

The Knife's Edge of Visibility: Cruising, Surveillance, and Discursive Practices of Queer  
Communities in Ottawa

by

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# Abstract

This thesis investigates how men who have sex with men (MSM) discern, discuss, and defy issues of surveillance in the context of casual, public sex—also known as cruising—and how these exchanges constitute and inform subaltern counter-surveillance measures. Focusing on written exchanges by users of the queer hook-up website *Squirt*, I analyze how users discuss safety and surveillance of cruising locations in the Greater Ottawa Area. This work concludes that surveillance and cruising is normalized, both police and ordinary citizens present safety risks, great care is taken to act discreetly and not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers, and environmental factors contribute greatly to the construction and circumvention of surveillance infrastructure. The data additionally complicate well-established perspectives on surveillance, including surveillance realism and introduce opportunities for queering and expanding future research.

# 1. Introduction

To be queer is to live on a knife's edge of visibility. In some contexts, the queer body is scrutinized, debated, vilified; in others, it is merely a statistical anomaly and dismissed to make room for more traditional configurations. In any case, the watchful eyes of surveillance infrastructure—both technological and social—determine how, if, and when queer individuals are recognized. In other words: perception, as an extension of normative power, lies at the heart of legibility for queer communities.

But queerness also presents the opportunity to camouflage the body and circumvent powerful surveillance. Queerness is unknown and amorphous, an ever-shifting constellation of practices, aesthetics, linguistic signifiers, social movements, and expanding desires. Indeed, as José Esteban Muñoz notes, “We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (2019, p. 1). Such unknowability weaves through systems, jamming surveillance infrastructure and eluding dominant watchers of society.

One such visible yet unseen queer act is *cruising*. Broadly understood as men searching for anonymous sexual encounters with other men in public settings, cruising can be viewed narrowly as a rejection of normative erotic practices undertaken by a subset of an already minority population. Such an approach suggests that cruising offers limited insight into larger issues of societal engagement. However, I argue that cruising gestures to a deeper understanding of ongoing surveillance practices as they collide with sexual, social, and spatial relations.

This thesis focuses on written exchanges by users of the queer hook-up website *Squirt* by analyzing how users discern, discuss, and defy safety and surveillance of

cruising locations in the Greater Ottawa Area. I reviewed 4,366 comments and location profiles from *Squirt*, of which 163 related to safety or surveillance. Combining elements from Foucauldian discourse analysis and the walkthrough method (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018), I focus on understanding how these exchanges uncover hidden power structures and contribute to discussions of surveillance writ large. At the centre of this project is the issue of how queer communities are *seen* and how queer communities see the world in different ways including as a place of potential pleasure and desire; as a landscape of surveillance; as a technical bricolage that connects the corporeal and the digital; and as a political arena where the private can act as a protest against the public.

As will be explored in detail below, the intersection of queerness and surveillance is a productive site of academic inquiry. Far from new, Gary Kafer and Daniel Grinberg note that “surveillance has long been hostile to queer and trans identities in seeking to control deviation” (2019, p. 593). Such deviation is perhaps best exemplified in cruising, as it represents non-normative sexual acts in non-normative locales.

When combined with the technical affordances of a website like *Squirt*, cruising—and its surveillance—bridges the physical and virtual dimension. By studying digital exchanges related to surveillance, we can understand not only how these users experience surveillance but how they bring these worlds together because “In contrast to the historical (and overwhelming heterosexual) perception of virtual realities being non-corporeal, gay men’s digital culture has long been preoccupied with the re-emergence, re-imagining and re-evaluating of gay male corporeality” (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 60). By taking an expansive view, we are reminded that digital technologies

present both affordances *and* constraints, reflecting the nature of laws, regulations, and societal norms that govern queer bodies.

Equally important to the study of surveillance are investigations into the ways in which queer communities circumvent it. This is not novel for queer folks, as they have “long found ways of contesting surveillance to extend their life chances” (Kafer & Grinberg, 2019, p. 598). However, an investigation of current literature on surveillance reveals a gap: queer communities themselves are rarely centred in discussions of their own surveillance. My research examines this gap by asking: What issues raise the most concern? What precautions are taken to guard against law enforcement agencies and private citizens alike? How does the environmental composition of cruising locations contribute to safety precautions taken? The data and analysis in this thesis address these questions and reveal that surveillance in regard to cruising is normalized, anyone who is not a cruiser is considered a potential agent of surveillance, great care is taken to act discreetly and not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers, and environmental factors contribute greatly to the construction and circumvention of surveillance infrastructure. The data additionally complicate well established perspectives on surveillance, including surveillance realism (Dencik & Cable, 2017), and introduce opportunities for queering and expanding future research.

However, this thesis is limited in scope and cannot address every possible perspective. For example, by focusing on MSM in a North American urban center where many participants are likely white and cisgendered, I risk perpetuating the overemphasis of these subjects in queer literature. To help me navigate these limitations, my approach draws from critically-inflected work on racialized surveillance

(Browne, 2015), trans surveillance (Beauchamp, 2019), and feminist scholarship at large (Dubrofsky & Magnet, 2015) to highlight those experiences not explicitly rendered in the dataset of this study. Likewise, while technological mediation undergirds this work, cruising is neither a solely digital nor solely analog practice. As will be seen below, technology provides a useful framework for thinking through cruising but I adopt non-technical perspectives where appropriate. Finally, I opt for the term “queer” as a catch-all for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (2SLGBTIQ+) individuals and communities. This is both a stylistic choice as well as an attempt to show the common experiences of these communities regarding surveillance, but it is necessary to underscore that each community (and certainly individuals within each community) face unique issues. Due to constraints of space and resources, I am unable to fully explore each community in depth but I do make suggestions for future research in section 5.4. Where appropriate in my research, however, I will highlight specific identities for the sake of clarity, including transgender communities and men who have sex with men (MSM).

The thesis unfolds across five chapters. Chapter Two explores key theoretical concepts of cruising and coded communication, conceptualizes queer surveillance, and investigates elements of *Squirt*, sexual infrastructure, and spatial relations. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology, data collection, and analytical approaches used in this investigation, including Foucauldian discourse analysis and the walkthrough method (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018). Chapter 4 reviews *Squirt* data and discusses general and specific observations drawn from discursive exchanges, including the surveillant impact of ordinary individuals, law enforcement entities, and environmental

constructions. Chapter 5 offers concluding thoughts, considers implications for the field of surveillance studies, and points to future areas of research.

While cruising and surveillance have tangible consequences, they are also intertwined with abstract understandings of communication, power, privacy, pleasure, sex, and space. The following chapter foregrounds this investigation with an overview of existing literature and core theoretical concepts.

## 2. Literature and Theory

### 2.1 Cruising and Coded Communications

As a suite of embodied actions with historic roots, cruising presents an expansive approach to understanding sexual, social, and spatial relations in queer communities. And because cruising is the central arena in which I investigate surveillance throughout this study, it is necessary to approach cruising from several perspectives. In this section, I provide an overview of the cultural and communicative significance of cruising, particularly as it offers a queering of normative concepts of public and private. Following this, I discuss how cruising fits into the long lineage of coded communication tactics deployed by queer communities, enabling them to weave between invisibility and discoverability. Finally, I end with a brief discussion of Polari as a linguistic expression of cruising and secret communication.

### 2.1.1 Subaltern and Subversive

For the purposes of this research project, cruising will be defined as “the deliberate, active, and usually mobile search for sexual partner(s) in a social setting” (Dynes, 2016, p. 284). More colloquially, cruising involves primarily queer men looking for sexual partners in public or non-private locations, including parks, gyms, movie theatres, truck stops, alleys, and washrooms. Cruising is such an established part of queer male culture that it often unconsciously becomes part of one’s sexual repertoire, often without explicit instruction or knowledge. This is made clear in Michael Bullock’s commentary on cruising and queer architecture for PIN-UP magazine: “I almost instinctively learned that the I-95 highway rest stop, the Emerald Square Mall bathrooms, and the steam room at Gold’s Gym were where I could connect with my kind. I didn’t know how or why, but even at 15, I understood those places were for sex” (2019, para 1).

Cruising is not a modern phenomenon. By some accounts, the Roman poet Publius Ovid, around 1 A.D., would seek out both men and women for sexual encounters (Dynes, 2016). Cruising’s long lineage is perhaps not surprising, given the plethora of stories in human history that speak of forbidden attraction, star-crossed lovers, and dangerous liaisons. If cruising is being open to the possibility of spontaneous intimacy, it has, arguably, been present throughout human history. However, it has not always been equally regarded. Toronto lawyer and writer Marcus McCann notes the discrepancy between heterosexual and queer couples who engage in public sex:

Straight people do it all the time — on a blanket in the park after sunset, in the backseat of a car in a lot overlooking a ravine — and when they do, it’s considered a harmless “Lovers Lane” scenario. If found, the couple may be told to “knock it off” or “move along” but there are rarely harsher consequences. When queer people do it, it is all too often viewed as a disgusting blight requiring a police crackdown. (McCann, 2021)

So why, then, has cruising become so closely associated with queer men?

Historically, in the presence of cross-cultural social and moral prohibitions against public sexual expression, queer sex had to be opportunistic, creative, fluid, and mobile. While an extensive overview of the religious and legal persecution of queer relationships is outside the scope of this current study, Western institutions have long attempted to enforce normative standards of sexuality. For example, Christian writings in the first century “were unequivocally opposed to male prostitution and pederasty—probably the most visible forms of homosexuality in their time” (Greenberg, 1990, p. 218).<sup>1</sup>

Cruising has traditionally found footing in scholarship that attempts to unpack and understand queer practices. Perhaps the most infamous is Laud Humphreys’ *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (1970). While this work is now mired in criticism because it relied on unscrupulous and unethical research methodology, it stands as one of the first scholarly attempts to understand MSM who cruise, and it continues to be widely cited for its focus on the subject. It sought to understand the sociological nature of cruising, but many other disciplines have also explored cruising, such as public health

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<sup>1</sup> Much can be said about non-Western cultural and social approaches to queer configurations, such as waria of Indonesia and Two-Spirit peoples of North American First Nations, but this is outside the scope of the present study.

research and outreach (Binson et al, 2001; Gama et al, 2017), psychology (Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 1999; Frankis & Flowers, 2009), criminology (Valverde & Cirak, 2003; Woods, 2014), and history (Bleakley, 2021; Petri, 2018).

While heavily focused on gay, bisexual, and queer men, research on cruising has been expanded to other identity groups. For example, Denise Bullock investigates cruising in lesbian communities, creating a typology, methodology, and seven distinct styles of cruising for queer women (Bullock, 2004). The presence of women in cruising in general is a particularly enlightening entry into this sexual environment. Artist Liz Rosenfeld discusses the tensions, conflicts, and pleasures that arise from being a woman who enjoys cruising, often in queer male spaces. For them, cruising is a practice “tinged with an air of misogyny, however deeply far away it exists from a political framework” (Rozenfeld, 2021, p. 27). Despite this, they cruise. They cruise not as a political gesture towards equality or to call out these misogynistic practices, but because “cruising is a practice, an art form, a need, a feeling, a glimpse into bodies, needs, uncomplicated while also intensely entangled in conflicting, mostly silent, emotions” (Rozenfeld, 2021, p. 27). Cruising brings together the somatic and the sensual, wherein the hunt for sexual engagement can be just as desirable as the end result.

Cruising is also deeply connected to the politics and policing of space. Generally speaking, throughout the early to mid-twentieth century in North America, queer-friendly locations, such as bookstores and bars, were often under police surveillance (Kinsman, 2000) and therefore not considered safe by anyone seeking anonymity. Cruising presented an option—sometimes the only viable one—to reimagine which spaces could be rendered sexual.

Cruising must further be regarded in connection to a constellation of legal, political, and social structures that constrain acts defined as lewd *and* give them meaning. As Sharif Mowlabocus notes:

Whether through the medical discourses of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, sexology, phrenology and genetics or the judicial powers of governments, law courts and the police, such mechanisms have simultaneously constructed and codified male homosexuality within Western cultures since the nineteenth century. (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 59)

It is in being pushed to the margins of acceptable behaviour and contrasted against a culture with gender codes that conform to heteronormativity that cruising becomes reified as a subaltern act.

Given the modern protections that have been extended to non-normative sexualities and gender identities and expressions, why do some men continue to cruise? That question suggests neatly defined answers when such might not exist. Some men might believe they exist outside the protection of the law, such as newcomers and refugees, including those from countries where homosexual acts are criminalized, and therefore see cruising as an option of necessity. Others may find safety in anonymous and ephemeral encounters because they are heterosexually-identified. Some may have cruised when it was necessary and find it challenging to give up: a 2016 sexual health survey by a Vancouver-based community group revealed that “older men more commonly reported outdoor or bathhouse cruising than younger men” (Community Based Research Centre for Gay Men’s Health, 2016, p. 24). Finally, some may cruise because they find it a pleasurable act. A participant at an outdoor leather

cruising location in the Netherlands notes: “Woodland in the dark has a promise of adventure. Perhaps it is the combination of fear and expectation. Behind each tree you may expect something or someone frightening or tempting or both” (Van Lieshout, 1995, p. 34).

Cruising is a conduit for, and extension of, queer desire. As a pursuit of pleasure, it exists as a deeply political act: bypassing heteronormative notions of appropriate sexual conduct and seeking out queer companionship offers an individual mechanism for jamming deeply entrenched societal systems. As adrienne maree brown writes, “Pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” (brown, 2019, p. 8). While writing a critique of the hook-up app *Grindr*’s inability to reinvigorate cruising culture in North America, Jody Ahlm notes that in a climate that is “increasingly hostile to promiscuity and the open pursuit of (homo)sexual pleasure” (2017, p. 377), any casual sex is a welcomed act of subversion.

### 2.1.2 Cruising as Culture

Cruising is the act of looking for sexual encounters in non-traditional locations, although it is more than sex. In conducting an ethnography of MSM cruising in Los Angeles, Judith Stacey suggests that it “generates bonds of kinship and domesticity” (Stacey, 2004, p. 183). These bonds, she argues, represent strong and complex sociological connections, ones that are often overlooked in both academic literature and normative queer circles alike: “Sexual cruising...initiates lasting familial ties more than is commonly recognized. Anonymous erotic encounters occasionally yield fairly

conventional forms of love and ‘marriage’” (Stacey, 2004, p. 190). Cruising, then, exists as a cultural expression of physical, emotional, and social intimacy, satisfying many forms of desire. It is part of a collective past that speaks to oppression and, potentially, a future that speaks to liberation.

As noted above, cruising was born out of necessity and opportunity. But its adoption as a queer cultural artefact has not been uncontentious. Beginning in the 1970s and gaining traction at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s, cruising presented a complicated position for public queer figures, with many leaders in the push for queer ‘acceptance’ denouncing it:

Cottaging<sup>2</sup> had long been regarded as deviant by the mainstream and, in a bid to raise funds for HIV research and care, the gay community were quick to distance themselves from any bad old habits that might muddy the waters and jeopardise their progress. (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 124)

Here we see how outside pressure forced queer communities to take a stand against their own conduct. To gain wider societal approval, many were forced to abandon public endorsement of public sex. Such disavowal is powerful as it diminishes the capacity for the liberatory potential of cruising and reduces homosexuality to nothing more than “a bunch of dirty old men preying on the innocent” (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 124). That such views may have traction within queer communities speaks to the divisive nature of cruising and the diversity of sexual cultures. So what is at risk in abandoning cruising and the pursuit of public pleasure if not, potentially, the very nature of queerness as a counterpower to unchallenged heteronormative dominance. As Stacey suggests, “the

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<sup>2</sup> “Cottaging” is a term primarily used in the United Kingdom, referring to cruising in public bathrooms (which are said to resemble small cottages).

contemporary gay rush to the altar and the nursery will erode the liberatory, transgressive character of queer sexual culture” (2004, p. 182).

While not to suggest a moralistic dichotomy between sex and cultural cachet, it is important to underscore that, as Stacey observes, cruising is more than sex. Artist and activist Keith Cole recently wrote a beginner’s guide to cruising for queer lifestyle website, *Yohomo*. In it, he notes that successful cruising does not necessarily require sex:

For me, as I get older, the sexiest cruising is the “look back.” You casually pass someone and catch each other’s eye for mere seconds and walk away but then you both magically turn back simultaneously and grab a second glance. It still happens to me, and I love it. (Cole, 2021, para 14)

So while cruising is codified as a sexual act, it also reaches beyond the body and fulfils cultural, emotional, and social needs. In cruising, we find both escape and acceptance.

