenged by passengers which can lead to tension during interactions as will be discussed more in Chapter Six.

In some instances, personifying Ideal-Zealot identities involves personalizing job duties and demonstrating organizational identification. “Carol,” a TSO I encountered on a number of occasions, tailored aspects of her work, taking time to tell passengers gate locations while checking tickets, and describing parts of a pat-down as a game of “hokey pokey.” Carol and others who manifested zealotry enacted policies with precision but also ownership. Similarly, some of these TSOs also use discretion when enacting rules—helping passengers deposit belongings into bins for scanning, not re-screening bags containing innocuous identifiable liquids/gels. However, discretion typically manifested for the purpose of achieving another organizational goal such as making the lines go faster rather than specifically being helpful for passengers. Indeed, TSOs embodying Ideal-Zealot identities displayed organizational and group identification, as evidenced by the use of “we” and prioritizing organizational rules and goals, such as when Divestiture Officers frequently proclaim, “*We* need you to remove all liquids and gels from your bags.” Such demonstrated identification puts a clear demarcation between “we” TSA officers and “you” passengers which can reinforce identity positions for both groups.

Officers exhibiting Ideal-Zealot behavior often prioritized security above all else—clinging to and enacting ideals. I spoke with a young TSO in a large Los Angeles airport during his lunch break. “It’s important to get people through quickly, but ultimately it’s about security,” he said, explaining that he tries to get people through as fast as he can, “But if it takes 10 minutes to check a bag, it takes 10 minutes to check a bag.” He emphasized that it is critical to be thorough when searching baggage and implied significant potential consequences, both moral and material, for shoddy work. Enacting organizational ideals is wrought with potential conflict, however. Take, for instance, the tension between the ideals of efficiency and thoroughness. Both meso-level discourses, TSOs must decide which one

takes priority—thoroughness that equates with safety, or efficiency that equates with customer/managerial<sup>14</sup> satisfaction (or at least lack of confrontation/complaint).

Discursive tensions may present TSOs with paradoxes to navigate as they try to determine which discourse is most important to satisfy at any given time. However, hanging on to broader ideals of work as mission and service can help officers make sense of and manage cognitive dissonance related to paradox (Benefiel, 2005). Then again, emphasizing mission can mask important tensions that plague agents who highly identify with their workplace. For example, correctional officers who strongly identified with their work environment and viewed it as central to their identities experienced more confusion and frustration as compared to officers who did not (Tracy, 2005). Likewise, most TSOs that I interviewed seemed irritated by “red tape” and bureaucracy that they felt interfered with their work. However, some officers who described enacting Ideal-Zealot behaviors, including Carrie and Rick, managed these tensions by continually referring back to the broader goals and mission of TSA, and discourses of “safety” and “security.” A factor in officers’ ability to manage paradox may lie in the differences between holding a “career” and “calling” orientation to work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Conceptualizing work in terms of mission and service indicates that some TSOs view their employment as a “calling” which emphasizes a sense of fulfillment from work. Unlike Tracy’s (2005) correctional officer “lifers,” some of whom managed frustrations with workplace bureaucracy by breaking policy (p. 277), TSOs appear able to transcend paradoxes by keeping focus on the superordinate goals/macro discourses of their work such

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<sup>14</sup> Although not a specific focus of my work, I interviewed a flight attendant and an air captain-turned-TSO to understand the airlines’ relationships to the TSA. Even though smooth and efficient security is important to the airlines, the onus to get to flights on time is laid entirely upon passengers who are consistently warned in airline rhetoric to get to the airport at least an hour or two in advance of their flights to have enough time for security. That said, many TSO interviewees described feeling pressures from management to speed passengers through lines to avoid complaints.

as keeping the public safe and preventing “another 9/11.” Those who get mired in the meso-level practices of efficiency vs. security, however, can choose to enact a different type of identity position e.g., a “Stereotypical TSO” identity with a “job” orientation that is not as intricately bound with personal conceptions of identity.

It may also be that shifts in “job” or “calling” orientations indicate changes in organizational identifications. In my data, some TSOs with Ideal-Zealot characteristics who otherwise suggested that their work was about “giving back” and “serving their country,” also discussed frustrations with job politics in markedly jaded tones. For instance, TSO/Behavior Detection Officer Steve ruminated about being passed over for several promotions and advancement opportunities:

Am I going to do my job? Absolutely. I signed and I’m under oath of protecting and defending the elements of the constitution. So I am not going to back down as a government employee. I’m not going to be a shitbird employee. . . . The shitbird person is the person that doesn’t give a rat’s rear end but isn’t going to do their job. Although Steve, a 10-year veteran of the TSA, started the interview espousing meso-level ideals, as he spoke about paradoxes in his work, he seemed more apathetic and less in tune with the TSA as an organization. In fact, Steve insinuated he might even need to “get out of government” work to clear the “sour taste” in his mouth. Changes in work framing over time may demonstrate shifts from positive organizational identification to ambivalent identification, disidentification, or de-identification (Pratt, 2000).

As with managing paradox, enacting ideals can be difficult for TSOs and impactful to relationships with passengers and coworkers. This fieldnote excerpt illustrates some of the pressures that TSOs face at work:

The 20-something TSO working the walk-through x-ray machine reminds me of a dark-haired Ken doll—6-feet tall, short dark hair, clear skin, warm eyes. He smiles vaguely as I approach the advanced imaging line. When I ask to opt-out, Ken surprises me by belting into his walkie-talkie “FEMALE OPT OUT ON BAKER. FEMALE OPT-OUT ON BAKER!” He over-enunciates the words in a way that reminds me of a talk-show announcer. Within moments, a young female TSO appears and taps him on the shoulder from behind. Tapping must be protocol of some sort as I see it frequently and hear references to people being “tapped in” and “tapped out” of position. Despite being addressed, Ken does not turn or take his eyes off the crowd in front of him. He maintains constant vigilance.

“Ken” demonstrated an exacting, if not embellished performance of professionalism, which mirrored meso-level organizational training that demands constant situational awareness and precision. However, by maintaining strict focus on the scene—indeed refusing to look backwards at his coworker—he misses opportunities to connect with passengers and coworkers as he otherwise might. Such missed connections can make work less enjoyable and also reinforce “us/them” status differences between passengers and TSOs, as well as among different “types” of TSOs.

**Ideal-Disciplinarian TSO identities.** Embodying similar characteristics as the Ideal-Zealot identities in terms of organizational identification and prioritization of organizational goals, what I call Ideal-Disciplinarian TSO identities include a more punitive edge, with TSOs taking vigilance to paranoia, and exacting the letter of the law instead of the spirit. When discussing security procedures, Neece, a TSO from a large international airport, framed TSA rules as superseding the tenets of constitutional freedom. Neece stated, “I feel like civil liberty goes out the door when it comes to security. If they want to go the route of

the airlines they're going to comply with what's explained or they need to get a train, a bus<sup>15</sup>, drive, or stay home.” In many ways, these TSOs demonstrated an extreme acceptance of organizational policies without questioning. Such a black and white approach to TSA practices contributes to friction with passengers.

The idea that TSOs should enact Ideal-Disciplinarian characteristics emerged primarily from meso and macro-level discourses. For instance, TSOs drew heavily upon meso-level organizational training and policy, prioritizing internal “Standard Operating Procedures” and published policies as they interacted with coworkers and passengers. At the same time, they chose certain macro-level discourses to prioritize, presumably at the risk of alienating others. For instance, TSO Neece placed “security” above the ideals of “freedom” and “liberty” in her depictions of security procedures. Likewise, TSO Carrie said she did not agree with the over-75/under-12 shoe policy because “over-75s have nothing to live for” and parents can take advantage of children by using them to smuggle contraband. Carrie extended her thoughts about safety to the extreme, exhibiting paranoia as she argued for the acceptability of some policies.

Despite feeling some of the same malaise associated with Stereotypical TSO identities, especially when passengers make mistakes or act rudely which quite a few TSOs described as “irritating,” acting as a Disciplinarian means upholding the rules fastidiously. For example, instead of “punishing” a rude passenger by taking a longer time to conduct a screening or unnecessarily repeating a procedure, as Skeet mentioned, officers follow the Standard Operating Procedure above reproach. That said, officers portraying a Ideal-Disciplinarian persona often *avoid* using discretion to help passengers sometimes at the

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<sup>15</sup> Intriguingly, the TSA’s VIPR program (Visible Intermodel Prevention and Response) which positions the TSA as expanding their role to all transportation systems, would include screenings for bus and trains as well (Elliott, 2013; TSA, 2013).

expense of organizational goals. For instance “Alexa,” a TSO at a major airport in California, described her interaction with a man who did not want to take off his shoes and tried to invoke the TSA’s 2012 rule that certain passengers do not have to remove footwear when going through security checkpoints. Backing up the line, the passenger at first refused to take off his shoes or go through the scanner. When Alexa informed him that the rule was meant for people 75 years and older and that he did not meet the age criteria, she recalled, “He completely snapped. He took his shoes off and then he started to get mean. He, he started getting mad.”

In reflecting on the incident, where the passenger actually had a medical condition and would likely have been granted an exemption had he explained early on, Alexa insisted that she “has” to be “a little tough sometimes with the passengers, and I don’t like to be... This is partly my home. This is where I’m at, my rule, my regulation. It’s not *my* rules, but I’m here to implement them.” Alexa enforced and took ownership for the rules and her work environment. As the passenger acted more and more erratic, she enacted the rules with even more sternness. Unlike Carol and others who personalized and customized the enactment of rules, Alexa seemed to internalize them even while suggesting they are not *hers*, per se. One result of enforcing the letter of the law and deferring to “the rules” is that it puts distance between TSOs and their actions—i.e., “It’s not *me* doing this, it’s *the rules*.” While these thoughts may help TSOs to deal with aspects of the work they find displeasing, it also in some ways releases personal accountability for the ways they treat passengers.

### **Mindful TSO Identities—“Humans,” “Helpers,” and “Service Professionals”**

Contrasting greatly with the aforementioned identities, glimmers of the most rare TSO identity surfaced in interviews with passengers, and more frequently in fieldnotes and interviews with TSOs. A surprising subject position was what I call “Mindful,” meaning that



TSOs seemed aware of and able to resist some dominant discourses in the security context, namely discourses of authority and strict emotion management as TSO Roger describes below. Instead, TSOs enacting a Mindful persona “transgressed,” most often emotionally, in order to make travel easier for passengers and work better for their fellow employees.

TSOs appeared Mindful when they conceptualized their work as helpful and service-oriented, and maintained friendly, engaging, and supportive relations with passengers. For instance, one TSO greeted me prior to a pat-down by saying, “Hi love, what’s your name? I’m Andrea [pseudonym], I’m going to be taking care of you tonight.” Importantly, as TSOs demonstrated affirmative emotions and customer service, they also appeared well-trained and professional, often using discretion to help passengers but without compromising security. Unlike other TSOs who might use discretion to speed up lines, a Mindful approach would be to help because “it’s the right thing to do.” Mindful TSO identities involve infusing work with humor and humility, while still accomplishing the job well. TSOs might also draw on discourses of service and mission but in less militaristic/patriotic ways than their Ideal-Zealot counterparts.

Portraying Mindful TSO identities involves recognizing negative discourses about the TSA and in many ways, working to counteract them. For instance, Carrie acknowledged attitudes about what it means to be a TSO:

There’s a lot of negativity out there about it [being a TSO] but if you came to my airport and you met me and you didn’t know me, you would be so surprised at how great of a person a TSO can be. We don’t have to be nasty or rude to be professional. You can be professional and still do your job and be nice.

In her comments, Carrie reacted to negativity from the general public and meso-level organizational discourses from training which were enforced by managers who want officers

to maintain assertive/aggressive, militaristic demeanors. In fact, TSO Roger lamented training that requires him to reflect a “commanding presence” and how the emotional rule affects both him and passengers:

When they [passengers] get stressed out, they make mistakes. Not through their own fault, it’s because the way they see things. . . . eventually they do something wrong because of fear. It can be avoided if you have more friendlier, I wouldn’t say really friendly, but approachable presence than a commanding presence. I know they [the TSA] try to implement commanding presence in everybody because we are in charge of security. But, like I said, we are also people. Being commanding sucks.

As one of the few officers I had the opportunity to both interview and observe, Roger consistently resisted the requirement for TSOs to have a commanding presence. Instead, with a soft-spoken and helpful demeanor, he employed humor and kindness in his work. Importantly, it seems that empathy, kindness, and humor are not mutually exclusive with security goals, but instead reinforce the value of communicating *with* passengers instead of *at* them.

Underscoring positive communication, Ty, a TSO at a small airport in the Southwest, described how he interacts with passengers. Ty said, “I’m a people person. I’m friendly to people. I can get them to lighten up. Like I say, every day, I hear at least one to 10 people say, ‘We wish we could have it like this everywhere.’” Admitting that it is often easier to be friendly and engaged with passengers in such a small setting—his rural airport serves less than 50 people per day—he said he responds to passengers<sup>16</sup> who compliment his service by saying, “Well, I’m glad that we were able to make you feel better.’ At least they

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<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, during interviews, passengers talked about service sometimes being worse at smaller regional airports where TSOs “take themselves too seriously.”

know that there are places where they don't have to feel like a cow." By "cow," Ty explained the stereotype that passengers describe feeling like cattle getting herded through security. Instead, he offers more personalized and courteous interactions. In an analysis of "workplace selves," Collinson (2003) described "Resistant Selves" as identities employees use to express dissatisfaction with workplace policies. Resistant Selves use strategies including satire, irony, and whistleblowing (p. 539) to express discontent. Collinson's conception of "resistance" is entirely pessimistic (at least in terms of employees' feelings towards their organization). I suggest that people embodying Mindful characteristics and who transgress against emotional norms use affirmative emotional displays and behaviors that serve as "protest" against dominant discourses but also allow organizational members to still identify with their workplace.

Some TSOs, like Carrie, Roger, and Ty, described care-full approaches to work. In fact, TSO Roger explained how by being friendly to passengers, they will "know that we care about [them]." When asked to explain the "we" in that statement, Roger stated,

Us, the company, TSA, we're all people. We're not robots that just do our jobs and don't care about the passengers. We do care. We care so much that is why we are there for them, to make sure that they are safe when going through the checkpoint and traveling in the air.

In observations, Roger made a point to go out of his way to help passengers, joking, helping with luggage, trying to get them to smile during security processes. Roger described these actions as demonstrating the care that he and his organization feel. While not all TSOs would depict their role as caregivers, some identity positions allow TSOs to demonstrate care about passengers and coworkers as fellow human beings worth respect and civility.

## Summary

In their daily work, TSO identities are constructed and shaped by multiple discourses. Observation and interview data suggest that TSOs perform three main types of identities at work—those that conform to discourses of “Stereotypical” TSO identities, those that uphold discourses of the “Ideal,” and those that are “Mindful” of discourses about what it means to be a TSO. As demonstrated and will continued to be discussed throughout this analysis, TSOs can perform more than one TSO identity, merging categories or combining performances depending upon audience or situation. How a TSO performs sometimes relies on the identity performances of passengers which I describe in the next section.

### Passenger Identity Positions

As mentioned previously, nearly two million people fly commercially in the U.S. every day (TSA, 2010). Approximately half of the U.S. population will fly in a given year, on average, less than two round trips each (Jones, 2007; U.S. Travel Association, 2013). Given these statistics, it is safe to say that flying is not a frequent activity for most people. In part as a result of infrequency, flying tends to be an emotional experience for passengers, fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. In preliminary work, I focused on the emotional experience of travel and what it feels like to be an airline passenger (Malvini Redden, 2013). Participants described primarily negative feelings about airport security and demonstrated a unique type of emotion management during mandatory interactions in security checkpoints, what I call “emotional taxes.” Similar to emotional labor, which is accomplishing work by performing organizationally-mandated emotion rules in exchange for a wage (Hochschild, 1983), emotional taxes liken the emotions “paid” during mandatory interactions to financial taxes. Unlike TSOs, for whom the emotional rules are explicit, passengers are left to intuit

appropriate emotional norms through experience and via various levels of discourse. For people who fly often and who have been able to learn the environment, the emotional tax may equate to a small bridge toll, an insignificant nuisance. However, infrequent passengers, for whom the experience of flying can constitute a sensemaking event, may be required to “pay” a heftier emotional fee.

During subsequent interviews, I asked passengers what the “perfect” traveler was like, and how “perfect” they would consider themselves. In answering these questions and reflecting about the other travelers around them, passengers depicted identity positions that corresponded with the Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful TSO identity constructions mentioned above. TSOs also spoke of passenger behavior throughout their interviews, overwhelmingly discussing passengers who “check their brains with their baggage” as aviation security specialist Greg described, or those with whom interactions were particularly engaging, emotional, or upsetting. Popular culture and mass media portray the flying public in a variety of lights by reporting on consumer frustrations regarding new technologies and procedures, and outrageous airport stories caused either by passengers or individual TSOs.

### **Stereotypical Passenger Identities: “Idiots,” “Newbies,” “Rule-Followers,” “Jerks”**

During interviews, both TSOs and travelers depicted “typical passengers,” describing them as often nervous, disorganized, unprepared, and emotional. TSOs especially generalized broadly, constructing images of passengers as those who do not fly frequently and if they do, seem to find the process of security nerve wracking. From these generalizations that typecast passengers as a broad reference group but do not seem to necessarily represent the “average” flier in the airport, I constructed the category of Stereotypical Passenger identities. In my observations, travelers embodying Stereotypical Passenger identities moved slowly, seemed oblivious to their surroundings, and took up

extra time by making mistakes in the process. Fellow travelers, while not always kind in their representations of passengers who have a tendency to slow down lines, seemed likely to attribute nerves and mistakes to inexperience. In contrast, TSOs described these people as “stupid” and lacking in common sense for not listening to TSO directives, neglecting to read up on policies, and also “checking their brain at the curb,” as TSO Alexa described. Pilot-turned-TSO Peter concurred, that at the airport, “People just don’t think.” From participants’ descriptions and my observations, I delineated two major categories of “stereotypical” passenger identities, the Inexperienced and the Hostile.

**Stereotypical-Inexperienced passenger identities.** Prevalent in the airport, according to TSOs, are inexperienced passengers who fumble through security processes, exuding nervous energy, while lacking common sense. Indeed, some passengers are notorious to TSOs for being unfamiliar with TSA rules and in particular, making mistakes. A fieldnote exemplar demonstrates behaviors in line with Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities in the extreme:

As I step off the tram, a woman cuts me off, running towards security. A frisson of energy surrounds her as she drags clog-slipper shod feet into line. Her breath comes in ragged gasps as she gulps an icy bottle of Smart Water, the condensation a clue of recent purchase. Her eyes dart from side to side as she joins her husband in line.

“Suzanne” spits orders at her husband as she rearranges herself in line.

Poring through a Betsey Johnson travel bag in leopard and pink, she pulls out an iPad with Louis Vuitton case, a small can of hairspray and a lotion. She shoves the iPad towards him, and asks him to retrieve her boarding pass. Periodically, she inquires if he thinks they are going to “make it” through, and he remarks that he’s

glad they chose this line since it is shorter. They have no idea that it is a special frequent flier lane, and neither do the TSA agents inform them.

No less than four times, Suzanne asks questions of the TSOs nearest us— Are these liquids and gels okay? (A blank-faced woman replies: “If they are less than 3.4 ounces”) Does my iPad need to come out? (A stony-faced 30-something man says: “No.”) Before they reach the ID checker, a male TSO walking along the line remarks, “You can’t take that” in reference to the Smart Water. Suzanne blurts, “I know, we’re drinking it” before taking another giant gulp.

The nervous energy buzzing off Suzanne is almost comical. Her small blue eyes, painted in shimmery pink with blue mascara, stretch wide as she blinks left and then right. She bounces and hops to see around, as if that will make the line go faster. Her husband must have told her to calm down because she says something about trying to relax since she can’t make the line move faster anyway. When he walks 10 steps left to toss the Smart Water, Suzanne doesn’t realize where he went and screams (yes, screams) “RONNY!! RONNY WHERE ARE YOU?!” as if they are lost in the wilderness. Before I can respond, a TSO tells her he went to throw the water away. Suzanne heaves her ample chest as if her heart might thump out of it at any second. When Suzanne, covered in brightly colored tattoos across her arms, neck, hands, and chest, speaks to the TSOs, it is with deference, in a small, quiet voice. I watch her long, hot pink wave of hair swing as she walks into line.

In this example, two passengers demonstrate the ultimate in Stereotypical-Inexperienced traveling. Running late, they seem unprepared for security, extraordinarily nervous, and terrified of TSOs. Passengers this inexpert seem to manage their emotions in a taxing manner such as by suppressing negative emotion (Gross, 2002) in order to “get through.”

Some Stereotypical-Inexperienced passenger actions appear to be shaped by macro discourses like authority and compliance such as “following the rules” and “not questioning authority.” These discourses are reinforced by “commanding” TSOs who enact meso-level organizational policies. Although an extreme example, Suzanne and Ronny’s behavior exemplifies how passengers demonstrating Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities seem bent on controlling emotions and especially doing things “right.” Even as the rules and rule-enforcers seem to intimidate them, Suzanne and Ronny tried to get through the screening by doing everything correctly, asking questions to make sure they conformed to expectations. During these interactions, the procedures themselves were accepted unquestioningly.

TSOs refer to passengers demonstrating Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities in demeaning ways, rolling their eyes when they talk about passengers’ stupid and yet amusing behavior. TSO Peter described a passenger who tried to bring a wooden scale model of a broadsword through a checkpoint. Peter mocked the passenger, mimicking him: ““You mean I can’t take this through the checkpoint?” No! That’s a 5-foot long broadsword!” Peter laughed, demonstrating a certain appreciation of passenger bumbling, admitting, “If they [passengers] didn’t shut their brains off, we wouldn’t be entertained!” Other more seasoned travelers recognized and in some cases ridiculed inexperienced passengers as well, making fun of those who seem nervous or anxious about the security process. For instance, passenger Mac asked rhetorically, “What’s the big deal?” As passengers and TSOs derided and distanced themselves from Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities, they often reinforced their own more expert identities.

**Stereotypical-Hostile passenger identities.** Whereas passengers exemplifying Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities come across as almost child-like in their behaviors and depictions by others, passengers demonstrating what I call Stereotypical-Hostile Passenger



identities act more aggressively and in some cases egregiously especially when interacting with TSOs. Portraying Stereotypical-Hostile identities involves passengers reacting to the stress of the security environment and especially, becoming triggered by the actions of TSOs, particularly in regard to the confiscation of property. Nate, a passenger, described how passengers demonstrating hostility react nonverbally in security: “The [TSO] will be like, ‘You’ll need to remove your belt, sir.’ They’ll sigh, shuffle over, and they’ll slap it on the thing and then walk back, rolling their eyes or slamming their suitcase down on the conveyor belt.” While Stereotypical-Inexperienced identities involve emotion management processes that can “leak” emotions like anxiety or fear, Stereotypical-Hostile identity performances allow passenger to communicate irritation and anger clearly, although not always directly.

Some passengers stand out to TSOs and other travelers for their antagonistic behavior and reactions to organizational policy. For officers, people exhibiting Stereotypical-Hostile identity performances tend to be the subject of memorable stories. For instance, TSO Jeff described rude passengers who often react to having their belongings confiscated:

They will call you... anything from fuckers to assholes to, um, I don’t even know...all kinds of stuff. They’ll just blabber something off to you. . . . I’m trying to think of the worst thing someone’s said to me. This was awhile ago. . . . It was over some cologne or something. . . . They said it was too bad that my mom didn’t abort me when she had a chance. She must be really pissed off about that today, because of what I do for a job. . . . It’s amazing what people will say to you, which they would never say at someone in the grocery store or anything like that. It’s not a normal thing to say to someone, but they will say it to you, because you work for the government. You’re a TSA agent.

I felt shock at Jeff's casual reference to a passenger suggesting his mother would prefer that he be aborted than work for the TSA, but Jeff seemed unfazed, telling me that dealing with that type of behavior is just part of the job. Likewise, Amber, a TSO in the Southwest, described passengers who just the day before had called her a "Nazi" and claimed she "assaulted" their daughter by giving her a pat-down. Unlike travelers (and interviewers) who find hostile behaviors somewhat shocking, most TSOs I spoke with referenced antagonism as par for the course and routine enough to be ignored or at least compartmentalized. That some passengers attack TSOs personally for enacting organizational rules suggests that when TSOs embody meso-level discourses, it may lead passengers to view and treat them as not human, but an extension of their workplace, presumably without feelings.

Passenger outbursts often stem from travelers not being familiar with organizational policies and arriving at the airport unprepared. By reacting so negatively, passengers respond to and reinforce macro-level discourses that position airport security as a hostile, conflict-ridden space when in fact these extreme examples occurred infrequently in my observations and interviews with other passengers. Although uncommon in observations, every TSO I spoke with had myriad "passenger stories" about irate or outrageous travelers. Fewer described specific stories about interactions with the other large group of passengers, those who I describe as enacting Ideal Passenger identities.

### **Ideal Passenger Identities: "Lemmings," "Non-Entities," "Sheeple"**

Intriguingly, passengers and TSOs constructed the same picture of the "ideal" or "perfect" traveler. As perfect travelers were described as those who fly most and arrive at the airport prepared, organized, and familiar with rules, I describe them as performing Ideal passenger identities which reflects constructions of expertise. When going through screenings, passengers demonstrating Ideal identities listen, comply with directions, do not

question what is going on, and complete tasks without expressed emotion. In short, the travelers enacting Ideal behavior perform as docile bodies (Foucault, 1979) who do not give trouble to the TSOs or fellow passengers, and recognize the roles they must play in order to make security successful.

