

'He is the customer, I will say yes': Notions of power, precarity and consent to sexual harassment by customers in the gay tourism industry

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Abstract

This article explores the sexualized nature of the gay tourism industry and examines how 'pink dollar' organizations tacitly encourage incidences of sexual harassment from customers. Drawing on qualitative data from two popular gay tourism destinations, the article shows the embeddedness of sex, as a selling point, in the industry which creates blurred lines between service, sexuality, and sex. This consequently leads to sexual harassment by customers which is accepted and to which workers consent. Consent is driven by the hyper-sexualization of the workplace and the power imbalance within the service triangle and the interaction with the customer and the precarious nature of the sector. Mirroring Burawoy's (1979) idea of employees consenting (giving in) to organizational norms, we contribute to theory by suggesting that the power imbalance constructed within the service triangle gives high interactive power to the customer to harass workers without evident consequences for their misbehavior, whilst the latter consent and accept this as part of the job, due to the limited support from management.

KEYWORDS

consent, customer, gay tourism, interactive power, LGBTQ+, service work, sexual harassment

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Customer sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in interactive service work with most research focusing on the sexual harassment of female employees who are called upon to cope with heterosexualized interactions with male customers. Thus, there is a lack of research which considers organizations primarily catering for male gay¹ customers. This qualitative, exploratory study thus seeks to address this research gap. Tourism scholarship has given some attention on aspects of sexuality (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016), focusing mainly on the experiences of the gay male traveler and customer and their motivations for travel (Hughes, 1997, 2002, 2006; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Melián-González et al., 2011). Thus, Ong et al. (2022) argue that the individual experiences of customers, as well as customer behavior are the most prominent and frequently researched topics in this area whilst, surprisingly, limited research has explored the experiences of workers in the gay tourism and hospitality industry. Indeed, as Vorobjovas-Pinta (2021) reports, there is limited knowledge about workers' experiences in the LGBTQ +² tourism and hospitality industry that predominantly caters to LGBTQ + clientele. Similarly, Mills and Owen (2021: p. 5) note 'LGBT workers' experience of interactive service work are near-absent from the literature, yet, they have the potential to provide unique insights into the service labor process'. We address this lack of empirical attention to recognize the atypical manifestation of sexual harassment by men of other men (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016) whilst contributing to debates on sexual consent by mirroring Burawoy's (1979) idea of employees consenting to organizational norms and the managerial prerogative, even when such consent can lead to deleterious outcomes for the employees. Focusing on the provision of hospitality services for gay men, the paper analyses the blurred lines between selling a service and selling sexuality in a hospitality context responding to Warhurst and Nickson's (2009) call to include male sexuality in labor process analyses.

We thus explore the sexualized nature of service work and examine the manner in which many organisations in the hospitality industry, either tacitly or explicitly, encourage and/or tolerate incidences of sexual harassment from customers, focusing on the niche market of service organizations intended for gay male customers. The research was conducted in two well-known gay-friendly destinations in Spain, Gran Canaria/Maspalomas and Sitges, which are openly gay-oriented destinations where gay tourism makes a significant contribution to the local economy and the local labor market. For example, according to the island's official tourism website, Gran Canaria is one of the 'greatest gay tourism destinations in Europe', offering a wide range of gay exclusive or gay-friendly establishments. Similarly, Sitges has a long history as a gay-friendly destination and is promoted by the Spanish government as one of the internationally famous LGBTQ + destinations, along with Ibiza and Maspalomas, offering gay-friendly leisure activities, accommodation, and parties. Acknowledging that the tourism and hospitality industry is multi-faceted (Davidson et al., 2011), the research was conducted across a variety of organizational types in the two geographical areas (see Table 1). The selection of these broad and diverse types of organizations allowed us to explore in depth the issue of sexual harassment from customers, across a variety of organizational contexts reflecting different levels of sexualization of the workplace. Data is reported from 36 interviews with owners, managers, and employees working in organizations, which either exclusively or primarily cater to gay male customers.

The research is therefore novel in making several original contributions. Firstly, in examining the experiences of employees in the context of gay tourism, which, as we noted above, is usually studied via the experiences of consumers, with little attention paid to employees. Secondly, the research assesses the under-researched phenomenon of same sex sexual harassment (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016; Mims & Kleiner, 1998) by examining sexual harassment from customers. Lastly, we seek to explain the manner in which employees consent to this harassment in synthesizing insights from the literature on sexual consent with Burawoy's (1979) consideration of how employees consent to the power dynamics and norms of their organizations, which in the context of hospitality creates the conditions for sexual harassment by customers. Specifically, the paper explores the following research objectives.

- To understand whether sexual harassment is embedded within the gay hospitality industry and how employees experience, consent to and/or contest it.
- To assess what support, if any, management offers to workers experiencing sexual harassment in this context.

TABLE 1 Range of organisations in which the research was conducted.

Type of organization	Destination	Clientele and level of sexualization
6 Hetero-friendly Gay bars	Masspalomas and Sitges	Both men and women Different levels of sexualization
2 Gay saunas	Masspalomas and Sitges	Men only Highly sexualized
3 Gay sex clubs	Masspalomas and Sitges	Men only Highly sexualized
1 Gay café	Masspalomas	Both men and women Average level of sexualization
1 Gay club	Masspalomas	Men only Average to high level of sexualization
1 Drag queen bar	Masspalomas	Both men and women Average level of sexualization
2 Bear bars	Masspalomas and Sitges	Men only Average level of sexualization
2 Men only resorts	Masspalomas	Men only Highly sexualized
1 Men only hotel	Masspalomas and Sitges	Men only Average to high level of sexualization

2 | SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY CUSTOMERS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Minnotte and Legerski's (2019: p. 6) observation that, 'some workplace contexts heighten the structural vulnerability of workers' to sexual harassment', has a particular resonance for the hospitality industry. Research in a variety of national contexts reveals sexual harassment as endemic, rampant, and uncontrolled in hospitality (see e.g., Good & Cooper, 2016; Kensbock et al., 2015; Poulston, 2008; Reguera & García-Izquierdo, 2021). Consequently, hospitality workers report incidences of harassment higher than any other private sector industry (Poulston, 2008). European research shows that 4% of employees (both men and women) in the hotel and restaurant sectors are sexually harassed each year. This prevalence is higher than reported in any other sector (Milczarek, 2010), having negative impacts on individuals, organizations, and society as a whole (Ram et al., 2016). A survey of employees by the trade union Unite in the UK hospitality sector, titled *#NotOnTheMenu*, revealed that 89% of the participants had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their working life, with nearly 60% of such harassment coming from customers. Moreover, around half of the workers who had been harassed said the experience made them want to leave their job and led them to feel unsafe and less confident at work (Topping, 2018). Similar research in the USA showed that 58% of hotel workers and 77% of casino workers surveyed have been sexually harassed by a customer (UNITE LOCAL, 2016).

