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Résumé de l'article

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Article

Capital City Cruising: Surveillance, Pleasure, and Discursive Practices of Queer Communities in Ottawa

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Abstract

This study 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 individuals share information about the safety and surveillance of cruising locations in the Greater Ottawa Area. This work concludes that surveillance and cruising is normalized, and that both police and ordinary citizens present safety risks. Because of this, great care is taken to act discreetly and not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers. Finally, environmental factors contribute greatly to both the construction and circumvention of surveillance infrastructure. The data additionally complicate surveillance realism (Dencik and Cable 2017), since cruisers accept the presence of surveillance but not the inevitable impact of it.

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. 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 (2019: 1) notes, "We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality." 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, cruising gestures to a deeper understanding of ongoing surveillance practices as they collide with sexual, social, and spatial relations.

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This article analyzes written exchanges on the queer hook-up website Squirt and observes how users discern, discuss, and defy the safety and surveillance of cruising locations in the Greater Ottawa Area. I review 4,366 comments and location profiles from Squirt, of which 163 relate to safety or surveillance. Combining elements from Foucauldian discourse analysis and the walkthrough method (Light, Burgess, and 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 pleasures of being seen and unseen, and the tensions between heteronormative (Warner 1991) structures and queer subversion.

An integral element of any conversation about queer communities and surveillance is the ways in which they circumvent it. This is not novel for queer folks, as they have "long found ways of contesting surveillance to extend their life chances" (Kafer and Grinberg 2019: 598). However, an investigation of the current literature on surveillance reveals a gap: queer communities themselves are rarely centred in discussions of their own surveillance. I examine 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 the safety precautions taken? The data and analysis in this article address these questions and conclude that surveillance and cruising is normalized, and that both police and ordinary citizens present safety risks. Because of this, great care is taken to act discreetly and not infringe on the safety of non-cruisers. Finally, environmental factors contribute greatly to both the construction and circumvention of surveillance infrastructure. The data additionally complicate surveillance realism (Dencik and Cable 2017), since cruisers accept the presence of surveillance but not the inevitable impact of it.

Subaltern and Subversive

For the purposes of this research, cruising will be viewed as "the deliberate, active, and usually mobile search for sexual partner(s) in a social setting" (Dynes 2016: 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 (2019: para 1) 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."

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 (see the Implications for Surveillance Studies section below), it stands as one of the first scholarly attempts to understand men who have sex with men (MSM) who cruise, and it continues to be widely cited for its focus on the subject. Peter Nardi (1995: 2) 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."

While Humphreys (1970) sought to understand the sociological nature of cruising, many other disciplines have also explored cruising, including public health research and outreach (Binson et al. 2001; Gama et al. 2017), psychology (Frankis and Flowers 2009), criminology (Valverde and Cirak 2003; Woods 2014), and history (Bleakley 2021; Petri 2019).

Regardless of discipline, cruising is often understood as 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 (2019: 8) 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.” While writing a critique of the hook-up app Grindr’s inability to reinvigorate cruising culture in North America, Jody Ahlm (2017: 377) notes that in a climate that is “increasingly hostile to promiscuity and the open pursuit of (homo)sexual pleasure,” any casual sex is a welcomed act of subversion, cruising included.

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. While the damage that surveillance can have on queer populations has been examined in great detail (Beauchamp 2019; Article 19 2018; Conrad 2009), surveillance does not have to be viewed as negative. 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 and Mäkinen 2016; Albrechtslund 2008; Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005), empowering (Koskela 2004), or even “sexy” (Bell 2009). Hille Koskela (2004: 199) directly challenges the notion of surveillance being an inherently adverse act: “To be (more) seen is not always to be less powerful.”