From a TSO perspective, compliant passengers come across as unremarkable. As Rick, a TSO manager from the Midwest, described, these types of passengers are easily forgotten because they do not stand out, cause a scene, or do anything to be remembered. Many business travelers fit into the Ideal category because the process of travel becomes routine after a while. Casual traveler Rachel described the ideal traveler, saying:

A perfect traveler I suppose would just have everything in line, ready, organized to go. Whether that's checking your bag, being ready to go and have everything in order. Your I.D., your luggage ready to put up on the cart to. . . It's sad to say this, but like doing what you're supposed to do in line. Being ready to go at your gate, knowing where you're going, getting in your seat right away at the airplane without holding people up.

When asked to reflect about whether or not she considered herself a perfect traveler, Rachel initially said yes, saying that she was familiar enough with travel and considered herself a "rule follower." However, after giving the identity position some thought, Rachel seemed upset by the realization that she conformed to the rules unquestioningly and would not, for example, display negative emotions for fear of getting in trouble or stand up for another traveler who was being hassled. Poignantly, Rachel said, "That's not the person that I strive to be..." and indicated she would be giving the matter a lot of thought after our interview concluded. Indeed, Rachel contacted me later and described how upsetting she found the idea that she conformed to the ideal.

Passengers who demonstrated Ideal characteristics seemed to draw upon macro discourses of authority and compliance, enacting lifetime social norms of rule following and deferring to authority. As these passengers interact with TSOs—even though they do not demonstrate emotion outwardly—they may be feeling emotions at odds with their controlled countenance. In fact, most interviewees described feeling uncomfortable expressing emotion in security settings. As a result, passengers demonstrating Ideal behaviors likely engage in emotional suppression (Gross, 2002) which can have significant consequences for interaction including passengers feeling increased negative emotions and labor in managing how they express their feelings (Malvini Redden, 2013).

### **Mindful Passenger Identities: “Trouble Makers,” “Freedom Fighters,” “Stand Outs,” “Empathizers”**

Infrequently, passengers demonstrated identities that resisted norms in the security context and discourses about security that construct passengers as either unprepared emotional wrecks or unthinking automatons. I describe these identity constructions as “Mindful” to reflect an awareness of the airport’s discursive context and willingness to push against certain social norms. Prepared and familiar with organizational rules, these passengers performing what I call Mindful identities demonstrated “resistance” in two primary ways—by being militant about civil rights and critical of the TSA, and also by demonstrating empathy.

**Mindful-Militant passenger identities.** When I examined the data for passengers who seemed mindful in their identity performances, the most frequent examples included people who demonstrated concern for civil rights and protest which more closely aligns with typical notions of resistance in organizational settings (e.g., Collinson, 2003). Passengers expressing what I describe as Mindful-Militant identities demonstrated knowledge of policy

and security procedures, showed up prepared, and were not afraid to stand up for their beliefs. Most likely to “opt out” of advanced imaging and receive pat-downs, these passengers often described opting out as a political stance and made efforts to develop solidarity with other opt-outers. In the extreme, some passengers set up TSOs in situations designed to make them look bad and recording supposed improper actions (e.g., Zay, 2011).

Some passengers with Mindful-Militant sensitivities discussed feeling highly critical of the TSA and macro and meso discourses that promote security and compliance. These critical stances influenced how passengers communicated with TSOs. A frequent flier with extreme skepticism towards the TSA, Dirk described how he interacts with TSOs by being prepared, direct, and calm:

I'm ready for them. When they come up I try not to offend them or humiliate them.... Usually, I very clearly and very plainly, [say], 'scanner, no thank you. I don't think so.' I'm not aggressive, but I don't act wishy washy. They have a job to do whether or not they like me. I try not to take it as a personal affront to the people that are there. . . . I try to jump through the hoops as much as I can to make life easy. Really I try not to make the situation more aggressive or uncomfortable than it needs to be.

With more forethought than many of the passenger participants I spoke with, Dirk described his discomfort with the mission and goals of the TSA, and how he feels tension between his goals of travel and his desire to “take a stand” for his rights. Despite deep convictions about what he described as the irrationality of TSA policies, Dirk also recognized that the frontline TSOs were not to blame for the creation of said policies. Instead, he resisted dominant discourses framing TSOs as inhuman and instead treated them civilly, albeit firmly when it came to asking for alternative screening. Other passengers of this

sort including LeRoy, who grew up flying around the country with his salesman father, described actively avoiding flying whenever possible thanks to “TSA drones.”

In some instances, passengers communicated discontent with the TSA by actively expressing resistance. During our interview, passenger Sue described how she disagrees with TSA policies and always has “run-ins” with TSOs:

Each time I have been fairly accommodating, but I really felt when they implemented the scanners, the full body image scanners, that I just, I thought they just crossed a line. I thought everything had been irrational to begin with like the whole liquid thing. I honestly believe, and I have read studies that show that if somebody wants to get something past TSA, they’re going to regardless of these ridiculous measures that they do.

Sue went on to share a story about the last time she went through the advanced imaging machine. When inside, as she held her hands over her head, Sue flipped off the camera. Although she successfully completed the screening as she had several times previously, she was detained for further examination which involved having an advanced pat-down in private. This interaction may be an example of resistance being punished as when passengers who “mouth off” get punished by having screenings repeated or last longer than they might normally. Although the connection between the private enhanced pat-down and Sue flipping the bird might be coincidental, Sue spoke of their correlation and told of complaining vigorously to everyone who would listen via social media. However, despite being a self-described advocate for social justice issues, Sue did not think to formally complain on her own behalf.

Mindful Militant behavior—beyond negative nonverbal reactions and opting out of screenings—was rare in my observations. Much more frequent were passengers who

described *feeling* resistant, but *acting* in line with the Ideal. For instance, Bob, described eloquently how he disagreed with TSA policies and the repercussions for individual civil liberties. However, he still did not opt out of screenings, express emotion, or question protocol for fear of being singled out and punished. As with Mindful TSO identities, the Mindful-Militant passenger was not an identity position that emerged frequently in the data or within popular portrayals of airport security or passengers. Furthermore, during interviews and social media discussions, TSOs seemed apt to deride passengers who “take a stand” either by opting out or complaining. For instance, in a LinkedIn discussion, TSOs debated whether or not passenger behavior had improved since the removal of backscatter scanners in January 2013. When some TSOs lamented that passengers were “still” opting-out, others made fun of passengers for their obvious lack of understanding about security protocol and technologies. Moreover, TSOs seemed to construct Mindful-Militant behavior as ultimately a “hassle” to deal with and control.

**Mindful-Empathetic passenger identities.** Even more exceptional were passengers who demonstrated positive emotions in airport security and specifically, empathy for TSOs. While also being prepared/informed, passengers expressing what I call “Mindful-Empathetic” identities displayed resistance towards the emotional norms of airport security, namely in opposition of the majority of passengers I spoke with who described feeling anxious about TSOs, and needing to tightly control emotions in order to “get through” security. Mindful-Empathetic passenger identities involve recognizing the humanity of TSOs. Passengers demonstrating them offered friendly smiles and jokes, and made connections with officers and other passengers as they completed travel. Unlike their Stereotypical and Ideal counterparts, some travelers seemed more likely to take time in security, have brief conversations and not rush through line.

Passengers demonstrating Mindful-Empathetic personas explained feeling understanding for TSOs and the apparently stressful job they have to do. Tigger, an infrequent flier, said she wished people would not give the TSOs “such a hard time.” As a retired firefighter, she described identifying with the task of needing to get groups of people to comply with orders. Depicting her interactions with TSOs, Tigger said, “I’m usually pretty friendly, because there’s really no point in not being friendly, because they have to do what they have to do.” In my observations, I noticed the occasional friendly person, usually a business or frequent traveler. Portlander, a more-than-weekly flier, contextualized his often-friendly demeanor within discourses of security and empathy, “The point for security is to be safe overall. . . . They’re [TSOs] not there to block your time, they’re not there to invade your privacy. . . . They’re just human beings, too, just doing their job, right?” More so than any other passenger persona, people demonstrating Mindful Empathetic characteristics were able to see individuals rather than discursive constructions of “The TSA” when talking about and interacting with TSOs.

Although many passengers evoke this similar line of argument—TSOs are just doing their job, the whole point is to be safe—the majority of passengers do *not* act friendly towards TSOs according to my observations and interviews. Lucky, a TSO at a Category 10 airport, meaning one of the four busiest in the country, described meeting only a handful of exceptionally nice and gracious passengers in his two years of work as a TSO. However, friendly faces are accepted gratefully by TSOs, at least by TSO Jonathan who described one of his “favorite” types of passengers as those who “respond to my greeting and allow us to interact as people.” Intriguingly, those who do may be “marked” by other officers in the scene, however. I often act empathetic when I travel. I learned from several TSO interviewees that as a result of my joking, well-wishing, and small talk, I likely stand out in



the airport scene compared to other passengers who act reserved or demonstrate negative feelings. In fact, TSO Steve, a Behavior Detection Officer, described how his entire job revolves around spotting “difference” in line and assessing passengers who stand out from the rest. Passengers deemed different enough can be detained or flagged for further screening. Even though Steve discussed most often trying to assess people who might “snap,” he emphasized that *any* deviation from the emotional norm of the line at any given time could be cause for further investigation. Given that security lines are typically not places brimming with affirmative emotional performances, the few passengers who do demonstrate empathy, kindness, and humor may meet with extra suspicion.

### Summary

Using a gestalt understanding of my data—taking all sources and pre-analytic work into account—I developed and described three main archetypes of identity positions for TSOs and passengers which I label as Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful identities. Incorporating interview and fieldnote excerpts, I compiled portraits of what being a TSO and being a passenger means and looks like. In performing these roles, people enacted, reacted to, and resisted discourses at micro, meso, and macro levels.

Predictably, TSO identities draw upon meso-level organizational discourses most frequently—specifically organizational policies and practices—and micro-level sensegiving messages that reinforced organizational ideas. As employees are exposed to these messages frequently, it is not surprising that meso-level discourses emerged in speech and action through interviews and observations. Of course, as discussed in Chapter Four, these policies and sensegiving messages are immersed in macro-level discourses and historically situated ideas about security, authority, discipline, terrorism, etc. In my observations, the majority of

TSOs seemed to enact Stereotypical-Apathetic or Ideal identities which from outside observation may look similar in practice, at least in terms of emotional performance.

In contrast to TSOs, passenger identities draw upon macro-level discourses and micro-level interactions. In terms of their personal identity work, passengers routinely described reacting to meso-level discourses exemplified in policies and practices. Despite the fact that the average passenger in the U.S. flies just a handful of times per year, the expectation by TSOs and frequent travelers is that passengers know “the rules,” have experience traveling, or at the least, can access the media/internet to understand flying. Very few voices in my data described how bewildering the process of traveling can be for new fliers, or those without command of English. Although not a full focus of my study, these assumptions have definite access and class implications.

As alluded to in this chapter, how passengers and TSOs execute identity performances affects how they interact with each other. In the next chapter, I demonstrate more completely how passenger and TSO identities are enacted in security. In doing so, I describe consequences for interpersonal communication, emotion management, and sensemaking.

## Chapter 6

### AIRPORT SECURITY IDENTITIES IN ACTION

“I had a passenger give me a rough time, saying that we were nothing but thugs and idiots who didn’t even graduate high school. I simply responded that in doing our jobs, which he was apparently so high above doing, that we were trying to protect everyone’s lives—including his. I wished him a nice flight and went about my day. I know that most people are inherently decent people—let me stress MOST people. Most people also don’t think about how their interactions with others will impact that other person’s day. I try to always keep that in mind— especially while at work.”  
–Rick, TSO manager

“The concerns that I have about all that is wrong with airport security, I don’t take it out on them [TSOs]. . . . I have read accounts of people who have run into extraordinary situations with rogue agents, and things like that. I have not myself experienced that. I don’t feel like I really have anything to say there, by expressing any contempt for airport security. My expression of contempt is not useful at that place. However, there is an uncomfortable undertone of these people [who] have a lot of power to make my life more complicated in bad ways.” –Bob, Passenger

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I’m waiting in line for what will be my fifth pat-down of the day since my research trips involve many turns through security, although via multiple gates. Soon, a diminutive woman with salt-and-pepper hair parted in the middle and pulled back tightly into a tail, collects me. Languidly, she gestures for me to point out my belongings on the conveyor belt.

My three bags in her arms, we walk to a table adjacent to the advanced imaging machines, where she says she needs to change her gloves. She inquires if I’ve had a pat-down before. *Yes, just 20 minutes ago actually*, I think to myself.

Underneath blue latex, she wears fuzzy white gloves, probably made of cotton. I ask about them and she explains that they enable her to take latex gloves on and off more quickly and also avoid sweaty hands. Out of the blue, she remarks, “I’m going to test my gloves.” I ask why as testing gloves for explosives usually happens *after* a pat-down. She says that due to false positive alarms, “It’s just my habit.”

After testing the gloves, she uses a theatrical phrase to signal the beginning of my screening: “Pat-down commencing in 3, 2, 1...”

I ask how long she’s worked in airport security. She sighs deeply, “Ten years.”

I exclaim, “How on earth??” with a surprised and impressed tone. A tenure of 10 years means she’s been employed with the TSA almost since its inception.

She explains, “Well, it keeps me in my house. It keeps my bills paid.”

“And it provides entertainment, sometimes,” she quips, laughing.

Turning back to the business at hand, she inquires if I’m ticklish. I reply, never having been asked that by a TSO before, “A bit, but I promise to keep it in.” We chuckle.

She sets to work after posing the usual questions and confirming that when she gets to sensitive areas, she will use the back of her hands.

I am fairly well shocked a minute later when her double-gloved hands firmly “meet resistance,” touching my most sensitive body parts.

Standing arms and legs spread-eagle, I feel gloved fingers brush hair from my collar before trailing down my spine, pressing into flesh which takes no effort as I am wearing filmy pink rayon. She “clears” the waistband of my trousers, fingers sweeping deftly against skin before brushing my buttocks intently with the back of her hand. Downwards, she caresses my legs firmly, before gliding up to meet “resistance.” I startle. *Did she just touch my ladyparts from the back? An accident, assuredly.*

Coming round to face me, she “clears” my collar again, her hands following the line of my draping cowl neck. I feel her  *fingertips*  trace the contours of my breasts and grit my teeth. Only then does she use the back of her hands to sweep assertively around each breast. Fingers probe my torso carefully, clearing my waistband from the front before sliding down my legs and coming up once again to meet “resistance.” Without a doubt, this woman has

just touched my clitoris, a body part not even my gynecologist has ever attended to. I want to scream.

Instead, I wait for her slow work to conclude.

She walks away to test her gloves, again.

I stand in disbelief, seething, using all of my self-control to keep from shrieking as the memory of her groping hands makes me feel like my private parts are somehow burning. Standing stock still, I take no notice of anyone or anything around me.

A minute later, when the beep confirms I am not smuggling explosives, she wishes me a nice day. For the first time in more than 100 security experiences, I want to yell, complain, find a manager, make a scene.

But I don't. *Why not?*

She smiles and tells me to have a nice flight.

I say nothing.

*Would it matter if I did?*

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In this opening fieldnote vignette, I portray a troubling and surprising trip through security. As a savvy and experienced traveler, dressed and prepared as an Ideal business passenger, I held expectations of how the exchange would go. Namely, I figured the pat-down would commence as most others had previously. Since the TSO made a show of putting on her gloves and asking me questions outside the norm, I took those cues to mean that the pat-down itself might be slower and more involved as when dealing with TSOs who embody Ideal characteristics such as implementing rules with exacting precision. However, I was not prepared for the woman to be so invasive, all the while maintaining an apparently-cheerful demeanor.

Through the haze of mortification, her cheer came across as devious, an intentional masking of perverse actions. Although her performance of what I would call an Ideal-Disciplinarian identity at best, or a Stereotypical-Tyrannical identity at worst, led to no outward repercussions for security processes, it left me, the traveler, with temporarily broken sense (Weick, 1995). As a competent traveler, indeed a researcher aware of the power dynamics and discourses at work in security, I was left stunned, silent, and more troubling, impotent to act on my own behalf. Abandoning any semblance of my typically empathetic persona, I buried feelings of rage. Presuming that any complaint would be taken as a matter of “she-said/she-said,” I did not bother to lodge a formal grievance. Appearances from a security camera would show a standard enhanced pat-down with a pleasant-looking officer, not the overly intimate touch that had me questioning everything I knew about airport security procedures for a time. Not until later did I think to get the officer’s name and badge number.

I offer this highly intimate and frankly, disturbing personal experience as a testament for why understanding identity performances in the airport security environment is important both theoretically and practically. The interaction accomplished more than just a passenger screening. Rather, it shows how certain cues—dress, behavior, emotional performance—are used as clues to interpreting identities. Furthermore, it demonstrates how emotions manifest and shape encounters, as well as the emotion management processes of others. In this chapter, I look at these processes more closely, comparing how passengers and TSOs interact with one another in dyads, and occasionally, small groups. I demonstrate not only how identities are enacted, but what happens when certain types of TSOs relate with certain types of passengers as depicted above. Moreover, I describe the implications of

identity performances in terms of interpersonal communication, emotion management, and aspects of sensemaking.

To begin, I briefly illustrate combinations of identity performances I described in the previous chapter, e.g., a Stereotypical TSO identity performance with a Stereotypical Passenger performance, a Mindful TSO performance with an Ideal Passenger performance, etc. Using data, I show examples of typical interactions and ramifications of particular combinations. As a basic organizational scheme, I order the dyadic exchanges according to TSO identity type—Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful—before addressing mixed combinations. In doing so, I address my second and third research questions: “How are TSO and passenger identities enacted and shaped in airport security contexts?” and “What are the implications of TSO and Passenger identity performances?”

### **Interactions Associated with Stereotypical TSO Identity Performances**

Employing the conceptions of Stereotypical TSO identities from Chapter Five—that they are unfriendly, robotic, arbitrary, apathetic, and sometimes aggressive—I now describe implications for when TSOs enacting Stereotypical TSO identities interact with various passenger types. I start with Stereotypical TSO identities and Stereotypical Passenger identities before describing encounters between Ideal and Mindful Passenger identities.

#### **Stereotypical TSO Identities Interacting with Stereotypical Passenger Identities**

When people performing Stereotypical TSO and Stereotypical Passenger identities interact, the potential for conflict and security disruptions is ripe. For example, when TSOs exhibiting apathy engage with inexperienced passengers, security lines can slow down as inexperienced passengers try to get through line but react to disinterested TSOs who come off as intimidating or irritating. Stereotypical-Apathetic TSO identities often feature “just-a-job” mentalities (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997)—with TSOs sometimes doing the bare minimum.

Therefore, TSOs are less motivated to put extra effort to help passengers get through line efficiently, leaving them instead to muddle through. In this fieldnote example, I depict a TSO conducting a bag check with a nervous passenger who has broken TSA rules regarding allowable carry-on items:

The passenger leans over the 2-foot partition that separates her from her belongings, watching the young TSO search her diaper bag. The woman is simultaneously wan and pink-cheeked. She seems embarrassed, repeating, “I’m sorry” as the 20-something agent pores through her suitcase. He does not react, but keeps focused on his task. As the TSO eyes a large black leather coin purse, she makes excuses, saying she is a “coin collector.”

The woman seems deflated and near tears as the TSO tells her that she will have to “Leave it behind.” For a moment, I think he is referring to the woman’s breast milk or the bottle of water I see on the table. She seems to slump even more although he does not react in the slightest.

She replies plaintively, “My husband gave me those. I collect Civil War-era bullets.” She apologizes contritely, yet again. Slightly distraught at having to leave the bullets, she must have been offered the option to run them back to the car because she complains, “I don’t have time.” Although she seems near tears, the agent does not change his impassive expression. I can’t hear him speak now though, so I know that he is not raising his voice and it does not appear that he is censuring her for the contraband.

In this example, the TSO maintains strict control over his emotions while the passenger demonstrates embarrassment, chagrin, contriteness, fear, and sadness. Despite the



passenger's flurry of emotions, the TSO remains steadfast, completing his bag check efficiently and with little comment.

Whereas enacting a Stereotypical-Tyrannical TSO identity can involve communicating disapproval to the passenger, and an Ideal TSO identity performance can include giving sense (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) about what passengers can and cannot bring through security, this particular TSO instead kept quiet, just getting his work done. Although the TSO may have been feeling any number of emotions, he kept them inside following the emotional display rules set out by meso-level training (Hochschild, 1983). The passenger, who acted deferential and contrite, came into contact with TSO behavior that reinforced macro-level ideas about TSOs being figures of authority with the power to take away personal artifacts at will. Interactions like this reinforce or at least leave unchallenged macro-level stereotypes about TSOs and their authority.

More tension emerges between TSOs performing Stereotypical-Tyrannical personas and travelers enacting Stereotypical characteristics. In this combination, the stereotypes of despotic TSOs and outrageous, attention-seeking passengers can manifest. In practice, interactions were usually less shocking than news media portray, but still impactful for the people involved in terms of emotion management and interpersonal communication. This fieldnote demonstrates an encounter involving a TSO exhibiting an aggressive demeanor:

A TSO in his late 50s is working the x-ray baggage screener without smiling. He scans the crowd with a grimace painted on his face. A moment later, he hollers at an older woman in front of me for not putting her luggage into the conveyor belt quickly enough. "You have to push it through!" he chastises. The woman jumps to prod her suitcase into the machine.

This data shows a TSO reprimanding a waiting passenger who responds in a nervous, hop-to manner. Intriguingly, the TSO, who I observed over many occasions in my fieldwork, typically acts more easy going. Watching his entire demeanor change made the situation stand out to me. While *I* gave him the benefit of the doubt, his behavior in this single interaction served to reinforce negative discourses about the TSA. He was trying to move the line faster but may have resulted in making nervous passengers move more slowly.

Whereas interactions between unfriendly TSOs and inexperienced passengers simmer with tension, encounters between TSOs exhibiting Stereotypical-Tyrannical characteristics and passengers demonstrating Stereotypical-Hostile behaviors can boil over. In some instances, such as a news story about a young girl in a wheel chair who burst into tears during screenings, largely due to her mother's altercations with TSOs (Stebner, 2013), Stereotypical-Tyrannical behavior can provoke intense emotions from passengers. TSO Skeet described a memorable encounter with a passenger who grew upset when pulled aside for secondary screening. Skeet recalled:

And so I started to do my screening and he continued to give me an attitude. "Well, I'm sorry, I need to start over." So now I started over with what I had to do. And then he proceeded to give me an attitude again. "Well, I need to...darn it. Short term memory loss...I have to start over again." After a little while of him realizing that, okay, I was going to do what I had to do, and it wasn't going to change—his attitude wasn't going to change what I had to do, he calmed down. He legitimately calmed down to where we had a short conversation on where he was going, how he was doing that day, why was he going there. His demeanor changed completely from a negative to a positive.

Then, after we got done, I had to do a little more screening on his personal property—he forgot to take his laptop out of his bag. . . . And then he started to go negative again. I informed him of what he did wrong and he told me that there should be some signs in place to tell him. I informed him that there were, but they were on the other side of the checkpoint. I asked him, “Do you want me to show you where these were at?” For some reason, this guy said yes.

Skeet went on to tell me how he waited for the passenger to pack up and put on shoes, and then escorted him outside of checkpoint to see the signs. Afterwards, the passenger tried to follow Skeet back into the checkpoint via the employee entrance. Skeet said, “Then I inform him that he couldn’t do that, he had to go back through [security]. Of course that didn’t help his situation.” Laughing, Skeet crowed, “I removed myself from the situation so that he wouldn’t have to go through the screening with me. He was not happy and I got a little laugh out of it.”

In this example, Skeet, actively bullied a passenger, punishing him for expressing “attitude.” The passenger, presumably recognizing how his own emotional performance was affecting the interaction, managed his emotions, masking his anger and simulating calm which resulted in his ability to perform casual conversation. It is not hard to imagine the veritable roller coaster of emotions the passenger must have experienced as he demonstrated anger, masking, and then even more intense anger when Skeet performed the second laptop screening, all before being escorted out of the security checkpoint, realizing he had been duped, and having to repeat security processes once more. Although not representative of my data overall, this vindictive action by a TSO contributes to wide-scale misconceptions of TSOs so vivid in the data and news articles, which perpetuates Stereotypical-Tyrannical identities. Likely, the passenger shared this story of being tricked with friends and family

members. In particular, antisocial TSO behavior does a disservice to TSOs who want to emphasize professional TSO identities and avoid receiving grief from passengers.

Viewed from a TSO perspective, having a laugh at a passenger's expense and punishing "misbehavior" is probably an effective way to manage tedium and exercise power, so long as one is not caught. TSO Roger suggested consequences exist for TSOs who "mess with" passengers in this manner. However, Skeet's example also shows how emotional labor practices can be reclaimed by TSOs and be used for "fun," albeit for the TSO and not the passenger. This becomes more evident in Skeet's reflection about his experiences with passengers yelling at him:

Most of the time, I am very calm. They can yell at me all they want to. . . . Now I'm calm, completely calm, and they're still irate. I'm standing there, like, "Ha-ha!" Not really "Ha-ha" but, I'm smiling. You've heard the phrase "killing with kindness." Well, I'm smiling, being kind, in a totally snotty way. . . . They're getting irate whether they're looking at me and seeing the way I'm acting, or it's something that they've said. . . . So, I am calm. Most of the time. There have been a couple times where I've wanted to throw a person across the checkpoint!

Here, Skeet perverts TSA organizational training to remain "calm, cool, and collected," which according to other interviewees is meant to keep passengers in line and prevent negative situations from escalating. Instead, TSOs can use emotional labor to accomplish their own goals for interactions which unfortunately translates to increased stress and displeasure for passengers.