In seeking to understand the endemic nature of sexual harassment in hospitality work, Dawson et al. (2021), Minnotte and Legerski's (2019), Poulston (2008) and Yagil et al. (2008) highlight the structural features of the industry which serve to create an environment which encourages and tolerates sexual harassment and, arguably, makes such behavior inevitable. Furthermore, hospitality work is widely recognised to be precarious and is challenging in both workplace and wider lifestyle terms (Dreier et al., 2018; Knox, 2016). It is generally low paid (Lacher & Oh, 2012) and low skilled (Riley et al., 2002). Precarity in hospitality work is also greatly influenced by the impacts of seasonality and other forms of stochastic demand (Robinson et al., 2019), and hospitality is frequently perceived to be low-waged, of low status, and limited desirability from a career perspective (Mooney, 2018). Hospitality employees are highly

mobile, and the sector is commonly a first port of call for migrant workers (Janta et al., 2011). In short, the precarious nature of hospitality employment means employees' are often powerless to address poor employment conditions, including endemic sexual harassment from customers.

Sexual harassment in hospitality is thus associated with the characteristics of the employees, the precarious features of work in the sector, and the nature of service delivery, which involves close, at times intimate, interactive relationships between employees and customers. As Folgerø and Fjeldstad (1995) note, the inherent characteristics of service serve to create a prime breeding ground for sexual harassment. The philosophy of the contemporary service economy, within which 'the customer is always right', constructs a context of unequal interactive and institutional power (Flecha et al., 2020) suggesting the superiority of customers over service providers, implying that customers can misbehave, while the service providers have to tolerate it or even more ominously accept it 'as part of the job' (Good & Cooper, 2016; Poulston, 2008; Yagil, 2008). Furthermore, Ram et al. (2016) note that this is an industry that subtly or overtly sells sex themes, which encourages employees to, in the words of Pritchard and Morgan (2000: p. 888), 'serve the emotional and sexual needs of tourists'. Moreover, the manner in which many service organizations explicitly focus on the appearance and related use of dress codes and uniforms of employees to recruit for and further enhance the attractiveness of employees has been found to create a climate where managers, employees, and customers see sexual harassment as a routine and normalized part of the service being offered (see e.g., Warhurst & Nickson, 2009, 2020 for a discussion of how many service organizations either tacitly or overtly encourage sexualization through their esthetic labor demands). Other elements noted by Dawson et al. (2021), Minnotte and Legerski's (2019), Poulston (2008) and Yagil (2008) include the reality that many hospitality organizations are SMEs so may not have formal policies on sexual harassment and the triggering effect of alcohol and drugs, which often serve as a catalyst for inappropriate customer behavior and sexual harassment.

3 | CONSENTING TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In light of the above discussion, there is an interesting point about the extent to which hospitality workers might be willing to consent, either willingly or unwillingly, to behaviors which entail flirting, feigning sexual availability, and generally flattering customers (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011). This point may be particularly resonant on the question of tips, such that employees' will often have to consent to customer sexual harassment in order not to jeopardize their potential additional income through tipping (Klein et al., 2021; Kundro et al., 2021). The ambiguity of sexual consent in the hospitality sector is not, therefore, unexpected. The literature on sexual consent clearly shows that it remains a 'nebulous concept' (Beres, 2007), which lacks a clear, and commonly agreed definition, whilst its understanding is underdeveloped (Graf & Johnson, 2021). Thus, there is still much debate as to how best to conceptualize consent (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019; Fenner, 2017; Graf & Johnson, 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). Some argue that the word consent can refer to a mental or physical act (see Beres, 2007; Muehlenhard et al., 2016), others differentiate the definition based on physical, psychological, and emotional components (see Fenner, 2017), and others explain consent as a boundary (see Beres, 2007; Sternin et al., 2022). Muehlenhard et al. (2016) seek to provide a framework to understand consent by proposing three ways in which the word can be defined. Firstly, they discuss consent as an internal state of willingness, which is not directly observable, and observers can make inferences based on behavior. Secondly, consent is described as an act of (explicitly) agreeing to something, which refers to the legal concept of expressed consent (Sternin et al., 2022) and corresponds to the norm of verbal affirmative consent (Fenner, 2017). Lastly, consent is seen as a behavior that is interpreted by observers as willingness, which is similar to the legal concept of implied consent (Fenner, 2017).

Sternin et al. (2022) argue that despite the multiple and ambiguous conceptualizations of consent, a universal definition must include both the inward (voluntary willingness) and outward (communication to another person) dimensions of the term. We do not dispute this argument. However, we would suggest that this is an idealized conceptualization of consent. In reality, as highlighted by the discussion above, there is discrepancy regarding the

conditions under which consent is willingly given and clearly communicated. In this manner, personal, situational, and contextual factors influence an individual's ability to express consent freely (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019; Beres, 2007; Flecha et al., 2020; Graf & Johnson, 2021; Herbenick et al., 2019; Marcantonio et al., 2022). Indeed, although there is a general consensus that sexual consent represents some form of agreement (Beres, 2007) scholars distinguish between different types of consent, arguing for example, that even if this agreement is the result of coercion, there is still consent (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). This school of thought has provided various definitions of consent such as full and non-full consent, valid and invalid consent, real and quasi consent (see Beres, 2007), and *coerced consent* (Panichas, 2001). This discussion shows that consent is a *fluid concept* that varies across contexts (Wamoyi et al., 2022). In the specific context of work and employment, Burawoy's (1979) seminal work on consent in the workplace highlights the manner in which capitalism's rules and norms leads to workers consenting to the power dynamics and norms of their organizations, even if this means they consent to their own exploitation. We would argue that similar dynamics can be seen in the context of hospitality employment, within which, as noted above, sexual harassment and precarity are embedded norms. Thus, for the purposes of this article, we suggest that the notion of *coerced consent* (Panichas, 2001) begins to usefully explain hospitality workers' acceptance, or 'giving in' (Mckie et al., 2020: p. 1024) to the norm of sexual harassment by customers in the hypersexualized working environment of the (gay) tourism industry.

