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# Calling All Mares: Community, Identity, and Group Sex at the San Francisco Horse Market

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, masculinity and sexuality are explored from the perspective of gay men who participate in group-based sexual practices. The work contributes to the limited wider academic inquiry into collective sex environments. This is accomplished through a content analysis of 15 publicly accessible testimonials of men who have attended a group sex event called a “Horse Market” in the USA. The key findings reveal that participants experience a sense of enhanced community identity and unity through engaging in group sex that allows them the freedom to explore sexual boundaries in a way that is permitted, paradoxically, by occurring within an environment that is simultaneously highly regulated and controlled.

## Introduction

There is little doubt that across Western liberal democracies, homosexuality has contemporarily, gained a greater level of social acceptance than perhaps at any other point in history (Anderson, 2009). These shifts have occurred over a relatively short period of time, and have been driven legislatively, as much as the extension of legal rights to the LGBT+ community has in turn, reflected shifting social attitudes, too (L. Dixon, 2021). Such changes have been equally reflected in research across the social sciences and particularly, in literature focusing on the links between society and sport (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Bush et al., 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2014). This has been a key body of literature, not least because of the deeply embedded historical links that sport has with traditional ideas of masculinity. Sport has subsequently, therefore, offered an important lens through which to explore social attitudes about ideas of masculinity and femininity, which are often (more or less) explicitly related to ideas about normative and non-normative sexualities (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Bush et al., 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2014).

In line with the significant increase of acceptance across society then, this body of literature has documented the way that attitudes within especially male dominated sports toward alternative sexualities, have clearly moved toward acceptance (Anderson, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Homophobia itself is often now rejected by sportsmen at all levels, from amateur to professional, because it is seen to be at odds with normative social ideals, almost as much as alternative sexualities were rejected in that realm previously (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Bush et al., 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2014).

This progressive stance toward alternative sexualities has become newly normalized, it has been suggested, because of

broader societal changes in intimate interactions between men and in particular, amongst young men who identify as heterosexual, but who are now not only more likely than previously to spend time with gay peers, but to also be more open physically and emotionally with one another too (Anderson, 2014; McCormack & Anderson, 2014). Although there are of course locations across both space and time where such close interactions between men have co-existed alongside socio-culturally normative and fully institutionalized homophobia, such changes documented across the U.K. and U.S. are distinct in this respect, because they have evolved against a backdrop of what has been termed “homohysteria” (Anderson, 2009; see Hamdi et al., 2016). “Homohysteria” is a concept used to describe the phenomenon of a “fear of being socially perceived as gay,” operating on either the level of society, or an individual (Anderson, 2009). A society can be deemed to be *homohysterical* according to three defining characteristics (Anderson, 2009):

- (1) There is a majority feeling across society of hostility toward gay men;
- (2) There is nonetheless knowledge that gay men exist in meaningful numbers in that society;
- (3) That there is a culturally determined conceptual conflation between sex and gender.

Where these three characteristics exist, “maleness” is determined according to hegemonic conceptualizations of masculinity that are constructed in direct opposition to stereotypical beliefs around homosexuality, which for this formulation to function, is consequently imbued with feminine attributes in a way that leads to it being socially downgraded (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As homosexuality has become more culturally normalized, it is precisely the decline in acceptance of this counter-positional conceptualization that has been

key to it, so that as homophobia is rejected, homophobia decreases too (Anderson, 2009; L. Dixon, 2021; Weeks (2010) [1986]). Consequently, the way that masculinities are culturally constructed becomes in theory, less stratified and therefore able to include a broader range of performances that can be read as “masculine,” whilst being given equivalent social value (Anderson, 2009). In practice, it has been suggested that where a tendency toward homophobia has declined, intimate interactions between men are no longer seen as being indicative of homosexuality, precisely because the link between gendered practice and sexual identities is no longer so closely aligned (Anderson, 2009).

Although such research has discussed the effects of such changes in relation to broader hetero-normative understandings, perceptions and attitudes toward male homosexuality, less has been written about the impacts of such societal changes from the perspective of homosexual men themselves. Where such approaches have been taken, there has been often been a focus on the inclusions/exclusions encountered within (mostly urban) gay places, with those gay spaces themselves conceived of, as a result, in a singular and homogenous way (Ghaziani, 2019). In fact, it has begun to be recognized that many gay men are rejecting those spaces and seeking new forms of community interaction (see Gaston & Dixon, 2020; Ghaziani, 2019; Wignall, 2017), and, therefore, new ways of “doing” male homosexuality instead, which the Horse Market offers another key contemporary example of.