This emotional labor is reminiscent of "work to rule" resistance wherein employees actively express dissent by following the exact letter of laws and rules, especially when doing so causes work slow-downs or incurs extra costs (Bloch & Moorman, 1993; Fleming &

Spicer, 2003). A favored tactic of unions embroiled in contract negotiations, work-to-rule resistance also features in “seditious overidentification” which is “a tactic in which workers resist the discourse of culture management by taking it too seriously and overidentifying with certain norms and beliefs” (Fleming, 2005, p. 54). While working-to-rule has been identified in employees expressing cynicism in an effort to avoid managerial identity regulation (Fleming, 2005), TSOs also use the tactic in ways to punish passengers. Intriguingly, in Skeet’s example, he performs this reinterpreted emotional labor not as a way to resist the emotion rules of his workplace, but to purposefully discipline passengers which has a result of perpetuating negative cycles that require emotion rules in the first place.

### **Stereotypical TSO Identities Interacting with Ideal Passenger Identities**

Given the number of frequent fliers and business travelers routinely flying, another common interaction combination in my data involves Stereotypical TSO and Ideal passenger identities. Interactions between the two typically are efficient and brief, especially if the TSO leans towards Apathetic. Similarly, in this combination, the TSO identity position can be reinforced by the compliant, prepared passengers who do not challenge the TSO in any way.

However, tensions can arise with “know it all” business travelers and TSOs exhibiting punitive personas, who might make passengers “pay” for their impatience by dragging out screenings as described in Skeet’s story above. These “payments,” of course, do not involve money. Rather, the currency of “emotional taxes” (Malvini Redden, 2013) includes a range of managed feelings such as anger, irritation, hostility, etc. which as Skeet indicated, some TSOs may exact on purpose. Case in point, passengers portraying Ideal passenger identities, which characteristically involve some level of emotion management, can manage their feelings more forcefully interacting with frustrated TSOs. Consider this

fieldnote excerpt which includes observations of interactions between two passengers and a TSO who seemed put-out by aspects of his work environment:

Moving into the checkpoint, I notice the lines are moving steadily. I watch a male TSO in his 30s, leaning in and out of the metal detector, barking commands to passengers—take out liquids and gels, nothing in pockets, etc. He speaks with a slight accent that’s filled with irritation, almost derision. He warns people to remove liquids and gels, threatening to “shut down the whole x-ray just to search your bag.”

When I walk up, he gestures me towards the advanced imaging machine and to which I ask to opt out. He replies, “It could be awhile” in an ominous tone.

I remark, “Okay,” and step to the side, the normal waiting place.

After me, a heavily pregnant woman opts out as well. When he warns her “It could be awhile,” she sputters “I don’t care.”

“I’m not going through there,” she mutters under her breath.

I comment to her, “So? I’ll wait.”

She observes, “He was rude,” mumbling again, “Maybe I’ll make a complaint.”

I almost ask, “‘What good would that do?’ but I keep my mouth shut.

In this scenario, I felt tension between the TSO and passengers in the checkpoint. I did not appreciate his aggressive nonverbal behaviors and subtle threats that tried to coerce passengers into following protocol as he preferred. I felt especially critical as his interpretation of rules (e.g. “everyone needs to go through the machine or else”) potentially enabled him to do less work in that position as my observations demonstrated that calling for pat-down “assists” often resulted in the walk-through metal detector officer getting “tapped out” to complete the pat-down him or herself. Although I felt frustration, I kept my

feelings to myself under the mask of an Ideal business traveler who is prepared and does not cause a stir.

These findings support conclusions from past research that associate acceptable displays of negative emotions with positions of dominance and authority (Hess, Blairy, & Kleck, 2000), and emotional suppression with positions of subordination (Malvini Redden, 2013). For my fellow opt-out passenger, I imagine that portrayals of TSOs as lazy, aggressive, and unhelpful were likely reinforced in this scenario especially as pregnant women and children are typically given extra help and attention in the checkpoint, whereas she was not. Furthermore, the aggressive TSO performance served to provoke passenger complaints, although not to TSOs or TSA management, but in the form of commiseration between passengers. Behavior that definitely drives a wedge between passengers and TSOs in terms of communication, and reinforces negative constructions of TSOs in general, also may help forge relations between passengers. It would be interesting to consider what would happen if passengers questioned TSOs for unacceptable behavior e.g. by suggesting “You don’t have to be so rude.” What if, for instance, passengers demanded not just their civil rights but *civility* rights as well?

### **Stereotypical TSO Identities Interacting with Mindful Passenger Identities**

As passengers embodying Mindful identities often took extra time in security checkpoints, whether in casual conversation or in demanding particular screenings, interactions involving them and TSOs performing Stereotypical identities can result in slower security screenings, backed up lines, and for the Mindful-Militant identities, enhanced screenings. In this interview excerpt, Sue, a passenger who discussed demonstrating Mindful-Militant tendencies described her first enhanced pat-down and the related tension with a TSO:

I said I wanted to opt-out. Then he [the walk-through metal detector agent] questioned me for about three or four minutes, and he's like, "This is completely safe. I don't see why you wouldn't want to use this." I said, "Well, I just don't. I don't think that this measure is necessary. It's a little bit of an invasion of personal privacy. I don't like having an individual image of me floating around. I would just prefer a pat-down." He's like, "Do you realize what a pat-down would consist of?" I'm like, "Yes, I've been patted down before, it's fine..." // I already know what they're going to say because they have to follow their protocol. So I try and be as accommodating as possible and not upset them. But even in interactions like that, they've been rather short with me. . . . If there are any moments where I question what they're doing, I've definitely gotten hostility from some of them.

Sue depicted being prepared for the pat-down and aware of her rights, but also dancing a fine line between standing up for herself and not "upsetting" the TSOs.

In describing how she controls her feelings with TSOs, she said she realizes "If I lose my cool or lose my temper, if I get sore with them, they have the authority to kick me out. . . . I try very hard to bottle up whatever frustrations I'm feeling." In doing so, Sue attempted to manage her own feelings strategically in order to influence the feelings of TSOs and control interactions (Hayes & Metts, 2008). However, in the instance she described, the TSO extended their encounter by asking what Sue viewed as superfluous questions. Likewise, Sue depicted the TSO expressing irritation towards her for not complying with the standard screening procedures and indignation as Sue challenged his authority in a way he could not easily dismiss (e.g. unlike a TSO who might dismiss an emotional, erratic passenger of Stereotypical-Hostile persuasion).



When TSOs exhibiting Stereotypical identities encounter Mindful-Empathetic passenger identities, the most rare type of passenger persona in my data, there lies the potential for surprise-oriented sensemaking (Louis, 1980) as TSOs' notions of passenger identity can be challenged. As with many service workers (Daunt & Harris, 2011), TSOs regularly suffer abuse from passengers and are indeed trained to expect and withstand it. However, passengers sometimes bring unexpected humor and kindness to interactions. For example, describing his most memorable passenger story, TSO Lucky shared an experience he had with a couple whose baggage needed to be hand-searched. The bag contained a prohibited item which Lucky confiscated. Rather than overreacting to their personal items being seized, the couple instead expressed appreciation. Lucky recalled:

They went out saying “Thank you very much, you’ve been very helpful, you’ve been very understanding. . . . I understand the job that you do and the stress you’re under with all these passengers. We just wanted to thank you.”

Lucky described the interaction as one of the most memorable in his years as a TSO, one that stood out because of how surprising it was to be thanked and acknowledged, even in the face of taking someone's property.

To be surprised means that something does not meet expectation or fit into already constructed meaning making categories. As such, surprising encounters are sensemaking encounters (Louis, 1980). Events such as the above require TSOs to make sense as they so starkly contrast with day-to-day interactions, organizational training, and macro-level discourses about airport security. In particular, surprising interactions require TSOs to adjust their blanket conceptions of passengers and question meso-level discourses that frame passengers negatively. Meanwhile, such encounters can also encourage TSOs to maintain stoic, ideal, and professional identities, because as TSO Peter described, “While I’m taking

their property, they're thanking me? I know I've done my job right." Being thanked for completing a meso-level duty serves to reinforce it as acceptable to TSOs. Such reinforcement might be especially persuasive for TSOs who already embody Ideal identities with a penchant for embracing meso organizational discourses.

### **Interactions Associated with Ideal TSO Identity Performances**

Turning to the TSO identity type most concerned with getting things "right," I now address interactions between passengers and TSOs enacting Ideal identities. Again I draw upon conceptions of TSOs performing Ideal identities from Chapter Five—that they are unfriendly, professional, commanding, robotic, formidable, and concerned with rules. I start with encounters between TSOs exemplifying Ideal identities and passengers portraying Stereotypical identities, followed by Ideal and Mindful identities.

### **Ideal TSO Identities Interacting with Stereotypical Passenger Identities**

A frequent airport security identity pairing in my data involved interactions in which the "calm, cool, collected" Ideal TSO encounters the anxious, disorganized, emotional Stereotypical passenger. Tension permeates these interactions as TSOs exude authority and the appearance of sternness which passengers may react to with tension or anxiety, especially if inexperienced. When passengers arrive unprepared and unaware of security measures (e.g., bringing contraband, not having documents ready), lines they inhabit often move slower and with more potential for conflict, particularly if passengers act in a Stereotypical-Hostile manner.

Passengers, especially those not familiar with security, manage their emotions by suppressing or burying feelings like anger or anxiety (Malvini Redden, 2013). Some observations suggested that Stereotypical-Inexperienced passengers *try* to manage emotions in order to seem more expert, but under pressure, emotions can "leak" out unintentionally

and impact interaction (Gross, 2002) as with “Suzanne” and “Ronny” in Chapter Five. When TSOs who are focused on maintaining decorum and enforcing rules interact with inexperienced passengers, both parties may need to manage emotions—the officer performing emotional labor, and the passenger paying “emotional taxes.” For example, long-time TSO Rick described “following our procedures” when passengers make mistakes. Although Rick asserted that passenger errors “don’t faze me,” he admitted, “It does get a bit frustrating though. You’d think that with the media harping on it, and the forest of signage in front of the airport, some people would get the message. Apparently not.” Interactions between TSOs performing Ideal identities—which include swallowing frustrations—and passengers embracing Stereotypical identities—which involve making rookie errors—can reinforce identity stereotypes. Furthermore, these interactions cast TSOs as more Stereotypical (e.g. scary, unapproachable, emotionless) as they try to hold in irritation while “brainless” and emotional passengers make easily avoidable mistakes.

When emotionally contained TSOs meet hostile passengers, however, the potential for conflict intensifies. For instance, during fieldwork, I met a TSO at a large Southern California airport who recently found out he was going to be promoted to Lead. During our conversation, he admitted not liking when passengers were “noncompliant,” “irate,” or “demeaning to what we do.” He shared a story about a passenger who was randomly chosen for a security screening which involved an enhanced pat-down. The passenger ranted that the TSA was a waste of tax dollars. The TSO retorted, “I’m sorry you feel that way, sir” and indicated that the passenger’s feelings were not going to change the fact that the screening needed to take place. The TSO admitted “dealing with” passengers can be difficult but insisted the TSA was a good organization to work within. “They take care of you. There are lots of opportunities,” he added. In relating with a passenger who questioned his

professional identity by invoking macro-level discourses about waste and TSA spending, the TSO bottled his emotions, put a cap on his anger, and responded in a manner appropriate to his training. Furthermore, clearly identifying with the TSA as an organization, the TSO contextualized interpersonal conflict with passengers within discourses of opportunity and service, feeling pride in his workplace. Indeed, he told me at length how the organization rewards and promotes good work from employees.

During interviews and encounters I observed between TSOs enacting Ideal identities and passengers acting more Stereotypically, travelers propagate mainstream macro-level stereotypes about the TSA and TSOs such as that the TSA is framed as a “waste of tax dollars” and TSOs are robotic dolts. Having used these discursive resources (Kuhn, 2009) to make sense about security screenings, passenger perspectives are then reinforced when TSOs act according to their training. Although TSOs may initially try to “give sense” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) about security procedures when engaging with passengers, they are trained not to let emotional situations escalate and therefore stop after a certain point. TSO Jonathan described being “physically assaulted and verbally threatened,” and how he has learned to activate his “Screener Joe” persona which enables him to be “all business” and deal with problems efficiently.

As TSOs depicted being trained to work with an emotional flying public, interactions that activate “Screener Joe” facades reinforce the notion that passengers are stupid and that TSOs must turn tough and emotionless to deal with them. This type of emotional labor is constructed as a patriotic duty and badge of honor, although Jonathan admitted “Screener Joe” helps keep him from “questioning my faith in humanity.” Investigating discursive constructions of self-identities shows how organizational actors use discourses as resources, screens, and in the case of “Screener Joe,” shields against uncomfortable emotions.

Understanding how passengers and TSOs construct and enact identities, and how actions from one person initiate emotion management processes in another is useful for unpacking meaning making in complex environments. Specifically, examining identity performances shows how different identities can promote interpersonal conflict and burdensome emotional management which are cognitively difficult and bodily stressful. In a closed environment like airport security, it is especially important to understand the repercussions of emotional interactions as they can escalate into acts of aggression and violence (Bishop et al., 2005; Dallimore et al., 2007).

### **Ideal TSO Identities Interacting with Ideal Passenger Identities**

In contrast to interactions with Stereotypical passenger identities, encounters between people portraying Ideal TSO and Ideal passenger identities typically run brief and unemotional. Both TSOs and passengers know the rules, do not outwardly demonstrate emotion, and waste little time on talk or questions beyond basic pleasantries. Passengers comply with requests, and do not ask questions. As TSO Jonathan described, they “simply come in, go through the process, and leave. No personal investment, no problem. Just passing through.” Meanwhile, TSOs maintain constant vigilance and a formidable presence, “informing” passengers of adjustments that need to be made when necessary.

Ideal-Ideal combinations reflect discourses of discipline, compliance, and production (Foucault, 1979): “Perfect” TSOs are meant to produce “perfect” passengers through screening procedures that remain unquestioned and unchallenged. TSOs like Alexa discussed the pressure to “process” passengers as quickly as possible. Little, if any, meaningful interaction takes place. Without bag checks or emotional outbursts, TSOs can forget Ideal passenger identity performances almost immediately and maintain energy for assessing other potential threats. TSO manager Rick described, “If I’ve done my job properly, I can actually

forget about that passenger as soon as they clear the checkpoint.” When passengers comply with directives and do not ask questions, Ideal TSO identity positions are likely reinforced. By tacitly giving consent to the process, compliant passengers do not challenge what it means to be a TSO. Furthermore, passenger identities are also reinforced when TSOs “reward” them for “good” passenger behavior (i.e., compliance) by not requiring further scrutiny or taking extra time.

Of course, just because passengers *perform* idealized identities does not mean they internalize them, especially when it comes to emotion. Specifically, as passengers enact Ideal subject positions, they may be in fact managing their emotions in order to *seem* as if they are ideal (Malvini Redden, 2013). In fact, Kristine, a world-traveler who prides herself on “getting security right,” described purposefully not showing emotion in security:

Keep your feelings to yourself in security. They [TSOs] don’t care. It’s just going to cause problems. Move through. I am not expressing anything in security. . . . Because there is no reason to draw attention to myself. That’s the deal. That’s it, actually. I don’t want to draw any more attention to myself than is already there. That’s what it’s like. You get it right, there’s nothing out of the norm, less attention is paid to you.

Although Kristine shared examples of being assertive with other types of authority figures in the airport (e.g. gate agents and airline employees), she suspended those inclinations in security, even when feeling anxious or upset. Coming up to a formidable and authoritative TSO can further reinforce passenger beliefs that showing emotion in security is not tolerated and will result in problems. Similarly, such posturing on the part of TSOs can result in producing nervous passengers who fumble in the face of imposing TSOs, perhaps even triggering passengers who would otherwise perform the Ideal to act more Stereotypically.

Even while typically producing fast interactions, Ideal-Ideal combinations can result in frustration if the combination involves Ideal-Zealot TSO and Ideal frequent traveler performances. For instance, in this fieldnote excerpt, I show an eager TSO and irritated passenger interact:

A dialed down version of Carol Burnette bounds up in response to the “Female assist on B!” call. The TSO wears her coarse red hair in a short crop with blue eye shadow harkening back to the 70s. I remember being patted down by her before. I know it’s going to take awhile.

At the screening area, I know the drill and face my belongings without being asked. Carol speaks with an affected tone, similar to Sue Sylvester from the television show, *Glee*, but without the menace. She performs her role as if talking to children or acting on a stage—somewhat exaggerated, but not quite obnoxious. The way she speaks makes me suspect that she had a career in service prior to joining the TSA.

Explaining procedures slowly and loudly, Carol acknowledges that I may know them already but she has to review them with me again. When I verify that I have no sore or sensitive areas, she leans in to whisper conspiratorially, “Well, I don’t want to hurt anyone.”

After confirming I do not need a private room, I stand in the proper position—feet spread, arms like airplanes—without being asked. She begins her work methodically, slowly brushing hair from my collar (turning my tag in as several TSAs are wont to do), and dragging blue hands down my back. When Carol gets to my waist she says, “I’m going to need to see that waistband,” and automatically, I lift the edge of my shirt.

Carol continues brushing down my legs, coming to rest her blue gloves on my ankles. Given her measured tempo, I am too aware of how long it is taking today. Intriguingly, as she finishes her work, she compliments my outfit—black slacks and a close fitting shirt—saying it’s “easy” and that I wore “the right thing.” She doesn’t explain, but I infer this means “easy” and “right” for TSAs to search without trouble. In this example, I played an Ideal business traveler—someone prepared, organized, compliant, and unquestioning. The TSO caused me frustration with her dramatized performance of the pat-down. It took longer than normal, and was exceedingly thorough and uncomfortable. I found myself struggling to contain my irritation, wanting her to move faster and trying to speed the encounter along by anticipating positions and questions. Such behavior positions me as a “know it all” passenger who demonstrated frustration with the rules, albeit subtly.

Inadvertently, Carol “gave sense” during the pat-down, praising me for wearing the “correct” clothing, although no such specifications exist in public TSA materials. Her clothing comments made me wonder why there is not more explicit communication from the TSA about “what not to wear.” Furthermore, Carol linked the pat-down process simultaneously to carework and authority. She said “I’m going to need to see that waistband” which calls to mind a police officer asking to see identification during a traffic stop e.g., “I’m going to need to see some I.D.” Yet, at the same time, she reinforced a caring component—she does not want to hurt anyone, she turns down my collar tag. Although these gestures may come across as helpful or nurturing, they also take time, which is at a premium for passengers trying to make flights. Furthermore, nurturing behaviors may be “read” differently by passengers, depending upon which identity they enact. For instance,



people feeling Stereotypical-Hostile or Mindful-Militant personas might find nurturing to be patronizing and bristle against it.

During interviews, TSOs described frustrations specific to business travelers who think they “know it all.” For instance, TSO Peter stated with an authoritative, almost snide tone, “Just because you’ve been through it at one airport doesn’t mean it’s the same here.” Peter’s comment, echoed throughout my data, suggests that passengers can also “create” TSO identities. When passengers seem like know-it-alls, threatening TSOs’ presumed authority, TSOs may, in turn, amp up expressions of authority. If, as TSO Skeet described, passengers who perform outside of the preferred schema can get “punished” by TSOs (whether that be slower or increased screenings), it is not hard to imagine a negative cycle of frustration escalating over time: passenger frustration; TSO authority; more passenger frustration, TSO authority and punishment. Given the lasting imprint of negative emotion (Kensinger, 2007), passengers can carry frustrations into their next interactions—with other passengers and on planes—while TSOs can spin off negativity onto brand new unsuspecting passengers and coworkers in the checkpoint.

In fact, some of the more outrageous news stories about airport security interactions happen with passengers or air crew who frequent the airport regularly. For instance, John Brennan, a Portland business traveler, was detained when a TSO’s gloves tested positive for explosives after a pat-down in 2012. When the TSO wanted to perform additional security measures (as per protocol), Brennan—fed up—started removing clothes, piece by piece, to prove he did not have explosives on his person. Eventually peeling off *every* article of his clothing, Brennan was arrested for disrupting security. Courts later upheld his nudity as an act of free speech and protest (Duara, 2012). I offer this example that interactions even between Ideal passengers and TSOs can result in problematic consequences. Although TSOs

and passengers performing Ideally may not express emotions that are usually worthy of notice (at least from a TSO perspective anyway), emotional experiences can promote ways of thinking and enacting identity that result in serious repercussions.

### **Ideal TSO Identities Interacting with Mindful Passenger Identities**

Interactions between Ideal TSOs and passengers enacting Mindful identities take shape differently depending upon whether the TSO demonstrates Ideal-Zealot or Ideal-Disciplinarian characteristics, and whether passengers perform Mindful-Empathetic or Mindful-Militant tendencies. Going through security, I often acted empathetic, engaging TSOs in conversation, asking about their days, empathizing with the difficult duties they have to perform, and offering sympathy regarding past negative treatment. When I encountered TSOs demonstrating Ideal personas, these conversations were most often clipped, meaning that TSOs might answer direct questions out of politeness and professionalism, but rarely disclose information beyond pleasantries. Our interactions were typically short but often involved the TSOs seeming surprised by my friendliness and responding in a cordial but guarded manner.

Eventful exchanges sometimes occur when Ideal TSO and Mindful Passenger identities come together. In this fieldnote excerpt, I demonstrate interactions between two TSOs focused on protocol and two passengers performing Mindful personas, one Militant:

At an airport in the Southwest, I tell the young male TSO I want to opt-out. He warns, “Okay, you’ll have to get a full-body pat-down, you know.”

“I know,” I reply, and smile.

A moment passes and the woman behind me declares she wants to opt out as well. The second TSO insists, “There’s no radiation here. It’s radio waves.”

“I know,” I say, not wanting to argue technology or the finer points of etymology. “I’d still like to opt out.”

With a gruff countenance, the petite woman behind me in her baggy faded jeans and black sweater, blurts, “It’s nice to have some support here.” I nod.

The first TSO tells the woman, “We need your shoes.”

“Sure you do,” she spits. “Sure you do,” as she takes off her white sneakers and slams them on top of her suitcase. The second TSO hands her a grey bin without a word and makes eye contact with me while the first TSO speaks calmly into his microphone, “Female assist times two.” I offer a half smile and continue to wait.

As I get patted down, I notice that the woman’s screening takes twice as long as mine. A second TSO stands nearby asking questions about her trip—where’s she headed, how long she’s been in town, standard questions for a Behavior Detection Officer. The woman is assertive and just this side of rude. I lollygag putting my shoes on and my bags back together, but she is still getting her pat-down when I walk into the terminal.

In this example, I play a Mindful-Empathetic character, my typical identity position. I am competent in my knowledge of airport procedures, firm in my commitment to screening choices, but pleasant interpersonally. In contrast, I am joined by a woman acting Militant and bordering on hostile as she relates with TSOs. She identifies me as a kindred passenger, someone with whom there is solidarity in opting out. Facing two of us, the TSOs tag team to try and convince us of the advanced imaging machine’s safety, to no avail. As the interaction played out between the four of us, not only did we enact personal identities constructed via various discourses, we helped co-construct performances with each other. For instance, as

the other passenger bristled and snarled at the TSOs, I found myself emphasizing pleasant aspects of my Empathetic persona to compensate. Similarly, once the other passenger slammed down her shoes, both TSOs stopped trying to give direction or engage with us, instead exchanging knowing looks with each other.

At work are several levels of discourse. Most obvious are the interpersonal, micro-level interactions. The officers try to give sense to us about the machines, regurgitating their meso-level organizational training which says the machines are “safe.” This attempt to “break” the sense we have made in advance about the machines (e.g., that they are unsafe, that they constitute an invasion of privacy) also reflects macro-level conversations about health and safety surrounding advanced imaging, and civil rights. I, in particular, mentally dismiss the notion that there is “no radiation” present. Although I do not argue with the officer, I know that the millimeter wave machine uses a different type of radiation than the much maligned backscatter (non-ionizing versus ionizing) but is not completely absent of potentially harmful radiation. With her skepticism in full force, the more Militant seeming passenger enacts an identity that reflects macro-level Discourses of resistance, questioning the authority of officers. As the TSOs demonstrate organizational identification with the TSA—indicated by the use of “we”—she views them with suspicion, acting hostile. This direct questioning serves to challenge their authority and, if they have linked their identities with that of the organization (Pratt, 2000), challenges their very being. And, this questioning is followed by a longer, more in-depth advanced screening than the one conducted on me, the smiling empathetic passenger.

The fundamentally different subject positions of Ideal TSO and Mindful-Militant passenger identities can spur frustration on both parts and also demonstrate an interesting asymmetry in terms of emotion management. Whereas passengers enacting Mindful

personas are in the minority for their apparent willingness to intentionally express emotions in security, Ideal-acting officers still must manage the expression of their feelings. In part, this emotional labor results in passenger compliance and minimized conflict escalation which is an example of “double-faced emotion management” (Tracy & Tracy, 1998, p. 407) wherein by controlling their own feelings, TSOs help control the feelings of passengers and get the business of security completed. At the same time though, it also reinforces Ideal identities as “good” TSOs are those who stay calm in the face of trouble, or to passengers, act as emotionless robots. As TSO Jonathan indicated, however, emotional management is not always easy:

Nothing like the tension in a situation where a person who chooses to receive a pat-down proceeds to inform you every step of the way of how you are now sexually abusing them. Not fun, and you really can't do or say anything but try to finish the job and get away. . . . Makes me want to exclaim just how much we, the screeners, hate having to do the pat-downs.