Consequently, we would suggest that the complexity of defining consent is not necessarily the agreement on a common definition but its applicability in the context in which it emerges (Flecha et al., 2020; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). As Afloarei and Martínez (2019) fruitfully report, the context within which sexual engagement and harassment occurs is important as it influences communications among people (e.g., verbal and non-verbal consent) and consequently their behavior and approach toward sexual consent or their ability to consent. Similarly, Wamoyi et al. (2022) report that the *place* where unwelcome acts of sexual nature happen, as well as the nature of the perpetrator are important to understand, while others have long called for attention on environmental, social, and contextual forces that influence and coerce individuals to engage into sexual acts that may be unwanted (see Beres, 2007; 105; Sternin et al., 2022). This links to the ongoing debate in the literature of what is consent and how it is expressed. Scholars and policy makers have developed discourses on sexual consent (e.g., 'No means No', 'Yes means Yes', 'Enough is Enough') attempting to frame and define consent (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019). In reality, however, understanding consent as simply saying 'no' is inadequate because victims are not always able to say 'no' (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Indeed, the power structures and relations, within which sexual harassment and consent emerge, are likely to restrict the victim's ability to provide consent or not (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019). As Herbenick et al. (2019: p. 998) put it

We cannot deny how power imbalances and precarious social positions make choice and consent murky at times. In the context of power imbalance ... consent is not always as simple as 'doing what one wants' but may include concerns about consequences if one rejects advances from someone with more real or perceived power ... some people may reasonably fear negative repercussions should they wish to reject unwanted attention or address someone's problematic behaviour.

Clearly, then, it is necessary to understand and explore further how the context and the power dynamics within it impact on consent (Beres, 2007). As the focus of this research is on the service sector and the power imbalance evident within the triadic service employment relationship, it is important to understand how the power dynamics affect employees' consent toward sexual harassment by customers. Indeed, within the context of hospitality, Poulston (2008: p. 239) suggests that 'sexual harassment is widely accepted by hospitality workers, and to some extent, welcomed and enjoyed'. Yagil (2008: p. 144) similarly acknowledges

Sexual attractiveness and flirtation are often an institutionalised part of the employee's job description...employees are often forced to draw the line for themselves in distinguishing between legitimate

and illegitimate expressions of sexuality. A refusal to flirt with customers, and explicit objections to being sexually harassed, may be seen as non-conformance with organisational norms, eliciting disagreement by the customer, and social disapproval from peers and superiors.

Indeed, a recent study by Gibbs et al. (2021: p. 473) explored the relationship between what they describe as the 'blurred and sometimes invisible line' between flirting and sexual harassment in hospitality. Thus, they highlight how 'natural harmless flirtations between customer and staff can play a positive role in the co-creation of hospitable experiences' (p. 473). Importantly, though these authors add a caveat with regard to

...the impact that differing tolerance levels of both staff and customers may bring to the hospitable experience, and furthermore, how this fine line needs to tread carefully and managed appropriately in distinguishing between natural flirtatious encounters which lead to co-creation, and blatant harassment towards service staff (p. 482).

More realistically, though, the prevailing culture of the hospitality industry sees sexual harassment as an acceptable part of the job or is worryingly dismissed as being 'banter' or just a joke. Furthermore, research has found that hospitality managers are less likely to identify behaviors as sexual harassment, when the perpetrator is a customer rather than a co-worker (Madera et al., 2018). It is unsurprising then to see Wang (2016: p. 261) noting, 'workers often are far less able to oppose or report harassment from customers than from co-workers'. Resultantly, employee responses to customer harassment are often individualized and informal, such as ignoring the issue, avoiding certain customers, discussing it with family and friends outside of work, developing a 'thick skin', playing along or joking about the situation, laughing the situation off, attempting to directly, either themselves or with colleagues, stop customer sexual harassment and discussing episodes with co-workers, and changing shifts (Good & Cooper, 2016; Hughes & Tadic, 1998; Zampoukos, 2021).

4 | GAY TOURISM AND THE NEGLECTED AREA OF SAME SEX HARASSMENT AND CONSENT

Whilst the embeddedness of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry and harassment by customers has received significant attention, there is limited focus on male-to-male harassment. Unlike the multiple discussions and debates in the literature regarding how female employees in hospitality experience the sexual interaction with the customer (in relation to sexual harassment perceptions and sexualization of the labor process), research has neglected sexual harassment within the same sex. More specifically, it is important to understand how sexual harassment is perceived in the terrain of the 'gay venue', how employees' perceive and understand the sexualization of their work, and how they cope and contest it, as well as what support is offered by employers. It is perhaps surprising that sexual harassment has been neglected in the increasingly sexualized market of gay male hospitality and tourism within which 'looking for sex' and sexual encounters are embedded reasons for tourists to travel (Clift and Carter, 2000; Clift & Forrest, 1999; Köllen et al., 2012). Gay tourism, sex tourism, and marketing research discuss how sexuality, the gay social life, and 'looking for sex' (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Köllen et al., 2012) are significant variables for destination decisions for customers, which gay destinations need to meet and provide (ILGA EU). Unsurprisingly, however, the sexualization of women has dominated the literature on sexualized service work with theoretical and empirical analyses focusing on female employees who need to conform within heterosexualized demands. Similarly, research related to sexual harassment primarily focuses on female employees/victims, although definitions of sexual harassment make clear the fact that both women and men can be sexually harassed and that the person doing the harassing does not necessarily have to be a member of the opposite sex (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016). Indeed, Dawson et al. (2021: p. 3) note that there will often be gendered perceptions of sexual harassment such that 'men are less likely to label sexualized behavior at work as sexually harassing and are more tolerant of sexual harassment than women'.

Moreover, McKie et al. (2020) note that little research has specifically focused on sexual consent among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (*henceforth* GBM³), with the literature on sexual consent negotiation mainly focusing on heterosexual interactions (Sternin et al., 2022). Indeed, despite attempts by researchers (see e.g., Beres et al., 2004) to measure sexual consent for people who engage in same-sex, understandings of consent negotiation within this population is still in infancy (McKenna et al., 2021). This is highly problematic given the unique characteristics of the GBM population and the fact that gay and bisexual men are at higher risk for unwanted sexual experiences than heterosexual men (McKie et al., 2020). Gaspar et al. (2021; p. 1206) refer to discourses which regularly present GBM as highly sexually active, sexually desirous, and sexually assertive, which complicates sexual coercion within this population, generating perceptions of 'assumed consent' within a 'culture of silence' to sexual violence and a sense of entitlement to sexual advances. Sternin et al. (2022) similarly find that GBM men put themselves in sexual environments that do not exist in the 'heterosexual world' (p.524) and within which consent is assumed or even implied. As the authors note, in sexualized environments, similar to the service context examined in this study, where people are brought together by sexual orientation and where sex is the primary goal of an interaction sexual consent is assumed and implied.

Consequently, as Warhurst and Nickson (2009) suggest, the gendering of sexualized service work needs to be rethought and that men's sexuality should also be considered and analyzed in relation not only to interaction with female customers but also male, gay customers. Surprisingly, empirical data of men who experience sexual harassment within the service workplace is limited, with research primarily focusing on homophobic harassment of gay men working in the service sector (Mills & Owen, 2021). Relatedly, there has been limited, if any, research which has explored these issues in a (almost exclusive) gay space.