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 (2019: 597–598) note in their introduction to a special issue on queer surveillance, 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.” 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/or invisible. This can be carried through to the erotics of surveillance and the prohibition of cruising as a public act of queer pleasure: “In some cases, to be seen is exactly what makes criminal acts thrilling for the criminal (Koskela 2004: 211). In other words, deeply embedded within queer surveillance as an analytic is the possibility for pleasure in the push and pull of (il)legality and (il)legibility.

Additionally—and crucially to understanding the true extent of queer surveillance and cruising—queer bodies often jam systems of surveillance. Kafer and Grinberg (2019: 593) 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.” 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 and 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.

“Non-Stop Cruising”

This research is centred around data collected from Squirt, a Canadian-based social networking site primarily for men who have sex with men (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 publisher Pink Triangle Press and launched in 1999, 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 2022: para 3).

Figure 1: *Squirt homepage (captured May 8, 2022).*

As an object of study, Squirt 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 and Tong 2014; Licoppe, Rivière, and Morel 2016; Blackwell, Birnholtz, and 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, and Crawford 2016). This is curious, as Squirt has existed for over twenty years and therefore represents a rich repository of sexual data that can be viewed alongside the wider adoption of digital technologies. Squirt has, however, 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 (Ha and Hayes 2018). In this case, we see Squirt transforming not only from a location of pleasure to one of harm but also as a site of safety to one of surveillance, as police used it to investigate leads (Ha and Hayes 2018).

Data Collection

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.

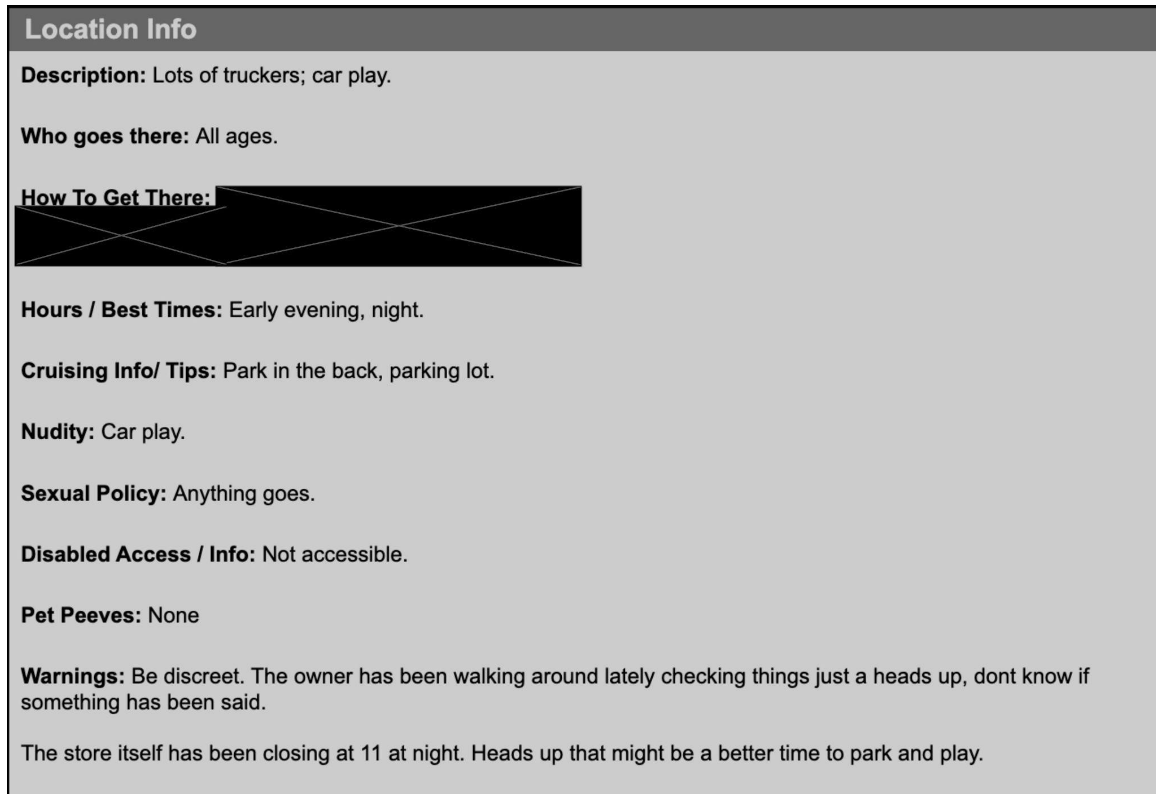

Figure 2: *Screenshot of a Squirt cruising profile's location information (captured May 21, 2022)*