Jonathan described how he often wants to explain the rationale behind certain procedures, like enhanced pat-downs, but cannot due to lack of time and restrictions about what TSOs can divulge about security practices. Being unable to explain procedures fully constrains TSOs who otherwise might be able to handle situations with less stress and tension. Instead, by masking tensions, TSOs perpetuate “robot” stereotypes that underlie negative interactions with passengers. Managing stressful paradoxical situations and performing emotional labor may contribute to burnout or emotional exhaustion if experienced over time, especially with types of passengers who require more emotional energy than other passengers (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003).

## **Interactions Associated with Mindful TSO Identity Performances**

Considering a more affirmative type of emotional energy, I now turn to interactions with TSOs portraying Mindful identities, those who seem cognizant of dominant discourses in airport security checkpoints and resist them by acting friendly, helpful, and empathetic. I begin with encounters between Mindful TSO personas and Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful passenger identities in turn. As Mindful TSOs emerged scarcely in my data, these combinations also appeared only occasionally.

### **Mindful TSO Identities Interacting with Stereotypical Passenger Identities**

TSOs who act friendly and empathetic can challenge negative impressions held by passengers, particularly those who are inexperienced and nervous to interact with TSOs who they envision as scary and aggressive. TSO Peter described acting friendly and engaged with passengers, “We’re taught over and over and over, body language speaks volumes. If you’ve got a smile on your face. . . versus arms crossed with a look on your face that says ‘you’re an idiot.’ How would you respond?” When TSOs go out of their way to be helpful and friendly, inexperienced passengers can enjoy increased satisfaction with security processes and potentially change the way they conceive of TSOs. Through affirmative interactions, Mindful TSO identities can potentially *produce* more satisfied customers.

That said, when Mindful TSOs interact with Hostile passengers, conflict can also result. TSO Roger described a scenario where he had to perform additional screening on containers of breast milk that a mother brought with her to security. The woman grew irate, accusing Roger of trying to put something in the milk and ranting about her civil rights being violated. Finally, the passenger became aggressive. With visible anger, Roger recalled:

She said, “Did they teach you how to be rude?” I was so, I was so shocked I couldn’t say anything. I was so mad because I’m being blamed for something I’m not, and I

don't like that. I try my best to be a very good person, a courteous person. But to tell me something that I haven't done, is unforgivable. I don't like people judging me.

They don't even know me. What did I do? I just walk away.

Roger reacted to this hostile passenger by controlling his anger and surprise in the moment, and asking a supervisor to help him with the situation. As a TSO who prides himself on being kind and helpful, Roger's identity was challenged by accusations that he was acting in a rude Stereotypical manner. With satisfaction, however, Roger described how this type of heated exchange is rare for him. In fact, a number of TSOs bragged that their helpful demeanors and excellent communication skills can diffuse hostile attitudes and behavior, and that they experience far less antagonism from passengers than less friendly colleagues.

Interactions between Mindful TSO and Stereotypical-Hostile passenger identities in particular can result in changed perspectives for passengers. TSO Peter recalled a situation in which he had to perform a pat-down on an elderly man, and the man's son was upset:

I was working with one of the original members of EZ Company, the Band of Brothers, the real deal. I had to do a pat-down and his son was just livid—a war hero getting a pat-down? He [the father] couldn't put his hands in the proper position because he was 90-years-old and he had more metal in him than he had bones. If he walked through the metal detector he'd light up like a Christmas tree. We know he's not dangerous, of course we do... But the guy's son, he's really upset about it. . . . I spent the next 20 minutes bringing him [the son] back down to earth. If my father was a World War II vet, a hero, I'd be pissed. But I just treated him with empathy.

Peter took care to not only perform a gentle and compassionate search of the elderly man, but he also spent significant time calming down the son. Peter counted this interaction as successful because his communication skills and empathy helped the passengers walk away

feeling good, or at least better, about the experience. While good for passenger morale, however, Peter's Mindful performance resulted in the screening taking much longer than is typical—taking him away from other screenings in the checkpoint. Also, a consequence of paying such close attention to this pair of passengers meant that Peter could not be ever-vigilant and aware of others around him as TSOs are meant to be according to meso-level discourses. As many TSOs described the hyper-awareness of managers who prioritize efficient Standard Operating Procedures, being an especially helpful TSO may actually lead to trouble with management. This conundrum is faced by many in high-stress service environments where organizational members must decide whether to immediately appease a customer or attend to and prioritize higher level organizational goals (Tracy & Tracy, 1998).

Indeed, increased communication with a particular passenger, whether small talk or addressing questions/concerns, can result in slower security screenings and delays in lines, which can spur irritation for other passengers concerned about “getting through” quickly. Likewise, TSOs demonstrating Mindful behaviors who take time away from screening processes, even for helpful purposes, can face consequences from coworkers and managers. TSO Carrie described how her supervisors did not appreciate the extra time she took to help passengers:

[They] don't like people who are nice. . . . who go out of their way to help people. I've been told I am unprofessional, unprofessional, unprofessional, unprofessional. That's all they keep telling me because I help old ladies with their carts. I tie people's shoes for them. I help people with their coats when they need it, and that's being 'unprofessional.'

Depending upon where in the security line “chain” Mindful-acting TSOs are stationed (e.g. from ID checker to Divestiture Officer to Walk-Through Metal Detector officer),



conversation and help-related delays can cause passenger bottlenecks that back up lines and potentially breed resentment in coworkers who must then deal with cranky fliers. It is interesting here that Carrie's perception of management's definition of "unprofessional" so starkly differs from what "unprofessional" might mean to a passenger. Understanding "professionalism," then, depends on the context and subject position. During traditional customer service encounters, "professionalism" often means doing the job right and as the customer wants it. In security, professionalism includes navigating discourses that equate "professionalism" with stoicism and strict protocol enactment from management, whereas those behaviors may not seem satisfying to passengers who could benefit from extra help and care.

### **Mindful TSO Identities Interacting with Ideal Passenger Identities**

When TSOs resist dominant meso and macro discourses about what it means to be a TSO, relations with passengers can produce positive interactions, surprise, and sometimes, transformation of preconceived notions about identity. TSOs embodying Mindful personas often infuse their work with kindness and humor, relying heavily upon interpersonal communication skills. TSO Peter said, "I can communicate pretty well with passengers because I can empathize. . . . I treat them [passengers] as humans. With humor, empathy." In observations, helpfulness and humor seemed to make the security process less of a drag, such as when I observed TSO Roger aiding a group of elderly travelers. When a wheelchair-using passenger in their assembly stood up next to her chair, Roger murmured to her companions, "She got free. I don't think she plans to go back." The group and surrounding passengers chuckled. TSOs describe these instances of connection as what make their jobs satisfying and fun.

However, when TSOs who embrace Mindful identities encounter passengers who strongly enact Ideal passenger personas, interactions might produce little interaction at all. This fieldnote example demonstrates how a friendly TSO related to young family traveling together:

In line for the ticket checkers, I see a 30-something TSO with dark brown hair chatting with passengers, making eye contact and smiling amiably. When I get closer, the TSO directing traffic joshes with passengers as they walk by. I see yet another young male TSO checking boarding passes and occasionally smiling to passengers.

In spite of these outward displays of amiability, the passengers respond with dour and drawn expressions. Case in point, a family traveling together—a couple in their mid-30s with a toddler and an infant. Even though the TSO is entirely kind and helps them manage documents for their children, they neither acknowledge or respond to her.

In this example, the passengers stringently enact an Ideal identity which involves tightly controlling emotions, performing the role of passenger-as-lemming perfectly. Despite the fact that the TSO is exceptionally friendly and helpful, the passengers do not react or reciprocate the feelings. While it can be argued that a couple with two small children may be more focused on the cumbersome tasks at hand, it may also be that people perceive what they expect to see, and based upon macro discourses about airport security, friendly TSOs are unanticipated. However, it could also be that in refusing to participate in positive emotional exchanges, passengers are in turn disciplining TSOs and encouraging them to also perform more Ideal identities.

As described in Chapter Five, when TSOs engage in Mindful identity performances, they essentially “transgress” against dominant discourses and normative emotional

performances in security checkpoints. Depending upon how TSOs challenge accepted behavior standards, the potential for surprise and meaning making is possible. For instance, Skeet, a TSO who described ambivalent feelings about passengers, discussed playing with people in security checkpoints. He described leading passengers in games of “Simon Says” as they finished screenings:

I'll stand there with my hands up, not saying a word [in an “A” shape above his head]. And they'll stop in front of me and do the same thing. I'm not saying a word. . . . At first, they think, “What's going on? I must do this.” Or, some people just ignore me altogether. Once they figure out what's happening, it puts a smile on their face. I actually had one person tell me, he hated TSA. Then, I changed his opinion of TSA completely. He was going to go out and buy a t-shirt and wear it to the airport that read, “I hate TSA.” I don't care. That doesn't bother us. Because I had messed with him a little bit, he smiled when he left, and said he wasn't going to go buy the shirt.

In this example, a Mindful TSO performance of fun broke through passengers' expectations, something that can spur passengers to see security processes in a more positive light. Doing so can challenge stereotypes of TSOs and generate more positive interactions between passengers and TSOs.

### **Mindful TSO Identities Interacting with Mindful Passenger Identities**

In my observations, positive and conversation-laden interactions tend to occur between people who portray Mindful TSO and Mindful passenger identities. For passengers with Militant leanings, relating to a receptive TSO can mean feeling comfortable to ask questions or address assumptions about security processes without receiving hostility or censure. For passengers embracing Mindful-Empathetic identities, interactions with engaging

TSOs may mean simply enjoying small talk. For example, in this fieldnote excerpt, I briefly speak with a TSO who infuses humor into our exchange as he checks my carry-on, within which is a desktop computer:

The TSO asks, “What do we have here?” I offer that it is a desktop computer. When he sees the big Dell logo, he says, “You know they make laptops now, right?” With a serious expression, I ask “Really?” We both laugh.

With this type of easy humor and kindness, the security process felt more like customer service than customer searching, contrary as that might sound.

Throughout this analysis, I have referred to ways that TSOs performing Mindful identities transgress against normative and prototypical discourses about their work and identities in counterintuitive ways (e.g. by demonstrating kindness, empathy, etc.). In some instances, TSOs also engage in more common methods of resistance, such as expressing discontent about or acting against workplace practices (e.g. “whistleblowing”). For example, Collinson (2003) described “resistant selves” who “may help subordinates in ‘surviving’ organizational regimes of tight control, surveillance, and commodification” in the workplace (p. 539). TSOs enacting Mindful identities may indeed help their TSO counterparts “survive” the environment. However, my data show at least one example where “helpful” albeit unauthorized advice is extended to a passenger—something that invoked surprise for me as illustrated in this fieldnote excerpt:

Waiting for my pat-down, I observe the line and my belongings slowly sliding into the x-ray. Soon I am collected by a petite woman with short curly red hair who reminds me of “Carla” from the 1980s television show, *Cheers*.

I can feel the energy moving off of her as she asks, “What side are your things on, sweetie?” We walk to the opposite side of the conveyor belt and I noticed

other passengers watching me. She gathers my things, placing them on the steel table. While changing gloves, she leans in toward me.

Standing close enough that I can smell her minty breath, she asks if I've been through the pat-down before and I confirm.

Leaning in closer, she confesses, "I could get fired for saying this."

Holding my breath, I wait.

Her heavily penciled blue eyes stare directly into mine as she admits, "I won't ever go through the x-ray and I won't let any of my five daughters either."

Eyes wide, I remark, "I never go through them." She seems to breathe easier.

We chat, me about my doctoral work, she about her daughter in medical school. She proceeds to tell me, leaning in as if I am about to learn trade secrets (and apparently, I am), that a way to get directed into the metal detector—and avoid advanced imaging *and* pat-downs—is to say that you cannot<sup>17</sup> raise one or more of your arms up to shoulder height. (In order to go through the advanced imaging machines, you have to be able to raise your hands above your head, and pat-downs require arms to be extended at the shoulders.) I thank her profusely for the knowledge and she begins my pat-down.

With a brisk pace and firm pressure, she wipes me down, not giving me any direction or advisements as she likely (and rightly) assumes I know them all. I laugh when she says, "There's more than one way to do this..." evoking the "There's more than one way to skin a cat" cliché and referring to getting around the system. We both laugh heartily.

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<sup>17</sup> Anecdotal personal evidence suggests that this technique works like a charm.

She tells me to “stay put” while she tests her gloves and we chat amiably for a little while longer. As I pack up, she walks back over, again standing less than a foot away and pulls a business card out of her breast pocket. She tells me to call the 1-800 number and complain about the backscatter scanner, to say that I don’t like it, that I don’t appreciate it, etc. I agree that I would and for the first time, I shake hands with a TSO. I walk away bewildered.

Out of the hundreds of TSOs I encountered during this study, *none* except this curly-haired Carla look-alike shared “insider” information about how to game the system. Empathetic TSOs were rare enough in my data and encountering one who also seemed Mindful-Militant frankly stunned me.

Although an extreme example, the interaction has characteristics similar to experiences with other TSOs performing Mindful identities. Namely, we took time to connect on a personal level and joked around. Using her discretion and the information that I had been through the screening before, the TSO sped up her “advisements” prior to the pat-down. Despite being friendly and confiding in me, she performed the pat-down thoroughly, maintaining her professionalism for the most part. However, I noticed that our extended interaction drew the attention of other TSOs and passengers, likely due to our laughter and the extra time taken.

Although Mindful TSO behaviors may not be overtly supported by management or always appreciated by TSO coworkers, performing kindness, empathy and assistance can offer positive consequences for the checkpoint environment. In terms of identity construction, positive encounters with TSOs can challenge and potentially adjust the ways that passengers conceive of TSOs broadly. During interactions, affirmative emotional performances can also potentially reduce passenger anxiety and generate positive emotion

cycles which can counteract the effects of negative emotions (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009). In the case of Carla's resistance, Mindful identity performances also demonstrate that thorough security screenings can be accomplished without sacrificing passenger dignity or mutual expressions of humanity.

### **Identity Performances in Combination**

For the sake of demonstration, I organized the preceding section by illustrating all pairings of TSO and passenger interactions. Of course, this presentation belies the complexity of interactions in airport security. In fact, passengers may encounter several different "types" of TSOs in a single security screening, sometimes more than one at a time. TSOs most certainly manage different types of passengers all day long. Moreover, TSOs can enact a combination of identity positions depending on training and sensegiving messages, or how passengers perform identity with them. Likewise, passengers may start out playing one identity position (let's say Ideal) but transition depending upon the encounter (perhaps to a more Stereotypical passenger persona). Within every encounter, emotional expression and management plays a role.

To illustrate these points, I now turn to mixed combinations of TSO and passenger identity types which illustrate the intricacy of airport security identity performances. With concern for brevity, I show three extended scenes that include multiple types of passengers and TSOs rather than try to portray all possible combinations. I focus first on implications related to identity performances, then after the second vignette, emotional management/cycles, and finally, security interactions as part of a larger system.

### **Ideal and Mindful TSO Identities Mix with a Mindful Passenger Identity**

More often than not, passengers will encounter multiple types of TSO performances during a single security screening. The dynamics of these exchanges can be particularly

compelling as TSOs not only perform identities for passengers, but each other as well. For instance, this fieldnote excerpt shows what happened when I encountered two TSOs, one acting in the Ideal short and professional manner, and the other more helpfully:

My bags disappear into the x-ray scanner, and I hear an excited voice call, “Bag check, I’ve got a bag check!” Two TSOs confer as a third walks up with my purse, his blue gloves contrasting with the grey bag. As the young man motions me over, I hear the X-ray Scanner TSO mention something about lotion.

I walk over and apologize immediately as the young man opens my bag. I say “Sorrrrrry,” and ask if I forgot anything, knowing good and damn well I never take out my toiletries in security. He digs around and I joke, “At least I remembered to take out my mace!” as if that’s a mea culpa.

“Where you from? LA?” he jokes, surprised.

“Tempe, it’s dangerous out there” and I reference recent shootings near campus. He comments and then disappears with my purse. I can’t see where he walks with it, lotion extracted. I am nervous for a moment until I realize he is re-scanning my bag. The X-ray TSO is adamant that there is something else in there. The young man takes me to a table and asks me to stand on the opposite side so there is a partition between us. He digs and finds alcohol gel. He tosses it back in my bag, nodding towards the X-ray Screener and saying “He’s crazy!” I smile with thanks, and then immediately disappear with my things.

During this exchange, which occurred early in my data gathering, I noticed an arbitrariness inherent in security screenings. Some TSOs, like the young man who searched my bag, used discretion to help passengers (e.g., letting me keep my contraband, not running my bag a third time once the second container of liquids was found). Other TSOs followed rules



exactly, like the X-ray Screener TSO who acted hypervigilant, scanning the bag multiple times, still certain that *something* was there. Having taken the purse, contents exactly the same, through security successfully at least 30 times before this experience, I wondered how the bag was okay most of the time, passing muster with most TSOs, but not all of the time, with all of the agents.

Later, after interviewing an independent security professional who trains TSOs on X-ray scanning, I learned that TSOs working the X-ray Screening position labor under enormous pressure not to miss dangerous objects, including “test” objects<sup>18</sup> that “secret shopper” managers bring through to ensure TSOs are paying attention. TSO Cat described the pressure, saying, “You can get tested on all of it. Then they grade you and see. Your manager wants you to pass, too, because then it looks bad on them if you miss.”

Consequently, in-training TSOs often err on the side of caution and rescan bags frequently, much to the chagrin of passengers like me and TSO coworkers. In these examples, fear of reproach from supervisors manifests as a mechanism to control low-status employees and position them as somewhat nonsensical in their hypervigilance which is similar to pressures that new 9-1-1 emergency call-takers face when learning the ropes (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). Furthermore, hypervigilance reinforces stereotypes about “trying too hard”/foolish TSOs whose work seems more like theater than effective security.

As indicated by the young TSO’s interactions with me, some agents are aware of the identity performances of coworkers, and work to distance themselves from identities that seem displeasing. What I defined as “hypervigilant,” the young TSO called “crazy,” seeming to suggest that rescanning the bag multiple times after two visual inspections produced no

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<sup>18</sup> During final edits of this dissertation, TSOs in Newark were under fire for twice missing test explosives that an undercover agent was trying to carry through security, including during a pat-down (Chumley, 2013).

dangerous objects was perhaps lacking in common sense. Further, he compensated for his coworker's "crazy" behavior by joking with me and not "correcting" my behavior as an Ideal TSO might. Indeed, while the extra scanning felt superfluous and the X-ray scanner's suspicion was not encouraging, the interactions with the friendly young TSO lent the encounter a pleasant air. The ability to cross-commiserate—a TSO-to-passenger, versus passenger-to-passenger or TSO-to-TSO—seemed to build camaraderie and reinforce our Mindful identities while also tempering the irritation associated with getting detained for further screening.

Interactions between multiple actors demonstrate how complex identity work takes place in security checkpoints. The encounter above shows how a passenger can be read and treated differently by TSOs who work closely on the same team and likely receive the same sensegiving messages. It may be that certain positions prime TSOs to think in particular ways—e.g. more suspicious when checking baggage than when giving advisements as a Divestiture Officer. However, the disparate appraisals from TSOs can send passengers mixed messages about how to behave in and prepare for security in the future. In some ways the Mindful identity performance, while a breath of fresh air interpersonally as compared to the paranoid persona, undermined organizational discourses like "the rules." Passengers in similar situations might wonder which TSO's identity performance to give more credence for guiding future interactions.

### **An Ideal TSO meets a Stereotypical passenger in Ideal clothing**

Like most people, TSOs use heuristics to "interpret" the identities of people in their environment (Cialdini, 2009; Weick, 2005). When interpreting passengers, TSOs often assess attire as a signal for expected behavior. When people arrive in security wearing business suits and carrying briefcases and small roller bags, TSOs may presume that those travelers are

experienced Ideal passengers who need little help through security. Likewise, TSOs may assign passengers who arrive in casual or complicated (i.e., difficult to quickly remove) clothes a Stereotypical persona and treat them accordingly. Passengers who fly frequently use similar heuristics to judge TSOs and other passengers they encounter. When quick categorizations are challenged, there lies opportunity for surprise and sensemaking (Louis, 1980), depending upon the degree of expectation violation. For instance, this extended fieldnote excerpt depicts what happens when a TSO encounters a Stereotypical passenger who *looks* like an Ideal business traveler:

Inside the security checkpoint, I wait for a female TSO to perform my pat-down. The X-Ray Screener scrutinizes items intently, the line of waiting passengers backing up. I notice a bag getting rescanned belongs to an “A-Lister” who cut me off in line.

A TSO with a sweet demeanor and lilting voice finally arrives. She directs me to the screening area next door to the A-lister who watches his suitcase being searched by a male TSO in his late 40s who wears a red braided cord over his left shoulder that I will later learn signifies an honor guard of some sort. As the woman rubs her latex-laden hands over me, I watch A-Lister get snooty with the TSO.

As blue fingers comb through A-Lister’s suitcase, the TSO tells him that liquids and gels need to be removed from the suitcase and scanned separately. The A-Lister spits out a haughty “I know” as he fiddles with his phone. (At least when I purposefully ignore the rules, I act somewhat abashed or apologetic...) A-Lister stands, pin-striped legs akimbo, now *not* watching the proceedings.

I ask my TSO how her day is going and she replies, “Good, it’s my Friday!” to which I respond, “Hooray!” with genuine enthusiasm. As her pastel blue hands

slide around the curves of my breasts, she glances toward her colleague and confides, “I can’t wait to get out of this place.” *No kidding.*

While she scans her gloves for traces of explosives, I watch A-Lister plunge in earbuds and fiddle with his iPhone, although the TSO is still checking his bags and talking to him. The A-Lister stands erect and I can sense the passenger’s utter disdain for the process, if not the man, who is holding him up. The TSO, however, remains pleasant—seemingly oblivious to the scorn of A-Lister. I am disgusted by this passenger’s nonverbal behavior—the dismissive tone, use of technology for distancing, disregard for the person just trying to do his job. I can’t hide my smile as I see the TSO take the bag back to the scanner, having found the errant liquid or gel, furthering detaining the condescending passenger.

In this example, the A-Lister—likely used to being treated as the Ideal—is challenged by the TSO who does not acknowledge his status. Whereas many passengers describe *not* feeling like customers in airport security, A-Lister seems to draw on discourses of “the customer is always right” to enact a position of privilege. The passenger exudes irritation and disgust, while the TSO completes his work impassively, not reacting to the degrading behavior. The TSO meanwhile keeps his emotions buried, despite the A-Lister’s apparent loathing. With his behavior strictly professional, the TSO attempts to give sense about how to avoid a bag check in the future.

Although TSOs described seeing all sorts of rude passengers—TSO manager Rick reminded me “You can’t classify stupid”—the TSO in this interaction may have been initially surprised by the passenger’s behavior. Wearing the trappings of a business person, the passenger on his face appeared to fall into an Ideal, low-effort category. The passenger’s hostile behavior, however, clashed with his business suit wrapper. Mismatches like this can

trigger attention and alertness on the part of TSOs. As the TSO acted Ideal and indeed wore accoutrement to suggest an elite TSO status, he almost certainly had extra training that equipped him to deal with the passenger without conflict. However, a newer or more Stereotypically-acting TSO in the same situation could likely have engaged in the interaction with less sensitivity and therefore more of a possibility for conflict.

Importantly, this vignette emphasizes how emotional performances influence people in dynamic organizational settings, and pivotally, those not even directly involved in an interaction. For organizational members immediately engaged, emotional residue from customers can accumulate over time, especially in airports that see thousands of people every day, triggering a longer lasting mood for that employee. It is not hard to imagine a TSO tolerating demeaning emotional performances from passengers at the beginning of a shift, but demonstrating less patience as the day wears on. Furthermore, in the case of TSOs performing Ideal identities such as in this example, perpetually burying emotions cannot only contribute to burnout over time (Grandey, 2003), it can generate significant health consequences such as decreased immune function and increased cardiovascular risk factors (Kemeny & Shestyuk, 2008). Socially, managing interactions with troubling passengers can promote solidarity between TSOs who, as Skeet described, “have each other’s backs” when it comes to emotional passenger outbursts. It would be interesting to know which types of TSO responses are admired, tolerated, or discouraged by fellow TSOs.

This vignette also shows that bystanders are also linked into the emotional encounters of others, which supports research regarding emotion cycles (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Scarduzio, 2012). Although my personal interaction with the TSO screening me felt pleasant, indeed we exchanged greetings and I asked her several questions about work, I could not help but notice the irritation exuding from the passenger nearby. Both the female

TSO and I marked his behavior, me with surprise and her with resignation. Whereas passengers seem focused on themselves and their own experiences (especially, in my observations, those enacting Stereotypical or Ideal identities), depending on how much and what type of emotion is expressed, they may inadvertently cue responses from other passengers as well.

### **Stereotypical and Ideal TSOs, and a Stereotypical-looking Mindful Passenger**

As demonstrated in the previous passage which showed tense and cheerful interactions happening side-by-side, the security checkpoint chugs along with a steady stream of expressed emotions from passengers and TSOs alike. Although I have focused primarily on snapshot interactions between TSOs and passengers, the airport is a highly dynamic system where emotional encounters in one setting (such as security) can influence relations in another (such as boarding areas, on planes, etc.) (Malvini Redden, 2013).

In this extended excerpt, I show how security interactions manifest as a linked chain of emotions for passengers as they transition through stations and into the airport proper:

In between the creeping checkpoint lines, the petite Divestiture Officer paces around practically whispering advisements. I hear her plaintive pleas about taking out liquids, gels, and aerosols. The metal detector officer watches me as I wait to push my last bags into the X-ray. With an acerbic air, he tells me to “hold on” as if I’m trying to force my bags through.

I walk over to him and he points me to the advanced imaging machine. I say firmly, “I’d like to opt out.” Instead of telling me to wait along the side as usual, he curls an index finger towards me, motioning me over. Standing close, I feel his eyes boring into mine.