## A Horse Market – The Event

The Horse Market San Francisco (Horse Market SF), which is the focus of this research, is modeled from the German base *Fickstutenmarkt Party* that translates loosely to the “Fucking Mares Market.” Events following a similar model to *Fickstutenmarkt* can be found in the United Kingdom (Horse Fairs), Canada (Rough Stock Roundup) and in the United States of America (Horse Markets). Within the community sex scene, similar events are referred simply as “Stallion and Mare” parties. Regardless of the name or geographical location of the events, they follow a similar format that revolves around a controlled space allowing for semi-anonymous sex based around faux-dominance.

Prior to the start of the event, participants select to be either a “mare” (one that is penetrated/passive/bottom) or a “stallion” (one that penetrates/active/top). Once the event has started, changing roles is strictly forbidden, as is “Mare on Mare” and “Stallion on Stallion” sexual activity. Stallions, in other words, are only allowed to pursue sexual activity with mares. As per the rules stated by the Horse Market SF, mares arrive at the event location known as the “marketplace” an hour before the arrival of the Stallions. When the Mares arrive, they are asked to select either a white or red cotton hood. The hood acts as a blindfold, preventing the Mare from seeing any of the Stallions. The color of the hood also plays as an important signifier; the “White Hood” indicates that the Mare practices safe sex only (i.e. sex with condoms), whereas the “Red hood” means that the Mare favors (or is willing to participate in) “Bareback” sex (i.e. sexual activity without a condom).

To help participating Mares, volunteers known as “Stable Hands” assist in the hooding process prior to the event, and in the general welfare of the Mares during it, by providing water, condoms, lube and in facilitating toilet and rest breaks during the course of the event. Crucially, Stable Hands also help in the policing of condom use, though the White Hooded Mares are still given primary responsibility to check that any stallions they are “mounted” by, are wearing a condom. Nonetheless, the rules clearly state, without equivocation, that:

In the case of infringement of the safer sex rules (or should any grievous bodily harm of any sort be done), I will press criminal charges and insist upon the further pursuit of the matter in a court of law. In clear and plain English: when it comes down to safety, I mean serious business. No means no and be respectful.

After the hoods have been distributed, the Mares remove all of their clothing, minus footwear. Mares then have their wrists bounded together and hoods are secured in place, obstructing the Mares’ vision. Mares are then led into the event space by the Stable Hands, who place the Mares in various positions throughout the event space. Once the “Market” has been set, the Stallions are then allowed to enter and to “inspect” the Mares that are on offer. Once a Stallion has selected a Mare, they can position the Mare where and how they see fit. When the Stallion has finished mounting the Mare they are available to be mounted by the other stallions. While the rules state that Mares have consented to be “used” as seen fit by the Stallions, a Mare does reserve the right to refuse a Stallion if his penis is too large or has a piercing(s). Mares also have the right to refuse if they are in need of a break.

The event spaces are equipped with various types of sex specific furniture such as sex swings, benches as well as more commercial items but as the venue changes so does the staging of the actual market space. The only permitted time a Mare may remove the hood is when in a rest area or in a closed bathroom. Any breach of this rule, be it intentionally or unintentionally, results in the immediate disqualification and expulsion of the mare from the event, and potentially from future events too. Only once the event has ended and the last stallion has left the market are Mares allowed to remove their hood. As the events do not occur in a fixed location, the length of the event varies. A typical Horse Market SF event lasts between three to four hours start to finish, offering a contemporary space for gay men to participate in consensual communal sex. Nonetheless, this kind of event – more commonly referred to as an “orgy” – has taken place in different forms, across different times and places.

## The History of the Orgy

The actual meaning of the word “orgy” originates from the Ancient Greek term, *orgia*, used to describe a form of ecstatic worship that was most often associated with mystery cults. The popular use of the term has long been used as an indicator of social deterioration and (most often sexually) rebellious/ socially transgressive behavior. Historically, beliefs around orgies/group sex have been used to fuel moral panics. The groups who are at the sharp end of these accusations, whether truthful or not, have typically been those who flout

conventional dogmatic beliefs and/or traditional institutions of power (Frank, 2013, p. 5). In the past, accusations of orgiastic behavior have been used to demonize and create fear, as well as to justify violence and subjugation. Klaitz (1987) provided a provocative example of linking group sex to that of witches and devil worship,

Naked witches danced lasciviously, back-to-back, until the dancing turned into a sexual orgy that continued to the dawn. Incest and homosexual intercourse were encouraged. Often the devil would climax the proceedings by copulating, painfully, it was generally reported, with every man, woman and child in attendance, as mothers yield to Satan before their daughters' eyes and initiated them into sexual services to the diabolical master.