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 were collected, I created a coding system informed by the type of surveillance issues described. Such coding categories included reference to police or security guards, environmental factors, CCTV cameras, undercover agents, and the safety features of specific locations.

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.

Peering Under the Stall

This research involved elements from two analytical approaches: the walkthrough method and a Foucauldian discourse analysis. The walkthrough method (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018: 882) provided a structured way to explore Squirt's functionality, purpose, and user engagement as it advocates "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." 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 and Duguay 2018: 889), its governance documents, and the design of its menus, layout, and even colours. 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.

Alongside the walkthrough method, I conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which aims to understand data as exchanges of social dynamics. As Sharp and Richardson (2001) note, discourse hones in on the social, cultural, and historical construction of knowledge. Such constructionist methods "put considerable emphasis on knowledge, and hence, on the communications through which knowledge is exchanged" (Sharp and Richardson 2001: 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 and Richardson 2001: 195).

Observations

Invoking best practices of Foucauldian discourse analysis, 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 top five coding categories I developed and observed.

Non-police entities comprise the most common category, representing 33.74% of all observed surveillance-related data, followed by observations of police entities and environmental concerns. I examine each of these three categories below.

Table 1: *Coding system of top five categories, in descending order of entries assigned to each category.*

Code	Description	Number of Entries	Sample Comment from Data
NP	Families, janitors, heterosexual passersby, or other non-police entities	55	"Watch out for non-cruisers. janitorial crew cleans every 4-6 hours."[1]
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"

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 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"—

[1] All of the comments presented are pulled directly from Squirt without any copyediting. Many of them contain spelling or grammatical mistakes. For readability's sake, I've opted to not indicate these issues with "[sic]."

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."

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, "Be subtle - lots of straight guys around" and "Be aware of straight people and those who are not there to cruise," underscore the danger conjured by non-cruising (and presumed heteronormative) individuals.

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 (2006) in his investigation into the then-emerging use of the internet to connect cruisers. Ashford (2006: 281; emphasis added) 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." [2] Research on the warnings users share with each other highlight 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: 282).

This sharing of information is additionally supported by Kevin Walby (2009: 386) 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… though they sometimes check online chat sites to monitor communications about where people are likely to congregate." 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 and 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.

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.

Environmental Considerations

As noted above, 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

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[2] "Cottaging" is a term primarily used in the United Kingdom, referring to cruising in public bathrooms (which are said to resemble small cottages).

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.

Table 2: *Distribution of Cruising Location Type*

Location Type	Number of Entries	% of Total Entries	Number of Comments	Number of Surveillance Comments	Location Type % of Total Comments	Surveillance % of Total Comments
Bathhouse/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%
Total	**101**		**4265**	**163**	**100%**	
Location information			101			
Total	**101**	**100%**	**4366**	**163**	**100%**	**3.73%**

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, 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: 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 (1999: 3) notes, "Media are ensembles of natural element and human craft." 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 (2020: para 13) 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."

Given that nature is not easily—if ever—dominated, other comments noted how changing environments imposed limitations on sexual activities: "It is almost too cold to there 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 (1995: 200) notes, "Parks played a critical role in the social-sexual space for queers," a fact supported in my research data as well, with parks representing the most common cruising location (39.6% of all entries).