### 2.1.3 Public Privates

Cruising is the rendering of private acts in public spaces, whereby sex can be moved from the bedroom to the mall, locker room, or park. Cruising does not have to entail explicit sexual activity in these public spaces, however; cruising can also be the act of finding a partner and bringing them back into a bedroom.

Cruising exposes the tension between ideas of public and private, since cultural norms in liberal society constitute intimate sexual expression as a private act whereas cruising is overtly public. Alongside this, neat divisions between public and private have been called into question with the twenty-first century’s increasing adoption of

information communication technologies (ICTs). As Sarah Michele Ford notes, “Whether the public is taking over the private or the private is taking over the public, treating the public/private distinction as dichotomous is no longer realistic; public and private must be reconceptualized” (2010, p. 558). Ford advocates for reconceptualizing public and private as anchors occupying either end of a continuum, with any number of fluid categories occupying the space between. By adopting Ford’s approach, we can ask: how does cruising challenge or complicate notions of public and private? As will be explored in the upcoming chapter on sexual surveillance in the Canadian context, sexual liberation has always been tied to normative understandings of keeping certain actions out of the courtroom *and* out of the public eye.

A paradox of public and private lives exists as a constant for queer individuals. To be “in the closet” means to have not publicly announced your non-heteronormative sexuality to the world, suggesting that queerness is only recognized when it takes private desires and places them in the public realm. At the same time, public declarations of queerness are often seen as dangerous for their ability to influence behaviours, as evidenced in Russia’s “gay propaganda” laws (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Caroline Dadas (2016) discusses the interplay between public and private in her research on the rhetorical constructions of gay marriage in Facebook groups. She demonstrates that public and private are social byproducts, often troubled by technological interventions: “Considering that it now takes effort to keep information private—whereas it once took considerable effort to publicize information—privacy and publicity have *changed*, not merely blurred” (Dadas, 2016, p. 65, emphasis in original).

Cruising is, in itself, a further queering of traditional conceptions of public and private (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018), since sexual acts are conducted in public spaces.

Frankis and Flowers (2005) differentiate between Public Sex Venues (PSVs) and Public Sex Environments (PSEs). While PSVs are designed explicitly for sexual encounters (e.g., bathhouses, saunas, pornographic theatres), PSEs are places that *can* be rendered sexual locales through cruising. However, as Frankis and Flowers note, not all spaces can be turned into PSEs: “A critical aspect of most PSEs is that each provide men with a ‘legitimate’ (that is, socially acceptable) reason for being there (Van Lieshout, 1995), for example to stroll in a park or use a toilet facility” (Van Lieshout, 1995, cited in Frankis & Flowers, 2005, p. 274)

When many public locales present opportunities for private acts, societal rules are called into question. This seemingly unnerves many, as evidenced by reader comments on news articles that discuss cruising. In response to a CBC piece that proposed cities should build public parks with public sex in mind, one commentor asked “What if my wife and I suddenly felt the urge to have sex at the supermarket. At the restaurant? The library? Would that be okay too?” (CBC, 2016). This suggests that cruising and public sex pull on a thread threatening to unravel a wardrobe of established heteronormative practices. In other words: cruising is contentious because it forces individuals to renegotiate their relationships with spatial and sexual expression and redefine their definitions of “public” and “private,” something queer communities have long been doing.

This transformative danger is not limited to cruising, with Mowlabocus noting that “the male homosexual has been the imperceptible traitor infiltrating the boardroom,

bathroom, changing room and bedroom” (2010, p. 72). Here, the mere presence of queerness challenges the boundaries of “safe spaces” for non-queer individuals. Similarly, while the ability to move through hetero-dominant environs undetected serves to protect queer communities, it also undermines the ability of dominant parties to accurately categorize them. By sharing concerns with the infrastructures, ideologies, and laws that validate some acts while repudiating others, concepts of public and private run parallel to those of visibility and invisibility and, as will be discussed below, surveillance. In this regard, queer communities are both over- and under-surveilled, often easily identified yet constantly jamming rigid systems of immutable identity (Kafer and Grinberg, 2019).

Finally, in exploring post-coloniality, Walter Mignolo discusses the fruitful investigation of the connective tissue between ideas and the tension that separates yet unites them: “Thus, the colonial matrix is built and operates on a series of interconnected heterogenous historico-structural nodes, bounded by the “/” that divides and unites modernity/coloniality, imperial laws/colonial rules, center/peripheries” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 17). We can adapt this further to see how cruising is not simply the movement from private to public but occupies a space *between* the two; cruising is liminal. To cruise is to pleurably explore open waters, not necessarily to land ashore.

#### 2.1.4 Gestures, Codes, and Hankies (Oh My)

Cruising is a communicative act. It is looking without being seen; flashing hidden signals and deciphering gestures with no decryption key except instinct, experience, and context. Existing outside normative and legal boundaries, queer communities have

been required to adopt ways of weaving between invisibility and discoverability. The most basic and perhaps famous of such acts is the concept of “gaydar,” the purported ability that some queer individuals claim to have for recognizing others, which has been noted as a “psychic-sexual interrogation” (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 46). The concept of “gaydar” suggests that queer communities are uniquely equipped to decipher hidden sexuality through complex communication that is imperceptible to heterosexuals.

Importantly, not all cloaking is intentional or codified. In discussing Jesus’ use of parables as an obscured means to spread his doctrine, John Durham Peters notes that “the signal was open to all, but only some perceived the sign” (Peters, 1999, p. 53). This highlights the ways in which quotidian tools can be appropriated by subaltern groups to connect *and* evade detection. In this way, queer communities have often sought to hide in plain sight. In 1937, the first “queer city guide” was published (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 51). It outlines London’s many washrooms, also known as “cottages.” These were sites of much anonymous homosexual activity and the guide spoke to a niche audience while ostensibly speaking to everyone: “Burke guided men to London’s urinals safe in the knowledge that most readers would not comprehend anything else. Yet those in the know found an alternative” (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 51). This “alternative” is not only a divergent use of public washrooms, but a divergent reading of public signs.

Similarly, the hankie code allowed for members of queer communities to communicate desire safely and secretly without compromising discoverability: while everyone could see the signal, only some understood its intended, covert meaning. Also known as “flagging,” the hankie code was a system of clandestine communication used in queer communities in the United States, originating in the 1960s and used until the

HIV/AIDS epidemic struck in the 1980s (Reilly & Saethre, 2014). The code worked by placing a handkerchief, bandana, or related item in one of your back pockets, with both the placement and type of hankie expressing meaning: in a left pocket, the user was looking to assume a more dominant or active role (often referred to as a “top” in terms of anal sex) and in the right they assumed a more passive role (or were considered a “bottom”). Likewise, the type of hankie indicated the type of sexual activity you were interested in. While there is no standard legend for decoding (Reilly and Saethre, 2014), some common combinations include: dark blue for anal sex and light blue for oral; green for sex work and grey for bondage; and red for fisting and yellow for watersports.

Like a homosexual Houdini, the wearer of a hankie morphs an everyday piece of fabric into an invitation to carnal delights. This speaks to the transformative power of shared understanding: a sandwich bag in a lunchbox likely invites one singular interpretation but tucked in the pocket of someone’s Levi’s, it can be seen as a desire to purchase drugs (Reilly & Saethre, 2014), assuming the receiver of this message understands its meaning. This kind of signal is precisely the type of code John Guillory ascribes to the 17th century language theorist John Wilkins: “He is interested rather in what technical devices exist or might be invented to frustrate immediate legibility without failing ultimately to communicate to a select addressee” (Guillory, 2010, p. 337).

The stakes of misinterpreting these signals are dangerously high. While decreasing, many American states still recognize so-called 2SLGBTIQ “panic” defenses, which is “a legal strategy that asks a jury to find that a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity/expression is to blame for a defendant’s violent reaction, including murder” (LGBTQ+ Bar, 2021). The successful deployment of such a strategy

means that misinterpreted signs of interest that lead to a romantic gesture could be grounds to justify murder.

The corporeal elements of these signs also underscore cruising as a spatial act. It exists in and of the world, even when negotiated online. As will be discussed below, *Squirt* is a queer digital space (self-described as a website for expression, enjoyment, and connection) that additionally transforms non-queer spaces by facilitating cruising. As Tziallas notes, “anywhere a GMSNA [gay male social networking application] user goes, the gay village follows—every unofficial straight space has the potential to be instantly turned into a gay one” (2015, p. 762).

This transformative power is not merely theoretical: the very landscape of spaces have been altered in response to cruising:

Cruising happens in the shadows: behind bushes, in cars, or in isolated areas at night. However, in places from Copenhagen’s Ørstedsparken to Ottawa’s Rémic Rapids Park to Toronto’s Queen’s Park, municipal strategy has been to cut down bushes and add lighting to dissuade cruising. These interventions tend to have an opposite effect: *cutting down bushes makes cruising more overt* (Robertson, 2016, emphasis added).

In response to these attempts, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the advent of new technologies, cruising now extends into digital spaces. Living primarily in cyberspace, some fear this heralds the end of the opportunistic and public tradition of cruising as we know it. Ahlm, for instance, expresses displeasure that queer hook-up apps like *Grindr* have not reinvigorated public sex. His research suggests that *Grindr* brings people into bars and bedrooms, not parks, and that this is a missed opportunity for reclaiming queer

spaces: “Shifting cruising to private spaces—both actual sex acts and the practices associated with finding a sexual partner in a public space, furthers the sanitation of gay physical spaces” (Ahlm, p. 373). But as my research below demonstrates, cruising through digital and physical means is far from over.

### 2.1.5 Bona to Vada Your Dolly Old Eek!<sup>3</sup>

The connection between secret codes, public/private identities, and negotiations of spatial politics are evident in Polari. Established at the turn of the 1900s and used throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century, Polari was a ‘secret’ language used by queer men and women, primarily in London and other UK cities (Baker, 2002). Polari constituted a “symbolic, linguistic, safe space” (Baker, 2002, p. 68) as a protective sociolinguistic mechanism to both identify partners and avoid potential harm from interlopers: “It became not so much a physical place (e.g. a private club or home) where people could be themselves away from prying eyes...but theoretically any place where Polari was spoken” (Baker, 2002, p. 68). In this regard, Polari was less of a cloak and more of a shield: speakers were observed but their identities were protected.

As Baker observes:

The use of Polari was therefore a complex interplay between speaker, hearer and social context. To simply characterize it as a ‘secret language’ is missing this important point. Polari clearly had a crucial role to play in both ‘outing’ oneself and revealing the sexual identity of the listener.  
(2002, p. 68)

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<sup>3</sup> Polari greeting, translated to “Good to see your lovely face” (Gallafent & Werman, 2012).

To demonstrate this, let us explore the following excerpt, taken from *Putting on the Dish* (Fairbairn & Eccleston, 2015). Spoken entirely in Polari and set in 1962 London, the short film centres on two strangers sitting on a bench. One man initiates a conversation with the second, asking for a smoke in Polari (“Got three drags and a spit, doll?”). When the second man produces a cigarette, their shared homosexuality is established and they begin conversing in their secret language. After discussing common acquaintances, the first man tells the story of cruising in a local washroom: upon exiting this cottage, he runs into a police officer and alerts him to the other gay man still inside, ensuring his own safety while sacrificing his sexual partner’s.

Man 1: “Nearly got nabbed myself the other week. I'd just finished plating a chicken in that cottage ajax Clackett Lane, you know the one. Anyway, I'm mincing outside, wiping my screech, when who do I bump into but one of your orderly daughters. "There's a poof in there," I said. Nabbed him with his kaffies down I 'spose. She'd have never vardered it coming. Must have been a right fericadooza. Sharda.”

Man 2: “You’re disgusting.”

While the exchange would likely be indecipherable to almost any passerby, the second man understood both the details of the story and the values of his conversational partner. It should go without saying that diversity of thought exists in queer communities, but *Putting on the Dish* highlights the unspoken necessity of communal protection that underscores cruising. That the story of turning in a fellow gay man elicits such a stark and strong response speaks to a disconnection of values, not communication: all the codes, gestures, and secret languages in the world are not

enough to protect a community if shared values are not established, respected, and maintained.

### 2.1.6 Cruising Onwards

While potentially dismissed as nothing more than salacious acts by a few deviants in public view, investigating cruising unearths deep and meaningful value, both societal and academic. Cruising holds communicative, cultural, political, emotional, and historic insight into understudied communities and the structures that exert power over them. As Liz Rosenfeld notes, “Cruising is how you touch the world, and the world touches you back” (2021, p. 28). But as will be seen in the next chapter, before the world can touch you, it must first see you.

## 2.2 Queer(ing) Surveillance

To exist in modern society is to be surveilled. But just as queer communities have unique relationships with societal structures, so too do they with surveillant structures. To better understand these connections, I investigate cruising and queerness alongside surveillance, both as a theoretical discipline and a verifiable reality of the world. In this section, I investigate the development of surveillance from its disciplinary roots to its more quotidian interpretations: from the influences of David Lyon, Zygmunt Bauman, Lina Dencik, and Jonathan Cable on my research to the community-based surveillance as articulated through the GaysOverCOVID Instagram account, and the history of sexual surveillance in the Canadian context.

## 2.2.1 Relational Infrastructure

Literature surrounding surveillance has traditionally focused on discourses of discipline. In analyzing the foundation of legal and political powers, Michel Foucault notes that “panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion” (Foucault, 1995, p. 222). Put another way: watching was the mechanism through which bodies exercised power. The Panopticon was a carceral layout designed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham which allowed guards to maintain a centralized gaze on prisoners and influenced much early understandings of surveillance studies. In more recent scholarship, our understanding of surveillance has shifted away from a solely panoptic framework: while surveillance can continue to be read as a structure, technology, or state function, it is also understood as a malleable characteristic of modernity. In what follows, I focus on three theoretical approaches that guide my research and present opportunities for divergence: a culture of surveillance (Lyon, 2018), surveillant liquidity (Bauman & Lyon, 2013), and surveillance realism (Dencik & Cable, 2017).

David Lyon advances the notion of a “culture of surveillance,” shifting from notions of police power to the prosaic: the everyday instances of how individuals are surveilled and, in turn, surveil others (Lyon, 2018). In framing this shift, he notes: “Today, surveillance is frequently fluid and flexible, in contrast to previous solid and fixed forms” (Lyon, 2018, p. 31). While not disregarding the significance of cultural cornerstones of absolute surveillance, such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Lyon suggests surveillance does not have to be viewed exclusively in stark, dystopic terms; yes, states continue to coordinate mass surveillance initiatives and

campaigners still push back against intrusive technologies, but Lyon suggests that we *all* engage in surveillant practices. From relying on CCTV footage to catch a street corner mugging to keeping tabs on an ex-partner through Instagram, “surveillance has become central to social experience, both as a serious security issue and as a playful part of mediated relationships” (Lyon, 2018, p. 31). This broad interpretation of surveillance as both technical and social is central to my investigation and, as will be explored in upcoming chapters, underscores how cruisers discuss issues of surveillance and safety.

Lyon complements this culture of surveillance with Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of “liquidity,” in which a distinguishing feature of modernity is its resistance at being neatly categorized and controlled: “Without a fixed container, but jolted by ‘security’ demands and tipped by technology companies’ insistent marketing, surveillance spills out all over” (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 2). This underscores what many of us already implicitly understand: surveillance is now a social practice that has become increasingly difficult to ‘nail down’. Such liquidity introduces notions of complexity to neat divisions of surveillance in modern society, whereby we all surveil and are surveilled, often regardless of intention or culpability.<sup>4</sup> And as will be outlined below, liquidity is a useful concept for thinking through queerness and its ability to complicate neat ideological divisions.

Finally, Dencik and Cable (2017) note the complex and shifting relationship individuals have with understanding the challenges of ubiquitous surveillance and the

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<sup>4</sup> This, however, should not dismiss the many instances where individuals knowingly surveil others, such as through technologically-facilitated intimate partner violence and “stalkerware” applications (Parsons et al, 2019).

perceived inability to resist it. They designate this resignation to surveillance practices “surveillance realism,” wherein “the lack of transparency, knowledge, and control over what happens to personal data online has led to feelings of widespread resignation, not consent, to the status quo” (Dencik & Cable, 2017, p. 763). Key to this is a restrained use of collective imagination to conceive of alternatives, since “the limits on imagination are a significant aspect of accepting particular systems and infrastructures, despite significant fallacies and injustices” (Dencik & Cable, 2017, p. 767). Given the specific and laborious relationship queer communities have with surveillance, a framework of resignation presents a complex analytical dynamic through which to interrogate aspects of queer cruising behaviour, surveillance, and mediated communication.