From the outside, the orgy is used to suggest social degradation and insurrection; however, from the inside the orgy can simultaneously be presented as an act of liberation. Partridge (2017), for example, described the orgy as “an organised blowing off of steam; the expulsion of hysteria accumulated by abstinence and restraint” which allows a release from everyday stresses “re-arousing by contrast an appetite for the humdrum temperance which are an inevitable part of everyday life” (p. vii). The orgy, in other words, acts like a pressure valve, relieving tensions caused by the tediousness of contemporary life and ultimately allowing participants to function more healthily within it. However, sex used in this fashion is not widely accepted as appropriate behavior, especially in societies rooted in traditional Judeo-Christian values.

Notwithstanding possible stigma and potential legal punishment, consensual group sex happens all over the world and amidst all ages, ethnicities, sexualities and socio-economic classes (Frank, 2013). Yet, as claimed by Frank (2013), “academics have barely touched the subject of consensual group sex since the 1970’s” (p. 9). When the word “orgy” is included in an academic inquiry, it is used in a figurative sense or in reference to the “acting out” of an orgy in a performance such as a film, play or literary writings. Seldom is the academic inquiry actually about a sexual encounter involving multiple people. Because of the lack of academic investigation into the lived experiences of collective sex events, there is a deficiency of consistent information allowing for a generalized understanding of the participation in communal sex environments. It was a key goal of this article, therefore, to respond to the lack of academic investigation into the phenomena of communal group sex.

This is not to say that the academic inquiry into collective sex is completely absent. There has been an increase amongst social scientists looking into recreational sex (Bernstein, 2010; Giddens, 1992; Haywood, 2023; Hone et al., 2023; Meunier & Sauermilch, 2023). Giddens (1992) and Stacey (2011) for example, highlighted that sexual minorities, and gay men in particular, have been pioneers in the constructing and deconstructing of sexual interaction due to historical exclusion from and rejection of traditional models of intimacy, including events like the Horse Market.

The possible negative impact of recreational sex on traditional understandings of intimacy have been examined (Bauman, 2003) as well as the possible ethical concerns surrounding the organization and engagement in recreational sex (Laumann et al., 2000). However, research also suggests that

participating in collective sex has potential for challenging heteronormative forms of sex, intimacy, and relationships (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Dean, 2019; Delany, 2019). Surprisingly, little is known about how gay men who engage in collective sex reconcile their participation to their own desires for relationships (Coelho, 2011; Meunier & Sauermilch, 2023; Pawlicki & Larson, 2011). However, Orne (2020) has shown that participation can create a sense of “community” between participants. Along with the research on internal dynamics, work has examined how this “community” has been impacted as result of HIV/AIDs (Meunier, 2014, 2018; Mimiaga et al., 2011) and more recently impacted by Covid-19 (Haywood, 2023).

## Method

### Participants

This study was a qualitative thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017) based on written first person testimonies of men who have participated in a Horse Market Event. The testimonies, or as they are referred to by event organizers website “stories”, provide an insight into the lived experiences of those who have attended a Horse Market event. As the stories are housed on the event organizer’s website (horsemaretsf.com), authors are provided a safe environment to express their experiences in a pro-sex environment. The anonymous stories are unbridled first hand experiences that express raw feelings in a safe space, thus potentially allowing a more honest expression of experience (Ernulf & Innala, 1995; Langdrige & Butt, 2005). Fricker (2004) highlighted that testimony based data offers a foundation for knowledge to be discovered that is rooted in a real experience, which is the key aim of this research.

At the time of data collection, 15 stories were publicly accessible via the event organizers website horsemaretsf.com. The testimonials were posted between the dates of September 2021 and April 2022. All 15 stories were included in the study; no additional selection criteria was applied in either the inclusion or exclusion of testimonials for examination. It is unknown if the website owner censored any of the submissions as the testimonials were sent directly to horsemaretsf.com by the testimonial’s authors. On the “Stories” page of horsemaretsf.com the following disclaimer is provided:

Below are a collection of stories that have been sent in. I’ve decided to display them here for your enjoyment. Keep in mind, no play is guaranteed at Horse Market and your personal experience can and most likely will be different than the stories below.