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, governance, and surveillance. Kyla Bender-Baird (2016: 985) reminds us that "the very architecture of public bathrooms is panoptic." 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 *drienne50ing* wider biological processes" (Marks 2008: 96, emphasis in original). Public washrooms highlight a tension of scale and scope, where the observation of an individual (surveillance) intersects with the infrastructure of societal regulation (biopolitics). That a location can be both a geography of pleasure and a site of governance underscores fertile ground for deeper exploration.

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: "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." The distinction between the legitimacy of different types of bodily functions underscores how cruisers as a *population* must negotiate pleasure and the use of public geographies.

In some instances, the 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." 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[3] between stalls, police would use hidden openings in walls to observe these acts. This positionality influenced what was made visible. As Maynard (1994: 242) 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."

The relationship between queer communities and space cannot be understated. In fact, some of the most formative events in modern 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.

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[3] 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.

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 all 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 above, 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 (2009: 375) 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.'" Together, these comments suggest a transfer of power, where non-police entities are deputized to conduct surveillance on behalf of law enforcement agents and the mere perception of queerness is sufficient cause for suspicion.

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 (2016) observations by revealing that many cruisers caution against, and actively avoid, interaction with children, families, and, generally, anyone not cruising. This can be interpreted not only as an act of self-preservation by the cruisers, given the inherent danger of cruising, but also as an indication 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. This relative absence is difficult to understand, as racialized individuals experience increased forms and frequency of surveillance (Lowe, Stroud, and Nguyen 2017; 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 (2015: 10) notes, "Surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness." 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. If this is the case, the assumption of whiteness and the prevalence of homonational frameworks (Puar 2007) surrounding queer pleasure could then be seen as robbing all cruisers of increased protection. In the context of this narrow study, however, 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.[4] 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 2023). 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 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: 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 (as will be discussed below), 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: 5; emphasis in the original) 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." This tension between surveillance realism and imagined affordances is productive and creates space to further investigate what these data suggest broadly for surveillance theory.

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[4] The entrapment of queer men by police has a long lineage, with Maynard (1994) noting Paris police were entrapping men as early as the 1700s.

Implications for Surveillance Studies

The data observed from this study complicate Dencik and Cable's (2017) theory of surveillance realism. 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: 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: 763). Through interviews with UK citizens and semi-structured interviews with political activists, Dencik and Cable (2017: 778) 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."

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*. Users regularly comment on matters of surveillance and arguably see it as an inalienable element of cruising—perhaps even a pleasurable one—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 (2017: 772) note in their study, for the everyday (i.e., non-activist) participants they interviewed, "[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." 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: 773). Likewise, in Dencik and Cable's (2017: 776) research, activists reported *not* adopting technological solutions to surveillance such as encrypted messaging systems, because "circumventing surveillance through technological means is seen to be at odds with inclusivity and transparency." The data presented here paint a more complex picture as cruisers acknowledge surveillance and act to avoid it.

While cruisers—and queer communities at large—experience increased levels of surveillance, Dencik and Cable (2017) 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" (Dencik and Cable 2017: 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 (2017) 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 concern 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 (2017) 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) contentious and criticized investigation into cruising. Humphreys (1970) 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 (1970) 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 (1970) 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 (2017) 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 everyday 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. It is also possible that, for some, their aim is not the dissolution of all surveillance ecologies but rather the fulcrum between cruising and being caught: circumventing surveillance might actually add to their pleasure. This is not meant as a critique of surveillance realism, but rather a suggestion that queerness, cruising, and pleasure constitute lenses through which existing theories of surveillance can be scrutinized and—potentially—strengthened.

Conclusion

The data presented here suggest both the normalization and ubiquity of surveillance while cruising. By employing the walkthrough method and Foucauldian discourse analysis, I look beyond the content of messages to reveal hidden power infrastructure and 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. These data additionally complicate surveillance realism (Dencik and Cable 2017) and suggest ways in which the theoretical approach can be examined in future research.

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