What all these conceptual frameworks suggest is that we have an environment where surveillance is a deeply ingrained aspect of our lives, modes of surveillance are not fixed, and we are becoming resigned to continuous, persistent forms of surveillance. But even within these expanded understandings of participatory and cultural surveillance, issues of power, care, and control are never far away. As Mark Andrejevic writes, “The study of surveillance is, of necessity, a study of power relations” (Andrejevic, 2015, p. xi). Such surveillant power is often expressed as *imbalances* of power. These imbalances inform our engagements for, as Foucault notes, “a society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (Dreyfus, Robinow & Foucault, 2016, pp. 222-223). Governments, state security agencies, employers, schools, and parents all wield power relative to their respective domains; citizens, suspected criminals, employees, students, and children do not. In this regard, we are not speaking about absolute power but about *relational power*. For example, in looking at the

relationship between employer and employee, we can note imbalances of power in terms of, among other things, access to resources, crafting of protocols, and disciplinary capacity. From these imbalances, we can see a surveillant relationship emerge, where a dominant body (employer) has the means to surveil, and a non-dominant body (employee) does not have the ability to appropriately resist.

Imbalances of power likewise frame relational expressions between normative and queer populations: “Like gender, sexuality can exert and fortify power relations through the imposition of binary and hierarchical oppositions, normal/abnormal and natural/unnatural key among them” (Kunzel, 2018, p. 1566). As noted above, cruising—as an act that runs counter to hegemonic powers—is effectively denuded of power, at least in any material sense. Users are relegated to bathrooms and dimly lit parks, often putting themselves in physical danger, to engage in acts that are illegal in most jurisdictions. Indeed, in a move to gain social and legal traction, many queer leaders disavowed themselves of cruising (Mowlabocus, 2010), suggesting a hierarchy of sexual practices and mores, with cruising branded ‘abnormal’ in exchange for acceptance.

Such relational imbalances of power and surveillance are acutely felt in regard to race. Simone Browne introduces an intervention in surveillant hierarchies by investigating how racialized imbalances of power are impacted by surveillance, stating that “rather than seeing surveillance as something inaugurated by new technologies...to see it as ongoing is to insist that we factor in how racism and antiblackness undergird the intersecting surveillances of our present order” (Browne, 2015, pp. 8-9). She highlights the connection between the disempowerment and disproportionate over-

surveillance of Black populations, from lantern laws to airport security. To be human is to be surveilled; to be Black is to be over-surveilled.

This overall study of power imbalances and relations has further been investigated through many lenses, including, importantly for this thesis, feminist, queer, and gender critical frameworks. In the introduction to their book on feminist surveillance studies, Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet note that “A feminist approach to surveillance studies demonstrates how the production of knowledge, when it comes to vulnerable bodies, is always already bound up with gendered and sexualized ways of seeing” (2015, p. 9). This suggests that not only are women and queer populations subject to specific ways of being seen in the world, but that even approaches to surveillance studies must become self-reflective to avoid gender normative habits of thought in scholarship. Queer surveillance, then, calls into question these gendered and sexualized ways of seeing by asking what it means to fall outside normative lines. In producing a transgender critique of surveillance practices, Toby Beauchamp demonstrates an increasingly common “context in which certain bodies or behaviours appear as strange and suspicious threats even in the absence of any actual misconduct” (2019, p. 5). This means that increased scrutiny and surveillance can be considered justified simply for standing out: having a body that does not meet traditional understandings of bodies or engaging in sexual acts that circumvent traditional understandings of sex can be grounds for more focused watching.

Despite the harms that surveillance can have on queer populations, it does not have to inherently be viewed as negative. While careful to not undermine or ameliorate its many documented harms, some researchers have begun incorporating analyses of

care, pleasure, and play in their work on surveillance. Several key scholars have proven how surveillance can be playful (Gangneux, 2014; Koskela & Mäkinen, 2015; Albrechtslund, 2008; Albrechtslund & Dubbeld, 2002), empowering (Koskela, 2002), or even “sexy” (Bell, 2009). Perhaps the best known self-initiated sexual surveillance comes in the form of “camming”: performing sexual acts via webcam for paying audiences. Angela Jones notes that when performers control how they are seen, a dynamic shift in agency occurs. She notes that “The models choose how, when, and if they climax—a movie producer does not direct the cam model” (Jones, 2020, p. 4). Care and control are no longer pretenses for increased surveillance, but rather affordances that performers can reappropriate through regulating the mechanisms of being seen. Such approaches to surveillance demonstrate the liquid and queer nature of watching and desire.

To situate cruising within a surveillant context, it is necessary to view it as part of a constellation of queer surveillance practices. But what precisely is queer surveillance? It is a quantification of how queer and non-normative populations are surveilled, yes, but it is also more and substantively different than that. As Gary Kafer and Daniel Grinberg note in their introduction to a special issue on queer surveillance, they argue that such surveillance:

... is an analytic that emphasizes how non-normativity is produced and administered across sites of power. This is not to ignore the specificity of queer and trans experiences under surveillance regimes but rather to consider how queer and trans lives are rendered secure or disposable

when distilled through the nominalizations of surveillance systems. (Kafer & Grinberg, 2019, pp. 597-598)

In this way, surveillance becomes one paradigm where we see empowered dominant discourses clash with non-normative ways of being. Queer surveillance exists as an onto-epistemological experience, through which power is executed and felt, rendering some bodies hypervisible (and, as will be discussed below, invisible). In this way, I do not only seek to enumerate the surveillance of queer bodies but to additionally understand how queer bodies complicate traditional notions of surveillance. Such an understanding is a generative approach to the present study as, outlined above, cruisers constantly negotiate for footing between security and disposability.

While Lyon does not explicitly discuss surveillance and cruising, he certainly lays the groundwork for the intersection of the two: “Context turns out to be crucial; some watching eyes are as unwelcome, as read as intrusive or malevolent, as others are embraced and seen as adjuncts to identity and a positive self-image” (Lyon, 2018, p. 56). Cruisers must rely not only on context but also on instinct and experience to determine which watching eyes are harmful and which are welcoming. As noted above with 2SLGBTIQ+ panic defenses, discerning the difference can be a life-or-death skill. Likewise, finding those eyes that are also searching for intimacy in washrooms or secluded parks can indeed be a welcome respite, demonstrating a salubrious side to a salacious act.

Additionally, and crucially to understanding the true extent of queer surveillance, queer bodies sometimes jam systems of surveillance. Kafer and Grinberg note that normative assumptions are at the heart of surveillance, whereby systems are trained to

understand how people *should* behave and to note any deviations: “Queer identities are opaque to such systems insofar as supposedly improper configurations of gender, sex, and sexuality conceal the body and render it a threatening inconsistency” (2019, p. 593). Put another way: surveillance systems first need to understand what they are searching for in order to find it. For example, attempts have been made to train deep neural networks to identify the faces of queer individuals (Wang & Kosinski, 2018) which would allow for sexual identification from sight alone. Despite this, internal desires and private sexual practices are still rendered opaque to many mechanisms. Queer bodies, then, are both hypervisible and invisible to systems of surveillance. And as will be explored below, technical approaches to discovering queer desires has a long lineage in Canada.

Because of this complex relationship with visibility, queer bodies have been analyzed for how they can circumvent detection. Specifically, drag queens have received special attention for the ways in which they complicate surveillance. Harris Kornstein (2019) observes that drag acts as a form of obfuscation that confuses facial recognition software, such as when Facebook erroneously tags one drag queen as another. The author views drag less as gender performance and more as theory of information:

Drag queens model a form of nuanced communication that is neither fully transparent nor completely opaque, but instead withholds aspects of personal information not intended for public consumption while at the same time presenting themselves as glaringly visible public performers. (Kornstein, 2019, p. 685)

This interplay of public and private is not simply masking; it is, as Kornstein argues, an example of obfuscation as “a tactic that generally leaves private information out in public but makes it difficult to identify, parse, or make use of” (Kornstein, 2019, p. 685). Drag queens are always seen but not easily understood, disorienting both surveillance systems and dominant conceptualizations of gender, sex, and performance.

Invoking the World War One strategy of “dazzle camouflage,” Jessica Lingel (2020) argues that while surveillance is inevitable, playful resistance to it is not futile. Through case studies—including the drag queen practice of playfully insulting someone or ‘reading’ them—she demonstrates a queering of visibility as a response to the surveillance of bodies, particularly those that are already highly marginalized. Just as the British navy used dazzle camouflage as a tactic to evade detection by painting dizzying lines and contrasting colours on the side of their ships, marginalized bodies can use it to “invite attention in a way that disrupts recognition, where hyper visibility becomes a form of self-protection” (Lingel, 2020, p. 4). This is different from many counter-surveillance strategies, since dazzle camouflage “operates at the level of managing and subverting rather than avoiding surveillance” (Lingel, 2020, p. 13). By recognizing surveillance and regulating how one’s body is seen, individuals can mitigate the harms of operating in non-normative contexts. This also speaks to a shift in power, whereby the surveilled take an active role in how they are seen. The Algorithmic Justice League puts this playful resistance into practice for wider populations, hosting “Drag Vs AI” workshops, where attendees learn to “use make-up, accessories, and other props to drag the machines and confront the ‘Coded Gaze’ -- the algorithms that claim to read our age, gender, mood, and identity” (Algorithmic Justice League, 2022, para 1). While

there is much to be said about the adoption of queer practices by non-queer audiences to challenge surveillance systems that have complex relationships with queer bodies, that is outside the scope of this present study.

### 2.2.2 Self-Surveillance and Community Monitoring

Just as we investigated coded communication practices that allow individuals to play with notions of visibility, we can analyze how queer communities engage in self-surveillance and reconfiguration to evade detection yet remain discoverable by others. Focusing a gaze either on yourself or another requires understandings of power structures, normativity, and visibility. A prison guard within Bentham's infamous panopticon, while occupying a physical, institutional, and societal position of relative empowerment, is aware of the role they play in surveilling prisoners (Lyon, 2018). In doing so, they surveil both externally and internally. Practically, self-surveillance involves checking yourself against your surroundings. Paulo Vaz and Fernanda Bruno suggest that "self-surveillance is usually understood as the attention one pays to one's behavior when facing the actuality or virtuality of an immediate or mediated observation by others whose opinion he or she deems as relevant" (2003, p. 273). In this way, self-surveillance and surveillance share many theoretical similarities.

Self-surveillance, in one regard, can be viewed as a learned and adapted behaviour in direct response to surveillance. When a body is presumed to be under scrutiny, the body itself engages in pre-emptive surveillance to determine the ways in which it might be rendered recognizable and, perhaps, altered to evoke normativity.

Mowlabocus writes about how MSM communities are specifically implicated in issues of self-surveillance:

[G]ay male subculture surpasses the general population in its methods and means of self-surveillance, control and discipline. It is something of a paradox that a culture so often criticised for being hedonistic and carefree is simultaneously enmeshed in strategies of self-surveillance, self-discipline and self-control. (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 77)

Mowlabocus uses gym culture and aesthetic body modification as examples of this self-surveillance, but I argue cultural code-switching is a more fruitful example of this awareness. The ability to enter a hetero-dominant space and adjust yourself—by changing voice pitch, gait, and vocabulary, among other characteristics—suggests practiced and consummate skills of camouflage. Given queer communities' long-standing relationship with (in)visibility, this code-switching suggests a longer lineage than current MSM-dominated gym practices.

A more nuanced approach of this is taken by Getsy: “Everyday mutinous practices of opacity, transparency, passing, camouflage, duplicity, and code-switching all gesture toward the queer ways of abstracting identity to scramble state-sanctioned practices of computation and control” (Getsy 2019, p. 70). Abstraction, accordingly, can be viewed as a double-edged sword: by diminishing the parts of you that signal queerness, you evade detection by those in dominant positions as well as other queer members. By softening the signals, safety is prioritized over discoverability.

In addition to individual self-surveillance, it is useful to investigate intra-community surveillance as a form of self-surveillance. How might queer communities

attempt to police their own members through the use of surveillance tactics? Orne and Gall (2019) examine this using Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a medication taken daily by individuals to prevent HIV infection and primarily used by MSM. By conducting interviews with PrEP users, they discovered surveillance techniques used to conduct “PrEP citizenship,” a form of biosexual citizenship that promotes the vision of a “responsible, moral, and healthy HIV-negative individual that indefinitely continues PrEP as a public good” (Orne & Gall, 2019, p. 642). Specifically, they identified the use of lateral surveillance, which is the “use of surveillance tools by individuals, rather than by agents of institutions public or private, to keep track of one another” (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 488). Similar to Manning and Stern’s idea of “interpersonal panopticism” (2018), lateral surveillance operates in the absence of overtly traditional institutional power dynamics. This is not to suggest that intersectional identities do not inform or influence intra-community dynamics, but rather that surveillance practices can be replicated in localized areas.

Orne and Gall found that PrEP citizenship played out with a combination of lateral and self-surveillance:

PrEP users employ lateral surveillance to monitor each other for proper use and stigmatize *irresponsible* behavior. Methods of surveillance also include a drive to self-monitoring through the belief that one is under constant scrutiny through Foucault’s panopticon (Wood 2003). (Orne & Gall, 2019, p. 643, citing Wood, 2003, emphasis in original)

Similarly, we can look to the Instagram account GaysOverCOVID for additional examples of community-based self-surveillance. As the COVID-19 pandemic

disproportionately impacts marginalized individuals—including those within queer communities (Reid, 2021)—a schism of surveillance and safety has emerged. Active between June 2020 and March 2021, GaysOverCOVID was a queer-run Instagram account dedicated to naming and shaming queer men who broke social distancing rules and quarantine guidelines. Posts featured leaked pictures of packed parties, ‘circuit queens’, and beach vacations, in an attempt to discourage similar behaviour, tagging individuals in pictures and crowdsourcing the identities of others.

In one post, a video shows a large group of people—mostly men—gathered around a pool, watching a drag queen perform in Mykonos. The account asks: “They wont [sic] wear condoms, so why would we expect them to wear masks?”

(GaysOverCOVID, 2020). Parallel to PrEP citizenship and the disavowal of cruising by queer leaders in the 1980s, GaysOverCOVID employs community surveillance tactics alongside heteronormative standards of health to police other queer individuals.

GaysOverCOVID also presents an opportunity to investigate reactions *against* surveillance. *Sousveillance*, a way of creating “an active inversion of the power relations that surveillance entails” (Brown, 2015, p. 19), constitutes a suite of approaches to resisting surveillance through the use of surveillance. For example, exposing police brutality through cell phone footage places the typical administrators of surveillance in the position of themselves being surveilled. Similarly, as the GaysOverCOVID account hit a fever pitch during New Year’s 2020, someone offered a \$500 reward for the identity of the administrator of the account. When individuals feel personally attacked by an anonymous account, they could be seen as fighting against a system that has more power than they do, and therefore on the receiving end of classic top-down surveillance.

So, an attempt to use those same means of surveillance (e.g., social media and crowdsourcing) might be seen as a way of inverting existing power structures to reappropriate those methods. That all parties involved in this exchange are queer demonstrates the transverse power of surveillance, as well as its liquid nature: individuals can occupy multiple surveillant positions at once, complicated by perceived power imbalances and positionality. And as will be outlined in later sections, crowd-sourced surveillance information and sousveillance continue to exist as powerful tools employed by queer communities.

### 2.2.3 Sexual Surveillance in the Canadian Context

Present-day movements against cruising and the surveillance of queer communities can be viewed with a wide lens that incorporates historical ideologies and constructions of sexuality. By doing so, we can better understand how the relationship between queer sex and surveillance is not a modern occurrence facilitated by emerging technologies and big data but has long been central to Canada's understanding of state security. A socio-historical approach further allows us to better understand queer (in)visibility, which, as noted above, is central to understandings of surveillance studies:

In abstract terms, a historical change can be conceived as a play of light and shadow. On one hand, types of behavior once held as problematic come to be tolerated; they fall into the background in terms of social concern. On the other hand, types of behavior that were not seen or could not even exist come to the forefront and society begins to warn individuals about their dangerousness. (Vaz & Bruno, 2003, p. 279)

At a time when anxieties of communism loomed large in the minds of ordinary citizens and state officials alike, queer individuals emerged as a risky vector for ideological infection. Gary Kinsman has addressed the historical surveillance of queer activities and notes that throughout the 1950s and 1960s in Canada, “Homosexuals were designated a 'national security threat' because of their 'character weakness' which supposedly left gay men and lesbians open to blackmail by Soviet agents” (1995, p. 134). Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile argue that this supposed character weakness emerged because queer individuals were believed unable to adequately perform the era’s “socially acceptable gender practices” (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010, p. 169). However, instead of attempting to neutralize this threat by advocating for increased social and legal protections of these communities—thereby limiting Soviet abilities of blackmail—Canadian officials opted to build surveillance structures to detect and eliminate queer individuals from official ranks in government and military offices. This so-called “gay purge” would lead to a \$110 million pay-out by the federal government and a formal apology by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Levin, 2017).