### Procedure and Data Analysis

The objective of a qualitative content analysis is to convert large quantities of text into a succinct summary of significant outcomes (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). For this article, we followed an inductive coding process, a method in which raw textual data is reviewed in order to develop themes based from that data (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 1999).



To accomplish this process, a conventional thematic content analysis approach was employed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As the research was empirical in nature, we did not want to apply a set of predetermined themes; thus, the themes identified in the research are a product of the data set (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach allowed for inductive category development to occur (Mayring, 2004, 2021), thus creating the possibility of new perspectives to emerge from the data.

To help increase the rigor and decrease possible researcher bias, we utilized a blind theming strategy. Both authors read the complete set of 15 testimonials individually and produced their own set of comments in order to construct a system of themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) which included words, concepts and/or ideas that occur consistently across the data set.

From there, each author created their own categories or themes that gathered the previously conducted descriptive coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The categories presented in this article are a product of discussion and negotiations between the two coders after agreeing on a single list of themes which represented the dominate ideas being expressed in the testimonials. When the two sets of codes were merged together little disagreement was discovered. The only area of difference was coder A. isolated the bondage, discipline, sadomasochism (BDSM) statement as a stand-alone theme while coder B. included the BDSM element into the broader sexual adventurism theme.

After the consistently expressed ideas were identified, the research moved into an analytical coding phase looking to find meaning in the theme (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). From the coding the main themes of 1) community and 2) sexual adventurism emerged. Saturation was achieved as all 15 testimonials were examined and all of the descriptive coding was able to be included in the major overarching themes of the participants. Overall, the approach of TCA provided a pragmatic approach to exploratory research, which laid the foundations for primary insights, with the potential for future investigation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The data used was acquired through a website which is publically accessible and considered as “research that relies exclusively on secondary use of anonymous information.” After consultation with our institutional ethics committee, no formal ethical review was required.

## Results and Discussion

From the analysis of the individual testimonials, several key themes became obvious 1) a sense of community defined by sexuality and 2) how sexual adventurism allows participants to challenge their own limits but also challenge the mainstreaming of homosexuality. The horse market provides an unbridled (forgive the pun) gay space that celebrates gay sex through the engagement of consensual group sex with multiple partners. This section of the article will show how the Horse Market allows a neo-tribe to emerge, providing a sense of community within the existing gay community through a reclaiming of a wanted and self-imposed desire for social “deviancy.”

### Major Theme 1 – Horse Market = acceptance/belonging

The first dominant theme that emerged from the participant statements was the feeling of community and a sense of belonging. This may come as a surprise, as a key element of the event is the pseudo-anonymity that comes with the mares wearing hoods. However, as Jenkins (1996) stated, in a group sex situation the emphasis is focused on the shared experience of the tribe and not just on the pair that is having sex:

In a group sex environment, there's a different thing that is happens. When you are having sex 1 – on – 1, there's an immediate, close sort of thing. Just a “you and me” sort of personal intimate contact. But in a group sex situation, you magnify that. It's not about “you and me” it's about us. There is a community, a tribe, a bunch of people who share something.

This idea of community put forth above by Jenkins (1996) is a predominant sentiment within the Horse Market participant testimonials. A community is described that is diverse in size shape and color, but alike in the bonding power of sharing physical sexual experiences. This sense of community is expressed in Testimonial 4 by a man who highlighted the physical differences of the participants:

I'm 59 years old here, I was in a group of men almost all of whom are decades younger than me that included porn actors, men with model looks and amazingly firm asses. There were also big beefy hairy bear, a beautiful Trans male, newbies and experienced men, and we were all talking and laughing. It was a great experience.

For this participant, through his attendance at the Horse Market, he was able to feel a sense of community with a much more diverse range of men than he might otherwise have been able to. Similarly, Testimonial 1 continues to speak to the sense of “community” created within the collective sex space, emphasizing how it provided for possible bridging between previously distinct groups, stating:

So for me to be in this place, where guys who under regular circumstances might not approach me for one reason or another, to be available for them in the manner where they can live out their fantasy with me while I am also getting off on the anonymity of it, each time has been such a great experience.