5 | METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Spain between May 2018 and September 2019, specifically in two gay-oriented destinations, Gran Canaria/Maspalomas and Sitges. Data was collected from a variety of organizations operating across the spectrum of male gay hospitality venues (see Table 1). These included hetero-friendly gay bars, male-only hotels and resorts, gay clubs, sex clubs, and gay saunas. The selection of this broad spectrum of businesses allowed us to assess the issue of sexual harassment from customers across different organizational contexts, from a 'normal' gay bar toward more overtly sexualized venues that offer spaces for sexual encounters (e.g., gay saunas and sex clubs). This selection of different types of organizations sought to take account of the point made by Minnotte and Legerski's (2019) who, whilst recognizing the intrinsically sexualized nature of the hospitality industry, also acknowledge differences in terms of how overt this process is (see also Warhurst & Nickson, 2009, 2020). Consequently, the choice of organizations reflected the way the level of sexualization could potentially vary depending on its target audience.

Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with bar owners, managers, and frontline hospitality employees as shown in Table 2. The majority of participants identified as cis gay men, with three individuals identifying as cis straight men. In total, 36 interviews were conducted (six Managers, 30 Employees). Interviews lasted between 45 and 140 min and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Access to participants and organizations was gained via an individual gatekeeper who introduced the first author to a number of workers in the two areas. Thereafter, a snowball sampling strategy was followed, accompanied with visits to organizational premises, approaching bar managers, owners and employees, informing them about the research, and recruiting participants. In reporting the data, pseudonyms are used for both participants and their organizations. Before they consented to be interviewed, research participants were given appropriate and accessible information about the purpose, methods, and intended uses of the research and what their participation in the research would entail. As the study included discussions of sensitive issues which could create emotional distress, interviewees were informed of their ability to stop the recording or stop the interview process at any time. Interviews were carried out outside the participants' workplace, in a place of their choosing, such as quiet areas of cafes, where the interview would not be overheard.

TABLE 2 Interviewee profile.

	Pseudonym	Age	Place of work	Role	Years of experience	Sexual preference
1.	Mateo	Mid-40s	Daddy bar Maspalomas	Employee/waiter	27+	Gay
2.	Diego	Mid-30s	Gay bar - Maspalomas and Sitges	Seasonal/event based barman	6	Gay
3.	Michael	Late-20s	Gay bar - Maspalomas	Manager	5	Gay
4.	Marco	Late-30s	Sitges Gay bar	Employee/waiter	6	Gay
5.	Andrea	Mid-30s	Gay bar/cafe Maspalomas	Manager/owner	17	Gay
6.	Cesar	Mid-20s	Gay club Maspalomas	Employee/waiter	3	Gay
7.	Elias	Late-20s	Gay bar Sitges	Employee/Barman	5	Gay
8.	Manuel	Mid-30s	Gay bar Sitges	Employee/Barman	7+	Gay
9.	Eduardo	Late-20s	Gay bar - Maspalomas and Sitges	Seasonal/event based barman	4	Straight
10.	Pablo	Mid-30s	Underwear bar - Maspalomas	Waiter	10	Gay
11.	Alessio	Late-30s	Male only resort Maspalomas	Barman	7	Gay
12.	Roberto	Late-20s	Sex club Massplaomas	Barman	5	Gay
13.	Oscar	Mid-20s	Gay club Sitges	Barman/Waiter	7	Gay
14.	Jose	Late-20s	Gay bar Masspalomas	Barman/Waiter	3	Gay
15.	Pepe	Mid-20s	Sex club Sitges	Barman	3	Gay
16.	Martin	Mid-40s	Sex club/Gay bar Maspalomas	Barman	13	Gay
17.	Ross	Mid-20a	Drag queen bar Maspalomas	Barman/waiter	3	Gay
18.	Pedro	Late-20s	Gay bar Sitges	Barman/waiter	6	Gay
19.	Nico	Late-30s	Men-only resort Masspalomas	General service	9	Gay
20.	Raul	Mid-30s	Sex club Sitges	Barman	10	Straight
21.	Gustavo	Early-30s	Gay bar Sitges	Waiter	5	Gay
22.	Salva	Mid-40s	Gay sauna Maspalomas	Barman	20	Gay
23.	Leonardo	Late-20s	Gay bar Sitges	Barman	4	Gay
24.	Valerio	Late-30s	Gay bar - Sitges and Barcelona	Seasonal/event based barman	5	Gay
25.	Ander	Late-20s	Sex club Maspalomas	Barman	5	Gay
26.	Guzman	Mid-40s	Gay bar Maspalomas	Assistant Manager	18	Gay
27.	Miki	Late-30s	Bear bar Sitges	Barman	12	Gay
28.	Jorge	Early-30s	Gay bar Maspalomas	Waiter	8	Gay
29.	Rey	Late-30s	Gay bar Maspalomas	Waiter	11	Gay
30.	Maxwell	Mid-30s	Gay bar Sitges	Barman	8	Gay
31.	Angelo	Late-20s	Men only hotel Sitges	Waiter	4	Gay
32.	Jonas	Mid-40s	Gay bar Maspalomas	Assistant Manager	13	Gay
33.	Ben	Early-20s	Male only resort Maspalomas	Barman	2	Straight
34.	Jason	Early50s	Gay club Maspalomas	Owner/manager	10	Gay
35.	Miguel	Early-40s	Sex club Sitges	Co-owner/manager	10	Gay
36.	Rodrigo	Early-30s	Bear bar - Sitges	Barman	3	Gay

A thematic analysis was followed to provide a structure to manage the data and achieve a deeper analysis of the collected data through coding. Coding was utilized to organize and analyze and disaggregate data, to recognize relationships between themes and produce integrative categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

6 | FINDINGS

6.1 | The sexualized context of gay tourism

Across both destinations a common theme that emerged in the data was the embeddedness of sex as a selling point in the gay tourism industry. Jonas, for example, described Maspalomas as a 'gay paradise' and a 'sex paradise'. Similarly, a number of participants highlighted that gay tourism events are promoted and facilitated by organizations that chase the pink dollar, creating a sexualized environment to attract the gay customer. As Andrea, a bar manager and owner reported

... for the gay man sex is most of the time the first thing. If you decide to go on holidays you will choose to go somewhere you can meet cute guys and you can have sex. Look what happens at gay pride... everybody is getting crazy about it. It is only gay, gay, gay and it is only sex, sex, sex. It's a great business...The gay industry is just selling sex, 99.99% is all about sex.

Jorge similarly commented on the importance of sex tourism in Gran Canaria:

We have the bars, the apps, the sex clubs, and the saunas. Now sex is everywhere, and most of the people come here to find sex. This is what brings money in. It is not the coffee, the museums, or the culture. What brings money here is sex. And for bar owners to make money they have to sell sex.