Certainly, much can be investigated about how queer communities were considered national security risks, but an in-depth exploration is outside the scope of this present study. While I focus on surveillance and cruising, it is crucial to recognize the scale of these concerns and how deeply they affected official policies:

There were at least three aspects of the construction of homosexuals as a danger in Canada during [the 1950s and 1960s]: the purge campaigns in the civil service, military and the RCMP; the related immigration legislation changes of 1952 which prevented homosexuals from immigrating to

Canada and were tied into 'security' concerns; and the construction of homosexuals as a 'sexual danger' (especially to young people) through the extension of criminal sexual legislation and through mass media coverage. (Kinsman, 1995, p. 137)

As the nation's capital and home of security agencies and bureaucratic offices, Ottawa specifically has a rich history regarding cruising, safety, and surveillance. By the late 1960s, primarily through park patrols, infiltration of queer bars and community spaces, and the interrogation of arrested homosexuals, the RCMP had collected the names of close to nine thousand confirmed and suspected homosexuals in Ottawa alone (Kinsman, 2000). Central to this was surveillance architecture and a set of practices, whereby "local sexual policing resulted in the apprehension of public servants who provided information that was fed into the RCMP surveillance web" (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010, p. 212).

The era's most infamous queer surveillance technology also emerged in Ottawa. In 1963 Dr. Frank Robert Wake, Carleton University's first full-time faculty member in the psychology department, was seconded by the federal government's Security Panel to develop a mechanism for detecting homosexuality in subjects. Wake advocated for a battery of procedures to detect homosexuality, including word association, sweat tests, and, most prominently, the measurement of pupils—which informally became known as the "fruit machine" (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010). While easily regarded as quackery with the advantage of hindsight, the fruit machine received support from substantial government bodies, including the National Research Council and the Privy Council (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010). Despite such heavy-hitting backers, Wake's research faced

challenges with adapting existing technologies and recruiting willing test subjects (particularly queer women) and was abandoned in 1967 (Kinsman, 1995).

The fruit machine emerges as a form of bodily surveillance meant to render sexual desire visible. By being served erotic images, measurements of pupil dilation would act as a gateway to draw out subversive desires under the guise of scientific inquiry and national security. In doing so, authorities could guard against Soviet incursions and inoculate against queer indiscoverability, which had long “instilled a sense of paranoia amongst the power-holding group” (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 71). In conjunction with the fruit machine research, law enforcement would conduct in-person surveillance of community spaces. Police would often surveil gay bars, taking pictures through a camera concealed behind a newspaper. When queer patrons suspected the presence of an undercover agent, they would pantomime taking a picture with a bar top object, such as a wallet or a book of matches, and point to the suspected agent. In this regard, they organized intransigence and shared knowledge of police invasion of queer spaces, illustrating “a form of collective non-cooperation and resistance to the security investigations, as well as making fun of the security campaign as a way of surviving it” (Kinsman, 2000, p. 150).

Had the fruit machine proved successful, we could see how Canadian security forces were attempting to forge a path of surveillance that would have engaged multiple agencies, techniques, and technologies: queer spaces are surveilled by undercover agents, homosexuals are detained and pressured to provide the names of other homosexuals, and more would be brought in for confirmation by the fruit machine.

At the same time that this sexual surveillance apparatus was being built, former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's 1967 quip that "there's no room for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" (CBC, 2022) gestured toward a potential shift in attitudes toward queer sexualities. However, when Trudeau's comment is cited in full, it reveals that outside of the bedroom, the state reigns supreme over sex. Trudeau makes explicit the limits of his perspective and, presumably, of the government of the day: "The view we take here is there's no room for the state in the bedrooms of the nation. *What's done in private between adults doesn't concern the Criminal Code. When it becomes public, this is a different matter*" (CBC, 2022, emphasis added). This is jarring when understood alongside what the fruit machine was concurrently positioned to do: to uncover homosexuality in public service. As Kinsman points out, "Criminal charges not only continued after 1969, they escalated. Mass arrests took place in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton and more than 1,300 people were charged" (Kinsman, 2019). Indeed, there is considerable push-back to the myth that the 1969 *Criminal Code* reform decriminalized homosexuality, when it pointedly did not, as several anti-queer provisions continue to exist in federal law to this day (Hooper, Kinsman & Pearlston, 2019).

So, what happens when bedrooms are not viable options? Trudeau's comments were predicated on normative assumptions of home, accessibility, and material affordances. Many individuals—particularly in 1967—did not have the socio-economic means to explore homosexuality in the comfort of bedrooms. Indeed, men could not easily check into a hotel room together or were otherwise confined by cultural or religious lives. This left cruising as a necessary expression of sexuality in the only

means available to many, particularly those who experienced multiple forms of marginalization: “Cruising facilitates the possibility of intimate encounters across racial and class lines when not everyone can simply “go rent a room”” (Smith, 2020, para 6). Historian Steven Maynard argues that sexuality has often provided a means of traversing often rigid social boundaries, finding that court records between 1890-1930 “indicate that working-class men in Toronto were as likely to have sex with other working-class men as with middle-class men” (Maynard, 1994, p. 220).

Outside of the bedroom, the state was—and remains—free to implement whatever surveillance methods they deem necessary to quash queer sexual expressions. In a 2009 study, Kevin Walby investigates the surveillance and enforcement methods of cruising as performed by the National Capital Commission (NCC). The NCC is responsible for land development and beautification in Ottawa and deploys conservation officers to patrol parks to enforce NCC bylaws and the criminal code of Canada (Walby, 2009). These officers conduct plain clothes patrols as well as surveillance of queer websites<sup>5</sup> in an attempt to curb outdoor sexual encounters. Through the NCC and surveillance of MSM cruisers, we can see a modern parallel to the historic construction of homosexuality as a security risk. As Walby notes, “sexuality is a matter of national character for the NCC, which, in this case, leads to the barring of male homoeroticism from public” (2009, p. 368).

Finally, Walby (2009) finds that the majority of heterosexual couples who were caught engaging in sexual acts were often let go without a ticket or fine, while only a minority of MSM were provided the same treatment: “The tendency of these data

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<sup>5</sup> While Walby does not name the websites monitored by NCC officers, it is entirely possible that they include *Squirt*, given the site’s prominence and focus on cruising.

substantiate claims...that even when laws and regulations are written in gender-neutral and innocuous language these are enforced in a biased way against men seeking sex with men” (p. 375). In this way, surveillance of public sex does not eliminate it but surveillance is deployed disproportionately for the elimination of visible, public queer sexual encounters.

The construction of sexuality as a national security threat is also not solely a historical relic. In 2020, *Grindr's* Chinese owner, Beijing Kunlun Tech, was forced to sell its shares in the app after the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States suggested China could have access to sensitive data of users, particularly U.S. military or intelligence personnel (Wang & Oguh, 2020). While not explicitly articulated, a reasonable assumption is that access to evidence of the queer lives of high-level officials could lead to blackmail that could compromise the integrity of the United States. The parallel between Canada's “gay purge” and current international policies that frame queer communities as security threats demonstrates that sexuality is often tied up with culturally-informed notions of safety and fears of surveillance. Put another way: surveillance of queer communities by one state is seen as a justified response to the surveillance of queer communities by an adversary. Such instances demonstrate how these issues play out in a top-down environment, where dominant bodies express panic through policy. Such panic-informed policy is not only theoretical but has deep impacts on queer communities and how they navigate the world. In the following chapter, I broaden this approach by investigating cruising and surveillance as uniquely spatial expressions.

## 2.3 *Squirt*, Sexual Infrastructure, and Queer Spaces

As outlined above, sexuality and surveillance are deeply intertwined within queer communities, and those communities have particular relationships with the spatial organization and navigation of the world. To best understand how these elements intermix in this present study, it is necessary to briefly explore the website *Squirt*, as it forms the basis for my data collection. In this section, I investigate the sexual infrastructure of *Squirt's* governance documents, elements of queer digital engagement, and spatial configurations more broadly.

### 2.3.1 “Non-Stop Cruising”

Founded in 1999, *Squirt* is a Canadian-based social networking site for MSM with a reach that extends globally. Users can create profiles, post pictures and videos, exchange messages with other users, and share homemade pornographic content. Operated by queer publishing organization Pink Triangle Press, *Squirt* positions itself specifically as a website to facilitate cruising, offering services such as “listing and evaluating cruising locations all over the world, providing maps and pictures of listings, as well as offering a forum for men to discuss their cruising experiences and desires in an open-minded environment” (Squirt, 2022b, para 3).



Figure 1. Squirrt homepage (captured May 8, 2022)

As an object of study, *Squirrt* has not received the attention of an app like *Grindr*, which has been the focus of much scholarly research on queer digital engagements (Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014; Licoppe, Rivière & Morel, 2016; Blackwell, Birnholtz & Abbott, 2015). In fact, *Grindr* is so widely used that individuals who choose to *leave* the app have prompted scholarly attention and research (Brubaker, Ananny & Crawford, 2016). In describing the walkthrough method—a method of critically engaging with and evaluating an app by interacting with it as a user might (detailed below)—Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay use *Squirrt* as a case study, highlighting, among other findings, “its functionality for communicating with multiple partners at once, disregarding monogamous relationship norms” (2018, p. 889). By focusing on how the functionality of the platform facilitates connecting with many individuals, they

demonstrate how a platform's design can speak to the values of its developers and influence how users engage with it. *Squirt* has also been the subject of targeted public scrutiny. A series of *Squirt* ads featuring three shirtless men and offering “non-stop cruising” was removed from Toronto subways after several complaints were lodged (Christopher, 2015). According to freedom of information documents, users complained that the ads were inappropriate, with one complainant—a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) employee—taking issue with an ad that seemed to advocate for sex on TTC property. While at least one of the complainants self-identified as a gay man, the ads were placed at Wellesley Station in the centre of Toronto's queer community for months without issue and only faced backlash after being moved onto trains that ran across the entire city.

*Squirt* also establishes a link between digital mediation, surveillance, and queerness in the case of serial killer Bruce McArthur who was active in Toronto's Gay Village neighbourhood. Before he was arrested and convicted of murdering eight men, McArthur was active on several social media sites, including *Squirt* (Hayes & Ha, 2018). *Squirt* thus becomes not only the location of potential harm to its users, but also a site of surveillance, as police used it to investigate leads. This particular incident led to considerable criticism:

Never forget that at one point in the investigation into the Village's missing men, Toronto police flipped the burden of safety (and thus culpability) onto gay men themselves by issuing warnings about dating apps, as if dating apps were something new and untested, as if gay men needed any help

from the police in figuring out how to be safe when cruising. (Vaughan, 2019)

As argued above, surveillance within queer communities is ever-present and, as Vaughan notes, predates police instruction on safety. In fact, police have often been the reason for such caution (Village Legacy Project, n.d.), making their warning both unnecessary and tone-deaf. As Vaughan notes, queer communities have long been accustomed to the potential dangers of violence while searching for intimacy.

In retracing the steps of McArthur's victims, investigative journalist Justin Ling employs a cruising app which, while unnamed, bears a striking resemblance to *Squirt*. After travelling to the last known location of Abdulbasir Faizi, one of McArthur's first victims, Ling describes deducing why Faizi's car might have been abandoned on an otherwise quiet Toronto street:

I opened my phone and plugged in an address. A landing page popped up, complete with half-naked men, arm-in-arm. The site offers details and methodical listings on cruising sites around the world where men, especially men in the closet, can find other men looking for the same. The closest result? The Beltline Trail, exactly where I was standing. (2020, p. 62)

By using *Squirt*—or another similar app that facilitates cruising—Ling was able to use sexuality as an anchor to connect Faizi and the location of his car: the sexual became a tether to the spatial. The reapplication of a website for novel purposes emerges as a 'liquid' application, further strengthening the relationship between *Squirt*, surveillance, and space. While we should exercise caution in reading too much into this

anecdotal account, it serves as an important reminder that digitally-mediated sexual practices can offer valuable insight and serve as important sites of localized knowledge.

### 2.3.2 Sexual Community Infrastructure & Governance Documents

The specific policy and governance approach that platforms, apps, and websites adopt inform their use, and act as sociotechnical prisms through which they can be studied. These approaches and underlying design decisions can be broadly captured in a platform's "vision" which is intended to tell the "user what it is supposed to do and, by extension, implies how it can be used and by whom" (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018, p. 898). While visions are not immutable or definitive, they provide a baseline for understanding a platform. In the context of a cruising platform such as *Squirt*, such sociotechnical assemblages also inform what Jason Orne and James Gall (2019) call "sexual community infrastructure," which "have structural power over sex and desire through policies and their organization" (p. 644). By analyzing key elements of *Squirt*, we can better understand how issues of surveillance and cruising are articulated as part of the platform

*Squirt* is not available in app stores due to policies that ban nudity. Google, for instance, states that they "don't allow apps that contain or promote sexual content or profanity, including pornography, or any content or services intended to be sexually gratifying" (Google, 2022, para 1). Apple also bans all adult content which "includes "hookup" apps that may include pornography" (Apple, 2022, section 1.1.4). This means that *Squirt* exists apart from other dating sites such as *Grindr*, which is, as noted above, one of the most popular hook-up apps for MSM, boasting 13 million active users each

month in 2020 (Grindr, 2020). *Squirt* makes clear that operating as a website instead of an app lets users “share [their] dirtiest pictures and videos with the hottest guy” (Squirt, 2021, para 1), suggesting that facilitating sexual connections is more important than wide reach. *Grindr*, on the other hand, cheekily advises that their “user experience has to be acceptable to the chaste eyes of Apple and Google’s app store decision-makers, lest we get kicked off their platforms” (Grindr, 2022, para 10), but states that they allow private, consensual sharing of sexually explicit material. In this regard, we observe a tension in how each platform approaches notions of public and private: while *Squirt* runs afoul of app store censors by refusing to diminish the overt sexual expression of its users—and the website as a whole—*Grindr* circumvents reproach by relegating sexuality to private messaging. While both facilitate intimate acts, they diverge in how they allow the representation of such acts. In appealing to the “chaste eyes” of app store regulators, *Grindr* adopts a more heteronormative approach to privacy and sexuality, one that fosters a sexual environment that is largely kept behind closed (digital) doors.

*Squirt* and *Grindr* also deviate from each other in the type of sexual encounters they mediate. Unlike *Squirt*, *Grindr* seeks to bring people into bars and bedrooms, not parks. In conducting a digital ethnography of *Grindr*, Jody Ahlm finds that, instead of capitalizing on the app’s potential to invigorate public sex culture, its primary function is to coordinate private sex: “I do not doubt that some Grindr users have used the app to facilitate public sex or semi-public sex such as at a bathhouse or backroom, however none of my data revealed this to be common or socially acceptable” (2017, p. 371). *Squirt*, however, makes no secret of its aim to help users cruise and engage in public

sex. Its homepage boasts that with user submissions “it’s easy to find the best parks, beaches, gyms, washrooms, glory holes, and bathhouses in town” (Squirt, 2022a, para 2).

Despite these deviations from a more normative queer hook-up app like *Grindr*, *Squirt* does not exist entirely outside of normative bounds. *Squirt’s* website certainly facilitates and embraces non-traditional sexual acts and activities such as cruising, however, it also sets limits on the types of activity that can be shared. For instance, photos or videos must not include anyone under the age of 18 and scatological content is only permitted in private albums (Squirt, 2021b).

*Squirt* also does not break from the for-profit model of many hook-up apps and uses a subscription model whereby users pay to access an increasing array of services. While it may offer liberatory affordances for specific queer communities compared to other apps, it is not a complete rejection of well-trodden approaches to technological and capital design. Miles (2018) explores this tension and considers the “assumption that these platforms are not queer in the theoretical sense (i.e., anti-heteronormative and radical) [nor is] their neoliberal economic context ... complicated by their subversive potential as devices to assist male–male intimacies in socially illiberal contexts” (p. 5).