Participant 8 continues to highlight the diversity of both the Mares and Stallions in the Horse Market stable, further indicating a level of inclusion that allows all regardless size, shape, and color to participate.

Although the lighting in the stable was dimmed, I could see that in the true HM spirit, the mares came in all colours. The mares also came in all shapes and sizes, from skinny guys to cubs and big bears. From dad bods to worked-out muscular jocks. From naturally smooth to furry. From big bellies to ripped abs. There was something for every stallion in this buffet of mares ready to serve them. Similarly, my fellow stallions came in all colours, shapes, and sizes.

Testimonial 4 spoke to how the Horse Market event differed from other sex events, highlighting the community aspect that was experienced:

The Horse Market is a really pleasant group sex event that didn't feel at all like an event full of strangers, and the staff could not have been more friendly and helpful. I continue to see comments in the HM's online community that refer to it feeling like a brotherhood and not just some event full of “randos and anons.” That is exactly what made this such a great event that I will attend again! . . . “The

first thing that struck me about this event was how nice all the Mares were to each other while we waited. Unlike almost every other mass sex event I've been to since coming out several years ago, there was no feeling of cliques or snobbery.

What all of these testimonials (and participant 4 in particular) speak to is the notion of Jenkins (1996), highlighting that the sexual activity of the Horse Market is "about us"; in other words, it is not just one mare and one stallion, but about a tribe of men who find union with other gay men through communal sex. This was similarly evident in the comments in Testimonial 5, who stated, "Lots of camaraderie and support going on"; Testimonial 11, "No attitude, a great spirit of community and awesome guys," and in Testimonial 2, "It brought home to me the communal nature of this gathering.

Going one step further, many of the participants expressed how participating in the event created a sense of "family." Testimonial 5 stated for example, that there was a "Feeling of a brotherhood." This idea of brotherhood was also shared in Testimonial 2: "I commented to some of my fellow mares about being bareback brothers together, ready to service all the stallions." He also expressed this brotherhood verbally to one of his fellow mares, "The mare to my right was mounted and he moaned; I grabbed his hand tight and simply said 'congrats brother.'" He happily thanked me and focused on servicing his stallion while I waited. ". Testimonial 6 also spoke to the bond created stating "I have found my people, my family" or in other words, participants had found their neo-tribe (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018) within the gay community.

While events like Horse Markets are primarily about sex, there are also acts of bridging and bonding actions taking place, both conscious and/or unconscious. The development of these types of bonds are not uncommon as suggested by Ryan and Jethá (2010, p. 93) who claimed that socio-erotic exchanges "strengthen the bonds among individuals . . . forming a crucial, durable web of affection, affiliation, and mutual obligation," thus furthering the neo-tribalism sentiment being suggested in this article. This notion is furthered by the work of Allyn (2016, p. 210) who argued that participation in an orgy "reflects human beings' social nature – it engages them in the communal activity for their collective gratification-and animalistic past".

## Major Theme 2 – Sexual Adventurism

There is little doubt that the sociality created through participation in the Horse Market also underpins the second theme of "Sexual Adventurism." A sense of "family" provides participants with the freedom to explore, just like other forms of group sex which allow "participants the opportunity to explore every aspect of human sexuality, to translate fantasy into reality" (Allyn, 2016, p. 210). As stated above, the current findings suggest that the Horse Market allows for the creation of a sub-group of men who have sex with men. The secret worship space of an orgy and in particular, the Horse Market, provides a liminal state for this performance to occur. The liminal experience starts once the ticket is purchased to attend. Between the point of purchase and attending the event, the participant is in a "no man's land." The excitement of attending the Horse Fair has only just begun but it is not until the participant engages in the Horse Market that the liminal

transformation occurs and acceptance into the neo-tribe emerges. Testimonial 3, for example, provides a description of the entire liminal journey from "no man's land" to tribe member:

From the moment I clicked the purchase button there was some mild apprehension. Could I do this? Would the reality of it be as hot as the fantasy? Was I biting off more than I could chew? . . . I felt I needed to do this, for my exploration.

Later, the participant goes on to speak of his liminal transformation:

Damn, it was life changing. In that moment, those few seconds that would usher in a long night of fucking, my bottom self was liberated and given the freedom to explore . . . finally broke free from the shackles of self-restriction.

