# Are police using dating apps to target gay men looking for sex?



In a recent social media alert, Jared Trujillo, a CUNY professor and civil rights attorney, raised alarms about a potential sting operation by Amtrak police at New York’s Penn Station targeting queer men via the dating app Sniffies. Trujillo alleges officers have used the app to arrest men on charges of public lewdness even when the interactions appear wholly innocuous. While his account is so far unverified by other sources, it echoes distressing patterns documented in previous years and raises significant concern about ongoing discrimination and policing tactics aimed at LGBTQ+ communities.

The allegations bear unsettling similarities to a scandal that erupted in 2017 involving the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD). At that time, officers were accused of systematically targeting men they perceived as gay or gender non-conforming in the bus terminal restrooms, arresting them on baseless charges related to public lewdness and exposure. One plaintiff from that case, Miguel Meija, described being arrested after feeling watched in a restroom, a fate that befell numerous men leading to a class-action lawsuit. The officers involved, sometimes referred to as employing homophobic tactics such as those by a figure known as The Gay Whisperer, reportedly sought to inflate arrest statistics by singling out queer individuals without cause.

This practice, rooted in a long and painful history of police hostility toward LGBTQ+ people, continued to reverberate well beyond New York. For instance, a 2022 case in Orlando also spotlighted deputies using Sniffies as bait in sting operations targeting gay men, particularly those with public visibility. Authorities defended such tactics as necessary to curb illicit public sexual activity, but the approach remained deeply controversial.

Critically, these enforcement strategies disproportionately affect Black and Brown queer men, compounding the risks for undocumented individuals who face harsher consequences, including jeopardised immigration status, from lewdness charges. A legal aid representative involved in the 2017 New York case testified to endemic police misconduct that led to wrongful arrests of racial minorities simply for using public restrooms during their commutes. The demographic when targeted also included anyone perceived as gender non-conforming, amplifying the scope of discrimination.

Despite broad recognition of the historic harms caused by such policing—including public apologies issued by New York’s police commissioner in 2019 for pre-Stonewall era raids on gay bars—there is an alarming resurgence of similar tactics. Trujillo described the practice as "really disgusting," suggesting a regressive return amid heightened anti-LGBTQ+ conservatism in the post-Trump era. Legally, undercover operations like these remain permissible; entrapment laws generally require law enforcement to induce a criminal act, and mere undercover surveillance or engagement is often defended as legitimate policing. Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.queerty.com/are-nyc-cops-using-sniffies-for-sting-operations-heres-what-we-know-20250918/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.queerty.com/are-nyc-cops-using-sniffies-for-sting-operations-heres-what-we-know-20250918/> - An article discussing allegations that Amtrak police in New York's Penn Station are using the Sniffies app to target and arrest gay men on charges of lewdness, even for innocuous responses. The piece references a similar 2017 case where Port Authority police officers were charged with targeting and wrongly arresting men perceived as gay or gender non-conforming in bus terminal restrooms. The article also highlights a recent case in Orlando where deputies used Sniffies in a similar sting operation targeting gay men. It underscores the disproportionate impact such operations have on Black and Brown queer men and the legal risks for undocumented individuals. The piece concludes with advice for individuals to be cautious and assert their rights if approached or arrested by law enforcement.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/28/new-york-port-authority-police-gay-men-discrimination> - A report on a class-action lawsuit accusing the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD) of targeting gay men using restrooms at New York City's main bus terminal. The lawsuit alleges that officers falsely arrested men perceived as gay on charges like public lewdness and exposure, aiming to boost arrest statistics. The article details the accusations and the legal actions taken against the PAPD.
4. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/port-authority-bus-terminal-bathroom-arrests-target-gays-lawsuit/438698/> - Coverage of a class-action lawsuit filed against the Port Authority Police Department, alleging that officers discriminated against gay men by falsely arresting them in bus terminal restrooms on charges of public lewdness and exposure. The article outlines the claims made in the lawsuit and the response from the Port Authority.
5. <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20170328/hells-kitchen-clinton/port-authority-police-restroom-public-lewdness-lawsuit> - An article detailing a lawsuit accusing Port Authority Police officers of targeting men they perceive as gay or gender non-conforming in bus terminal restrooms, leading to false arrests on public lewdness charges. The piece provides specific examples from the lawsuit and discusses the broader implications of the alleged practices.
6. <https://www.advocate.com/news/2022/6/02/new-york-port-authority-stop-undercover-public-bathroom-stings> - An article reporting on the Port Authority's decision to cease undercover public bathroom stings targeting gay men, following a lawsuit that alleged discriminatory practices by the police department. The piece discusses the legal settlement and the reforms implemented as a result.