*Squirt’s* privacy policy sheds additional insight into the environment for users. The privacy statement is not a conversation or dialogue with their users; rather it is a declaration. The platform clearly lays out the terms of service and users must agree to them if they wish to access the platform. The *Squirt* policy makes clear that while the developers implement certain safeguards to protect exposure of sensitive information, they are not responsible for what users share about themselves on the website. The

policy also extends European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) data rights to all members, regardless of location, “as a goodwill gesture and demonstration of our commitment to the privacy and data protection rights of all our members” (Squirt, 2022c, s.8.1). Additionally, safety seems to be a central concern within the privacy policy. In its preamble, the organization states that “We know that cruising and meeting other guys for sex may be fun, but it can also be dangerous; if we are to feel and be safe, then privacy is a central concern for all of us” (Squirt, 2021, para 1). Elsewhere in the privacy statement, *Squirt* urges users to “consider your own privacy and personal safety when using the Service and sharing your information with anyone” (Squirt, 2022c, s.4.2). The privacy policy emerges as a key element in balancing safety and sex. Anonymity and discretion are often a key element of cruising and *Squirt* does not implement a real-name policy or require users to upload any personal information, but does require credit card details. To that end, the privacy policy outlines how payment processors operate, including their use of encryption and a generic name that will appear on users’ credit card statements.

The privacy statement and policy show the balance of personal and corporate responsibility for the protection of *Squirt* users in the online space and extends to concerns for offline places where users hook up. This blurring of online and offline is additionally integral to understandings of how queer communalities organize themselves and interact with the world. As will be explored below, this is not a novel phenomenon but is a re-emerging principal of queer re/configurations.

### 2.3.3 The Construction of Queer Digital and Spatial Relations

To properly investigate *Squirt* or any queer-oriented dating, hook-up, or romantic app, it is necessary to understand them as bound within a constellation of digital affordances and constraints, particularly as they play with spatial configuration. Doing so allows us to recognize the emancipatory possibilities of these apps while acknowledging their limitations.

As Sam Miles notes, in the past 30 years “internet technology has influenced and shaped queer spaces more than any other single factor” (2018, p. 1). By this they mean that any mapping of queer communities and geographies must also contend with queer technologies, as they “increasingly constitute what these spaces are, how they are performed, and who is able to access them” (Miles, 2018, p. 2).

Taking a step back, what can be said about queer relationships and digital mediation? Queer individuals have often been early adopters of technologies<sup>6</sup> (Miles, 2018) suggesting they have been experimenting with the dissolution of discrete separations of “online” and “offline” lives more than other communities. This, however, is not without consequence. While creating connections through digital engagement is important to queer communities (Cserni & Talmud, 2015), doing so puts them at risk of abuse (Article 19, 2018) and censorship (Dalek et al, 2021). Even so, queer communities continue to live online, even in repressive environments. Whether in one of the 68 countries that criminalize same-sex relations (Human Rights Watch, n.d.) or in an

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<sup>6</sup> This does not account for the digital divide of communities in the Global North and South, nor does it factor in that many intersectional queer communities face additional financial, cultural, and structural constraints which may make it difficult to become early adopters of technology.

oppressive household, queer-focused digital engagement exists as a lifeline that defies spatial constraints. In environments where physical meeting is prohibited, difficult, or criminal, digital spaces are not only extensions of queer spaces and communities but constitute the only ones available.

Broadly speaking, queer relations can productively be viewed as spatial relations. Cruising, as noted above, is a physical act that utilizes spatial configurations and requires specific geographic knowledge: for example, cruisers might avoid well-lit and heavily trafficked areas but gravitate towards dark paths and secluded enclaves. However, cruising can happen anywhere—even in populated areas—if a participant understands how to effectively interact with and navigate through their material environment. Holding the gaze of a stranger on a crowded bus, for instance, can constitute an act of queer erotica that utilizes otherwise normalized spatial relations. Additionally, as detailed in my analysis of cruising data (see Chapter 4), environmental issues are one of the most common factors that influence surveillance discourse among *Squirt* users, underscoring that sexual-spatial relations are not merely theoretical but constitute tangible concerns for MSM.

Apps and digital technologies that facilitate cruising and queer sex open up the possibility of broader spatial and physical connections. No longer confined to ‘gaybourhoods’ or chance meetings in bathrooms, users can now explore the entire world for sexual encounters. In this regard, they have both freed users from physical limitations and reconnected them to their environments: “Contrary to earlier cyberqueer visions of the domain as something disembodied and free from the constraints of the human body, locative apps actively foreground embodiment and physical encounter”

(Miles, 2018, p. 6). These apps are not utopic, however: digital divides, online racism, transphobia, and Western beauty standards all contribute to the potential for a toxic environment. In fact, a 2018 study found that *Grindr* ranked as the number one app that left users feeling regret (Center for Humane Technology, 2021). Additionally, the use of these technologies does not always meet the potential that some have envisioned for them. As noted above, instead of *Grindr* promoting a renaissance of cruising and ushering in a new era of sexual-spatial relations, it “furthers the sanitation of gay physical spaces” by encouraging what Ahlm calls “respectable promiscuity” (2017, p. 373).

While a full investigation of how *Squirt* interacts with spatial configurations is outside the scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge the existence of these relationships, since “digital objects, praxes and ways of knowing always contain possibilities for unanticipated forms of agency, subjectivity, or sociospatial relations” (Elwood, 2021). Such possibilities become increasingly salient as we look to the future. As cities become more networked with digital technologies, how might that render cruising, outdoor sex, or illicit fun in general more of a rarity? One cannot help but consider how residents of Songdo, South Korea—a purpose-built smart city of 100,000 (Poon, 2018)—might successfully sneak away from CCTV cameras for queer embraces in non-normative locations. When motion-activated streetlights illuminate every corner, where can residents go to escape not only the watchful eyes of neighbours but those of the city’s technologies? This might not be top-of-mind for architects, but such considerations are crucial for queer communities who seek to balance sexual expression with the realities of surveillance.

### 2.3.4 Material Consequences

As Mowlabocus notes, “Spanning both the physical and digital worlds, public sexual cultures are the subject of both online and offline systems of security and surveillance” (2010, p. 119). At-risk, marginalized, and otherwise disempowered communities are often the targets of state and social surveillance and, as outlined above, this has particular concerns for queer communities. But these considerations also impact how the study of sexual-spatial relations should be approached. In the following chapter, I discuss methodological considerations for data collection and analytical approaches.

## 3. Methodology and Analytical Approaches

To best situate theories about cruising, surveillance, and sexual expression, it is necessary to view these discussions alongside an overview of the data I collected for this study and the methodological concepts I deployed. My investigation relies on a Foucauldian discourse analysis and also draws on the walkthrough method (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018) as a way of understanding *Squirt* as a digital cruising platform. In this section, I provide an overview of these methods, a description of my procedural, analytical, and data collection steps, and ethical considerations.

### 3.1 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

What benefits does a Foucauldian discourse analysis provide as a method of inquiry? As Sharp and Richardson (2001) note, discourse hones in on the social,

cultural, and historical construction of knowledge. Such social constructionist methods “put considerable emphasis on knowledge, and hence, on the communications through which knowledge is exchanged” (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 194). When this approach is applied to non-dominant communities and perspectives, new vantages and viewpoints are uncovered. But these do not exist in vacuums: subaltern perspectives are always intrinsically tied to dominant ones. By investigating surveillance and safety issues shared on *Squirt*, we can understand the experiences of non-normative communities *as well as* heteronormative ones. Any tension between the two might “mirror a changing balance of power between the competing discourses” (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 195). While Sharp and Richardson are speaking specifically about discourse in regard to policy, such competition is a productive grounding for the present study as cruisers almost exclusively exist outside, and in contravention of, established legal norms.

An important feature in this present study is the connection between discourse and spatial relations. Sharp and Richardson (2001) emphasize that:

Whilst Foucauldian discourses may shape what happens in public meetings and policy processes, such events are simply manifestations of their existence. In this conceptualization, the continuous power struggles between competing discourses create the conditions that shape the social and physical world, and construct the individual. (pp. 195-196)

Discourse, then, acts as a bridge between renderings of reality: exchanges at a public meeting and the content of a policy document both come from and influence the world. Likewise, while my study investigates digital exchanges, they are intrinsically

connected to real-life cruising. In fact, one can imagine a curious observer who has never experienced cruising first hand but only followed along via discussions on *Squirt*. Here, the digital construction will likely inform and, in a sense, shape what may become their material encounters and spatial relations.

The connection between digital and analog is not new and has long been identified as a feature of queer digital cultures:

...from the very beginning, at least some of the work on gay men's digital culture has recognized that the digital is not separate from other spheres of gay life, but in fact grows out of it, while remaining rooted in, local, national and international gay male subculture. (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 7)

This suggests that discourse analysis, which bridges the physical and the persuasive, is well suited for this study, given the particular relationships between queer digital cultures and the non-digital world.

### 3.2 Walkthrough Method

Developed by Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay, the walkthrough method “is a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences” (2018, p. 882). This involves a researcher approaching the app as a user would—not a technical expert—by looking at how an app operates in an everyday “environment of expected use” (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018, p. 889), its governance documents, and the design of its menus, layout, and even colours.

In fact, Light, Burgess, and Duguay specifically use *Squirt* as an example when introducing the walkthrough method. They reference *Squirt* in regard to its 'vision', which "tells user[s] what it is supposed to do and, by extension, implies how it can be used and by whom" (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018, p. 889). *Squirt*, they find, "highlights its functionality for communicating with multiple partners at once, disregarding monogamous relationship norms" (Light, Burgess & Duguay, 2018, p. 889).

While not looking to replicate their findings, I incorporate the walkthrough method more as a guiding framework to how I work through accessing, observing, and engaging with *Squirt*. As noted below, this manifests itself in how I approach not only the content but also the structure of the website.

### 3.4 Data Collection

*Squirt* is a web-based service and not a mobile phone app. Even so, the walkthrough method provided a structured way to explore its functionality, purpose, and user engagement. My collection of *Squirt* data involved engaging with both user-generated content and structural elements of the website itself, allowing me to understand individual expressions in conjunction with technical architecture.

I created a research account with no personal information attached to it and conducted a textual search of *Squirt* cruising listings in the Greater Ottawa Area between September 9, 2021 and September 17, 2021 with the purpose of identifying and noting any reference to surveillance or safety issues. Between the dates, 101 cruising entries were available. Each cruising entry consists of a profile page. At the top

of the profile are photos of the cruising venue (if available) and specific location data, including city, neighbourhood, address, and GPS information. Below this, the page can be separated into two sections: location information and user comments. Location information consists of a set number of categories that users can choose to fill out when adding a new entry. These categories include: Description; Who Goes There?; How Do You Get There?; Hours / Best Times; Cruising Info / Tips?; Nudity; Sexual Policies'; Disabled Access / Info; Pet Peeves; and Warnings.

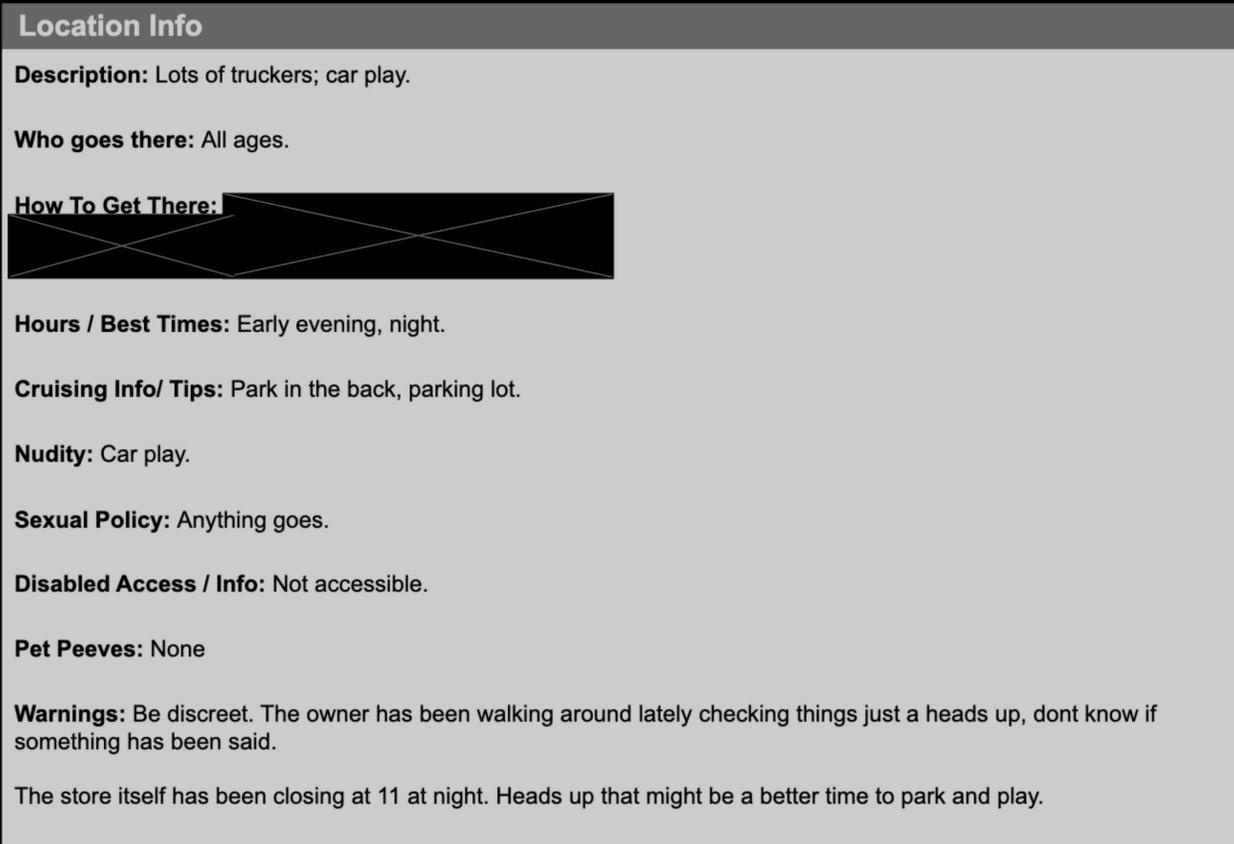


Figure 2. Screenshot of a Squirt cruising profile's location information (captured May 21, 2022).

Below this section are user comments. Comments appear to be a common way for users to engage with each other, coordinate meet-ups, let others know they are available for cruising, and ask questions. A maximum of four pages of the most recent

comments are available, which differ depending on the location: more popular ones can go back a few weeks while less popular ones can go back up to a year. For each listing, I navigated to the earliest chronologically available comment and worked my way back to the most recent.

In total, I reviewed 4,265 comments and 101 location profiles (n=4366). From this aggregated dataset, I identified 163 comments or references related to safety or surveillance, or 3.73%. For both comments and location information, I documented any reference to surveillance and safety issues. I deliberately took a broad approach, collecting all comments that referenced anything to do with warnings, caution, discretion, danger, security mechanisms, and surveillance infrastructure. Casting a wide net allowed me to ensure that I was not imposing a limited view of what constituted surveillance in these communities. Once the data was collected, I created a coding system informed by the type of surveillance issues described. Such coding categories included reference to police or security guards, CCTV cameras, undercover agents, and the safety features of specific locations. A discussion of the codes, themes, trends, and observations is detailed in Chapter 4.

### 3.5 Data Limitations

While 3.73% may seem like a statistically small dataset, it is worth noting that the primary function of *Squirt* cruising profiles is to facilitate sexual activity. Indeed, the vast majority of comments by users relate to arranging meet-ups at specific locations. Beyond this, however, we see surveillance built into the fabric of each profile, as evidenced by the inclusion of a “warnings” section in each location. This suggests safety and surveillance are indeed important considerations in cruising, albeit secondary to

sexual pursuits. It is additionally worth noting that this dataset reflects one website and one city in a short time frame relative to the scope of this study. If this research method was replicated by studying more apps, in different geographic areas, and over a longer period, a more statistically significant set of data might emerge.

### 3.6 Analytical Approaches

After compiling the data, I engaged in several rounds of analysis. While it has been suggested that strict operationalism is in opposition to the aims of discourse analysis (Waitt, 2012), I have found it useful to adopt some identified strategies for how precisely to analyze content through a Foucauldian approach. Gordon Waitt (2012) identifies seven such strategies. Firstly, he advises a researcher to carefully consider the choice of source materials to analyze, leading me to incorporate *Squirt* governance documents alongside user comments. Secondly, he advocates for self-reflexivity in examining the pre-existing knowledge that a researcher may bring to discourse analysis. As a member of the queer community, it is important to acknowledge my own lived experiences and be aware of instances where I may inadvertently impose them on texts. Thirdly, he advocates that researchers become familiar with the texts they analyze, including understanding how technologies influence knowledge-production. Fourthly, he advises a two-step coding process, whereby data is coded once for organization and again for interpretation, a method that proved useful for this project.

The final three strategies relate to power, knowledge, and persuasion; rupture and resilience; and silence. These are more substantive approaches and I therefore explore them in detail below.