That said, given the different levels of either overt or tacit sexualization across different venues, there was, in theory, the potential for differing experiences for employees. For example, workers in the gay sauna, gay resorts, and sex clubs were exposed to nudity, sexual comments, and incidences of sex as these venues are specifically created as 'sex venues'. Nico, who worked in a male-only resort where guests are nude, discussed the normalization of nudity and sexual gestures as part of his job:

I might go to clean and change their bed sheets and they are just sitting there naked on the terrace, touching [themselves]. But this doesn't bother me anymore because I've been seeing these things for so many years. Maybe in the beginning I would just leave. But now it's a normal thing. I just smile and do my job.

Similarly, Salva, who works in a gay sauna, discussed how customers would often masturbate in front of him asking for sex, commenting: 'It wasn't just a guy, it was guys. A lot of times. You just ignore them'. Although 'sex venue' workers have normalized and ignored these behaviors, participants in other types of organizations, such as a gay bar with a mixed clientele, experienced similar incidents of overt sexualization. Jose, who worked in a hetero-friendly gay bar, described how one customer had his penis exposed when he went to take his order, 'I went over and said what do you like to drink, and he said, "I want to show you this". He had his cock inside the menu'.

This process of overt sexualization has created an ambiguity around selling the service and selling sexuality. For example, a number of interviewees felt that there were expectations that they should also be part of the industry's sex culture:

Many customers think that I am there also to fuck. They believe that in these [gay] clubs in Gran Canaria, people who work there must fuck with the customers. [Researcher: Must?] Yes, they believe that they must flirt and fuck (Alessio).

This point was further exacerbated with expectations around flirting with customers. Indeed, most of the participants recognized that sexual flirting with customers and touching are 'part of the job' and a requirement from management:

I do flirt with customers, but not because I want to have sex with them. It is part of the game...flirting is part of the job. Some people fancy you and you play a little bit more. This is my job (Matteo).

Participants suggested that sometimes it becomes a requirement from management to increase sales and encourage the return of customers to the venue. As Gustavo commented

When I was working at a restaurant, I was the only gay waiter. She [the manager] asked me if I am gay and two days after I started working there, she asked me to be a little more affectionate with the gay customers. Everything is a game, customers come here because I'm handsome and I flirt with them, so they think that maybe something can happen... So, we can get more money from them, and they come back again ... It's normal to ask you to do this [flirt]. This is the business, and this is the way to retain customers in the bar.

This practice was evident in the different organizational contexts considered here. Salva for example, who worked in a gay sauna, reported:

Yes, of course, my boss expects me to flirt with the customer. He is gay, he knows how the business works. I am friendly with everyone. I am working in this industry for 20 years and you must be friendly, flirty and a good seller.

Similarly, Ben, a straight barman in a men-only resort, reported, 'If the customer flirts with you, you will have to flirt back to keep them in the bar. Everything is done to keep the customer inside the bar and to spend more money'.

Roberto, a barman in a sex club, provided a similar argument commenting that this requirement is reflected in the recruitment strategy of the organization, seeking workers who are available and openly willing to flirt:

The owner here appreciates if you are quite slutty [sic] and he prefers someone who is single because they are much more open to have conversations, flirt with the customer, and play this game. The customers like that.

Interestingly, Michael, a bar manager, reflected on this practice and recognized the risk of customers confusing service and flirting, which leads to misbehavior and harassment:

We are being funny and flirty with them because we need that customer to come back in the bar. But sometimes the customers confuse what you are doing... flirting is common but it's mixed signals to people...then they might take it a bit too far.

This issue becomes even more complex in the case when management not only requires workers to flirt but also touch customers as part of the service process and selling strategy. Andrea, a manager, commented

What is very important, is to touch the customer...when you go to their table to take an order just a touch on the shoulder, or on the arm. It is very, very important that you spend several seconds and a moment giving special attention to the customer. It doesn't matter if you know him, or you never met him it's just a connection you are making with them. It is a special attention directed to the customer and it pays back. You see difference in the tips they are giving to you.

Employees discussed this approach as 'part of their job' and a necessity to develop a personal, yet sexual, connection with the customer to sell more drinks. For example, Salva discussed how he would sexually flirt, joke and touch customers as part of his job:

You see a customer coming in then of course you will joke with them and tease them. You might grab their ass or touch them ...what I am trying to say is that in this job sometimes you try to be friendly with people and joke. This can be a sexual joke ... you are just doing your job.

The blurred line between service and sex is evident in this data. Interviewees made clear that this 'blurriness' and consent to sexual banter and touching the customer are what keep the customer happy to return to the venues.

6.2 | When sexualization leads to sexual harassment

In consenting to sexual banter and being encouraged to touch customers, interviewees were asked whether they experienced inappropriate behaviors and touching from the customers. The majority of participants reported that touching and sexual harassment from customers are embedded parts of the job. That said, it should be acknowledged that there were mixed views as to whether such practices were acceptable. Valerio, for example, responded to the question of whether he would allow customers to touch him: 'If it is for the business yes, for tips yes. Why not? Yes!'. Although not everyone accepted touching from customers, evidence shows that this behavior was more tolerated toward customers who spent money in the bar. Leonardo described a case of a harassing customer who was removed as he was not spending enough at the bar. However, he clarified that this would not be the practice for a high spending customer:

The customer wasn't there to have fun but the only thing he had in mind was to have sex with the waiter. He was obsessed to touch my ass and touch my cock. He was trying to do it all night. He was not ordering any drinks he was just on the bar and was more concentrating on trying to touch me. We called the boss to say 'look this guy is sitting there and all he does it trying to touch my ass', so we escorted him out. He was not drinking anything. If he was drinking maybe I would have allowed him to touch me a little bit. Why not? It's a tactic you know.

Leonardo's quote clearly shows that consenting to sexual advances is driven by both the sexualized culture of the gay tourism industry and management's requirements to sell both sexuality and drinks. This, however, creates blurred boundaries of what behaviors are acceptable from customers in this context and what it is tolerated by workers. Many participants commented that workers are perceived by both customers and management as 'objects' attached to the sexualized and sex-driven customer service culture of the industry. As Salva put it

It is true that a lot of customers think that you are part of this [service], you are another object of the sauna. They assume that if you are working there you have to accept people touching you and people

treat you without any kind of respect. The sauna sells sex. 99.9% yes. But the workers who work there do not sell sex, they serve drinks. But the customers do not see it this way.

Similarly, Pablo reported, 'They think they can have sex with me because they are gay, and I am gay. Customers touch you, slap your ass...you are a sexual object to them to have fun'.

Raul, a barman in a sex club, similarly reported that customers see workers 'as their toys to play with them and have sex with them'. Seemingly, then, the hyper-sexualization of the industry and the perceived power held by customers drive sexual harassment in this context, as well as blurring the lines of service and harassment. As Andrea, a bar manager, explained

The whole industry is built around sex. That's why the customer acts in this way [sexually harassing staff]. [They think] I'm here to have sex and you are someone I could have sex with. There are a lot of customers who come here they believe that because they are customers and pay, they do have slightly more rights. That probably seeds the idea in their heads that they can grab asses and crotches.