Similarly, Testimonial 6 outlined a similar experience:

I hopped online and bought one immediately (a ticket), all on the basis of several stable experiences and fantasies I've played out in my head. Reality set in: I was going to get to fulfil this fantasy. I told my best friends that I was heading to San Francisco for the weekend. The city of sex and kink.

The bounding and bridging that occurs at the Horse Market is the product of sexual adventurism, a concept that largely refers to the desire to maximize the number of partners, the occurrence of sexual activity and the length of time toward a high number of partners, high sexual frequency and duration (Hurley & Prestage, 2009). This is particularly evident in the reflections of the participants highlighting both the frequency of sexual activity and amount of different sexual partners:

I can hear the thumping of electronic dance music bouncing off the walls, yet my ears are more so drowned out by the sounds of sex: over 200 guys moaning, grunting, and coming in unison like one amorphous sexual being. I've already been fucked for a couple of hours non-stop and have lost count at 24 Stallions who were inside me . . . Some guys aren't obvious about it when they come in you, so you don't know if you've taken three loads or ten. I remember at one point, I got up to go to take a break - thinking maybe one or two guys had come in me - and as I start walking away I feel a massive stream of cum leak out of my hole and drip down my leg - it was well more than one or two (Testimony 1)

Throughout the event, whenever a stallion added his seed, I did my best to get them to add a mark to the growing tally on my ass, and others didn't hear me or just walked off before I could ask anything. Whenever a stallion couldn't mark my ass, I raised my hand high and had a stable hand do it for me. (Testimonial 2)

After my buddy and I had taken probably 5-6 guys each one of the tops pulled me away to bring me elsewhere in the play space and I played solo the rest of the night. That night I got fucked 20 times. I say 20 because around 18 I was in a totally fucked blissful blur of a state and I am estimating 20. It could have been more. Honestly, that was way beyond anything I had done before. Way beyond. (Testimonial 3)

Five stallions mounted me in the first fifteen minutes. Raw cock after raw cock; I felt like I was on an assembly line of a factory. Then a sixth stallion mounted and penetrated me. He used my mare hole for a few minutes, then grabbed my shoulders pretty aggressively and pulled himself as far deep in me as possible. That's when I felt his huge cock start to pulsate inside of me, and I felt a huge rush of warm fluid in my raw insides. (Testimonial 6)

I lost count of the number of times I got mounted, but I'd have to guess it was somewhere between 25-30 times, and of course, I had no idea how many of those were repeat visitors. I am fairly certain, though, that the only stallion who came in me was mount number 15 of the night, which is also my lucky number! (Testimonial 9)

I was mounted at least 75 to 100 times and took more loads than I could keep count of. I took notice of some stallions that paid me two or three visits that night. I had enough cum bred deep into my gut that I continued to leak cum well into Saturday evening. (Testimonial 10)

This form of Sexual Adventurism, however, was not exclusive to those who were attending as Mares – many men who attended as Stallions provided testimonials that spoke in similar tones:

In just over two hours' time, I think I mounted 20 Mares (some a couple of times) and then lost count. Each and every one was ready to take what I would give. (Testimonial 7)

It was then about 10:30 PM. I had already sampled and mounted almost every mare in the stable and shot four loads. I was surprised and impressed by a handful of mares who took cock after cock after cock, almost nonstop since the beginning of the Horse Market. (Testimonial 8)

As all of the above quotes suggest, sexual adventurism is a significant push factor for attendees; the Horse Market provides a unique pull factor for those seeking a specific type of sexual adventure. The Horse Market is seen as a celebration, as providing an opportunity to explore carnal desire, which is very different from mainstream culture that shames and oppresses overt and unapologetic sexual want (Bergstrand & Sinski, 2010). Testimonial 9 supports this notion stating that the event provided an environment to be sexually adventurous, "It gave me a chance to test my limits and try something I may never get to experience again." Similarly, many of the participants spoke of sexual adventurism in joyous terms:

Willy Wonka came to mind: Come with me, and you'll be in a world of pure insemination! (Testimonial 2)

It was simple, gay sex the way it is meant to be. (Testimonial 2)

When the adventure was over one participant expressed his sadness at the event being over as, "Kind of like telling a child that it's time to leave Disneyland. (Testimonial 5). While all of the content reviewed for this article presents Horse Market experiences in a positive light, it is important to acknowledge that what is being suggested may not be a completely accurate reflection. While many spoke of their experience in glowing terms of diversity and acceptance of the participants, there needs to be a recognition of the possible exclusive nature and that the "tribe" may not be assessable to all. Gross (Halutz, 2011, p. 5) asked this very question,

This sex culture, while it rejects conservative ideas, also creates a new norm in relation to "what it means to be gay" ... The question is whether [this culture] creates an alternative to the social order, or whether these are again just men of privilege who can afford to travel the world and fuck other men like themselves, as consumers of plane tickets, entry to clubs, alcoholic drinks and maybe other men as well.