“I have to tell you, if you opt out—you know what we’re going to do to you?” he asks, in a near-menacing tone.

“Yes,” I counter, returning his steady gaze.

“We’re going to pat you down, head, chest, waist, legs, breast, buttocks, groin, sensitive areas,” he continues, leaning closer.

“Yes,” I reply, not shrinking back.

“You know this is a millimeter wave scanner and doesn’t have the radiation?”

“Yes.” *Well no, I think, it absolutely uses radiation.*

Exasperated, he directs me right to wait. I’m surprised by the coercion and it occurs to me that I don’t look like a business traveler today, wearing jeans and sandals, instead of slacks and heels. I inwardly laugh at myself for feeling a momentary blip of “Don’t you know who I am?” Did he read me as a Stereotypical traveler, someone likely to freak out at a pat-down? He clearly didn’t recognize my Mindful/Ideal knowledgeable persona. This mental dialogue becomes all the more amusing when moments later, I watch TSO Roger walk behind the conveyor belt, apparently recognizing my baggage. He looks at me, holding up four fingers to ask if all the items were mine. I nod, mouthing, “Thank you!”

A moment later, a TSO comes up to collect me with a “sweetie” on her lips and a smile across her face. She asks me to point out my things and I motion to Roger who walks the baggage over to the pat-down area. As she moves to change her gloves, she advises me to keep an eye on my things but not touch them. Smiling sweetly, the TSO talks through her advisements one by one. Even though she knows I know what they are, she repeats them without rushing. When I stand in the proper position without being asked, she praises me.

When she pats my hair, she exclaims how much she likes the color. I tell her that my mom is a stylist and she lavishes more compliments. The pat-down feels thorough but not invasive. Blue hands sweep bare arms and palms. When she comes around front, I automatically point my toe and lift my heel off the floor. She again praises me saying that that makes it easier for her. I repeat on the right side, aware that I am enacting Ideal passenger status right now. She asks me to wait while she checks her gloves. I look over and she tells me “Ten more seconds.” I smile. When the beep sounds, she wishes me a nice day.

In this vignette, a passenger with a Mindful/Ideal mindset encounters three types of TSOs within a short span, and seamlessly portrays several passenger identities. Bypassing the mumbling apathetic-appearing Divestiture Office, I meet the Metal Detector TSO evoking an Ideal-Disciplinarian attitude. In light of my dress, he seems to place me in a Stereotypical-Inexperienced category by preemptively scolding me to be patient while pushing my baggage on the conveyor belt and trying to bully me into the advanced imaging machine. I felt frustrated by the Ideal TSO attitude, not only because of his coercion attempts but also his misreading of my status as a competent flier. Although my irritation did not have time to manifest into Stereotypical behavior, I felt hostility kindling at the TSO’s brusque style. At the same time, TSO Roger validated my identity by recognizing me and being helpful. Most meaningfully though, I interacted with another Mindful-type TSO who offered kindness in place of the other TSO’s Idealized bravado.

Comparing the TSOs’ actions, both accomplished their duties, the Ideal acting TSO monitoring the checkpoint lines, feeding passengers through the advanced imaging machine. The TSO enacting a Mindful identity completed the pat-down with exacting detail. However, the *feeling* of each encounter differed dramatically. The Ideal-acting TSO embraced meso-



level organizational training requiring a “commanding presence.” Likely responding to pressure to meet quotas and because inexperienced passengers may not realize what a pat-down entails, he tried his best to get me to acquiesce to the advancing imaging. Demonstrating his affiliation with “the rules” by invoking the collective “we,” he explicitly named all of the body parts “they” were going to pat-down as if to scare me. Whereas a Mindful approach might have been to explain the procedure in order for me to be prepared and avoid any surprise later during the pat-down, his adversarial manner positioned the encounter like a game and that if I went through the scanner, he would “win.” The close-talking coercion attempts felt pressure-filled and although as a seasoned traveler I felt confident to stand up for myself, I could easily see a passenger embodying a Stereotypical-Inexperienced persona submitting to the screening that TSA policies maintain are “completely optional.”

Whereas interacting with the rule-oriented officer felt emotionally taxing, engaging with the friendly TSO felt easy and inviting. Her cheerful demeanor prompted me to respond in a friendly manner. Although her pat-down was quite thorough, she did not over-embrace meso-level discourses of “meeting resistance” as did the TSO performing an Ideal-Disciplinarian identity in the opening vignette. In fact, her pleasant countenance and steady stream of compliments induced me to act as an Ideal passenger, doing what I could to make her job easier and faster. It would be interesting to know whether this type of good natured officer identity would be more successful at convincing passengers to use advanced imaging than the combative Ideal-Disciplinarian persona. However, the strategic use of positive emotions does not appear to be a formal TSA tactic, at least where adults<sup>19</sup> are concerned.

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<sup>19</sup> Alongside the standard placards in security checkpoints stands a cartoon of “TSA Officer Smith,” a dark-haired woman of indistinguishable descent who wears large glasses and holds her hand up in greeting. In a

## Summary

In this chapter, I put Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful TSO and passenger identities described in Chapter Five into action, illustrating how people perform certain facets of identity in airport security settings. Specifically, I provide fieldnote and interview examples of basic character configurations that travelers and TSOs might enact and encounter, before illustrating more complex situations. In doing so, I depict consequences of identity performances, both positive and negative, in relation to interpersonal communication, identity work, and emotion management. Importantly, this chapter demonstrates how passenger and TSO identity performances shape and co-construct each other, reinforcing, shifting, and transforming how people conceive of themselves and others in airport security. This work provides a platform from which to address theoretical connections between discourses, identity, and emotion management further in the next chapter.

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cartoon “thought bubble” with red children’s converse sneakers overlapped, Officer Smith tells children: “Good news! If you’re 12 and under make sure to tighten your laces because you can keep your shoes on during security.” This overtly friendly presentation works to normalize security processes for children who will grow up with TSA policies as taken for granted.

## Chapter 7

### IDENTITY PERFORMANCES IN AIRPORT SECURITY CONTEXTS:

#### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

“I just try to treat them with respect, and how I treat anybody in a service position, and when they don’t pay that in kind, that’s when it throws me off. When they’re less friendly, or they’re rude, or they’re treating me like I’m just I don’t know, like sheep going through the gate, or cattle, or just not treating me like I’m a fellow person, I guess.” –Soleil, passenger

“Outside of the uniform, I’m a mom. I’m a young, 25-year-old girl that’s working like everybody else. When I put my uniform on, some days, it’s straight work. I’m doing my job for the people, for the passengers. I don’t have to be in this line of service. I think that I’m a pretty good officer, and I think that I work myself down to the bone sometimes. I overwork myself. All for the good of you guys [passengers]. . . . Whatever the uniform, we’re regular people just like you guys. We’re all the same, you know what I mean?” –Alexa, TSO

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“Oh, she always opts out,” a TSO with short spiky highlights says to a white-shirted officer working the walk-through metal detector, smiling at me with recognition when I opt out of the advanced imaging machine.

I soon realize the white shirt indicates TSO trainee status. The Newbie looks confused as she directs me to stand aside and wait. Behind me, the Divestiture Officer stops his advisements to ask the Newbie, “Was she given her options?”

The spiky haired TSO, who I will soon learn is a manager, answers for her again. Laughing, she nods towards me, “She always gets a pat-down.”

A few seconds pass. The manager opens the gate to allow me through, bringing Newbie with her. Newbie asks which side my belongings are on and I gesture right. She points to a place at the end of the conveyor belt, commanding me to “Stand right there.” Newbie reinforces her message for me to “stay” with a flat palm extended, putting distance between us, as if I am a dog being told to sit.

The manager comes over and offers that Newbie's in training—as if to explain the gestures—and that I am a “perfect person to learn from.”

I laugh, assuming she means because I am a *nice* passenger with no history of troublesome emotional outbursts. I joke, “In that case, should I give her a hard time?”

The manager laughs and confesses, “She'll get that soon enough.”

She adds, “You do this more than we do,” suggesting I could probably give new people training myself. *That might be true!*

The three of us meander to a set of chairs and mats. The supervisor stands nearby as Newbie starts her process. Newbie stands close to me and even barefoot, I must gaze down to meet her eyes. Her speech comes in short gasps, like she is so nervous that she can't quite catch her breath. The litany of advisements seems longer than is typical, and she explains the motions she is going to use in full detail.

The pat-down begins as if in slow motion. I stand in the proper position before she directs me to and she makes a point to inspect both of my upward-turned palms before starting. Gloved hands pause on my skull, patting my hair but stopping at the collar. Newbie pauses and looks to the supervisor who reminds her she can ask me to move my hair aside.

As I lift brown locks, she sweeps my collar and then begins a tedious process of scraping down my back, inch by careful inch. Slow, deliberate strokes paint downward until she gets to my waist. Newbie asks me to lift up my shirt, “But only enough so that I can see the top of the waistband.”

She pauses again and the supervisor jumps in to indicate that when she encounters pants without belt loops (like mine) to just pinch together the fabric in the back so it bunches away from the body. That way, she can clear the waistband *without* touching the

skin. (*Apparently that is a rule! How, after more than 100 pat-downs am I just learning this? I wonder.*)

The supervisor says (from a previous conversation or maybe training), “Seam to seam.”

After completing waistband work, Newbie bends to clear my lower half. With the same measured, firm pressure she sweeps down my legs and then up fleshy inner thighs until her gloved fingers brush my groin. The contact feels like a zap to the system. Being touched on the arms, back, and head seems more clinical, ordinary, but the inner thighs and groin region—uncharted territory to strangers—always feels reprehensible.

When Newbie transitions to face me, she stutters, pauses, and stumbles while trying to explain the breast check. I somehow refrain from finishing her sentences and stifle a smile realizing that I really could give the advisements if I wanted to. Clumsy *finger tips* press down on the top of my breasts and around my collar bone. With forceful pressure, she swipes through cleavage, squashing the underwire into my flesh. She repeats on the other side and I feel fabric biting skin. *I recall TSO Carrie mentioning that TSOs can get in trouble if they don't press down firmly enough during “secret shopper” tests. I believe this Newbie will never be in trouble on that score.*

Newbie performs “seam to seam” work on my front side, sweeping down to clear my legs. As she stands, her radio goes flying. Immediately, she lunges to retrieve it, but the supervisor orders her to leave it be until she finishes up.

When Newbie goes to test her gloves, she again gestures for me to wait. After a moment, she says, “You’re free to go and to have a nice day,” but the supervisor scolds her—she can’t say that until the buzzer goes off, indicating I have not touched any explosives. When the signal finally sounds, Newbie repeats herself.

I look at the clock and realize this pat-down alone took more than 12 excruciating minutes. Her very first pat-down and coincidentally, my last. *For fieldnotes, anyway.*

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Weaving together historical accounts of airport security, formal interviews with passengers and TSOs, and extensive observations of security checkpoints, this qualitative exploration of identity in airport security provides insight into the processes of travel that affect millions of people every day. By integrating discourse, identity, and emotion theories, my analysis also makes several significant theoretical and practical contributions for organizational scholars and practitioners alike. In this concluding chapter, I provide a summary of the dissertation; an analysis connecting the dissertation findings to sensemaking literature (Weick, 1995); a discussion of theoretical, practical, and methodological implications; as well as reflections, limitations, and directions for future research.

### **Summary of Dissertation**

This dissertation explored identity construction, emotional management, and discourses in airport security checkpoints to see how passengers and TSOs perform identity and make meaning of interactions during travel and/or at work. The goals of the research included: providing a discourse tracing of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), describing how TSOs and passengers construct and enact different identities, and discussing the implications of identity performances for organizational theory and practice.

Using discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) as a guide, I began by constructing a narrative of modern airport security history using data from macro, meso, and micro levels of discourse. Developing this narrative demonstrated how airport security has changed since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent creation of the TSA. The discourse tracing showed that in 12 years, the TSA has become a taken for granted component of commercial flying—a now foundational aspect of what it means to fly—albeit not an uncontested one.

The history I composed illustrated the broad discourses that set the TSA in motion—terrorism, fear, patriotism, reclaiming American identity—as well as the meso- and micro- discourses that keep it going—policies, procedures, “following the rules,” “doing what you’re told,” “obeying authority.” In outlining meso-level discourses, I depicted how organizational rules have changed frequently and sometimes dramatically over time, and, importantly, how airport security policy changes are taken up in the popular imagination. Specifically, I described the ongoing events, conversations, and changes in policies that transitioned security from an unremarkable artifact of pre-9/11 flying to the elaborate, expensive, and invasive process that exists today. The history also showed how the meaning of airport security shifted dramatically in a relatively short period of time, and also, through interviews, how meanings diverge, sometimes spectacularly, for passengers and TSOs.

As people recalled during in-depth interviews their experiences of traveling through and working within security, they also spoke about ways of being, in other words, how they performed identity in that space. Using the discourse tracing and analyses of interviews and fieldwork, including my own participant observations, I found that distinct passenger and TSO identities emerged from and in relation to various discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels. With the history and the discourses that emerged from it in mind, I examined the experience of work and travel within airport security, specifically paying attention to how people described what it means to be a passenger or TSO. Using various levels of data, I showed how passenger and TSO identities are constructed by and through discourses. In particular, I compared and contrasted the identity constructions that emerged from macro discourses and macro-level conversations about airport security characters with those at meso-organizational and micro-interpersonal levels.

In Chapter Five, I presented a typology of passenger and TSO identities that emphasizes “situated” elements (Wieland, 2010) to show how people perform selves in certain places. I delineated three broad categories of identities for TSOs and passengers—Stereotypical, Ideal, and Mindful. I constructed these categories with respect to how they aligned with various types of discourses. For instance, Stereotypical identities reflect connections to macro discourses and understandings of security present in the popular imagination. These discourses position TSOs as objects of scorn and variously as robotic, emotionless, and indolent Apathetic characters or inhuman, authoritative, and despotic Tyrannical characters. Likewise, discourses locate Stereotypical passenger identities in descriptions of unprepared, anxious, and emotional Stereotypical-Inexperienced passengers who “check their brains at the door” and outrageous, aggressive, and antagonistic Hostile passengers apt to cause a scene and then post it to YouTube. Whereas these discourses and identities were familiar and indeed caricatured in popular culture via shows including *Saturday Night Live*, they overshadow other personas present in airport security, namely those found within Ideal and Mindful identities.

I described Ideal identities as those which reflect ideals generated in meso-level discourses. Virtually unrepresented in popular culture and passenger interview data, Ideal TSO identities manifested in relation to organizational training and inculcation that frame airport security in terms of duty, patriotism, and mission. These discourses position TSOs as highly identified, emotionally controlled, and mission oriented Zealots, and hyper-vigilant, black and white, rule-enforcing Disciplinarians. At the same time, Ideal passenger identities emerged within constructions of expertise that framed passengers as rule-following, emotionally contained “sheeple” who prioritize organizational processes, sometimes over personal concerns, in order to “just get through.” Focusing on Ideal identities demonstrates



how meso-level discourses construct normative expectations for behavior, even for people who are not formal organizational members but still cue into norms of the setting.

In contrast to Stereotypical and Ideal conceptions, I also discussed a rarely observed but significant identity position that challenges dominant discourses in the security setting and draws upon other important discourses of empathy and affirmative emotional expression. What I call Mindful identities were evident in TSO performances that “transgressed” emotional norms in security in order to make travel and work easier for passengers and employees. Mindful TSO identities featured an awareness and resistance of negative macro discourses about airport security especially those that eclipsed the humanity of those interacting together. Passengers also exhibited Mindful identities which recognized and resisted dominant macro and meso discourses in security, namely those that impinged on civil liberties as in the Militant identity and those that constrained emotional expression as in the Empathetic passenger identity.

After delineating categories of TSO and passenger identities, I then examined them in action in Chapter Six, illustrating what happens when certain TSO and passenger identities interact. What I found was that certain pairings promoted particular consequences related to interpersonal communication, emotional management, and identity work, in addition to practical concerns like line slow-downs. Although difficult to succinctly summarize due to the complexity of possible identity pairings, Stereotypical identity performances can prompt interpersonal tension, burdensome emotion management, and role/Stereotype reinforcement, while also perpetuating stereotypes about airport security contexts and employees in the popular imagination. Ideal identity performances necessarily involved emotion management—for employees, by organizational mandate and for passengers, by experience or perceived necessity. Ideal identity performances can reinforce certain

discourses such as “the rules,” and perpetuate macro discourses of discipline and compliance, although in different ways for TSOs and passengers. Finally, Mindful identity performances were associated with emotional expression, notably affirmative emotions, as well as conversation and interpersonal engagement.

As mentioned in previous chapters, an early focus of this dissertation was to understand how passengers and employees made sense of experiences in airport security. However, as the data and analysis emerged, I focused primarily upon identity and emotional performances. That said, the findings provide implications for understanding the substance of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and directions for future research regarding the process. In the next section, I use the aforementioned findings to demonstrate the relationships among discourses, identity, emotion, and sensemaking before discussing theoretical, practical, and methodological implications.

### **Relationships among Discourses, Identity, Emotion, and Sensemaking**

In telling a story about the experiences of airport security, I started by tracing the history of the TSA through macro, meso, and micro discourses. This work enabled me to show that passenger and TSO identities are constructed by and through discourses. As tacitly argued and will be unpacked further here, as passengers and TSOs construct personal identities, they also create expectations for the characters they will encounter in the airport. These dual conceptions of self and other shape interactions. Interactions, in turn, reshape understandings of identity. I begin by briefly revisiting the historical context of airport security to show how people make use of discourses as resources for identity construction, how emotional performances provide information about identities. Then I show how identity constructions serve as resources for interaction in airport security contexts, and how identity enactment connects to meaning making.

## **How Passenger and TSO Identities are Produced through Discourses**

In the activity of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009), I defined the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States as a rupture point by which to examine changes to airport security over time. Given my subsequent analyses, I suggest that the 9/11 events and resulting creation of the TSA also serve as examples of cultural-level sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Wiley, 1988). Put simply, the U.S. as a society made sense of a major terrorist attack and tragedy, in part, by creating the TSA. The events of 9/11 broke the sense of the American people (Pratt, 2000), in essence shattering what it meant to be a citizen in “the home of the free and the land of the brave.” I invoke this patriotic phrase as a cliché purposefully because the events that killed thousands of people and decimated an entire branch of the travel industry also provoked sensemaking of discourses like freedom, terrorism, and security.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, security processes rely on and revolve around the same set of macro discourses, namely freedom, terrorism, security, production, and patriotism. TSOs and passengers draw upon these systems of thought uniquely, as evidenced by findings in Chapters Five and Six which show how different types of passenger and TSOs identities emerge through and via discourses. For example, Stereotypical-Inexperienced passenger identities manifest through macro discourses like authority and “following the rules,” and in relation to meso-level discourses that reinforce rule-following. Similarly, Stereotypical-Hostile TSO identities emerge through macro discourses that position TSOs within a range of characteristics from deviant/amoral to indolent/apathetic which contrast with meso-level organizational discourses and emphasize patriotism, duty, and mission.

Discourses serve as resources (Kuhn, 2009) for identity construction and rationale for identity enactment. What I mean is that as TSOs and passenger identities are constructed

by discourses, passengers and TSOs can also use discourses to make sense of interactions and emotional experiences. For instance, upholding “the rules” allows TSOs a framework within which to see themselves as honorable officers concerned for the public’s safety and also disassociate from uncomfortable interactions that result from rule enforcement (e.g., customer hostility). Likewise, passengers who frame security as a “necessary evil” can use discourses such as “sacrifice for the greater good” to understand deferring to authority during processes that make them upset. In light of this, I suggest that *how* discourses are embodied—by perpetuating, integrating, or resisting—influences the “type” of passenger or TSO identity a person will portray (e.g., Stereotypical, Ideal, or Mindful). Take for instance, how TSOs and passengers conceive of their “roles” in the security process.

In my data, passengers primarily focused on themselves and their own individual travel experiences. TSOs by and large kept a broader perspective in mind, thinking of the “flying public” as a whole. This is not in itself surprising as TSOs and passengers *do* maintain different roles—one as employee, one as traveler. However, the discursive construction and framing of roles can impact identity enactment. For instance, TSOs receive constant “sensegiving” messages (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) throughout their tenure with the organization from initial training, monthly education, and daily briefings with supervisors, not to mention annual evaluations and frequent surprise inspections. A constant message is that TSA is responsible for taking care of the “flying public”—an abstract ideal that connects the mission of TSOs to lofty and noble goals that extend beyond the material realities of the job itself. At the same time, TSOs are trained to see individual fliers as potential threats and to treat them with a gaze of suspicion until “proven innocent” through screenings.

How TSOs perpetuate, integrate, or resist certain discourses helps explain how particular identities are enacted in the airport. Those TSOs who significantly identify with

the organization and its goals, for instance, can extrapolate the “flying public” to an ideal, enforce rules meant to protect that public and forego treating individual fliers as individual people. For instance, consider TSO Alexa who was introduced in Chapter Five as embodying disciplinarian characteristics by stringently enforcing “the rules” to “keep people safe.” However, in practice, this meant not being helpful to *individual* passengers. In contrast, TSOs who resist, to a certain extent, dominant discourses in their environment, are better equipped to continue to see travelers as people and treat them accordingly. Consider, for example, the ways that Mindful TSO identities emphasize concern for individual fliers’ feelings and experiences in security.

Given these examples and the preceding analyses, it appears that when TSOs perpetuate macro level discourses about security which emphasize TSO authority, efficiency, rule-following, and “just a job” mentalities, they also are poised to enact Stereotypical identities. Whereas when TSOs integrate meso-level organizational discourses that frame work as a patriotic duty, suggest strict emotion rules, and engender “career” mentalities, TSOs are primed to enact Ideal identities. Furthermore, when TSOs resist dominant macro and meso level discourses that abstract out the human components of interaction and emphasize discourses of “duty” and “rules” before empathy and emotionality, TSOs can enact Mindful identities. Of course, this is not to say that TSOs perform singular identities or that foregrounding one type of discourse means that others are no longer of concern. Rather, I suggest that by emphasizing certain levels and types of discourses, discourses make possible or make easier certain ways of being.

Likewise, the ways that passengers accomplish identity in relation to discourses suggests that they may perform identity work in particular ways. When passengers arrive at the airport, they come bearing a specific set of goals and expectations about what going

through security will be like and how security relates to their travel experiences as a whole. Passengers including Soleil and Nathan in particular described arriving at the airport hoping security would be “easy” so they could get on to the business of enjoying their travels. As they interact with TSOs, it becomes clear that passengers react to and enact certain types of discourses in consequential ways. As they embody passenger stereotypes as in the Stereotypical “idiot” passenger or Mindful “freedom fighter” positions, passengers invoke macro discourses while reacting to meso-level discourses e.g. “the rules.” As passengers defer to TSOs as Nathan mentioned, even when it does not feel right, they reinforce macro level meanings like authority or “doing what you’re told” by figures of influence.

When passengers perpetuate macro level discourses and stereotypes about security that frame passengers as cogs in a wheel and TSOs as authoritarians, this facilitates the enactment of Stereotypical passenger identities. When passengers integrate meso-level meanings that frame “good” passengers as perfect, emotionless automatons, passengers can enact Ideal passenger identities. Finally, when passengers resist dominant discourses related to security (e.g. compliance, authority, “the rules”) and instead prioritize other discourses (e.g. freedom, privacy, empathy), passengers are primed to enact Mindful passenger identities. Understanding how discourses are perpetuated, integrated, and resisted provides insight into how people perform identities, and how different types of characters emerge in airport security settings.

### **Anticipated Identities, Identity Performances, and Meaning Making**

Discourses not only shape how people develop and enact personal identity, but how they think about and prepare for encounters at the airport. For instance, passengers develop perceptions about airport security through macro-level discourses emergent in news stories, TSA press releases, etc., past experience with enacted meso-level discourses, and micro-level

conversations with significant others about security. What could arguably be called prospective sensemaking (Wright, 2005)—making meaning in advance of an anticipated encounter—these constructions can guide behavior in the airport. For frequent fliers, my data suggest that identity constructions focus on meso- and micro-level interactions in the airport while new or infrequent fliers, for whom the airport security experience is complicated and filled with uncertainty, draw upon more macro- and micro-level discourses—news about airport security and reports from friends and family. Fliers then use these frames as heuristics to guide behavior during trips through security. In Figure 1 below (see Appendix I for full-scale format), I depict visually how various discourses inform prospective sensemaking for passengers and TSOs. Depending on which discourses are foregrounded (illustrated by the darker circles), different types of sense can be potentially be made as will be discussed further below.

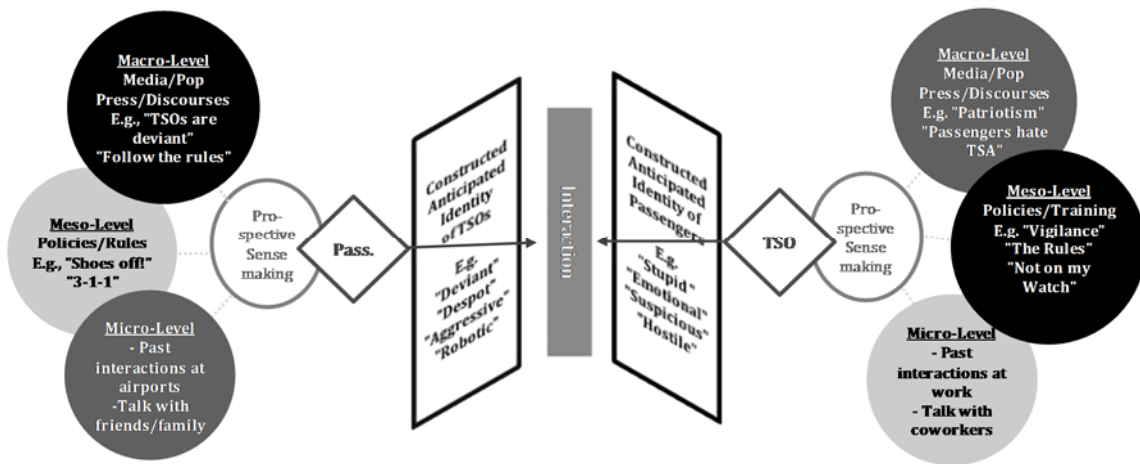


Figure 1. How discourses coalesce to inform prospective sensemaking and construct “anticipated” identities which are used to inform interaction.