Manuel similarly commented on the blurred lines between selling a service and selling sexuality:

They think because they are customers and they come in your bar this is included in the price. If I am coming in here, a bar or a restaurant, and I am paying for your service, why can I not touch you? I am paying. You are gay, I am gay, this place is gay. Why not? Boundaries are a really funny thing.

Almost every participant talked of daily incidences of sexual harassment in the workplace, both verbal and physical. Ross, for example, described an incident with a customer sitting in the corner of his bar and masturbating:

There was this older man who used to come on my bar. He always ordered two beers and stayed there watching the show. The bar is an L shape so there's only one way in and out. One night he stood at the side of the bar, where the opening is for me to go in and out, and he ordered the beer as always. I served him and kept working. And then I could see that something wasn't right, and then I look on my right and I saw him at the end of the bar with his penis and his balls out wanking and looking at me. And I was like, excuse me? So, I went to him, and I screamed in his face, really loud, like a crazy person... and he stopped...Five minutes later he came back again. I went back to my manager ... She went straight to him, started screaming and kicked him out.

Although Ross' manager was protective in this case, in most other cases, such incidents, including physical assaults, saw employees being left to manage such situations. Disturbingly, even when there was physical harassment toward workers which crossed the line of 'just touching' to becoming sexual assault employees were expected to accept and tolerate this as the outcome of the customer-centric sex culture of the industry and the lack of boundaries of what behaviors are acceptable. As Pedro described

Last week a guy asked me for a blowjob. While I was serving him, I saw he was hard, and he grabbed my neck and pushed my head towards his cock. I pushed him back. I said, 'no what are you doing, I am working here'. I smiled and that's it. [You smiled?] Yes. He is a customer.

Participants also discussed intimidating and dangerous behaviors and incidences:

The older man was at my bar all night. He kept looking at me like he wanted to eat me. At the end of the night when I was searching for my car, I found him on the stairs... He accompanied me to the car as

he said he just wanted to talk a little. He asked me for a kiss, I kindly refused. He asked me to go with him to his apartment. I politely said I was working all day and I was tired, and I was going to bed. He was drunk. ... He grabbed my hand and made me touch him. ... I pulled my hand out and I told him that he'd better go, he's drunk...he insisted and continued to ask me things... I said goodnight got in my car and left...it was disgusting. Thank God, I never saw him at the bar again (Pablo).

Pablo's story was not exceptional and other interviewees described instances of experiencing sexual harassment and assault by customers, even outside of the workplace. Ross, for example, described the incident of a customer following him in a white van to his house, while Raul mentioned his 'stalker', as he called him, who was always waiting for him at the end of his shift. Although the last two incidences did not end-up with physical harassment, they are still unsafe outcomes of the blurred service boundaries of the gay tourism industry. In these three cases, the employees did not report the incident to the police or even to the management.

6.3 | Normalization and consent to sexual harassment: Men are men and customers is the king

As suggested by the findings above, reporting harassment was very rare. Victims of harassment would rarely challenge or report harassment by customers for two main reasons: the normalization of such behaviors in the industry; and the customer-centric culture developed by management, putting the customer in a powerful position. Indeed, a number of participants discussed the necessity to develop a 'thick skin' toward harassment. A typical view was that of Salva who has 20 years of experience working in this environment:

All these years working in the gay world I have developed thick skin. We all have this in common. It is like prostitutes, after many years they don't care anymore. So, our behaviour becomes very similar to that one of a prostitute. Whatever they say to you, whatever they do at you, you learn to ignore it and deal with it.

As Salva argues, workers have developed mechanisms to accept and normalize customer misbehavior. The normalization and tolerance of sexual harassment by customers were summarized by participants in phrases such as 'men are men' or 'boys will be boys'. Many participants suggested that the customer's gender plays a significant role in the customer's mis(behavior), whilst the customer's sexuality drives tolerance and consent toward sexual harassment. As Oscar put it

The gay scene is selling sex and it is a sexual environment...people go to gay bars to pick up, to have 'fun'... the majority of people that go there are men and men are testosterone, whether they are gay or straight. So, boys will be boys. I don't think women behave like that. I don't think women touch other women whether they are gay or straight like that.

Similarly, Jason, a club manager noted

Men are men. It is more common in the gay community [to sexually harass], do not ask me why but it is more common. Men are men, whether it is straight men or gay men. We all love sex, we all talk about sex, we all show off about sex. When I worked in a regular [straight] bar all the guys in there talked about sex as well. I think men in general like to talk about sex.

This culture of masculinity and the links with sexual comments were recognized by Ben, a straight man who works in a male-only resort, who suggested that gender and sexuality are driving this behavior, as well as the consent to it:

I get more compliments from gay men than from women. Men are more direct, men are men. It's uncommon to have a woman saying jokes or making comments. This would happen more with gay men than women. They are more direct. I think that's the difference between women and men. Gay men are more open to talk about sex. We are both men, so we are thinking the same and whether you like girls or you like guys you are still a man.

These perceptions, rooted in masculinity, lead to unreported sexual harassment and sexual assaults in the industry as Gustavo argued:

I think we are still in a society with the heritage of masculinity, a man-dominated society and if a man complains about sexual harassment, either coming from a man or a woman, somebody will laugh about it. For example, if it happens to a woman, it's clearly harassment. If it happens to me at the bar, it would be very hard to prove it or find someone who believes me.

Participants also highlighted that there were no policies or processes in place to report sexual harassment. For example, Salva recounted his experiences of being harassed and the lack of action to address this:

They were trying to reach my pants, to touch my ass, my cock. I stopped them...it happened many times. I mean a lot more than you want. I think in a bar with female waiters this would have been sexual harassment. It is not, however, considered sexual harassment in the gay bar. If I go to the police and I say this happened to me, they will laugh out loud. I do not feel protected. ...My colleagues suffer the same, my boss knows about it, but this is expected in here... so you have to deal with it.

Similarly, Marco explained how such sexual behaviors are expected, tolerated, and consented to:

Complain? To whom? If I go and complain about a customer touching my ass or touching my cock, I will be the joke of the day. If I was woman, and someone dared to touch my ass I could go straight to my boss and say this has happened and that customer will be out of the bar in a second. If I go now and say this customer fisted me, the response will be: 'did you like it?' And everyone will laugh. No, I didn't. But I'll shut up, I know where I work.