### 3.6.1 Power, Knowledge, and Persuasion

Waitt notes that persuasion is central to discourse analysis, and “Foucault focuses on how particular knowledge is sustained as ‘truth’” (2012, p. 233). For certain truths to prevail over others, persuasion is required, which is a “power-laden process through which particular knowledge is deployed by institutions as a mechanism of social control” (Waitt, 2012, p. 234).

In the case of cruising, dominant discourses often seek to control cruising by framing it as an illegitimate form of sexual expression. For example, anger abounds in the comments sections of news articles about cruising or public sex. In rebuking calls for rethinking how MSM who are caught cruising are treated, users may invoke national identity, decorum, and punitive measures. For example, comments include statements driven by national identity such as “In Canada, a good citizen doesn’t urinate, defecate [sic] or have sex of any type in a public park” (Robertson, 2016); or calls for decorum such as “Since when did it become ok to have sex in a public place? It violates our laws of decency” (CBC, 2016); or a dismissal of any orientation-driven discrimination by attempting to appear inclusive with their condemnation, as in “Straight and gay should be cited. Rent a fucking room, assholes” (Hooper, 2017).

These all fall in line with Waitt’s understanding of prevailing knowledge: “Particular sets of ideas become accepted and repeated by most people as ‘common sense’, unproblematic, unquestionable, and apparently ‘natural’” (Waitt, 2012, p. 234). By focusing on the ‘common sense’ assumption that people should not have sex in parks instead of questioning the increased surveillance of queer bodies and elevated

levels of physical violence against them, such comments underscore the legitimacy of dominant views over marginalized ones.

So how do cruisers themselves seek to persuade others through their posts on *Squirt*? In one sense, the act of posting about surveillance may be seen as a persuasive act, with argumentation found in the evidence users provide to support their claims. In another sense, however, overt persuasion is rarely seen, potentially because safety and surveillance are built into the experience of cruising and users therefore are not required to convince others of the need to heed safety warnings. Since these posts are aimed at those already interested in cruising, there is no need to persuade for its legitimacy or the dangers associated with it.

To revisit Waitt's definition, persuasion is "deployed by institutions as a mechanism of social control" (Waitt, 2012, p. 234). As a group that runs contrary to (several) Canadian laws, cruisers inherently lack the social power that dominant institutions possess to enact control. But inasmuch as the act of cruising challenges prevailing social norms, cruising itself can be seen as a persuasive act, since it operates in a subaltern world with distinct 'common sense' rules where discretion and situational awareness prevail over decency and decorum.

### 3.6.2 Rupture and Resilience

Waitt further notes that rather than fixed, unrelenting bodies, "discursive structures are fragile and continuously ruptured" (2012, p. 235). Applying this knowledge means being attuned to inconsistencies, disagreements, and divergences in a particular text. Are there conflicting reports of surveillance in the same location? Are

there changes in attitudes over time? These are the questions I brought into my analysis of the data. As Becker advises: “The trick, then, is to *identify the case that is likely to upset your thinking and look for it*” (Becker, 1998, p. 87, emphasis in original). It may not be the case that we will discover commonalities around sites that warrant warnings, but we might find elements that unite safer sites. We may also find contradictory accounts of surveillance, or find that items that provide safety in one location evoke insecurity in another.

This thinking outside the margins falls in line with queer approaches to methodology and knowledge creation. In her search for a definition of queerness, Jean Bessette notes (cited in Dadas, 2016, p.63):

[Queer is defined] not as a synonym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals but rather as an orientation against normativity; someone, or something, is queer when s/he or it challenges the social processes that consolidate and normalize gendered, sexual, raced, and classed identities.

For Dadas, however, queer is a productive notion through which to “queer [is] to invoke complication: a way to describe how we might *trouble the production of knowledge*” (2016, p. 63, emphasis added). This troubling of knowledge production is a useful framework in my research; it enables me to challenge existing norms of scholarship alongside social conventions.

### 3.6.3 Silences

Silence operates on two levels. Silence reveals who is prevented from speaking and how dominant discourses push alternative ones to the margins, and as Waitt

emphasizes, silence is therefore a productive aspect of discourse analysis. Given that cruising is inherently an alternative approach to normative sexual relations, it is productively silenced or pushed aside in dominant environments. While some news articles advocate for the inclusion of sex areas in public parks, the comments of such articles suggest that these are niche and non-dominant views, as discussed above.

Within the context of *Squirt*— a non-dominant environment— we might expect to find other silences. As such, it is important to consider the safety and surveillance issues that are *not* being discussed, as these can provide insight into the beliefs and attitudes of cruisers.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research necessary to explore *Squirt* presents certain ethical considerations that must be addressed. To minimize harm to users and cruisers, I collected data without any user identifiers: no personal information was captured while collecting data on *Squirt*. Most users deploy pseudonyms and do not use facial imagery in their profile pictures, and I neither sought out nor recorded such data. Further, because I had to create a research account with no personal information attached to it to collect *Squirt* data, it is possible that other users thought I was a legitimate user. To avoid disturbing or interacting with other users, and following a similar approach taken by Light, Burgess, and Duguay (2018), I opted to ignore user attempts to engage with me.

Likewise, to protect cruising sites, I do not specify locations but instead provide broad descriptions (e.g., a wooded area outside of the city, a mall bathroom, a locker room at a gym). My reasoning for this is threefold. Firstly, by publishing exact location

information, I run the risk of exposing these locations and the counter-surveillance efforts deployed, which could potentially lead to *increased* surveillance acts. Given the discretion that cruisers typically require and the designation of cruising and public sex as unlawful conduct, I consider this an unnecessary danger for the purposes of the present study. Secondly, as an outside observer of this data, I could not seek informed consent from users. As such, I do not feel it is appropriate to disclose locations or specific details of any locale. And finally, I do not believe that naming these locations provides much scholarly benefit as I can just as easily convey the nature of a location through a generalized but anonymous description.

These ethical considerations underscore the often dangerous nature of cruising. An acute illustration of this lies in the case of Aaron Webster, a gay man who was beaten to death in 2001 in Vancouver's Stanley Park. Four men hid in the bushes of the well-known cruising area and attacked Webster, who was later found naked with his clothes in his car (Janoff, 2005), suggesting he was cruising at the time of his death. While Webster is certainly not the only man to be assaulted while cruising, his case galvanized the Vancouver community, particularly when one of the accused assailants was found not guilty of manslaughter (Janoff, 2005). As noted above, cruisers understand the dangers of their sexual activities, and I do not wish to further contribute to the very real risks they face.

Another infamous example that brings ethical considerations to light is Laud Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade* (1970). Humphreys' book shines a light on the sociological dimensions of MSM cruising. Throughout the course of Humphreys' study, the author went undercover as a "watch queen" and acted as a lookout for men cruising.

Humphreys then recorded license plate numbers and, using public records, visited these men a year later, posing as a survey interviewer to gather information about mental health (Nardi, 1995). Donning disguises, lying to participants, and tracking down individuals to their homes, Humphreys' work stands as a "primary example of unethical social research" (Mac Donald, 2017, para 2).

While Humphreys' account sought to hide the connection between researcher and subject, my proposed study wishes to bring the subject and researcher closer together in understanding but *not* through physical presence. In doing so, I want to highlight the knowledge of those with more experience in cruising. By centring the knowledge held by users and expressed through *Squirt*, we can move from a position of "lurking" to one of "listening" (Crawford, 2009) and more actively engage with the content as a form of expression instead of static text.

Humphreys' account is also a perfect example of how queering a study does not simply mean circumventing established customs: the protection of subjects' privacy and ethical research practice should be at the heart of any queer-focused scholarship. Humphreys' account indeed prioritizes sensationalism over safety, but it can still be a useful site of knowledge. On one hand, Peter Nardi suggests that the debate over issues of ethics and methods detracts from *Tearoom Trade's* important findings, "not only as one of the first major studies of homosexuality in America, but also as one of the only studies ever done on the more hidden forms of human sexuality" (Nardi, 1995, p. 2). On the other hand, the reappropriation of Humphrey's work can be seen as an example of queering scholarship. For example, in discussing how one can simultaneously use Heidegger's work while acknowledging and disavowing his Nazi

beliefs, José Esteban Muñoz sees this subversion as an empowering opportunity for queerness: “To draw from such sources and ultimately make them serve another project, one that the author himself would have quickly denounced, serves as a critical engagement—critique as willful disloyalty to the master” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 17). Humphreys, himself a gay man, must be viewed as substantively different than Heidegger, but Muñoz’s position certainly makes a provocative argument for including challenging texts. While others may not prescribe to this particular approach, I believe it serves as a useful framework for how to incorporate works like Humphreys’ into my present study.

Taken together, the walkthrough method and a Foucauldian discourse analysis comprise the framework through which I encounter, analyze, and ultimately make sense of data collected from *Squirt*. In the following section, I discuss this data in more detail and begin to discern queer elements of power hidden beyond written exchanges of cruisers.

## 4. Peering under the Stall

In discussing what subjects, peoples, or acts are considered worthy of academic investigation, Becker notes that “Good taste is a potent form of social control” (1998, p. 108). By this Becker means that researchers operate within institutions that are by no means neutral; rather, they are influenced by fashionable discourse, financial obligations, and pressing social challenges. While sociological work on cruising is not novel—as discussed above—focusing on community experience, particularly in relation to surveillance, is an area deserving of enhanced focus. Given the strong theoretical

and material ties that bind these issues together, this presents both a noticeable gap as well as an opportunity to offer redress. In this chapter, I present the findings from my analysis of *Squirt* data, offering community insight into surveillant elements of cruising locations in the Greater Ottawa Area by asking: How do queer communities discuss surveillance? How do they circumvent it? And how do they conduct intra-community surveillance as an expression of safety? In this chapter, I begin with a brief discussion contextualizing user-generated data before moving on to an analysis of the data collected for this study.

## 4.1 User-Generated Accounts of Surveillance

The data I am analyzing for this project is naturalistic. I collected the data from users without any direct intervention or contact with MSM in cruising places or on the *Squirt* platform. Using naturalistic data has several identified advantages, including opening observers to “novel issues and concerns that were not predicted at the start of the research” (Potter, 2008, p. 547). For ethical reasons (see section 3.6 above) and concerns related to COVID-19, I did not conduct field research to confirm the observations for each cruising site. While there are efficacy risks in working with a relatively small data sample focused on one platform, there are two reasons why I am inclined to assign authority to these data. Firstly, *Squirt* cruising profiles include input from many individuals. On several occasions, I observed individuals engaging in debates about issues, suggesting that divergent viewpoints exist and are made visible in the data. While an erroneous comment might not be rectified through additional user input, these discussions suggest there is some attempt made to present accurate

entries. In fact, some comments challenge certain cruising locations as dangerous or inappropriate. In cases where I observed contrasting entries, I incorporated this in my observations. Secondly, I argue these data are authoritative as they come from first-hand experience and are embedded within the larger context of queer individuals having to navigate surveillance and safety in their lives. Arguably, someone who is more likely to be surveilled is more apt to appreciate and note surveillance systems than someone who rarely has to worry about such issues. As outlined in Chapter 1, this situational, spatial, and sexual awareness is a reoccurring theme in queer lives. In conducting interviews about living in Ottawa in the 1960s, Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile identify this pervasive awareness in a comment by one of their research informants: “We were constantly on guard against strangers or against people we suspected of being snoops because they weren’t gay, they weren’t there to cruise, [and] nobody knew them from sexual contact” (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010, p. 206). While experiences may be individual, they are refracted through a prism of community until trends are made visible.

User-generated data also present a challenge of rhetorical categorization. Arguably, a cornerstone of traditional scholarship might be reputable and indisputable evidence. So how would such a rigid system incorporate something as malleable as gossip or rumours? In discussing historiography, VanHaitsma notes that gossip and speculation can be considered powerful tools for including marginalized voices that have traditionally been excluded from archival research. She further argues that “a disciplinarily diverse body of scholarship makes clear that queer and feminist histories have long necessitated speculative and even imaginative practices” (VanHaitsma, 2016

p. 135). In other words: often, 'unreliable' sources are all that are available when researching under-served communities. And the inclusion of something easily dismissed, that may force an academic discipline to question itself, is at the very heart of queer scholarship. Specific to this project, the safety descriptions of cruising sites on *Squirt* are entirely user-generated, placing them near gossip and speculation in terms of rhetorical classification but nonetheless requiring serious engagement.

## 4.2 Observations

As outlined in section 3.4, I developed and implemented a coding system to categorize the types of surveillance comments I observed as well as the types of cruising locations. Any comment that referenced surveillance or safety issues was included in this dataset, with comments assigned to multiple categories as appropriate. I reviewed 4,366 comments from *Squirt*, of which 163 or 3.73% related to safety or surveillance. Table 1 provides an overview of the 15 coding categories I deployed while Table 2 provides a quantitative distribution of comments across cruising locations.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of entries</b>	<b>Sample comment from collected data</b>
NP	Families, janitors, heterosexual passersby, or other non-police entities	55	“Watch out for non-cruisers. janitorial crew cleans every 4-6 hours.”

PO	Police, private security, or other law enforcement services (e.g., transit security, NCC officers)	40	"RCMP driving by making random sweeps."
EN	Environmental and/or construction features that make locations conducive to cruising or decrease safety for cruisers; including mention of refuse/garbage	25	"This is a quiet bathroom with private stalls and a loud door"
AS	Absence of surveillance	9	"Never patrolled, so no worries getting caught."
SU	Conversations about suspicious people	8	"Caution: watch out for a man in the white van with paint peeling near the roof who takes pictures of your license plate, car, and men entering the bush or follow you with the van"
CC	Cameras or CCTV	7	"Two new security cameras added."

QS	Questions about safety	5	“Anyone been there recently? What's security like?”
TI	Specific timing or schedules of surveillance	4	“Pop in for 20 minutes, stay in washroom to lay low until hook up, then leave. Any longer will have people asking questions in the building should you cross paths with local staffers.”
QU	Questions about the location entry itself being a security risk	3	“I think a cop made this posting since they are always in that parking lot”
UN	Undercover agents	2	“Use caution as security are aware of what goes on here. Watch out for undercover.”
ID	Identity features that might make you stand out	1	“The usual crowd here is students. If youre in your 40s or older, it may seem very suspicious, and could lead to an alert to security.”

TH	Thefts	1	<p>“Lots of thefts have been occurring from the locker room as of late. Whether you lock your things or leave them in an open locker, do not leave valuables behind. The suspect(s) have been prying into lockers that are secured, stealing wallets, computers and ipods.”</p>
ST	Reference to STIs	1	<p>“Would have considered it before I read that post from the guy who got herpes”</p>
DR	Drugs	1	<p>“Still not a cruising spot. Also, the area by the baseball diamonds is becoming problematic for drug consumption at nighttime.”</p>

CI	Potential agent of surveillance becomes an actor in circumventing it	1	“There used to be a janitor here. Black man, a bit older. Anytime he'd see me walk through he'd head to the bathroom and I'd follow. Had a massive uncut c*ck. He'd take me to the boiler room that's in the bathroom and f*ck me hard and raw while unsuspecting guys were right beside us pissing.”
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Table 1. Coding system, in descending order of entries assigned to each category

Visualizing the data shows that non-police entities and individuals describe the most common category, representing 33.7% of all observed surveillance related data, as shown in **Figure 3**:

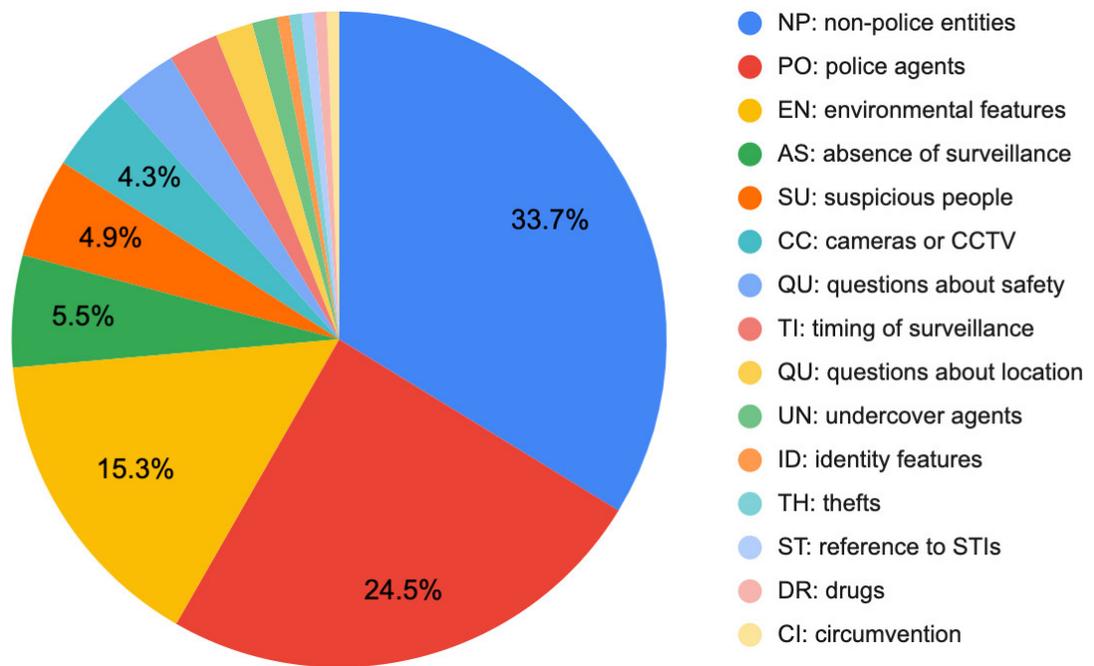


Figure 3. Distribution of code categories

Location type	Number of entries	% of total entries	Number of comments	Number of surveillance comments	Location type % of total comments	Surveillance % of total comments
Bathroom/Sauna	1	0.99%	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
Gym	18	17.82%	270	19	6.33%	7.04%
Hotel	4	3.96%	64	4	1.50%	6.25%
Mall	1	0.99%	49	0	1.15%	0.00%
Park	40	39.60%	2298	78	53.88%	3.39%
Parking Lot	4	3.96%	118	6	2.77%	5.08%
Theatre/Bookstores/ Sex Shop	2	1.98%	184	0	4.31%	0.00%
Truckstop	3	2.97%	242	5	5.67%	2.07%
Washroom	28	27.72%	1040	51	24.38%	4.90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>4265</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100%</b>	
Location information			101			
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>4366</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3.73%</b>

Table 2. Distribution of cruising location type

By parsing the data, both general and specific trends emerge. To begin, I will conduct an analysis of the top three coding categories for surveillance information exchanged. Following that, I will describe some of the more generalized, cross-category trends that emerge.