In terms of identity, passengers arrive at the airport with a multitude of selves available to perform which are shaped by competing discourses. As discussed in the literature review, personal identity can be thought of as answers to the question “Who am I?”, which guide behavior in a given context. Following Wieland (2010), I am concerned

with “situated” identity practices and therefore, the question “who am I, *here?*” becomes relevant as passengers enact a certain self or combination of selves. In order to know “who I am, here” and likewise “how should I *behave* here,” passengers use discourses to construct what I call the “anticipated identities” of TSOs. How passengers behave and perform facets of identity depends, in part, on the identity performances of TSOs. So, to know “who I am here,” passengers must ascertain the identities of TSOs by discerning answers to “questions” like: “Who are you?” and more importantly, “Who are you, *to me?*” These questions are “answered” by the reciprocating identity performances of TSOs who also rely upon discourses to construct anticipated identities of passengers. Of course, it is important to bear in mind that the perceived identities are constructed expectations and therefore subject to challenge and change as will be discussed further.

Past research shows that passengers (in particular new/infrequent fliers) improvise in airport security, using the behaviors of others as guides for interaction and completing unfamiliar protocol (Malvini Redden, 2013). In order to figure out what type of TSO they are encountering, passengers assess the emotional performances of TSOs. For example, Stereotypical TSOs were characterized by aggression/hostility or boredom/indifference (depending upon whether they were Tyrannical or Apathetic), Ideal TSOs by assertiveness, stoicism, and precision, and Mindful TSOs by empathy and kindness. In context, imagine a passenger encountering a gruff, unsmiling officer who barks orders. It is not difficult to imagine a passenger categorizing that TSO negatively and expecting difficult interactions. Likewise, if a passenger encounters a friendly, smiling TSO, it would be easy to assume their interactions might have a more positive tenor. How well actual interactions match passengers’ preconceived notions and interpretations can influence how meaning is made of the encounter, and whether anticipated identities will be reinforced, challenged, or adjusted.



Categorization processes are similar for TSOs, except that meso-level organizational training and micro-level interactions with passengers can sediment anticipated identities in patterned ways. By this I mean the process of being inculcated into the culture of the TSA, which emphasizes duty, patriotism, suspicion, and vigilance, encourages TSOs to assess passengers in organizationally approved ways. For example, TSOs are trained to view passengers with suspicion and a “guilty until proven innocent” mentality. Until passengers and their belongings are cleared, passengers are to be surveilled with skeptical eyes. Micro-level interactions with passengers add to TSOs’ anticipated identities of passengers, often by positioning passengers as inexperienced and bothersome. The fact that TSOs encounter streams of passengers on a daily basis who they perceive as having “their brains checked at the door” suggests why TSOs might anticipate seeing unprepared/potentially hostile people who may also be dangerous. However, as findings in Chapter Six indicate, TSOs have the opportunity to adjust their conceptions of passengers continually via interaction.

How passengers and TSOs perceive and recognize the identities of others depends on their respective performances of emotion which are also guided by existing discourses and norms of the context. During micro-level interpersonal interactions, passengers and TSOs audience each other’s emotional performances. Demonstrated emotions serve as cues for how to interpret interactions and more often for passengers, how to manage experienced emotions. The emotional performances of passengers and TSOs can be reciprocal (Malvini Redden, 2013), with TSOs most often setting the tone for an encounter. As with other figures of authority, passengers described deferring to TSOs and managing personal emotions in ways that keep interactions flowing smoothly (e.g., recall Sue’s encounter with a TSO who she worked hard not to upset). However, the emotional performances of passengers and TSOs have the potential to influence each other and change the tenor of

encounters. The following figure depicts the connections I have traced above among identity constructions, identity enactment, and emotional performances.

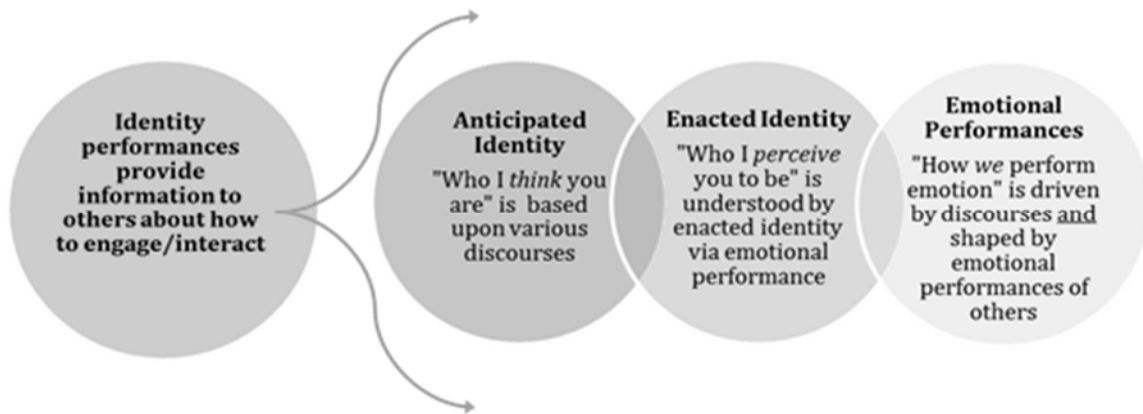


Figure 2. Connections between identity constructions, identity enactment, and emotion performances

As past research has demonstrated, emotion “cycles” emerge between organizational actors (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2009) with certain types of emotions processes serving as sensegiving or sensebreaking devices (Scarduzio, 2012). Extending this research, I link emotional performances with identity construction and suggest emotion performances also adjust/challenge/reinforce identity constructions of self and others (see Figure 3 below). For instance, when passengers who expect to encounter Stereotypical-Hostile TSOs instead meet with TSOs enacting Mindful personas, affirmative emotional performances can challenge preconceived notions (anticipated identities) of what TSOs will be like. Similarly, when TSOs encounter Inexperienced passengers who perform erratic or anxious emotions, TSO concepts of passengers as emotional and unpredictable can be reinforced. Also, when TSOs have experiences that require meaning making, they can adjust their views as well.

Understood within the language of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), the emotional processes that facilitate challenges to identity constructions of self and other serve as events that provoke meaning making for passengers and TSOs. Specifically, certain types of emotional encounters “give” and “break” sense about what it means to be a passenger or

TSO. Passengers and TSOs use discourses to make sense of emotional interactions which are intricately connected to performances of identity. What I mean by this is as discourses serve as resources for people to construct and enact identity, they also serve as important sources of meaning that help people navigate interactions with others. Corroborating this line of thought, Weick describes language, texts, ideologies, and institutions as the *substance* of sensemaking (1995). Connections between institutional theory and sensemaking also suggest that institutions provide meaning and context for sensemaking events (Weber & Glynn, 2006). As discourses make up/produce institutions (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), I suggest that discourses work similarly, and provide the same context and meaning.

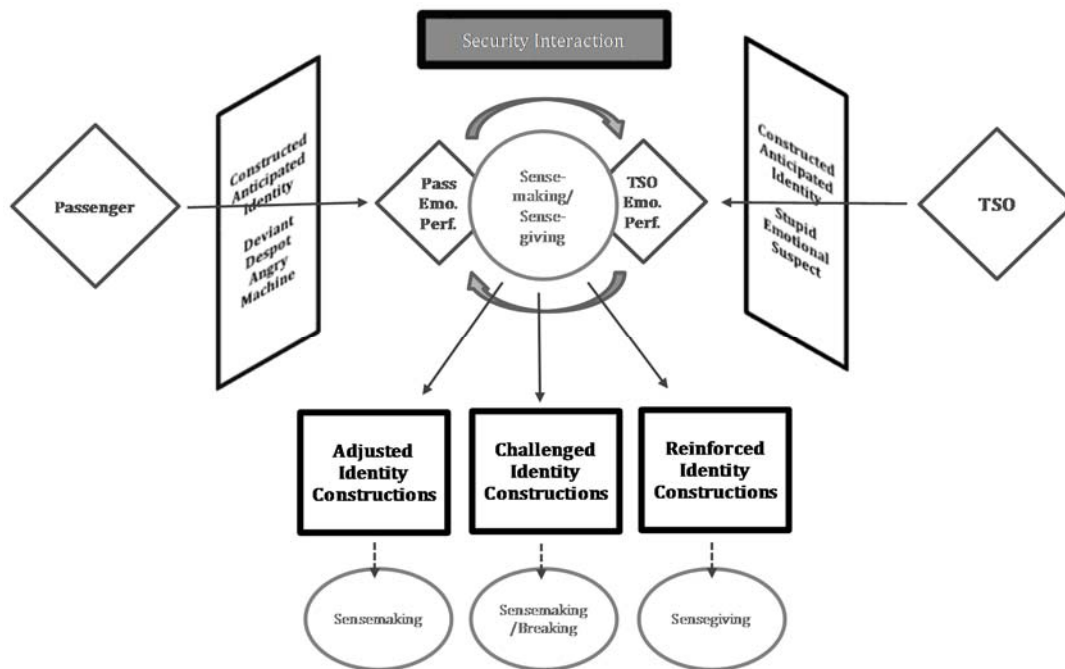


Figure 3. Building upon Figure 1, this model shows how emotional performances are reciprocal and serve as sensemaking and sensegiving devices during interaction, which can adjust, challenge, or reinforce identity constructions of self and other. As indicated by the dashed lines, the processes of identity (re)construction may indicate sensemaking, sensebreaking, or sensegiving, although further research is needed to assess that claim. (see Appendix J for a full scale version of the model.)

These findings are important because they provide insight about identity processes that are useful for understanding meaning making and ultimately, organizing in a unique context. The case study shows how discourses shape identities and serve as resources for identity construction and enactment. By tracing the discursive landscape of modern airport security, I link levels of discourse with specific types of identities, and show how passengers and TSOs draw upon and are constructed by discourses in active and passive ways. “Considering active forms of identity construction—as accounts that are explicitly processed—alongside passive forms of identity construction—as situated practices—provides a deeper understanding of how selves are communicatively constructed” (Wieland, 2010, p. 509).

Furthermore, passengers and TSOs use discourses to not only construct their own identities, but develop expectations about who they will encounter in airport security. These anticipated identities highlight how people are making sense of security characters in advance of interaction as in prospective sensemaking (Wright, 2005). For instance, if passengers envision anticipated identities that frame TSOs in Stereotypical-Hostile ways, then they may arrive at the airport expecting security to be an arduous process. If passengers assume Stereotypical-Inexperienced personas, this may manifest in feelings of anxiety and frustration as they prepare to encounter unfeeling, aggressive TSOs with the potential to make their experiences miserable. In this way, discursively constructed anticipated identities help inform behavior as they enable passengers to prepare for security. However, as demonstrated throughout Chapters Five and Six, anticipated identities function as heuristics that may not necessarily be accurate which leads to the potential for identities to be challenged and adjusted as well as reinforced. During interactions, then, TSOs and passengers relate with each other in ways that shape not only their personal identity constructions—what it means

to be a passenger or TSO—but the identities that they have developed for others as well. Using anticipated identities as filters for viewing other characters in security, passengers and TSOs essentially “test” these filters during interaction, ultimately interpreting through emotional performances the “actual” identities of people with whom they are interacting.

This research also shows how identity processes are inextricably linked with experiences and expressions of emotion. First, passengers and TSOs assess the emotional performances of others to interpret identities. In other words, passenger and TSO identities are “known” to others via their performances of emotion, for instance a Stereotypical-Hostile TSO identity is known by performances of aggression or vindictiveness, and an Ideal passenger identity is known by performances of compliance, or in the case of “know-it-all” business travelers, perhaps subtle irritation. Emotional performances are also linked to the enactment of identity by passengers and TSOs. When certain airport security identities are enacted, they come with particular emotional consequences whether that be emotional labor or emotional taxes, or in the affirmative, empathy and connection. Emotional performances can also be shaped by the emotional performances of others, which as suggested in Chapter Six, can spur emotional cycles in organizational settings. How these performances play out can impact organizing whether by promoting efficient security lines, spurring conflict, etc., as will be discussed further below. Specifically, I describe theoretical implications of this research regarding multi-level discursive analysis, emotion management, and identity construction and performance.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This typology of airport security identities helps to make sense of a complicated organizational context by illustrating the primary cast of characters in order to identify and address problematic encounters and perhaps encourage other more functional ones. If we

think of security interactions in terms of performances and discursive constructions, then we can see how people are cast into certain roles and when they choose to play particular parts or reject others. Furthermore, this typology is important because it shows how people make meaning of experiences and characters in airport security contexts by drawing upon certain types and levels of discourses. This analysis suggests that discourses can shape ways of being and that particular identities are associated with specific emotional roles and interpersonal consequences. Likewise, this dissertation offers a number of theoretical implications related to multi-level discursive analysis, emotion management, and identity construction and performance which I turn to next.

### **Multi-level Discursive Analysis**

As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, discourses about airport security play a pivotal role in the ways that passengers and TSOs construct and perform identities, demonstrate and experience emotion, and make sense of interactions with others. For instance, discourses “make certain ways of thinking and acting possible, and others impossible or costly” (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004, p. 638). Discourses such as authority, security, compliance, production, and patriotism shape the ways that the enterprise of airport security is understood by the public as well as the available meanings for what it means to be a member of the TSA. Discourses, for instance, dictate who is allowed to show emotion, what types of emotions are preferable, and influence how sense is made about emotional experiences.

Putting macro discourses into perspective with meso- and micro-level discourses enables a more nuanced understanding of the environment in which passengers and TSOs engage. Furthermore, considering the history, organizational context, material realities, and practices that structure relations, as well as some of the outcomes of interaction, this study

addresses critiques that suggest discursive analyses sometimes give short shrift to “the everyday dynamics of organizational life and the ways that organization members actively engage in an interpretive struggle with these discourses” (Mumby, 2005, p. 28). Importantly, this study directs attention to the ways that organizational members *and* customers make sense of discourses, and how interactions impact sensemaking. In a broader sense, this study also points to the ways airport security discourses are appropriated and normalized over time, and what consequences emerge.

**Appropriation and Normalization of Discourses.** A contribution of my study is that it demonstrates how macro-level discourses shift and are appropriated differently over time, as well as how meanings diverge depending upon one’s standpoint. At the TSA’s creation, the visceral impacts of terrorism were fresh for both security officers and passengers. As President G.W. Bush launched “The War on Terror,” this rhetorical move introduced the country to terror as a discourse and problem to be solved. U.S. citizens were asked to do their patriotic duty to prevent another terrorist attack, which included supporting a contested war, invasive laws like the Patriot Act, and also a dramatic uptick in airport security measures. These discursive moves also positioned airport security work as emblematic of patriotism and the enactment of duty and honor.



*Photograph 17.* Signage near security checkpoints subtly reminds passengers of 9/11 and patriotism with “faces of terrorism” (left) and faceless officers set in front of an American flag (right). Copyright 2013 S. Malvini Redden.

However, the memory of 9/11 has faded for passengers who have not remained steeped in discourses that keep terrorism and patriotism fresh, the discourses are less meaningful as a justification for security procedures. Thus, although the label of terror serves to reinforce the “mission” of TSOs, over 12 years, it does not provide the same fearful motivations for passengers as it once did. These observations connect up to organizational identity research that demonstrates how changes in language and

labeling of identity constructs can impact meaning making for organizational members in the midst of change (Corley & Gioia, 2004). In

the case of constantly evolving airport security, the meanings of the labels for discourses like patriotism and terrorism changed over time depending on role standpoint (e.g. passenger or TSO). Whereas TSA administrators have arguably filled the ongoing “sensegiving imperative” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) for TSOs, many of whom view airport security as a patriotic duty, passengers make sense within different frameworks, pulling from and reproducing discourses that position airport security as an invasive hassle.

The analysis also shows how airport security has become normalized in U.S. society to the point where resistance from passengers has not resulted in major changes in terms of procedures that challenge constitutional rights to privacy and lawful searching. Airport security is now a taken for granted aspect of travel. In fact, many in the Millennial generation



may not even remember a time prior to the TSA, when one could fly without removing shoes or submit to full body searching. What was once accomplished by treading upon the fear of passengers (e.g. from a terrorist attack) is now accomplished via conditioning and apathy (e.g., “I can’t change it, so why bother?”). What we see here is how fear, over time, turns to apathy and compliance. Fear appeals initially resulted in eager compliance, and over time, compliance without meaningful complaint turned some people into sheeple—unthinking, non-resisting, go-with-the-herd rule-followers.

It may also be that the fear has shifted—from fear of terrorists to fear of the officers supposedly responsible for protecting passengers from terrorists. Case in point, many passengers described and appeared afraid to talk to TSOs, hesitant to question procedures that induce discomfort, and conflicted about certain aspects of airport security protocol. These behaviors and perspectives reflect macro discourses that link deference with authority, knowledge with power, and discipline with compliance. Meso-level policies actively discipline the ways that passengers and TSOs relate. Lines physically orient passengers. Scripts and strict protocols structure communication. Latex gloves, stanchions, partitions, pseudo-law enforcement uniforms, and “commanding” emotional presences provide barriers between the knower and the known. With exceptions (e.g. Stereotypical-Hostile and Mindful identities), passengers react to these cues by acting compliant and attributing TSOs with total authority in the security checkpoint. Compliance and anxiety on the part of passengers is not necessarily surprising when considering that passengers are viewed with organizationally-mandated suspicion by TSOs. The tensions between acting compliant and being viewed with suspicion present passengers with unique challenges to navigate in security.

**Contradiction and Compliance.** Passengers are cast in a dubious role in the security process in that they are relied upon to make security function smoothly, but at the

same time, are fundamentally *not* trusted at least until they are cleared through multiple layers of security. (Even then, TSOs still cast aspersions on passengers by performing random security screenings outside of the checkpoint.) Despite being treated as suspicious, passenger cooperation is absolutely necessary to keep lines moving. More complexly, at the same time they are being treated as untrustworthy, passengers are also asked to facilitate security by looking at others with suspicion and calling attention to property left unattended in keeping with the “See Something, Say Something” program. Furthermore, it is tacitly expected that passengers will also actively participate in onboard flight safety as has been demonstrated by passengers historically taking down those who pose threats. Indeed, even as early as Flight 93, the third hijacked airplane in the 9/11 attacks, passengers have succeeded in subduing would-be bombers (CNN, 2001), as well as erratic passengers (Duell & Zennie, 2012), flight attendants (Baskas, 2012), and even a pilot (Avila, Hosford, & Ng, 2012).

Therefore, passengers are left to make sense of contradictory expectations—compliance as the target of suspicion on the one hand and participation in active suspicion of peers on the other—from officers who do more to engender fear than cooperation. However, this analysis suggests that the discursive, relational, and physical environment of the checkpoint makes it easier to perform compliance and that conformity keeps passengers focused on their individual role in security rather than the big picture. This finding positions passengers as “conformist selves” which Collinson (2006, p. 184) suggests can have detrimental consequences when people unwittingly obey authority. Whereas Collinson cites the Holocaust and the Milgram Experiments as extreme consequences of conformity, in airport security, we can see the implications in the acceptance of increasingly invasive protocols and the erosion of civil liberties. It may seem easy to dismiss—as some passengers and TSOs do—that current protocols are simply an outcome of and response to terrorism,

but the implications can extend beyond the airport. If passengers are willing to put up with indignity and, some would argue, lawful-only-by-technicality search and seizure in the airport, why not other areas of transportation and interactions with law enforcement as well?

Understanding the preceding implications is important because they help explain interactions in airport security checkpoints, for instance emotional management and performances of identity. In airport security, compliance means not only opening bags and proceeding through scanners, but managing emotions in particular ways. How passengers and TSOs accomplish emotion management can have repercussions for interpersonal interaction and provides insight into identity work as I discuss next.

### **Emotion Management**

Although the preceding discussion of compliance may evoke images of docility, security checkpoints often appear to simmer with tension. Given the aforementioned discussions of competing discourses and interaction goals, as well as the physicality of cramming hundreds of people into unfamiliar, uncomfortable configurations, this finding is not altogether surprising. Continuing my past exploration of the emotional experiences of passengers which showed that customers perform unique types of emotion management as a result of compulsory interaction (Malvini Redden, 2013), this study also links the emotion management processes of passengers and organizational members. As emotion management studies in organizational settings tend to privilege the experience of organizational members, my study contributes to theory by explaining how the emotion processes of passengers and TSOs are reciprocally linked, serve as evidence of identity, and provide shape to interactions.

In particular, my findings show that while emotional norms are propagated by meso-level discourses in the form of organizational training for TSOs, they are also understood and enacted by passengers for whom exposure to airport norms is informal and often short.

Whereas rules abound for passenger property and physical behavior, no such guidance exists for emotional displays. Passengers must then discern norms from macro discourses and micro-level interaction in the scene. As articulated earlier in this chapter, passengers and TSOs use emotional performances to gauge expected identities and provide sense for interactions. Emotional performances, then, can reinforce, challenge, or adjust identity constructions of self and other, acting as fodder for meaning making.

This study of TSO and passenger identity performances makes explicit connections between identity performances and emotional displays. It also suggests linkages between emotional performances and meaning making, acknowledging calls for research related to emotion and sensemaking (e.g. Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Considering the physiological and psychological processes associated with emotional experience makes clearer how emotional performances connect to sensemaking. As described in Chapter Two, emotional experiences are multi-faceted psychological processes that can occur in response to or when appraising stimuli (Scherer, 2005). For instance, passengers described feeling anxiety when they encountered a long security line and also when they *thought* about facing a long line. In security checkpoints, emotions of various tenors manifest during interactions between passengers and TSOs. Given the social influence processes associated with emotional experiences—that emotions can be “shared” through processes of contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993) and through interactions, can create emotion cycles (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008)—emotions do not just occur *within* individuals, but *between/ among* people. Emotions happen and change quickly, producing physiological and psychological experiences, and are managed within the scope of ongoing action. Thus, in terms of sensemaking, emotions can be considered events or cues that may require sense to be made, especially when they manifest within identity challenging interactions.

Certain emotional performances may require meaning making as they challenge dominant discourses in the security checkpoint. Confirming previous organizational research about the gendered nature of acceptable emotion displays (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Fineman, 1996), Ideal emotional performances in the airport are rational and involve masculine emotional displays for authority figures and either no emotions for those of lesser status or ones that are typically feminized such as deference or anxiety. Identity performances that feature more variable emotional displays, especially those of positive/feminine tenor, are viewed as problematic by management. For instance, recall TSO Carrie's discussion of management calling her helpful and caring behaviors "unprofessional," and TSO Roger suggesting "they" do not want TSOs to be "nice." However, Mindful-TSOs/passengers most often resisted emotional norms with affirmative emotions.

Although these "transgressions" were frequently explained in terms of pragmatics and customer service e.g., "being angry is not helpful/productive" and "being kind in the face of anger helps diffuse hostility," these moves are also discursively situated. In other words, positive emotions appear acceptable when they are productive in terms of material concerns, e.g. when they move an interaction along, but are less acceptable for purely relational purposes. These findings suggest how discourses of masculinity and authority can work through meso-level training to marginalize affirmative expressions of emotion which can constrain certain (more feminine) identities in organizations. However, this dissertation demonstrates that security and positive emotions do not have to be mutually exclusive. Ironically, and perhaps unfortunately, my analysis suggests that marginalizing empathetic emotions not only constrains certain selves, but also is not very helpful to the overall goals of security.

## **Cultivating positive emotions**

In fact, the documented outcomes of positive emotions in organizations suggest that affirmative feelings might be more helpful than harmful in facilitating security goals. As mentioned in Chapter Two, emotions are associated with certain response tendencies. For negative emotions, such as anger or fear, response tendencies include narrowing attention in order to focus on threats in the environment (Kemeny & Shestyuk, 2008). Although this type of narrowing might be helpful for dealing with specific hazards, the cultivation and expression of negative emotions at the expense of positive ones can make it more difficult to see the big picture. With this in mind, TSOs' competing emotional labor goals of simulating a "commanding presence" may make it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain constant vigilance, suspicion, and situational awareness. Furthermore, structures and interactions that prompt anxiety and fear from passengers likely contribute to their self-focus and framing of security as a hurdle to "get through." As depicted throughout this dissertation, these emotional labor and emotional tax requirements result in interpersonal conflict and tension as people simultaneously manage emotional expression in light of contradictions, tension, and paradox.

Cultivating positive emotions such as empathy, compassion, and interpersonal warmth can potentially help alleviate burdens related to emotional management involving emotional suppression for passengers and simulation or amplification of negative emotions for TSOs. Affirmative emotions are associated with creativity, openness, flexibility, increased trust, and strengthened interpersonal relationships (Frederickson, 1998; Sekerka, Vacharkulksemsuk, & Fredrickson, 2011). Further, positive emotions build up resources such as mindfulness, intellectual complexity, resilience, and optimism. "Broadening and building" positive emotion spirals translate to important outcomes in organizational

environments such as high-quality relationships; enhanced satisfaction, motivation, and productivity; increased organizational citizenship behaviors; increased perception of leadership effectiveness; and high-quality peer relationships (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Now, it may be radical to suggest fostering positive emotions in airport security, a context built upon fear, authority, and intimidation. However when security interactions include more affirmative feelings, as demonstrated in the preceding chapters, emotion management requirements and conflict were reduced. Furthermore, given the TSA's need for passengers to comply with aspects of security in order to keep the system functioning, an open, more affirmative environment may help move unthinking compliance to *cooperation*. Moreover, engaging passengers in cooperation may be easier when security procedures and interactions result in feelings of safety and security instead of suspicion and irritation.