From the data, then, it was clear that sexual harassment remained a neglected and unreported problem. As argued above, this is the outcome of a culture of masculinity and perceptions of 'men being men. Yet as interviewees also suggested, the 'customer is always right' mantra, as well as the precarity of hospitality work drives consent and tolerance toward customer (mis)behavior. Oscar commented, 'If the customer asks you for sex, what do you do? Because he is the customer, I will say yes'. This was a common approach discussed by participants arguing that you would never say 'no' to the customer. Employees would often feel compelled to encourage customers' sexual propositions, to keep the customer happy. Elias explained

He gave me his phone number and said to me directly, 'I want to have sex with you'...I said, 'I'll call you later'. Because I want the customer to leave happy and come back the next day. So, if the customer thinks he might have sex with me he will come back again. So, by saying to him I'll call you later the customer thinks that he has a chance to have sex with me so they will come back to the bar or the restaurant or whatever. And he did come back the next day and the day after. I continued the same

game and promises, and he kept coming back, until he decided not to come back again ... But I had this customer for three days in my bar spending money.

Many participants commented that the precarity and seasonality of hospitality work in the two regions examined were another important drivers for accepting and consenting to sexual harassment from customers. Martin with 13 years of experience in the industry discussed how the industry has transitioned from offering 40-h full-time contracts to 8-h part-time temporary contracts. Unsurprisingly, most of the organizations in this research follow the norm of the hospitality sector, offering precarious, short-term, temporary, and low-paid contracts, which force workers, who perceive themselves as easily replaceable, to consent to and accept harassment and assault from customers. Moreover, the data shows support from management and owners is limited. As Mateo summarized it

The problem starts from the boss [owner]. They treat you like shit ... You are on a really bad contract, and they think you are a slave, and you have to accept everything the customer wants. ... They know that there are customers that act like that, but don't do anything about it and you don't want to argue because you don't know who the boss will support, you or the customer... if you challenge the customer for their behaviour you are always afraid that the customer might go and talk with your boss and then you have a problem, you have no job. So, you just shut up and take it with a smile.

Mateo's argument was echoed in most of the interviews across the different types of organizations. Participants suggested that they could not refuse, for example, management requests to touch customers due to feelings of job insecurity and the risk of job loss. As Marco reported

[If you refuse] probably you are not the right person for them to do this job. So, if they find someone else you might lose your job. They won't say to you 'OK you are fired for that reason' [refused to flirt or touch customers] but they will find a different reason.

Similarly, Nico commented that refusing to touch customers would mean losing his job not only with the current employer but across the industry:

Here employees must do whatever the boss wants them to do because employment opportunities are limited. When you don't do what your boss wants you to do then you lose your job and you don't get any more work in other places around here because the owners know each other so if your boss fires you then it will be difficult to get anymore work...There is this bar which changes its employees all the time and that is because one of the requirements of the job and the boss is that you must do something with customers to keep them in the [sex] club. If the worker says no, then you don't have a job.

The last part of Nico's quote was aligned with the experiences of Miki who used to work as a barman in the gay sauna and was asked by his employer to have sex with a customer. When he refused to do so, he lost his job:

The owner came to me and said there is a customer that wants a massage... he said, 'do the massage and I'll pay you extra'. I said Ok. I went for the massage, and I said to the customer 'look I am not a professional masseur'. He said 'don't worry I just want to relax' ... So, while I was doing the massage this man tried to touch me. I was very upset about this, very upset. I stopped the massage, and the customer went to the owner, and he said 'What happened? Why did this guy not want to have sex with me?' I said 'What? That was not the deal'...The boss said to me afterwards if you want to work here you will need to do this and this, but I said no, and that was me kicked out.

Reflecting on this incident, Miki argued that the low wages in the industry serves to drive workers to consent to sexual propositions and harassment due to the need for tips. Andrea similarly commented that there is always tolerance on touching and sexual comments for higher tips and more money.

7 | DISCUSSION

This exploratory research makes a novel contribution in addressing the lack of empirical attention assessing sexual harassment by men of other men (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016). Specifically, it considered the sexualized nature of the gay tourism industry, exploring two popular gay tourism destinations in Spain, revealing how organizations would tacitly and, often, explicitly encourage and tolerate incidences of sexual harassment from customers. Spain has been listed as one of the most LGBTQ + -friendly' destinations in Europe (ILGA EU, 2020), whilst recently local governments have strengthened their commitment to putting into effect policies that favor the well-being of LGBTQ + people (Langarita et al., 2021). Nevertheless, LGBTQ + individuals still experience discrimination, gender-based violence, and harassment (Devis-Devis et al., 2017; Fernández-Rouco et al., 2020; ILGA EU, 2020). More specifically, we have shown sexual harassment, and what Panichas (2001) has described as coerced consent, are embedded issues in the Spanish gay tourism industry organizations that we studied.

Supporting Minnotte and Legerski's (2019) contention that the structural vulnerabilities inherent in hospitality work lead to sexual harassment, our findings present clear evidence of a strong link between sexualization of the working environment, labor, and sexual harassment. Specifically, the hyper-sexualization of the gay tourism industry leads to blurred lines between selling a service and selling sexuality, with employees required by employers to interact sexually with the customer via flirting and touching. In this manner, employees had to navigate the challenging relationship between harmless flirting and sexual harassment. Similar to the work of Gibbs et al. (2021), there was some evidence in our findings that some flirtatious behavior between customer and staff could co-create a potentially mutually rewarding hospitable experiences. However, there was equally significant evidence that the views between what constituted harmless flirtation and signals for sexual harassment would often differ between employees and customers, ultimately leading to often shocking harassing behavior from customers. Consequently, as the data shows, this has encouraged and normalized sexual harassment from customers whilst at the same time developing expectations of (implicit) sexual consent by front line workers.

Additionally, aligning with the work of Good and Cooper (2016), our data has confirmed the blurred lines of what is considered sexual harassment in this context, suggesting that the (hyper)sexualization of labor becomes the driver for normalization and consent of sexual harassment by the customer. In doing so, we also contribute to existing research suggesting that in gay community environments, sexual consent is assumed and expected (Gaspar et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022), leaving workers vulnerable to sexual harassment by customers. Indeed, the evident lack of policies and processes in organizations noted by authors such as Dawson et al. (2021), Poulston (2008) and Yagil (2008) to address the issue suggests that sexual harassment is an accepted (mis)behavior by customers. The findings highlight how the managers in our research were aware of the harassment and actively facilitated this environment of sexual harassment for the sake of greater profits, thus leading to customer feeling that sexually harassing behavior was acceptable. This finding of creating an overtly sexualized environment leading to sexual harassment reflects the argument of Rhee (1997: p. 197) that 'sexuality on display may very well result...in greater occurrences of sexual harassment'. This was evident in the data which shows that gay customers perceive workers as 'sexual objects', who consent to their sexual advances, due to their same gender and consequent assumptions of their sexuality. Thus our data supports Rhee's (1997: p. 197) view that 'places where sexuality is openly on display are more likely to attract [customers] who not-so-innocently assume a right to harass'.