While the Horse Market has every indicator of being a transgressive space, at the core it is a for-profit event that is

a classically financial transactional in nature. There is also a level of false authenticity to this "rebellious" action. Frank, (2013, p. 55) suggested that "Doing something that feels rebellious- streaking through a crowded football stadium, dressing in drag for a BDSM-themed sex party, or having group sex – does not mean one is really escaping social control. Experiences of rebellion or freedom are just as much a part of the system as experiences of oppression." Those choosing to participate in the Horse Market are agreeing to a whole set of rules that are strictly enforced, especially in relation to the distinct roles, in which attendees who do not wish to participate in only one role during the event, are therefore excluded, going against the explicit desire for (and commentary of) inclusivity. For a lack of a better word, the event staff and fellow participants "police" the event space, as Testimonial 10 stated,

The stable hands were awesome and very attentive. Through the entire night, both stallions and stable hands would check and make sure I was doing okay, asked if I needed anything, and ask if I needed a break. While this was an incredibly intense and raw session, I felt 100% safe giving up all my power and sight to the Stable Hands and stallions.

While there might have been the impression of giving up power, participant 10 – like all who purchase and attend a Horse Market event – had fully consented to the known activities of the Horse Market. They have also reserved their right and ability to refuse a stallion and ultimately retain the power to leave the event at any time. At no time has "power" been relinquished by any participant Mare or Stallion. As suggested by Frank, (2013, p. 55) while there is a feeling of being rebellious and socially transgressive the participants are in fact engaged in a controlled and regulated space.

## Conclusions

The data upon which this research was based was, of course, limited in a number of important ways. Firstly, it is clear that there were no negative reviews of, or by, event attendees available on the SF Horse Market's online public forum. One reason for this could be because the reviews/responses are moderated by the website's owners and negative reviews are removed or not posted, but it is not possible at this time to know the extent to which this is the case. This means that the data available for analysis could be considered to be biased in favor of the Horse Market events. Although this does limit the generalizability of the findings, and limits the potential for transferability to other communal sex experiences, the public posts still give a flavor of what motivated participation amongst event attendees; for example, what their experiences were that can be seen as credible, the freedom that anonymity allowed the men to discuss their experiences freely and in detail, as well as the similarity of themes that emerged from the analysis, despite those experiences posted only being shown in a positive light.

Regardless of this limitation, there is little doubt that those men who did take the time to post about their participation felt that the Horse Market provided a new way of performing their sexuality. The findings show that the men attending the Horse



Market were seeking out a sexually-charged space that is unapologetically homosexual. The horse market allows for an authentic and crucially homosexual experience that allows gay men to perform a gay identity and bond with other gay men over the shared experience of engaging in group sex with other men. That this has become increasingly important to some homosexual men, is in light of an argument that as homosexuality has become increasingly “accepted” across Western liberal democracies, it has led to the appropriation of gay space by the straight community. In turn, this has led some parts of the LGBT+ community to a belief that this has created a need for a new type of “gay” space, one that rejects the perceived singularity of gay spaces that has predominated (Ghaziani, 2019).

As heterosexuals frequent gay spaces (bars, clubs, and Pride events) and traditional forms of queer culture (drag) are commercialized and consumed by non-queer audiences, the Horse Market provides a protected space only for gay men doing what makes them gay; participating, that is, in sex with other men. To these participants, the Horse Market provides a performance space for homosexuality and a rejection of the need to be accepted by heterosexual society. The Horse Market, in other words, in embracing, celebrating and reclaiming a specific form of “self-assigned deviancy” associated with being gay, actually simultaneously allows for greater levels of sexual adventurism. The Horse Market permits gay men to perform and bond over their shared sexual desire, allowing for a reconnection to rebellious/socially transgressive behavior and at the same time, confers participants with a renewed sense of community and belonging, as they do so.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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