The security checkpoint operates in a system of linked encounters that passengers must successfully pass to get through to their flights. The TSA describes the structure of passenger-TSO encounters such as ticket checking, advanced imaging, and baggage screening in terms of security "layers." Some passengers, on the other hand, conceive of the system as an "obstacle course" or as passenger MacGruder described, "running a gauntlet." Given that successfully completing security protocol often involves peeling back and "clearing" layers of passenger identity, as well as sometimes intricate emotional work, it is not altogether surprising that passengers frame security in such effortful terms. However, as this dissertation suggests, the emotional tenor of encounters among passengers and TSOs can vary and change dramatically, especially depending on what types of passengers and TSOs are involved. By examining archetypes in airport security, this analysis offers several implications for understanding and extending knowledge about identity construction and performance.

## **Identity Construction and Performance**

This dissertation makes several important contributions to understandings of identity in organizing. First, it answers Kuhn's (2009) call for "scholars to analyse [sic] multiple and situated discursive resources" (p. 696) and Wieland's (2010) suggestion for researchers to consider identity work and identity regulation together rather than privileging one or the other. Second, by incorporating a poststructural lens, my research also invites consideration of multiple selves and normative constructions of selves in organizational settings. As my data demonstrate, passengers and TSOs do not perform one worker or traveler identity. Rather, as interactions evolve, they can take on several personas, or emphasize one more than the other.

My findings show how through enacting identity(ies), passengers and TSOs co-construct each other. In other words, the identity performances of one person influence/inform/shape the identity performances of another which can result in adjusted, challenged, or reinforced identity (re)constructions of self or other. Knowing this is important because it suggests that taking into account the various identity options available for organizational actors is critical for conceptualizing identity performances in organizations and understanding the implications of relations between organizational members and customer stakeholders. Furthermore, it also points out that identity maintenance and regulation processes (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002) occur within relations among organizational members and customers, as well as between organizational members and organizations.

**Customer Identity Work and Performances.** This dissertation provides important contributions towards understanding customer/stakeholder identity work and meaning making. Although studies concerned with employee identity work and identification abound



within organizational studies (e.g. Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 2006; Kuhn, 2009; Pratt, 2000), research focused on customer/stakeholder identity is shallow (Shuh, Egold, & Van Dick, 2012). Most studies involving consumer identity/identification emerge from consumer behavior and customer service literatures that investigate processes of identification in order to maximize profits and brand loyalty relationships (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Much of this work uses customer identification as a discrete variable without attention to complex meaning making processes that influence behavior and communication in actual organizations. Also, as Feldman (2012) argues, “Traditionally, service is viewed as something done to customers without considering the role customers play in temporal unfolding of actual service encounters” (p. 15). My findings add complexity to the literature by specifically demonstrating how passenger conceptions of self and other identity are critical for interpersonal interaction and are directly implicated in the emotion and identity performances of organizational members. At least in settings like airport security, where interaction is compulsory, my findings suggest that understanding the relationships between customers and employees, and how they connect to the discursive landscape in which their interactions take place can shed light on meaning making.

As demonstrated in this dissertation, how passengers embody airport security discourses—by perpetuating, integrating, and/or resisting—helps shape what type of passenger identity they perform. Considering customer relationships to the discursive environments of organizations they patronize is important, especially for encounters that rely upon interpersonal interaction between people with asymmetrical power/status. For instance, transferring the implications of these findings to a medical setting might help explain what types of identities patients perform when interacting with physicians who, historically and discursively, are imbued with greater social power by virtue of their expertise

and prestige. By examining the discourses patients draw upon and how they perpetuate, integrate, and/or resist them, scholars might be able to better evaluate communication in health care settings and explain why patients have trouble negotiating power dynamics and asserting themselves (Beisecker, 1990; Hanna & Fins, 2006).

**Idealized and Stigmatized Identities.** In addition to illuminating how identities are shaped and performed in airport security, this dissertation also demonstrates how certain identities are idealized and stigmatized. From an organizational perspective, exploring identity performances allows consideration of what types of identities are ideal and for whom. For instance, it could be argued that Ideal TSO and Ideal passenger performances are the personas of choice for organized, efficient security processes which are advantageous both for security functioning and passengers interested in getting to flights on time. However, what may seem Ideal from an efficiency standpoint can mask underlying tensions for organizational actors. As demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, Ideal TSOs must navigate competing discourses of thoroughness and efficiency which can make these goals difficult to achieve, and Ideal passengers perform sometimes challenging emotion management for the sake of “getting through.” Therefore, what may be “ideal” from the perspective of producing passengers efficiently can come at the cost of emotion and interpersonal conflict. Considered from the passenger perspective, ideal identities may be those that encompass a greater focus on civility and/or personal dignity. These findings are important because they show that identity work in organizational settings is a complex project, and that ideal selves depend not only on discourses but standpoint. Further, these findings prompt reflection about the difficulties of navigating idealized expectations (Wieland, 2010) and the repercussions for interpersonal interaction and emotion management.

Likewise, this dissertation demonstrates how as certain identities are idealized in airport security, others are marginalized and stigmatized. The ways that identities are categorized provides insight into social identifications, for example, in-group/out-group constructions. For instance, Stereotypical identities of both passengers and TSOs were derided in micro-level interactions and macro-societal conceptions of airport security characters. Some TSOs used these Stereotypical identities as scapegoats in order to make more favorable descriptions of themselves and what “good” TSOs are “really like.” Similarly, some TSOs made fun of Ideal TSO identities and their focus on patriotism and mission, in order to separate themselves and maintain different identities. These findings suggest that investigating identity performances and how organizational members make sense of them may be useful in understanding how social groups develop in organizations.

This analysis also provides understanding of how people contend with stigmatized occupational identities. In terms of occupation, TSOs seem to straddle several profession-al discourses. Although their work is arguably “dirty” in terms of physical and moral taint (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), discourses of patriotism and duty, along with militaristic uniforms and protocol in effect elevate TSO work. Furthermore, TSOs are entrusted with gaining intimate knowledge and touch of passengers that is normally associated with health care providers, but is not supported by diagnostic necessity or professional knowledge. Whereas workers in physically dirty lower class occupations like coal mining construct “discourses of dignity” about their jobs (Lucas, 2011) and workers in elite occupations draw upon discourses of professionalism (Ashcraft, 2007; Alvesson & Robertson, 2006), TSOs do not have a given set of occupational discourses to incorporate into their identities. For instance, although they are entrusted with sensitive security information and are trained in quasi-military fashion, they do not have the credibility of law enforcement or the

specialization of other types of security professionals such as the Secret Service<sup>20</sup>. The closest kin occupation-wise is likely the security guard or “mall cop,” both occupational identities that come with unflattering “wannabe” connotations.

Officers are left to choose which occupational discourses to incorporate into their identities. While this can be freeing in that TSOs can craft meanings for themselves as do other “dirty workers” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), it does leave TSOs without established career discourses that others such as passengers can recognize and respect. I do not mean to position these discursive choices as a dilemma, but as one explanation for why a variety of identity positions emerged from a fairly homogenous worker population. For example, my findings demonstrate that TSOs story themselves in three primary ways—as elite security professionals (e.g., Ideal TSOs), just-putting-food-on-the-table workers (e.g., Stereotypical TSOs), and as humanitarians who happen to work in airport security (e.g., Mindful TSOs). As I suggested previously, these choices could be considered evidence of sensemaking and researchers interested in assessing the *substance* of meaning making can look to discursive framing as a clue. In particular, for scholars concerned with occupational discourses, especially in terms of work as job, career, or calling (e.g. Wreznieski, et al.), a discursive approach may be fruitful.

Taken together, these theoretical implications invite careful consideration of the airport security context and theoretical lenses employed to examine it. As the majority of people reading this study will likely identify with passenger roles, this dissertation encourages a more nuanced understanding of security processes, especially in light of historical discourses and “behind-the-scenes” perspectives of TSO work. Moreover, these implications

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<sup>20</sup> Although TSO Steve, the Behavior Detection Officer I interviewed, likened his position to the President’s Secret Service detail.

provide an opportunity to assess the linkages between discourses, emotion, and identity construction and performance in applied contexts. Doing so exemplifies the strength of combining a discursive approach with an examination of identity performances, namely that considering identity construction and performance in tandem demonstrates the complexity and richness of organizational interaction. By suggesting that identity work and emotional performances in airport security constitute meaning making events, these implications also demonstrate that taken for granted organizational settings such as the airport can serve as important sites of meaning and sensemaking.

### **Practical Implications**

The enterprise of airport security, with rigid protocol, expensive technology, and regimented practices makes it somewhat easy to forget that beneath uniforms and behind boarding passes are human beings. TSOs complain about feeling like “just a number” to their management and “robots” to passengers, whereas passengers lament feeling as “cattle” or “widgets” being “processed.” Discourses that constrain the demonstration of emotion also objectify passengers and TSOs in the checkpoint and likely make it easier for people to treat others with disdain and incivility. Throughout this exploration of emotion and identity, I demonstrate how identity performances impact organizational settings—slowing down or speeding up lines, provoking conflict, improving morale, and more. My analysis also suggests several practical implications related to TSO and passenger emotion management and wellbeing, “the rules,” passenger agency and rights, and emphasizing preferred identities.

### **Passenger and Employee Emotion Management and Wellbeing**

As portrayed, the airport security checkpoint is an emotional context to work in and travel through. The TSA clearly trains its employees to perform emotion labor in specific ways—by staying “calm, cool, and collected” while also using a “commanding” emotional

presence to control passenger behavior. By virtue of various discourses, passengers also perform emotion management, controlling the demonstration of their feelings in line with presumed emotional norms for the context. Although helpful for efficiency in lines, these emotion management processes may have unintended consequences for personal wellbeing and TSO-passenger relations. Specifically, TSOs and passengers perform emotion labor differently depending upon what type of TSO identity they portray (e.g., Stereotypical, Ideal, Mindful). Identity positions that feature emotional suppression or masking—displaying one emotion while feeling another (Ekman & Friesen, 1975)—may contribute to feelings of stress which can promote tension for TSOs who are embedded in the context for long periods of time, and potentially, emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003). Even though passengers only experience active emotion management in airport security for a short time, how they manage their feelings can directly impact the several TSOs they will potentially interact with during a security encounter. If the interactions are negative, passenger emotion management can trigger negative emotion cycles (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008) that, in turn, impact other TSOs and travelers. (Of course, TSOs could also start positive emotion cycles as well.)

My findings also indicate that passengers have much more license to express emotions than they might otherwise realize. During interviews, passengers described feeling hesitant and uncomfortable to express any emotion whatsoever, and *especially* those of negative valence, in order to avoid conflict with and potential consequences from TSOs. Given that unusual emotional performances in airport security are grounds for extra screening from Behavior Detection Officers and often feature in many security stories in the popular press, passenger fears are not exactly unfounded. Nevertheless, a number of TSO interviewees discussed wishing passengers would relax and recognize that they will not “get

in trouble” for communicating their feelings. In particular, TSOs such as Jeff, Ty, and Carrie, described encouraging passengers to feel comfortable and ask questions. According to TSOs, much passenger stress could be alleviated by asking questions, admitting nerves, and not trying to “over-manage” feelings by “acting right” (e.g. “Suzanne” and “Ronny” from Chapter Five). In fact, TSOs expect passengers to be worked up simply by virtue of the stress that travel brings with time constraints, fear of flying, etc. As mentioned above, these findings are useful for understanding interactions in other environments where discourses heavily shape interactions between people in asymmetrical power/status relationships.

### **“The Rules” as shield, source of conflict, and constraint**

In juxtaposing the experiences of passengers and TSOs, this exploration of airport security also sheds light on discursive contradictions present in the ways that TSO and passenger roles are constructed and enacted via meso-level discourses. TSOs are often cast as interminably powerful by passengers who describe acting with deference and complying with “the rules.” Meanwhile, TSOs who wield the accessories of authority actually possess very limited discretion. Whereas TSOs enforce policies while wearing uniforms similar to police officers, their spheres of influence are limited to detaining passengers and calling upon law enforcement. TSOs maintain a façade of authority which while earning apparent deference also sparks the internal ire of some travelers, including many people I interviewed. Intriguingly, many low-level TSOs I spoke with acted quite candidly about their limited authority, seeming surprised when passengers continually blamed them as individuals for the rules they had to enact and enforce.

From an organizational perspective, “the rules” and paradoxes about “need to know” policies set passengers and TSOs up for conflicts. Passengers described tensions about rules that seemed illogical in nature and arbitrarily enforced. At the same time, TSOs

insisted that rules are “there for a reason” but that given the “sensitive” nature of security policy, they are not at liberty to discuss rules with passengers. In theory, a “need to know” attitude towards rules is meant to deter potential terrorists with “constantly changing” security. In fact, TSA Administrator John Pistole has previously responded to criticisms about TSA policies by invoking obscurity as a strategy (Hosford, 2010). However, in practice, unsubstantiated policies provoke confusion and consternation for passengers. Without a compelling rationale besides “it’s for your safety,” rules are enforced solely on the basis of authority and compliance. Furthermore, when TSOs cannot explain the rationale behind policy, they can come across as foolish or withholding, both of which can undermine credibility. This finding is important for policy makers to understand how rules are enacted, “live” in organizational environments, and exact unintended consequences.

Given that passenger cooperation is imperative for successful security screenings, the TSA would be better served by being more transparent about protocol rationale, especially for rules that have been long-standing in the security checkpoint, but still cause significant frustration for passengers. For example, when the 3-1-1 rules were first announced, then-TSA Administrator Kip Hawley described the rationale of limiting liquids to 3.4 ounces specifically as “too complex” to explain succinctly (e.g., in a news story) (Sharkey, 2007b), but later went on to discuss the rule with more reasoning in an editorial. Given that TSOs also face the same difficulty of explaining procedures in short order, they might benefit from written materials (e.g., pamphlets) they could share with passengers that had more detailed explanations. Furthermore, for protocols the TSA deemed necessary to shroud in secrecy, a more transparent script for TSOs might sit better with passengers e.g., instead of “I need you to do this for your safety” with no explanation, perhaps: “We’re purposely being confusing and inconsistent with our rules because we find that doing so provides ways to



stay one step in front of potential law-breakers. We realize this is also irritating to passengers who prefer consistency. However, we appreciate your understanding of why we aren't consistent." Even admitting "I'm not allowed to discuss security protocol" may even be preferable to circular reasoning or patronizing posturing about safety.

### **Passenger Agency and Rights**

In some cases, "the rules" as an extension of the institution of security seem like an overwhelming force that manifests in passenger apathy. As Portlander lamented, "I know I can't change it, so why bother?" However, discourses like "the rules" and enacted authority overshadow places where passengers can assert agency. Although some passengers confessed feeling constrained by and impotent to change airport security protocols that make them uncomfortable, changes over time suggest that passenger voices *do* matter.

Even though bureaucratic systems like the TSA may seem immovable, policies and practices change frequently over time. In airport security, changes arguably come most often in light of security threats, but they also come after news coverage, customer demand, and legal action. For instance, after several high profile media exposés on pat-downs involving children (Associated Press, 2012), the TSA debuted "modified" screening procedures specific to children (TSA, 2013). Additionally, the shoe removal policy has consistently ranked as a top passenger complaint (Nixon, 2012) and in recent years, the TSA has piloted several shoe "testing" machines that could enable passengers to stay shod (Mutzabaugh, 2012), although the machines were not deemed effective enough. However, changes were instituted to ease shoe-related burdens for young and elderly travelers. Furthermore, as a result of Congressional mandates potentially instigated by voter constituents and advocacy groups, the TSA has recently moved toward rectifying privacy concerns related to advanced imaging machines by removing backscatter scanners which produce unique nude images of

passengers. While these examples do not suggest that policy directly follows customer demand, they do insinuate that passenger interests and voices may help effect changes when



*Photograph 18.* In most security checkpoints, signage appears immediately in front of security lines. In some airports, signage is also situated within the checkpoint. However, having information such as this letter about advanced imaging options hoisted 8-feet in the air is not conducive to passenger understanding. Copyright 2013 S. Malvini Redden.

funneled through channels with clout, whether that be through news coverage, civic engagement, or advocacy groups.

Passengers should understand their rights, to know when TSO behavior is unacceptable, and to take action against experiences that make them uncomfortable or upset. My data suggested that a lot of uncomfortable emotional situations occurred when passengers did not know or chose to ignore TSA rules. Many of these situations

could be averted if passengers were prepared for security *prior* to coming to the airport where most signage appears within or immediately in front of security lines. In fact, TSA policies are not as well publicized as TSOs may think they are given the prevalence of passenger errors in security and the fairly frequent protocol changes. Furthermore, situational stress can reduce people's abilities to recall information (Sorg & Whitney, 1992). Therefore, the TSA should consider increasing information about policies well in advance of the checkpoint lines, perhaps in shopping and dining areas, baggage check-in lanes, and even in restrooms.

From a social justice perspective, passengers should know that they do have rights in security settings although those liberties are not always clearly presented such as the somewhat obscure TSA Civil Rights Policy (TSA, 2013c) which none of my participants knew existed. For example, passengers are not required to submit to advanced imaging screenings, and can choose to opt-out and receive a pat-down instead. When doing so,

passengers retain the right to be screened in public or private, and be cleared by an officer of their same gender<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, passengers have the ability to communicate with the TSA about security checkpoint interactions. However, as reports indicate that fewer than 40,000 passengers in 2012 lodged a formal complaint with the TSA—that is less than one percent of passengers who flew that year—it seems that fliers may not be aware of the mechanisms to communicate feedback. Likewise, my data suggests that even for well publicized protocols like opting out of advanced imaging technology, TSOs may try to steer passengers toward their preferred screening modality. Therefore, passengers should realize that, for better or worse, they may need to be persistent in order to access their rights.

Despite some evidence to the contrary, TSOs are extremely limited in their authority and how they interact with passengers. For interactions that appear untoward or cause undue stress (for instance, my overly-intimate pat-down referenced in Chapter Six), passengers should make themselves familiar with TSA complaint mechanisms including speaking with on site management and visiting TSA corporate web sites which feature a number of passenger relations specialists and ombudsmen. The TSA uses complaint statistics as evidence of tacit consumer approval—e.g. “If people aren’t complaining, then they must be satisfied”—however, my data and other consumer polls (e.g. Gallup, U.S. Travel Association) suggest that “consumer ambivalence” may be closer to the truth. Furthermore, in some instances where passengers have complained and requested a review of security surveillance recordings (either through general complaint mechanisms, media coverage, or lawsuits), the TSA has been known to make apologies and offer compensation (e.g. Baskas, 2010; Matthews, 2013; The TSA Blog, 2011). Passengers should also consider taking action

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, having “same gender” pat-downs usually means “same sex” pat-downs as people who identify as transgender or transsexual, including TSA employees, complete screenings with persons of their same physical/legal sex.

about philosophical and political concerns outside of the airport as well, for instance the invasion of civil rights and privacy. As the discourse tracing showed that change is often accomplished in light of lawsuits and Congressional mandates, formally contacting Congresspeople, political officials, and advocacy groups can potentially help security protocol evolve.

### **Emphasizing Preferred Identities**

Throughout much of this project, I reported the identities that are constructed, enacted, and occasionally contested by passengers and TSOs. In particular, I pointed out how discourses work to normalize and emphasize certain identity positions (e.g., the Ideal) while obscuring opportunities for others (e.g., the Mindful). Many interviewees I spoke with described mostly subtle but occasionally overt tensions between who they felt like (e.g. what type of passenger/TSO) and who others thought they were or treated them like. This tension was most apparent for TSOs who consistently reflected on the differences between who they were as individuals, as TSOs, and as members of the TSA, and how media portrayals and public opinions of them collided. In framing roles, whether as traveler, customer, “cow,” “widget,” or “suspect,” passengers also contemplated how they appear and are treated in security with how they feel, and also how they act outside of the airport. Taking inspiration from Tracy and Trethewey’s (2005) work on *crystallized selves*, which asks us to consider not whether the Ideal airport selves are “fake” and the “self that I know I am” is “real,” I suggest people should think about *preferred selves*.

This notion of cultivating a preferred self even in scenarios like security where emotions are heightened and experiences are not pleasant, and where discourses heavily impinge on available meanings for identity construction and enactment, may help people navigate identity conflicts by understanding that identity performances are flexible. Such a

framework enables a more nuanced understanding of identity and encourages people to view identity performances not as essentialized or dichotomous (e.g. “real” or “fake”) but as malleable. I do not mean to recommend “strategizing” the self, what Deetz (1995) refers to as “strategized subordination” (p. 124) for managerial goals, but rather, to understand how identity performances can be contextualized and made sense of in ways that allow people to “play” certain characters without having to “be” certain characters.

### **Methodological Contributions**

In completing this project, I negotiated a number of critical methodological issues that contribute to qualitative ethnographic studies and may be of use to other researchers. First, combining a longitudinal approach with elements of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) allowed me to assess change over time, connecting “local” voices with historical context and concerns. In addition to spending an extensive amount of time in the scene, sifting through discourses at macro, meso, and micro levels enabled me to follow discursive changes in the data. Doing so contributes to a thriving body of discursive research seeking to clarify the ways that discourses are identified and written about in communication studies (Way, 2012). Also, comparing a variety of data sources both public (news, TSA policies, observations) and private (interviews), allowed me to “make strange” a very familiar environment, albeit one that has not been well-researched ethnographically. However, my discourse tracing relied upon publicly available data (e.g. news, editorials, TSA published policies). While helpful in determining the messaging available to the average passengers, it certainly tells a partial story that could be complicated by comparing to behind-the-scenes information. However, in this research context, sharing sensitive security information is grounds for dismissal, so I did not seek to incorporate it into my study.

To complete this project, I navigated a sensitive research space without express organizational permission (although with proper IRB approvals). Doing ethnographic research in public spaces represented a major challenge for me, especially in a highly surveilled context like the airport which reserves potential repercussions for people who stand out. Going “undercover,” as it were, meant that I had to negotiate the ethics of collecting data from people unawares as well as the challenge of researching while being a full participant in the activity of travel. These logistical elements were intensified in regard to soliciting interviews from TSOs who acted suspiciously and occasionally hostile when approached. Furthermore, I completed my project with the lingering fear that my interest in security settings and TSO input could be misread by TSA officials and halted. Although my access issues represented significant hurdles in terms of gathering TSO interviews and making extensive observations in security checkpoints, I found that by soliciting interviews personally and via professional social media forums (e.g. LinkedIn), I was able to create connections with TSOs who, had I been integrated into the scene via formal mechanisms/permissions, may not have been as candid with me about their work and experiences. Additionally, by incorporating LinkedIn into my recruitment strategy, I was able to maintain a level of transparency for my participants some who initially feared I was an investigative reporter or critic out to lambast the TSA out of hand.

Aside from logistical and ethical challenges, this project also highlighted the incredibly embodied process of being a “human research instrument” (Garcia, 2000). Collecting data in the airport over several years required spending hundreds of hours in the airport and in the sky which took an immense physical and financial toll not well accounted for in the preceding prose. Furthermore, in order to experience the full gamut of passenger viewpoints, submitting to more than 100 hands-on screenings, a number of them highly

invasive, required conscious and continuous meaning-making. Although, at the end of the project, I feel like these experiences encouraged me to have more sensitivity towards my participants, many were personally challenging. In light of this, I encourage other researchers who conduct physically and emotionally taxing work not only to keep a research journal as many qualitative methodology experts advise (Goodall, 2000; Tracy, 2013), but to also make “emotional context” notes in fieldnote write-ups. Throughout my data gathering, I added personal “contextual” descriptions to my fieldnotes so that when I went back through to analyze them, I could keep track of my feelings in the research scene. By doing this, I could make note of when emotional experiences outside of my personal norm influenced my interpretations in the scenes and in what ways. For instance, in making sense of the troublesome, intimate pat-down referenced in Chapter 6, I took detailed notes of my emotions before, during, and after the pat-down. Going back as I read the data, my contextual feeling notes helped me to get back into the scene and also think about the ways that experience so greatly contrasted with 95 others.

### **Limitations, Reflections, and Future Directions**

Going forward, the airport security context offers important opportunities for future research. First and foremost, future research would benefit by having an embedded presence in airport security checkpoints. Due to lack of interest from the two Federal Security Directors that I petitioned, I was unable to spend long durations of time in checkpoints making observations. Consequently, my contributions to research on the process of sensemaking are less robust than they might have been. More concentrated time doing observations would allow researchers to connect the substance of sensemaking in this context (e.g. discourses) to the dynamic, ongoing, and constantly changing security scene of which thousands of people traipse through in a given day. Being embedded might also

alleviate the difficulty of recruiting participants and facilitate gathering a multitude of voices. Although I finally managed to get a reasonable number of people to talk to me, it was not without persistence and great effort, and I acknowledge that certain types of TSOs seemed more likely to speak with me than others.

In particular, embedded researchers could examine more carefully emotional cycles and the social influence of emotion in context to see how cycles started during interaction between passengers and TSOs evolve after those passengers pass through. Scholars would do well to address specific types of emotion cycles, for instance “deferential” and “defiant” emotion cycles (Scarduzio, 2012), as well as those involving positive emotions, as I observed evidence of them in my data but they were not a primary focus.