Our data shows that customers may both feel a sense of entitlement to behave aggressively and believe, correctly, that they can get away with it, while workers are obliged to consent to customers' sexual advances, propositions, and assaults, reflecting Wang's (2016) contention that workers were highly unlikely to report harassment

from customers. The pressure by employers to sexually interact with customers in order to encourage return to the venue and increase sales, along with the culture of the customer 'always being right,' generate a source of institutional power in service work and interactive power within the service triangle, creating assumptions that customers are free to harass without evident consequences of their (mis)behavior. As Flecha et al. (2020) conclude, understanding interactive power in organizations allows us to understand conditions for which the current definitions of consent are limited in responding to current realities. In the context examined here, saying 'no' was not a real option for workers (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019), complicating and blurring the boundaries of sexual consent. Indeed, as a number of authors have already acknowledged, and evident in our data, in the contemporary service economy customers are powerful and superior to service providers and they can misbehave, while the latter have to tolerate it (Poulston, 2008; Ram et al., 2016; Yagil, 2008) or accept it 'as part of the job' (Good & Cooper, 2016; Poulston, 2008). This philosophy constructs an imbalance of interactive power (Flecha et al., 2020) between service providers and service receivers, restricting the formers' ability to express their consent or not (Afloarei and Martínez, 2019; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). As sociology of service work scholars have discussed the triadic service employment relationship, positioning the customer in a powerful position, constructs institutional power dynamics, that is, the service triangle (Korczyński & Evans, 2013) and offers high interactive power to the customer to act as superior over service workers and therefore harass them, whilst the latter are forced to consent harassment. The contribution of this article relates to the links between institutional and interactive power, sexual harassment, and consent (Flecha et al., 2020). Indeed, as evident in our findings, customers, as the powerful actor, sexually harass workers, the vulnerable actor, who are then expected by both customers and management to accept and coercively consent to it due to the imbalance of power within the institutional dynamics and the triadic service relationship. Moreover, mirroring Burawoy's (1979) idea of employees consenting to organizational norms, even when they may have a deleterious outcome for them, the consent of employees in our research was driven by the precarious nature of hospitality work (Dreier and Flaming, 2018; Knox, 2016), leaving them vulnerable to both the exercise of managerial prerogative and to customer assaults. Reflecting Afloarei and Martínez (2019) point about the context within which sexual harassment may occur, the coming together of the structural features of the hospitality industry, including precarity and the nature of service delivery create the conditions in which employees may, to a large extent, coercively consent (Panichas, 2001) to their harassment.

Moreover, the data reveals a weak foundation for the protection of workers from customer abuse and ensuring management action against such behavior. Dawson et al. (2021) highlight the crucial role of a proactive and supportive management to tackle sexual harassment in an environment where the 'customer is king', suggesting the need for training both managers and employees. These authors suggest training for managers on steps and tools to keep the workplace free from sexual harassment and training for employees on how to reject sexual advances to protect themselves. Although such suggestions are necessary and welcomed, it is important to evaluate whether these interventions are applicable and convincing in the context examined here. The characteristics of the hospitality industry generally, and the specific context of these two destinations—informed by the 'selling sex' and 'boys will be boys' mantras—are translated into sexualized customer service ceremonies, for example, expecting hospitality workers to touch the customer and sexual harassment, which raise obstacles to changing the sexual culture of the industry. This, therefore, hinders the development of practical managerial interventions to protect workers and eliminate the normalization and consent toward sexual harassment evident here. Relatedly, there is limited evidence from research undertaken in other hospitality workplaces that bystander intervention from either fellow employees or other customers is likely to meaningfully impact on customer sexual harassment within this context (see e.g., Liang & Park, 2022). At the same time, the precarious nature of hospitality employment in general and, specifically in this context, undermines the agency of workers themselves in seeking redress for abuse. The remedy, therefore, may lie with fundamental cultural changes within hospitality employment in order to give greater security and recognition of rights to the workforce (Booyens et al., 2022). For example, there is an argument that fairly rewarding workers in hospitality are less reliant on tips that has the potential to lessen customer sexual harassment (Klein et al., 2021; Kundro et al., 2021).

8 | CONCLUSION

We have argued here that employees' consent to sexual advances and harassment by customers reported in this research is an issue which was integral to the identity of gay tourism in the particular context of the two destinations in Spain that we explored. To address this sexual identity, it is necessary to keep the customer responsible for their (mis)behavior and radically transform managerial approaches toward what is expected within the interaction with the customer, as well as to set boundaries within the service triangle, balancing in this way the interactive power of the customer and, consequently, diminishing employees' need to consent to any type of sexual advances by the customer. As a final point, it is important to note that this was an exploratory study in two regions which have marketed themselves as gay friendly, and further research is needed to assess whether the findings of widespread sexual harassment within this study are found elsewhere in other contexts. Moreover, our focus here was on the niche market of gay tourism, which caters mainly for the gay male customers. It is, however, important to investigate further the issue of same-sex harassment in other organizational contexts. The experiences of gay men have received the main attention of scholarship, whilst the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary individuals 'have been either (un)intentionally ignored or less extensively investigated' (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016: 412). Further research is required in more diverse markets, for example, the gay hospitality industry in cities and different national contexts (see e.g., Jeffrey & Sposato, 2021; Nghiêm-Phú & Suter, 2021) where a more diverse clientele might be present in terms of age, gender, and sexual identity, as well as the motivations for using the services. Although the data in this study demonstrates that the 'sex factor' is a key motivator for gay tourists to travel to the two regions explored, this argument has been disputed by gay tourism scholars (see Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). There is still a need for further research to understand whether sexual harassment exists and is consented to in non-tourist LGBTQ+ spaces. Finally, this study was conducted before the pandemic started. Given that emerging research shows that customer misbehavior and abuse has worsened during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Booyens et al., 2022), more research is necessary to re-examine the impact this may have had on sexual harassment within the gay tourism market and beyond. In this regard, the financial impact of the repeated lockdowns and the long-term precarity of service work will arguably remain drivers of tolerating, accepting, and consenting to harassment as part of the job.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are not available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ENDNOTE

- ¹ This study uses the term 'gay tourism and hospitality' to describe a market that primarily caters to the needs of LGBT + clientele (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016) whilst the term 'gay' is used in a wider sense to include all other sexual orientations or gender identities found within the LGBT+ (see e.g., Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021). To specify, although the research focuses on gay men tourism and hospitality, it should be recognized that research participants and/or customers in this market might identify differently (e.g., bisexual, non-binary, transgender, queer, asexual, etc.).
- ² LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (+ Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirited, and Asexual and other categories).
- ³ The term GBM was adopted by Mckie et al. (2020) and refers to gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

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