#### 4.2.1 Non-Police Entities

Looking at the dataset as a whole, the type of surveillance information that was most often exchanged relates to the presence of non-police entities. These data include references to families, children, janitors, heterosexual passersby, workplace staff, or other individuals who would not be considered law enforcement agents but whose presence were nonetheless worth noting in regard to safety or surveillance. This category and these comments account for 33.74% of all surveillance-related entries.

Some of the comments were general observations of the type of non-cruising individuals who frequent locations and did not cite any specific safety issues, such as “Families also use this gym.” Many of these warnings were generalized reminders that cruising operates in public spaces that are largely populated by assumed heteronormative individuals, seen in comments such as “It is a good quiet place to hook up, however, this is a public park and many other people use it. So please be smart!” Other warnings focus on specific and salient individuals. At one truckstop, a *Squirt* user noted that the “owner has been walking around lately checking things.” While not an official agent of law enforcement, someone in a management position at such a location is clearly understood as having authority and, indeed, conducts security checks.

By definition, the category of non-police entities is broad and therefore understandably widely used. However, an alternative interpretation of its prominence in the data exists. Put simply, cruising is not only an act between two (or more) individuals searching for sexual experiences; instead, it casts a much wider net whereby everyone—including non-cruisers—are participants in a larger surveillance assemblage. These largely passive, non-cruising individuals constitute a type of soft (or human) infrastructure (Mattern, 2018) that influences the sexual experiences of cruisers. In essence, they inform the conditions and support the environment of cruising. While some comments served as warnings for ways to circumvent these infrastructural challenges—“Pop in for 20 minutes, stay in washroom to lay low until hook up, then leave. Any longer will have people asking questions in the building should you cross paths with local staffers”—others found that their presence rendered the location unusable. As one observer notes of an outdoor location: “This is actually a terrible spot. It has people walking dogs off-leash, throughout the park until late at night” and “Here now but very busy with groups families Not a good place for cruising.” Some comments also suggest alternative locations where non-police entities are unlikely to interfere: “Don't do anything in the pool area cause there's caretakers that walk by every 30 min or so. Just get all naked in the sauna.”

In at least one instance, a janitor, while not a police officer nor security guard with authoritative power, became an active participant in circumventing surveillance by directly engaging in cruising:

There used to be a janitor here. Black man, a bit older. Anytime he'd see me walk through he'd head to the bathroom and I'd follow. Had a massive

uncut c\*ck. He'd take me to the boiler room that's in the bathroom and f\*ck me hard and raw while unsuspecting guys were right beside us pissing. he could c\*m 3-4 times a session. I miss spending my lunch breaks riding his c\*ck!

This encounter further serves to highlight the complex collisions of race, power, and class in cruising. An in-depth analysis of these sites of identity and influence is outside the scope of this study but it shows that “queerness is not simply consigned to discrete formations of non-heterosexual identities, but rather cuts across racialized, gendered, and sexual difference to name the way that relational privilege only accrues to some populations” (Kafer and Grinberg, 2019, p. 594).

The comments from this category further highlight that cruising locations are not designated sexual spaces. Indeed, the data confirm that *most* spaces can become a site of sexual exploration, but such a designation must be intentionally created through a process of contestation and negotiation of heteronormative presences.

Finally, while discretion is an integral aspect of cruising, it was very clearly enunciated in this category. Many comments provided common sense advice, whether subtly or directly, highlighting how cruisers must skillfully weave between invisibility and discoverability. Indeed, by merely noting the presence of non-cruisers, safety and surveillance concerns were articulated. For example, in these two statements, “Be subtle - lots of straight guys around” and “Be aware of straight people and those who are not there to cruise,” through which the danger conjured by non-cruising individuals is evoked whether speaking of (presumed) heteronormative individuals or, as the following section makes clear, law enforcement officials.

## 4.2.2 Police Entities

The second most common exchange in the data pertains to police, private security, or other law enforcement services (e.g., transit security, National Capital Commission (NCC) officers). In total, these comments accounted for 24.54% of all surveillance comments.

Cruising, surveillance, and policing share deep theoretical, social, and political links and histories. This relationship is explored by Chris Ashford in his investigation into the then-emerging use of the Internet to connect cruisers. Ashford notes that “The ‘Cyber Cottage’ can be seen as offering three principal functions: offering information and advice to online participants, *providing warnings to participants* and a meeting forum” (p. 2006, 281, emphasis added). Research on the warnings users share with each other underscores the inherent danger of cruising as well as the connection between queer public sex and law enforcement. Ashford finds that while users share information about police blitzes to catch cruisers, they also occasionally post on behalf of the police, asking cruisers to exercise discretion or to warn of violence in certain areas. This highlights an integral element of online cruising communities: “Just as all site participants can discover information about local cruising and cottaging locations, so too can the police” (Ashford, 2006, p. 282). In an overview of a cruising crackdown in Montreal, the application of this appropriated knowledge is highlighted:

Using their knowledge of gay cruising practices, plainclothes cops continue to harass, ticket, and arrest men who seek out sexual companionship in places other than those officially recognized and legally sanctified by heterosexist sexual norms. Having co-opted our shared

understanding of location, plainclothes cops are able to exploit, in a discrete, and largely unforceful manner, our need for affection and sexual companionship. (ACAB, 2018)

This sharing of information is additionally supported by Kevin Walby in his investigation of NCC officers' intervention of cruising in Ottawa parks: "The chief method by which NCC officers find out if sexual relations are occurring is to cruise around the parks by car, bike or foot, though they sometimes check online chat sites to monitor communications about where people are likely to congregate" (Walby, 2009, p. 368). Surveillance, then, becomes a two-way street, with cruisers conducting community-led surveillance that is in turn surveilled by police in precisely the manner of Bauman's concept of liquidity (Bauman & Lyon, 2013). Surveillance is neither exclusively top-down nor bottom-up; it is fluid and dynamic, operating in a space of ongoing tension and contestation.

Looking at the relationship between cruisers and law enforcement, it appears each group uses their unique perspectives and vantage points to gain an upper hand wherever possible, even if that position may eventually benefit the opposing group. While made apparent in this dataset, these fluid dimensions are not unique to this work. In investigating the use of hook-up apps by queer communities in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran, international human rights organization Article 19 notes that adversarial agencies are known to use these apps to entrap MSM. In spite of this, queer folks are not ditching their phones: "Due to these platforms' unique ability to connect, empower, and provide an avenue for expression...our research has shown that LGBTQ users will continue to use them even where it directly risks their safety or privacy" (Article 19, 2018, p. 6). This

suggests that even when the dangers of certain digital affordances are well understood, the potential of risk is outweighed by the potential for reward. In the case of cruisers, the data suggest that individuals will continue to share surveillance information even when doing so may benefit law enforcement and be leveraged against other cruisers.

The comments in the police category also speak to the varied ways in which intervention may take place: some advise of general police dangers, “Police do patrol occasionally”; others of observed schedules, “Cops start to patrol here after 10pm or so, whenever it gets dark”; and finally of individual instances, such as “there is a Cop car sitting at the very end of the road, don't know if he's just taking a break, or like a SPIDER waiting to catch a fly.” The last example articulates not only the adversarial nature between cruisers and cops, but also the predatory nature of their relationship: by sharing surveillance information, cruisers hope to avoid the proverbial spider’s web deployed by authorities.

These data also underscore the shifting and multifaceted use of cruising locations. In one mall washroom, a user notes that “the security guys come in for a pee once in a while.” While it is unknown whether security is aware of the cruising activity, their presence and use of the washroom for non-cruising purposes presents a noteworthy danger.

Ottawa’s position as the nation’s capital also appears to influence the police presence of at least one cruising location, with a user noting “Police are occasionally in the parking lot because of the numerous foreign embassies on [redacted] Road.” As noted above in section 2.2.3, homosexuality has long been a national security concern for Canadian government and law enforcement agencies. Further, as Walby observes,

“sexuality is a matter of national character for the NCC” (2009, p. 368), suggesting that there is merit to the user’s observation of police sweeps connected to the location of embassies.

### 4.2.3 Environmental Considerations

As noted in section 2.3.3, cruising is deeply rooted to/in the spatial, and this relationship is reflected in my data: 15.34% of surveillance entries relate to mentions of environment or location. These comments include both natural and manufactured features of a location that enhance or limit either cruising or surveillance infrastructure. It is also interesting to note that, when parsed for cruising location, some location types demonstrate a higher percentage of surveillance comments than others. Of all comments for gyms in this dataset, for instance, 7.04% related to surveillance, almost double the 3.73% observed across the entire data set (see Table 2). This suggests that the type of cruising location significantly impacts surveillance discursive practices.

#### 4.2.3.1 Earthly Delights

In some instances, natural affordances specifically presented opportunities for sexual engagement: “We could suck on each other c\*cks right out in the open since it is so foggy here no one can see you.” In this case, cruisers are seen as opportunistic and responsive to a dynamic environment: as the weather changes, so too do cruising tactics. Through this example, we can make three distinct but interrelated observations. Firstly, natural phenomena can be used as counter-surveillance mechanisms whereby the weather becomes another way in which queer bodies circumvent the systems used by surveillance operators. Such acts constitute the “everyday mutinous practices of

opacity, transparency, passing, camouflage, duplicity, and code-switching” that “scramble state-sanctioned practices of computation and control” (Getsy 2019, p. 66). Secondly, such an understanding of weather as a usable (if unpredictable) tactic of cruisers takes on additional significance when we consider the role of weather in communication studies. As John Durham Peters notes, “Media are ensembles of natural element and human craft” (2015, p. 3). Leveraging fog to conceal bodies from discovery, then, constitutes a communicative act as well as a sexual one. And finally, engagement with ever-changing and challenging natural conditions underscores a deeply political reading of cruising. As lawyer and activist Marcus McCann notes: “Nobody should be surprised that men continued to cruise during the pandemic. We cruised through winter. We cruised through police raids. We cruised through the AIDS crisis. Reagan is dead and we are still cruising” (McCann, 2021).

Given that nature is not easily—if ever—dominated, however, other comments noted how changing environments imposed limitations on sexual activities: “It is almost too cold to there [sic] and jerk off alone.” This relationship between cruising and nature is well supported by existing literature and, in particular, public parks emerge as a favourite locale for men seeking companionship. As Gary Kinsman notes, “Parks played a critical role in the social-sexual space for queers” (Kinsman, 1995, p. 200), a fact supported in my research data as well, with parks representing 39.6% of all cruising entries. As noted in section 2.1.4, law enforcement bodies well understand that parks are significant sites of cruising and have long sought to control sex by controlling space:

... in places from Copenhagen's Ørstedsparken to Ottawa's Remic Rapids Park to Toronto's Queen's Park, municipal strategy has been to cut down bushes and add lighting to dissuade cruising. These interventions tend to have an opposite effect: cutting down bushes makes cruising more overt (Robertson, 2016).

#### 4.2.3.2 Washrooms

While the outdoor aspects of this category are insightful, I took a broad approach in coding for 'environment' and included human-made locations as well. Washrooms in particular emerge as common cruising locations, representing the second largest category of location type at 27.72% of all cruising entries.

Given that washrooms govern how and when we exercise necessary functions of the body, they exist as sites of regulatory enforcement and, importantly, surveillance. Kyla Bender-Baird reminds us that "the very architecture of public bathrooms is panoptic" (2016, p. 985). From the placement of mirrors to the length of doors, washrooms are built upon an infrastructure of being seen. Here, we observe how infrastructure can enforce normative values, highlighting the importance of infrastructure as well as Foucault's notion of "biopower," which governs how bodies are regulated as a population, not only as individuals: "Whereas discipline has as its object the individual body, biopower focuses on *regularising* wider biological processes" (Marks, 2008, p. 96, emphasis in original). My data reveal that cruisers enter into complex negotiations of space within washrooms, as evidenced by comments such as: "Not very private washroom. Also many children and homeless people, as well as just regular people looking to use the washroom." Likewise, official overseers of bathrooms (e.g.,

maintenance workers and employees) are tasked with enforcing a particular view of the world and therefore act as an arm of the state, meaning they are temporarily given control over the bodies of others. This tension is reflected in the data in comments like: “Having your cock out at the urinal is fine but anything else might raise some suspicions [and] janitorial crew cleans once every 4-6 hours approximately so be careful who you whip it out in front of.”

In some instances, my data suggest that lavatory environments have been altered to limit cruising, as one commenter notes: “The washroom has two stalls, security has taped off one in efforts to stop the understall blowjobs.” As referenced above with parks and lighting, adjusting washrooms to facilitate surveillance is not a novel occurrence. Historical evidence indicates that Toronto police within the city’s Morality Department would often use hidden peep holes, providing officers with panoptic views of all stalls through which they could catch men engaging in sex (Maynard, 1994). This further highlights the liquidity and shifting perspectives of sex, surveillance, and infrastructure: just as queer men might have used ‘glory holes’<sup>7</sup> between stalls, police would use hidden openings in walls to observe these acts. This positionality influenced what was made visible. As Maynard notes:

If you were peering through the hole at the top of the wall into the stalls, sex between men was a site for sexual surveillance and discipline. If you were peering through the hole in the wall between the stalls, this was an act of possibility, a moment in the formation of a sexual subculture. (1994, p. 242)

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<sup>7</sup> A glory hole is an opening in a wall, door, or barrier through which sexual acts can be performed, providing anonymity while circumventing structural boundaries.

The relationship between queer communities and space cannot be understated, as detailed in section 2.3.3. In fact, some of the most formative events in North American queer history are related to the encroachment of queer spaces, including the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City, Toronto bathhouse raids, and cruising sting operations of Etobicoke's Marie Curtis Park. This importance of place is reflected in the data, where surveillance and sex are deeply influenced by spatial relations.

### 4.3 Reading the Data to Filth

Moving from the specific to the general, the data in this study present opportunities to discuss more global trends. Firstly, and quite significantly, it is evident from the data that surveillance is normalized and expected while cruising. While comments related to safety and surveillance make up only a small percentage of the total comments for Ottawa cruising locations (3.73%), the comments that *do* reference surveillance make it clear it is an anticipated risk to be managed and navigated. Further, as outlined in section 3.4 each location profile includes a "Warning" section, suggesting that danger and risks—including surveillance—are commonplace and built into the very structure of *Squirt*. In fact, given the ubiquity of surveillance, its *absence* is often noteworthy. For example, a comment on a park location observes that it is "Never patrolled, so no worries getting caught," while a gym is highlighted because "[s]taff do not monitor this room and most straight guys are ignorant of what might be going on." This absence of surveillance is the fourth most common category in the dataset, representing 5.52% of surveillance comments.