Future research could greatly complicate analyses of airport security contexts by considering the implications of gender, sexuality, race relations, and class. As Lucas (2011) notes, “Identity work is a complex and inherently communicative process in that it is a negotiation of simultaneously held identities (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, social class) and individualized meaning-making in interaction with people and systems” (p. 357). My findings and discussion present complex situated identity performances but they are largely devoid of other identity aspects that obviously make a difference. Likewise, although I allude to issues of bureaucracy and surveillance, those concepts are ripe for future discussion as they so obviously impact the ways that interactions take place. In particular, an interesting future direction would be to consider gaze and surveillance. Whereas passengers talk about being “viewed with suspicion” by TSOs, they do not seem to realize that TSOs are caught in a “double” gaze, being scrutinized by passengers as well as management who many TSOs described as “worse” than dealing with “the traveling public.”



The findings of this project may be useful for understanding other settings in which power dynamics are asymmetrical, interactions are compulsory, and emotion management is required. For example, these findings may help explain identity and emotional performances between police officers and community members. For instance, tracing discourses related to law enforcement can illustrate how officers conceive of community members (e.g. as citizens, potential criminals, suspects), and how people in turn, view police officers (e.g. as heroes, “pigs,” citation writers). As demonstrated by this study, how people construct the identities of others can generate implications for interaction and meaning making. In situations involving law enforcement which can be highly emotional and involve significant potential consequences including risks to safety and wellbeing for both officers and citizens, understanding the emotional and discursive climate may be a vital way to reduce unnecessary conflict and misunderstandings that can escalate to violence.

Likewise, the findings from this study can help illuminate identity construction and performances in health care settings where roles and experience are situated in a robust historical and discursive landscape with constant changes via new health care laws and the influx of publicly accessible health care information. By examining how identities are constructed and performed in health care settings, it may be possible to understand how people navigate complex and contested organizational settings, and ascertain which types of performances (perhaps Ideal, Stereotypical, and Mindful) offer constructive outcomes for health and wellbeing at individual and organizational levels.

Despite its limitations, this dissertation prompts consideration of a familiar context and organizational members made familiar by popular discourses, although in stereotypical and often disparaging ways. By illuminating the struggles and opportunities faced by TSOs and passengers in performing complex identity and emotion management work, a more

nuanced picture of airport security emerges. Importantly, this picture also points attention to implications for organizing that are permeated by paradox and tensions. However, “communication scholars have long argued that organizational contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities are the stuff of organizing, and that the analyses of these contradictions lead to richer, more complex understandings of organizational processes” (Trethewey, 1999, p. 142). My hope is that this dissertation complicates understandings of identity construction and performance, and especially how ways of being—even in liminal spaces like the airport—so viscerally impact others.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**To:** Sarah Tracy  
STAUF

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 02/20/2012

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 02/20/2012

**IRB Protocol #:** 1202007412

**Study Title:** Understanding emotion and communication in airport security contexts

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.



APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

## Understanding Interaction and Emotion in Airports

Dear Participant:

My name is Shawna Malvini Redden and I am a graduate student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. Under the direction of ASU professor Dr. Sarah Tracy, I am conducting a research study to understand how people communicate and manage emotions within airport security.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve discussing your thoughts about and emotional experiences within airport security. Interviews may range from 30-45 minutes, depending upon your availability, and will be conducted at your convenience.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you must be 18 or older. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. Also, you have the right to skip questions and/or to stop the interview at any time.

Risks for participating in this study are minimal. You will be asked questions that may elicit negative emotions about your travel or work experiences. As such, you may feel stress or mild discomfort. Direct benefits from the study are also minimal and may include a greater understanding of your experiences traveling or working within airports.

This interview will be confidential. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym and your name will not appear in my notes or transcripts. Only generic descriptive information such as gender, ethnicity, age, vocation, or location will be used to reference you. If you make any identifying statements, they will be stricken from all transcripts and not included in any field notes. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name or any identifying information will not be mentioned.

I would like to audio record this interview with your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Audio recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer in a locked office accessible only by me. After transcription and analysis, recordings will be destroyed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please let me know before we begin. You may also contact the research team at any time by calling 916-218-8536 or [shawna.malvini@asu.edu](mailto:shawna.malvini@asu.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX C  
PASSENGER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you read in the information letter, I am interested in understanding how interaction, communication, and emotion function with airports. Specifically, I would like to know what experiences you've had when traveling in airports.

### **Background/Demographic Information:**

Pseudonym:

Approximate age:

Ethnicity:

Vocation:

How often do you travel?

What are your primary reasons for travel typically?

### **General travel questions**

1. Please describe a typical air travel experience (e.g. walk me through a normal trip to the airport)  
**Probe:** What do you like about the process of air travel?  
**Probe:** What do you dislike about the process of air travel?
2. How do you feel when traveling within the airport?  
**Probe:** What do you find stressful?  
**Probe:** What do you find exciting?  
**Probe:** What do you find boring?  
**Probe:** What do you find confusing?  
**Probe:** Why?
3. What emotions do you experience when traveling (e.g., happy, sad, mad, stressed)?  
**Probe:** Do you often do you experience those emotions when traveling?  
**Probe:** How do those feelings compare to feelings during other day-to-day experiences? (e.g., do you feel “differently” than normal while at the airport)
4. Can you please describe your favorite air travel experience?  
**Probe:** What made it your favorite?  
**Probe:** How did you feel at the time
5. Can you please describe your most memorable air travel experience?  
**Probe:** What made it memorable?  
**Probe:** How did you feel at the time?
6. Can you please describe an example of conflict or tension you've experienced while traveling within the airport?  
**Probe:** What happened?  
**Probe:** How did you feel?
7. What would be an ideal travel experience?  
**Probe:** Why?
8. What is a perfect traveler like?

- Probe:** How do you know?
- Probe:** Do you know any perfect travelers?
- Probe:** Would you consider yourself one?
- Probe:** How do you compare to the perfect traveler?

9. How does your role as an airline customer compare to other customer service environments?

## Specific Travel Experiences

### Security

10. What is going through security like?
  - Probe:** What is the typical experience like?
  - Probe:** How do you feel?
  - Probe:** What a-typical experiences have you had or observed?
  - Probe:** How did those a-typical experiences make you feel?
11. How do you know what to do in security?
12. What surprised you most in airport security the last time you flew?
13. How do you feel when going through security?
  - Probe:** What troubles you?
  - Probe:** What excites you?
  - Probe:** What stresses you?
  - Probe:** What confuses you?
  - Probe:** What makes you happy?
  - Probe:** How do you deal with these emotions?
14. In the last question, you mentioned feeling \_\_\_\_\_ emotions when going through security. How comfortable are you expressing \_\_\_\_\_ emotion in airport security?
  - Probe:** Why or why not?
  - Probe:** How do you know when it's okay to show how you feel?
15. The mission of the Transportation Security Administration is to “protect the Nation’s transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce.” How do you feel about this mission?
  - Probe:** Did you know the mission before I asked the question?
  - Probe:** How is your opinion about the mission different than your opinion of the TSA itself?
16. When you think of a TSA agent, what descriptors come to mind?
  - Probe:** Why?
  - Probe:** What are members of airport security like?
17. When going through security, you come into contact with several TSA agents—

during the ID check, as you go through the metal detector, if you have any additional screenings, etc. Can you describe what those interactions are typically like?

**Probe:** Do you talk to the TSA agents? What do you talk about?

**Probe:** How does that interaction make you feel?

18. Have you ever been reprimanded?

**Probe:** What happened?

**Probe:** How did that experience make you feel?

**Probe:** Did you tell anyone about the experience? Why or why not?

19. Have you ever been joked around with by a TSA agent?

**Probe:** What did they talk about?

**Probe:** How did you feel?

**Probe:** Did you tell anyone about the experience? Why or why not?

20. What “outbursts” or examples of abnormal behavior have you witnessed during security screening at the airport?

**Probe:** What happened?

**Probe:** How did you feel?

**Probe:** How did others react?

**Probe:** What did you do?

21. If you saw a TSA agent yelling at another passenger ahead of you in line, how do you think that would make you feel?

**Probe:** How would you react to that employee?

**Probe:** How would you react to that passenger?

22. What would be an ideal experience at airport security?

**Probe:** If you could make any changes to security, what would they be and why?

23. From what sources do you get information about airport security?

**Probe:** What have you read about or heard about in the news or press about airport security?

**Probe:** How do your experiences in the airport compare to those accounts?

**Probe:** What do your friends and family think about airport security?

### Closing Questions

24. What advice do you have for new travelers?

25. What do you think is the most important or interesting topic that you've written about?

26. Is there anything else about your experience within airports that I haven't asked you?

APPENDIX D

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY OFFICER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you read in the information letter, I am interested in understanding how interaction, communication, and emotion function with airports. Specifically, I would like to know what experiences you've had when working in airport security.

**Background/Demographic Information:**

Pseudonym:

Approximate age:

Ethnicity:

Vocation:

Job duties:

Length of employment:

**General travel questions**

1. Please describe a typical day at work
2. How do you feel when working within the airport?  
**Probe:** What do you find stressful? Exciting? Boring?
3. Why did you want this job?
4. What did you think the job would be like before you started?  
**Probe:** What do like?  
**Probe:** What do dislike?
5. How did your vision of the job compare to what it's actually like?
6. How do you feel at work?  
**Probe:** When are you happy, mad, sad, angry?  
**Probe:** Do you often experience those emotions?  
**Probe:** How do those feelings compare to feelings during other day-to-day experiences? (e.g., do you feel "differently" at work than during other times of life?)
7. Can you please describe a favorite experience at work?  
**Probe:** What made it your favorite?  
**Probe:** How did you feel at the time?
8. Can you please describe your most memorable experience at work?  
**Probe:** What made it memorable?  
**Probe:** How did you feel at the time?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of working at the airport?  
**Probe:** Why?  
**Probe:** Can you give me an example?
10. Can you please describe an example of conflict or tension you've experienced while working within the airport? What happened? How did you feel?



11. What would be an ideal work experience?
12. How much do you talk about your job outside of work?  
**Probe:** What do your friends and family think about you being a TSA agent?

### Specific Work Experiences

#### Security

13. What is working in security like?  
**Probe:** What is a typical day like?  
**Probe:** What atypical experiences have you had or observed?
14. What type of training did/do you receive?
15. How do you feel when the line is long?
16. How do you typically interact with travelers during airport security?  
**Probe:** Could you give me an example?  
**Probe:** How did you feel?
17. What do you do when a passenger does something “wrong” in security?  
**Probe:** How did you feel when passengers make mistakes?  
**Probe:** How did you encourage “correct” passenger behavior?
18. What challenges working in airport security have you experienced?
19. What roles or positions are your favorite? Least favorite?  
**Probe:** Have you ever had to give an advanced pat-down? How did you feel?
20. What “outbursts” or examples of abnormal behavior have you witnessed during security screening at the airport?  
**Probe:** What happened? How did you feel? How did others react?
21. How do you interact with your coworkers?  
**Probe:** Do you have fun?  
**Probe:** Do you have friends at work?  
**Probe:** How do you talk about travelers with your coworkers?
22. How do you know when you’re doing well at your job?
23. What would be an ideal day at work?  
**Probe:** If you could make any changes to airport security, what would they be and why?

### Closing Questions

24. What advice do you have for new travelers?

25. What do you think is the most important topic we've discussed today?

26. Is there anything else about your experience within airports that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX E

PASSENGER PSEUDONYMS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Roundtrips Per Year</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Primary Reason for Travel</b>
Mac	21	Male	White	5-6	College Graduate	Visit Family
Kristine	27	Female	White	6-8	Self-Employed	Work or Leisure
Sue	30	Female	White	4-12	PR Specialist	Mostly work
Tigger	46	Female	White	<1	Retired	Leisure
Rachel	27	Female	White	4-6	Program Director	Leisure
Alice	29	Female	White	12-50	Marketing	Work
Bob	31	Male	White	4-5	Experience Designer	Leisure
Nate	32	Male	Latino	6-12	Attorney	Work or Leisure
Soleil	31	Female	White	2	Banking	Leisure
Dirk	39	Male	White	5	IT Engineer	Work
Ramona	28	Female	White	6	Graduate Researcher	Work or Leisure
Flyboy	29	Male	White	25+	Flight Attendant	Work
Jaycee	30	Female	White	6	Professor	Leisure or Work
Patrice	36	Female	White	<1	IT Manager	Work
Portlander	40s	Male	White	60+	Tech Sales	Work
Puzzled	30s	Female	White	4-5	Nurse	Leisure
Daphne	28	Female	White	2	Administrative Support	Leisure

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Elle	29	Female	White	5	Insurance Consulting	Leisure
Evan C.	32	Male	White	6+	MRI Technologist	Work
Isaac	43	Male	White	25+	Internet Marketer	Work and Leisure
Andrea	29	Female	White	2	College Instructor	Work and Leisure
Kim	30s	Female	Asian	4-5	Education	Work
Colette	45	Female	Black	25+	Sales Management	Work
Tex	28	Male	White	4	Software Developer	Work
Carrie	40s	Female	White	35+	College Professor	Work
Terry	30s	Female	Asian	4-5	Researcher	Work
Bud	60s	Male	Asian	6-10	Defense Contractor	Work and Leisure
MacGruder	40s	Male	White	2-3	IT Director	Work
Ed	40s	Male	White	3-5	Self-Employed	Work and Leisure
Leroy	31	Male	White	6-10	Professor	Leisure or Work

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APPENDIX F

TSO PSEUDONYMS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years Employed</b>	<b>Role</b>
Skeet	30	Male	White	4	TSO
Jeff	29	Male	White	2	TSO
Roger	42	Male	Asian	7	TSO
Carrie	58	Female	White	5.5	TSO
Peter	50	Male	White	1.5	TSO
Necie	45	Female	Black	6	TSO
Ty	50	Male	Latino/White	10	TSO
Rick	30s	Male	White	10	Screening Manager
Cat	55	Female	White	10	TSO
Alexa	25	Female	Black/Latina	4.5	TSO
Mike	40s	Male	White	10	Security Specialist
Lucky	28	Male	Latino	3	TSO
Jonathan	34	Male	Pacific Islander	6	TSO
Steve	40	Male	White	8	TSO

APPENDIX G  
PRELIMINARY CODEBOOK



- RQ1: How do airport security employees make sense of emotion at work?
- What discursive resources do employees draw upon to make sense?
  - What relational resources do employees draw upon to make sense?
- RQ2: How do passengers make sense of emotion within airport security contexts?
- What discursive resources do passengers draw upon to make sense?
  - What relational resources do passengers draw upon to make sense?
- RQ3: What are the relationships between passenger and employee emotional performances—including emotion management—and sensemaking activities? What are the consequences?

First Level Codes

Code	Category	Definition/Explanation	Examples
<b>Structures/Processes</b>			
Line-Sec	Lines-Security	Activity within the security line prior to the ID checking.	Standing in line
ID-Check	ID Checking	Interaction/activity involving TSOs and passengers during the ID checking process	
ChkPt	Security Check Point	Interaction within the security checkpoint after the ID checking and before any advanced scanning. Includes going through the metal detector or Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT), and having baggage screened.	
Patdown	Enhanced Pat-down	Interaction during enhanced screenings/pat-downs	
<b>Emotion Processes</b>			
EmoPosT	TSO Positive emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of positive valence such as happiness, joy, fun	Smiling, laughter
EmoPosP	Passenger Positive Emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of positive valence such as happiness, joy, fun	Smiling, laughter
EmoNegT	TSO Negative Emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of negative valence such as stress, anxiety, annoyance, frustration, etc.	Crossed arms, scowl, clipped speech, rushing, yelling
EmoNegP	Passenger Negative Emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of negative valence such as stress, anxiety, annoyance, frustration, etc.	Crossed arms, scowl, clipped speech, rushing, yelling
EmoNeuT	TSO Neutral Emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of a neutral character (boredom, contentment); Displays of no emotion; may also indicate emotion management	Blank expression, yawning, staring into the distance, no emotional displays

EmoNeuP	Passenger Neutral Emotions	Felt or displayed emotions of a neutral character (boredom, contentment); Displays of no emotion; may also indicate emotion management	Blank expression, yawning, staring into the distance, no emotional displays
EmoRules	Emotion Rules	References to “rules” for expressing emotion in airport security	“You’re always supposed to be calm, cool, and collected”
EmoMgmt	Emotion Management	Instances where TSOs or Passengers describe managing the experience or expression of emotions in security	“We’re told to maintain our demeanor and not let them get a rise out of us.”
EmoMgmt-D	Double-faced Emotion Mgmt	The process of managing personal emotions and the emotions of others...	When being yelled at, TSOs keeping themselves calm and also helping to diffuse the emotions of passengers
Empathy	Empathy	Demonstrations or discussions of empathic feelings	“I know they have a crappy job; I feel for them”; “Traveling is stressful; I try to make it easier for them”
<b>Interaction/Action Processes</b>			
Int-P/P	Interaction between Passengers	Interaction between passengers and other passengers	Talking, questioning, joking, complaining, commiseration
Int-T/P	Interaction between TSOs and Passenger	Interaction between TSAs and passengers	Talking, questioning, joking, complaining, commiseration
Int-T/T	Interaction between TSOs	Interaction between TSOs—camaraderie, workplace relationships, etc.	Talking, joking, commiserating, briefing. Talking shop
Outbursts-P	Passenger outbursts	Descriptions or observations of atypical behavior,	Woman crying about having to relinquish her Civil War bullet collection; Man chastising TSO for performing an extra screening
Outbursts-T	TSO outbursts	Descriptions or observations of atypical behavior	TSOs yelling at passengers
Emp-disc	Employee discretion	When employees use their discretion in interpreting policy or rules with passengers—Typically either making exceptions or typically making or “punishing” passengers	Allowing customers to use express lanes when running late; Strictly enforcing rules at some times and not others; Making passengers do extra screenings as a result of bad attitudes
Paranoia	Paranoia	Descriptions of feeling paranoid or anxious about security	“It [security] makes you feel like ‘What do I have in my purse?’” “Look, they even got <i>her</i> ...” “Nobody’s going to go to a school and shoot people. Nobody’s going to bring heroin to an airport. Why would they do that? [I was] naive in that sense. In reality, people do this stuff all day.”
Suspicion	Suspicion	Descriptions or actions demonstrating suspicion,	Passengers suspecting that TSOs are dishonest (accusing them of stealing

		distrust or doubt about passengers or TSOs.	medications); TSOs are trained to view passengers with suspicion, that any one of them may be a terrorist.
Soc-Supp	Social Support	Evidence of social support or community in the airport	Passengers helping other passengers with luggage; passengers helping employees with tasks; employees supporting each other
Protocol	Protocol	TSO references to rules or procedures	
Joking	Joking	Instances of joking/humor.	Passengers joking about how long the security line is, e.g., "I try to think Disneyland but it's more like the Post Office... No, the DMV"; TSOs using humor to complete work, e.g. "One shoe, two shoes, red shoes, blue shoes, they all gotta come off and go in the bin."

Second Level Analytic Codes

<b>Code</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition/Explanation</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Surveillance	Surveillance	Observations or references to human surveillance in airport security	TSOs standing at the head of the line and watching for atypical behavior; Passengers monitoring TSOs or other passengers
Att.Abt.TSOs	Attitudes about TSOs	Passenger attitudes about TSOs.	"They're like robots, machines..." "They don't seem educated"
Att.Abt.Pssg	Attitudes about Passengers	TSO attitudes about Passengers.	"They're mostly nice." (Lack of empathy) "It doesn't bother me that the line is way back there. I'm sorry that you came to the airport late and you need to get through. Sorry. Plan ahead."
Persp-Chnge	Perspective Change	Discussions of changing perspectives regarding airport security or TSOs	"I thought it would be really easy... All I saw was people on TV, checking bags. I couldn't see what actually does take place and what's really going on. It's quite a bit more than what people know about."  "I thought TSA had more power, and when I was going through airport, I was a little more frightful of what they... frightful of them"
Vigilance	Vigilance	The required state of TSOs—being aware and on guard at all time looking for atypical behavior or potential wrongdoing.	"There is a slight nervousness to you because it might be someone who has a gun, or some type of weapon... You always have to keep that in the back of your mind."
Sensegiving	Sensegiving	Communication that attempts to shape the sensemaking processes of others. (Typically TSO-to-Passenger)	"If you [follow directions], your trip through the scanner will only take five seconds"; "You know it's not an xray, right?"; "If you don't [remove liquids/gels], you'll get a paaatttttddooowwwwnnnn"
Sensemaking	Sensemaking	Meaning making processes	"If you don't want to do it, don't fly... we go through it when we fly"  "My dad flies a lot, so he has a little bit

			more respect of the TSA just because if he goes somewhere, he thinks it's me doing the job versus somebody he doesn't know."
Sensebreakin g	Sensebreaki ng	Experiences that "break" sense and trigger sensemaking	Receiving a highly invasive pat-down and needing to make sense of the experience; Security breaches that have never been encountered before
Discourses	Discourses	References to macro or meso level discourses that explain or complicate experiences in airport security	Discourses—Security, safety, nationalism, privacy, authority... "It's for our safety"
Paradox	Paradox	Negotiating/maintaining conflicting beliefs or positions.	For TSOs- The tension between boredom and danger (Wanting the job not to be boring but recognizing that "exciting" days at work involve danger). Paradox of success—Serving passengers, but also viewing them with suspicion.
Image	Image	Descriptions of TSA image	Describing people taking videos in security: "People will take videos and put them on the internet 'All, look at the stupid TSA'" "It's very obnoxious. People will overreact... That's one thing I really don't like. It's not the person, it's you, it's because you are the TSA and you are that person."
Identity-Org	Organizatio nal identity	Descriptions of TSA identity by TSOs	"The TSA's job is to keep people safe"
Identificatio n-Org	Organizatio nal identificatio n	Descriptions of how TSOs identify with the organization	"We keep people safe."
Identity- TSO	TSO identity	Descriptions of individual TSO identity, perhaps as in role identity	"It's amazing what people will say to you, which they would never say at someone in the grocery store... It's not a normal thing to say to someone, but they will say it to you, because you work for the government. You're a TSA agent." "TSA agents are people, too."
Us/Them	Us-Them Mentality	Behavior or attitudes of individuals that suggest distinct identity positions between groups e.g. "us" passengers and "them" TSA agents (or vice versa)	"They're trying to make it so that people who are normal, solid people, who just want to go through the process [can fly]"
Me/Them	Me-Them Mentality	Behavior or attitudes of individuals that suggest a "me" attitude, absence of community	Buffering, territorialism, rudeness in interactions, impatience, absence of conversation

APPENDIX H

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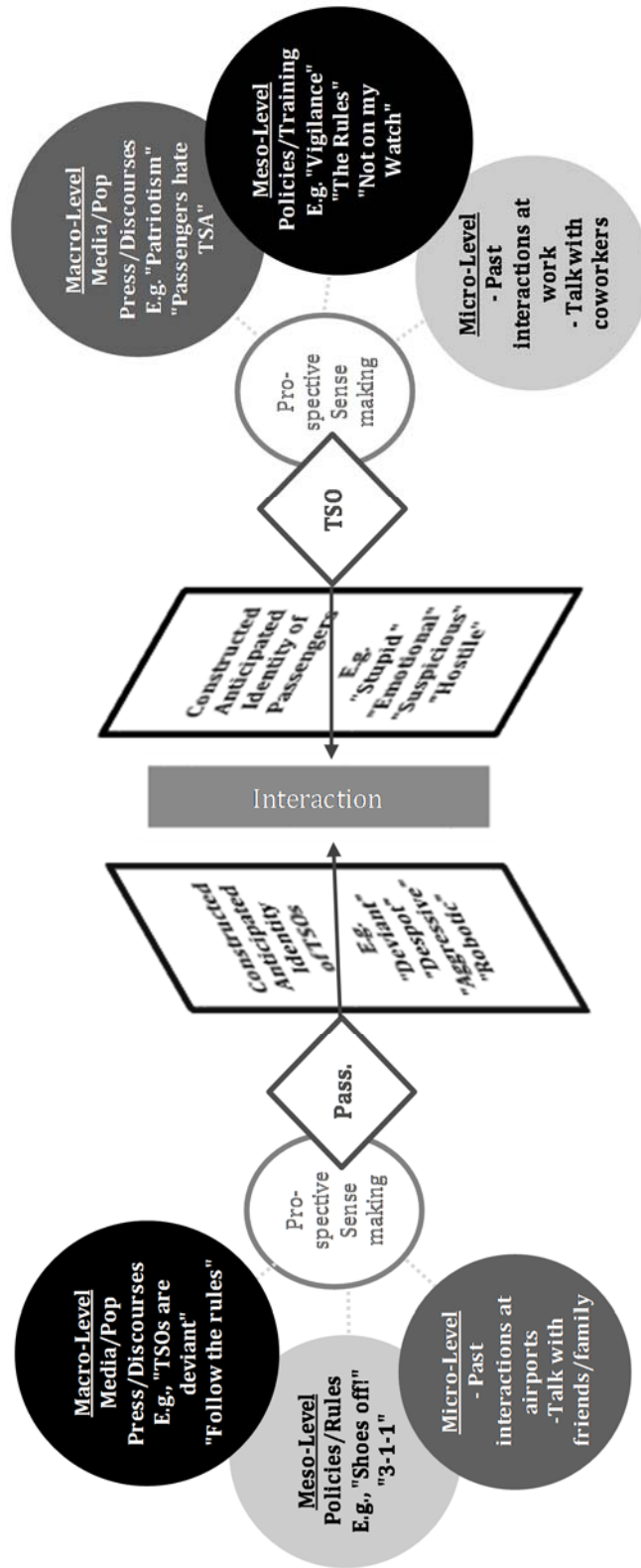
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APPENDIX I

FIGURE 1, FULL SCALE



APPENDIX J

FIGURE 3, FULL SCALE