Additionally, the data make clear that anyone not cruising is a potential threat or danger. This is articulated through the number of posts that reference non-police entities, suggesting that the very presence of someone who is unlikely to be cruising is enough to warrant a safety warning. In some cases, these non-police entities are seen conducting detailed surveillance of cruisers. For example, as one commenter notes: “Caution: watch out for a man in the white van with paint peeling near the roof who takes pictures of your license plate, car, and men entering the bush or follow you with the van.” This specific example bears a striking resemblance to activity cited in Walby (2009). In reviewing an NCC officer’s report, Walby notes that “the conservation officer comments on how he encouraged a land developer to get the license plate number of any car entering a park when he believed the man driving it could be ‘gay’” (2009, p. 375). Together, these comments suggest a transfer of power, where non-police entities are deputized to conduct surveillance on behalf of law enforcement agents.

Another way in which humans are emphasized as agents of surveillance is by the lack of comments related to the use of CCTV or other purely technical forms of surveillance. While some CCTV are present and explicitly noted in some cases—“Two new security cameras added”—these comments are uncommon and appear far less than references to human intervention, suggesting that technical elements of surveillance are not top of mind for most cruisers. This observation presents an interesting avenue for future study. For instance, how do surveillance warnings in cities with a high presence of CCTV cameras in places such as London, UK (Bischoff, 2021) compare to Ottawa in references to technologically-enabled surveillance?

While external threats are commonly observed, cruisers also acknowledge that their presence might be alarming to non-cruisers. In fact, great care is taken to act discreetly and not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers. In particular, children, parents, and families are often cited in safety warnings, such as when a location “has a playground and a lot of young families using it,” as one commenter notes, making it inappropriate for cruising. The research data shows that cruisers are focused on avoiding any contact in these locales and situations. This is noteworthy because popular discourse on the subject of public sex suggests that cruising will directly impact children:

Though difficult for many straight people (and a solid contingent of queer people) to imagine, the existence of public sex does not inherently compromise public safety. While many arguments against cruising in parks include “think of the women and children,” cruising does not, by its nature, compromise the safety of women or children. This is not to deny however, that for some, viewing an explicit sexual act in a public space without giving consent can be a violating experience. (Robertson, 2016)

These data support Robertson’s observations by revealing that many cruisers caution against, and actively avoid, interaction with children, families, and, generally, anyone not cruising. This can be interpreted as an act of self-preservation by the cruisers, given the inherent danger of cruising outlined in Chapter 2, but also that cruisers are only interested in other cruisers. While there are undoubtedly some individuals who derive gratification by exposing themselves to unsuspecting victims, none of the data in this study reference such activities.

While a multitude of sexual practices are discussed in the posts, issues related to other identifying information of cruisers are absent from surveillance warnings. Race, for instance, is only mentioned in one comment to describe a janitor who engaged in cruising practices (see above). This relative absence is difficult to understand, as racialized individuals experience increased forms and frequency of surveillance (Lowe et al, 2016; Canella, 2018; Selod, 2018), so we might expect this to factor into cruising warnings. However, this may reflect the normalization of surveillance for racialized communities. As Simone Browne notes, “Surveillance is nothing new black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness” (Browne, 2015, p. 10). In essence, racialized individuals who cruise might assume increased threats of surveillance will be present and feel no need to comment on them. Alternatively, racialized individuals might feel that such warnings will not be well received by other cruisers, if it is assumed that the majority of *Squirt* users are not racialized. In the context of this narrow study, there is insufficient data to speculate without further research.

As discussed above, *Squirt* does not exist in a vacuum. Operating within a liquid and highly dynamic environment, it is best described as an open system in which individuals share information about police surveillance and where police, in turn, can obtain information about cruising practices (Walby, 2009; Ashford, 2006). Because of this, some users occasionally interrogate specific cruising postings as themselves safety and security risks. The inclusion of unsafe environmental factors at a location leads some users to speculate about the genesis of listings. For example: “This is actually a terrible spot. It has people walking dogs off-leash, throughout the park until late at night. There are no secluded spots. This listing is misinformed at best, malicious

at worst.” Others suspect police of creating falsified listings, presumably with the intent of entrapment. For the listing of a parking lot in a recreation centre, one user notes: “I think a cop made this posting since they are always in that parking lot.” This intersects with user suspicions of undercover agents at locations.<sup>8</sup> At one washroom, a user warns “Use caution as security are aware of what goes on here. Watch out for undercover.” In spite of these suspicions of police intervention and surveillance, there is no mention of legal issues in the data collected. This is noteworthy given the illegal treatment of cruising and public sex writ large in Canada. This illegality is highlighted by *Squirt* itself, which has a section on what to do if arrested (Squirt, n.d.). While US-focused, the inclusion of this information by the website’s operators underscores the inherent danger and illegality of cruising, making it more noteworthy that users do not publicly discuss these issues more thoroughly.

Finally, missing from the data is any reference to the psychological or emotional impacts of surveillance on cruisers: users do not discuss how navigating and circumventing surveillance might contribute to feelings of anxiety or fear. There is also a lack of discussion of political mobilization to directly counter or topple these surveillance infrastructures. While the sharing of surveillance information implies both circumvention and counter-surveillance methods, both of which certainly can be viewed politically, there is no discussion of direct political lobbying to change bylaws that prohibit public sex. There are three possible explanations for these notable omissions. First, users might not experience any psychological distress while cruising and/or do not want to disrupt this system. This seems unlikely, given the long lineage of political advocacy of

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<sup>8</sup> The entrapment of queer men by police has a long lineage, with Maynard noting Paris police were entrapping men as early as the 1700s (Maynard, 1994).

queer communities and the emerging documentation of the impact of surveillance on MSM (Article 19, 2018). Likewise, police intervention in cruising has material consequences for cruisers, since “Men caught having sex with men are usually ‘outed’ to family and/or co-workers” (Walby, 2009, p. 374). Second, *Squirt*, as a sex- and hook-up site, might not lend itself to such discussions. However, this explanation denies the agency and creativity users have in determining how digital spaces are adopted, co-opted, and repurposed. Finally, these missing discussions might stem from challenges to imagination. As Dencik and Cable (2017) note in their analysis of surveillance realism, a lack of collective imagination is what leads to the public acceptance of pervasive surveillance infrastructures. In essence, while people may disagree with the increasing surveillance of their lives, they simply cannot imagine another system. However, this clashes with Nagy and Neff’s (2015) concept of imagined affordances, which suggests that technologies are not merely deterministic, following the scripts laid out by developers, but are influenced by users whereby “[t]he point is not solely what people think technology can do or what designers say technology can do, but what people *imagine* a tool is for” (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 5, emphasis in original). This tension between surveillance realism and imagined affordances is productive and creates space to further investigate what this data suggests broadly for surveillance theory.

## 4.4 Imbalancing the Numbers

In discussing how to rethink binaries and hierarchies in information studies, D'Ignazio & Klein note a troubled relationship between data collection and marginalized communities, whereby “Historically, counting and classification have been used to

dominate, discipline, and exclude” (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, pp. 122-123). Classification systems are culturally informed and, as such, reify existing biases and imbalances. However, through the above research, I have attempted to use data as a vehicle of illumination and empowerment. By understanding how queer communities discern, discuss, and defy surveillance in the context of cruising, we can centre those voices that have traditionally been excluded and expand the scope of surveillance studies. This suggests new areas of growth as a field. In the following chapter, I identify several such areas and reflect on the impact of cruising for surveillance scholars.

## 5. Parting Glances: Discussion and Conclusion

By parsing the data collected from *Squirt*, it is clear that cruisers regularly encounter surveillance and make attempts to circumvent it. While surveillance is an integral part of the queer experience, cruising offers a particular perspective that is not captured in existing literature. In my closing chapter, I consider how this data complicates existing theories of surveillance—particularly Dencik and Cable’s surveillance realism—and opens up areas for future research.

### 5.1 Queering Nineteen Eighty-Four

Surveillance is not new. And it is also not straight. George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a novel set in a dystopian future overrun by unfettered state control, has long been referenced in surveillance studies and political circles alike. Seventy years after its publication, its name continues to invoke fears of crumbling personal

privacy in the face of government overreach. For instance, in late April 2022, the United States Department of Homeland Security announced the establishment of a disinformation governance board, which Republicans were quick to liken to the Ministry of Truth, the fictional department responsible for propaganda in Orwell's novel (CNN, 2022). But despite its popularity as a talking point by pundits, a uniquely queer reading of the book is often overlooked.

Winston Smith, the novel's protagonist, meets a woman, Julia, that he believes could share his opposition to the world created by Big Brother, the political leader of Oceania. Because they are constantly reminded that "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell, 1949, p. 3, emphasis in original), they are forced to meet under the pretence of heckling a parade of prisoners of war, and proceed to plan a more clandestine, private meeting:

With a sort of military precision that astonished him, she outlined the route that he was to follow. A half-hour railway journey; turn left outside the station; two kilometres along the road; a gate with the top bar missing; a path across a field; a grass-grown lane; a track between bushes; a dead tree with moss on it. It was as though she had a map inside her head.

'Can you remember all that?' she murmured finally. 'Yes'. (Orwell, 1949, p. 145)

When they eventually meet at the described location, they embrace before even exchanging names, enthusiastic but anxious, ever aware that the same trees that provide them cover could also conceal hidden microphones.

Ephemeral instructions to a secret meeting place. Outdoor liaisons. Anonymity. While Winson and Julia are heterosexual, they engage in behaviour that can certainly be read as cruising, giving it a uniquely queer flavour. And that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is synonymous with surveillance yet overlooked for its parallels to queer experience speaks to the monolithic and heteronormative approach to the field of surveillance studies. Similarly, the data from this present study complicate the concept of tidy approaches to surveillance and open up new avenues of research while centring queerness.

## 5.2 Implications for Surveillance Studies

As outlined in the previous chapter, the data presented here suggest both the normalization and ubiquity of surveillance. By embracing a Foucauldian discourse analysis that looks beyond the content of messages to reveal hidden power infrastructure, I uncover several key elements about cruising and surveillance. I conclude that surveillance while cruising is normalized, anyone not cruising is considered a potential entity of surveillance, great care is taken to not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers, and environmental factors contribute greatly to the construction and circumvention of surveillance infrastructure. Taken together, these findings relate directly to two of the theoretical concepts underpinning this research: David Lyon's culture of surveillance (2018) and Dencik and Cable's surveillance realism (2017).

As noted in section 2.2.1, a culture of surveillance is one in which everyone participates in surveillant activities. No longer solely the domain of governments and militaries, the idea suggests we all operate within a social surveillance paradigm where

“people are watching others and are aware of being watched” (Lyon, 2018, p. 131). As part of this expansive culture of surveillance, surveillance realism describes how individuals have grown increasingly resigned to the presence of surveillance in their lives. This does not denote an acceptance of these practices but rather the “simultaneous unease among citizens with data collection alongside the active normalization of surveillance” (Dencik and Cable, 2017, p. 763). Through interviews with UK citizens and semi-structured interviews with political activists, Dencik and Cable postulate that this resignation is linked to an inability to imagine alternative ways of “organizing society that are more in line with the concerns for privacy and civic rights that are still prominent in how people feel” (Dencik & Cable, 2017, p. 778).

The data in my study complicate the position of surveillance realism. If surveillance were wholly accepted and cruisers lacked the imagination to dream of alternative arrangements without surveillance, they would likely not share surveillance information. What we see in this study, however, is a community that has accepted the presence of surveillance *but not the inevitable impact of it*. *Squirt* users regularly comment on matters of surveillance and arguably see it as an inalienable element of cruising, but, crucially, they also actively discuss methods of circumventing it. In fact, sharing surveillance information is itself a method of circumvention. If surveillance realism were deeply rooted in these communities, we might expect to see resignation in place of circumvention. As Dencik and Cable note, for their everyday interview participants, “[a]wareness or concerns...do not necessarily translate into active resistance or changes in online uses, even among those who have very critical attitudes toward these developments” (2017, p. 772). Users might exhibit chilling behaviour

“through varying degrees of caution and self-regulation” but they do so “within recognized limited parameters” (Dencik and Cable, 2017, p. 773). Likewise, in Dencik and Cable’s research, activists reported *not* adopting technological solutions to surveillance such as encrypted technologies, because “circumventing surveillance through technological means is seen to be at odds with inclusivity and transparency” (2017, p. 776).

While cruisers—and queer communities at large—experience increased levels of surveillance, Dencik and Cable make no reference to the factors that might make their interview subjects higher-risk. For example, in organizing focus groups, they emphasize “ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity” (2017, p. 767) but do not note sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. Taken together, it seems that *Squirt* users fall outside the paradigm of surveillance realism. There are several possible explanations for this.

First, Dencik and Cable’s work specifically investigates surveillance in relation to data collection, particularly as overseen by state agencies in the wake of the Edward Snowden disclosures. Given that most surveillance data from *Squirt* concerns the impact of human surveillance without technological intervention, it is possible this is a meaningful distinction that complicates surveillance realism. Cruisers might view surveillance by digital tools as inevitable, but human surveillance as fallible and avoidable.

Second, we could be observing a methodological divergence. Dencik and Cable conducted focus groups and semi-structured interviews, whereas I collected naturalistic data generated through user comments. It is entirely possible that such varied

approaches render significantly different responses. A strikingly similar comparison of methodologies can be found in Laud Humphreys' (1970) investigation into cruising. As previously noted, Humphreys went undercover as a "watch queen," acting as a lookout for men who were cruising, and collected observational data about their practices. He then recorded license plate numbers of those men and, using public records, visited many a year later, posing as a survey interviewer under the guise of collecting information about mental health. This combination of methodologies revealed divergent results: the very same men who Humphreys observed while cruising were also likely to consider themselves Christian, conservative and, in some cases, advocates for laws that would crack down on cruising. To account for this, Humphreys postulated the idea of the "breastplate of righteousness" (Nardi, 1995) to illustrate the disconnect between outward moral indignation and queer behaviour. Similarly, the methods deployed by myself and Dencik and Cable might be revealing similar tensions.

Finally, it could be the case that surveillance realism simply does not account for cruisers. As people who engage in prohibited sexual encounters, cruisers might occupy a liminal space between ordinary citizens and high-risk individuals. In this space, they know surveillance exists, they act to circumvent it, but they fall short of curbing the behaviours that invite surveillance.

### 5.3 A Complicated Queerness

Theories do not only open up possibilities for understanding the world, but also of complicating it. And queer approaches further complicate these existing complications.

By investigating surveillance within a queer framework alongside the act of cruising, we are oriented to think about surveillance differently.

In many ways, the liminal space I suggest cruisers occupy reflects and reifies the position of queerness in the world at large. As noted above, Caroline Dadas (2016) suggests “queer” can be employed in the quest for the complication of knowledge. The data presented in my study do not invalidate surveillance realism—or surveillance studies as a field—but rather invite researchers to complicate their approaches. Such complication presents an interesting and productive line of future inquiry. For example, to test the hypotheses for why my study differs from Dencik and Cable’s, it would be necessary to conduct interviews with cruisers and users of *Squirt*. Doing so would eliminate the methodological divergence noted above as well as uncover more detailed information on a number of topics, including the diminished role of technologically-enabled surveillance, the emotional impact of cruising, and the lack of political rhetoric, all of which would further cast light on the intersecting issues of sex and surveillance.

## 5.4 Eyeing the Future

Visibility is a double-edged sword, a truth not lost on queer communities who constantly negotiate between perceptibility and protection, roaming as proverbial ghosts in surveillance machines. Cultural imaginaries about visibility, surveillance, cruising, sex, and queer behaviours do not emerge from nowhere; instead, they are born out of dominant discourses, largely separated from impacted communities. To challenge the assumptions built into these imaginaries, it will be necessary for future work to centre the voices of cruisers, as I have attempted to do here.

In addition to the questions raised above that pertain to surveillance studies, there are multiple areas for future investigation. For instance, what are the specifics of how trans communities cruise? As cruising becomes adopted by broader kink communities, how do they make it their own? How might campaigns for expanded access to public washrooms incorporate cruising? What are the particular ethical considerations for this kind of research? Insight into these questions move us ever closer to understanding the unknowables of queerness.

Looking at growing authoritarian governments and anti-queer sentiment around the world, it is a dangerous time for queer communities. Coupled with the expanding availability and capabilities of surveillance technologies, surveillance researchers have an opportunity to create knowledge that has tangible impact. But if we do not expand the scope of our research and centre the margins, we risk alienating communities, perpetuating partial theories, and ultimately settling for uncomplicated accounts of the world. It is my hope that this thesis contributes, however modestly, to that endeavour.

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