

I'm Not Sure This Is Rape, But: An Exposition of the Stealthing Trend

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Sumayya Ebrahim¹

Abstract

Upholding the sexual and reproductive rights of all women and girls has been flagged as a global priority. However, the hetero-patriarchal actions and systems within which female sexuality and reproduction is situated not only disenfranchises women of these rights, but it sometimes usurps these rights from them, without them knowing. One such act, is the practice of stealthing. This conceptual article argues that the stealthing trend is a relevant construct in the human and social sciences because it has a detrimental impact on female sexuality and gender-based sexual violence. Through both a conceptual scrutiny of the construct and through online narratives of stealthing, this article not only establishes stealthing as a distinctive form of gender-based sexual violence, it also establishes it as a practice that deviously subjugates female sexuality and reproduction under the guise of sexual autonomy and sexual consent.

Keywords

condom-removal, sexual violence, sexual consent, sexual autonomy, hetero-patriarchy

The sexual and reproductive health of individual women and girls, and women and girls as a collective, has been listed as a global priority by the Cairo Consensus and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Cohen & Richards, 1994). Since these events, policy frameworks and practical guidelines on national and international fronts were tabled to improve the situation of girls and women around the globe (Cohen & Richards, 1994). The sexual and reproductive rights of all women and girls were prioritized, at least in policy.

In practice, the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women in almost all parts of the world still operate in a hegemonic hetero-patriarchal context. The concomitant power relations that are endemic to this context compromises the sexual and reproductive integrity of women around the world (Aniekwu & Atsenuwa, 2007; Fiaveh, Izugbarab, Okyerefoa, Reysooc, & Fayorseya, 2015; Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). Female sexuality, in particular, as it operates within hetero-patriarchy, is open to violence, domination, and oppression despite increased sexual assertion and autonomy among some groups of women (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013).

A long-standing sex act (Huges, 2017) perpetrated by individual men that resolutely vitiates the sexual autonomy and agency of women has recently garnered widespread media and limited but discipline specific academic attention (most notably in the field of law) (Brennan, 2017; Brodsky, 2017; Clough, 2018). This is the act of *stealthing*. Stealthing is the practice of a man nonconsensually and covertly

removing a condom, after his partner explicitly expressed that intercourse is subject only to use of a condom. Media reports have described the act of stealthing as a new sex trend and a feature of contemporary heterosexual relationships (Cogen, 2017; Lanquist, 2017; Maullin, 2017; Reeves, 2017). The use of the word trend to describe an act that has been flagged as assault and violence against women has been critiqued by Maullin (2017). As a practice, the act of nonconsensual and undisclosed condom removal is nestled at the intersection of sexual autonomy, sexual consent, and sexual violence, which have been firmly established in the literature with varying degrees of intersection among them (Hust et al., 2014; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, & Peterson, 2016).

In contrast to the media, as a construct of academic interest, scholarship on the stealthing trend is negligible (Brennan, 2017), particularly outside the discipline of law. Yet, stealthing, I will argue, merits focused academic scrutiny in the human and social sciences for a number of reasons. First, stealthing as located at the nexus of sexual autonomy, sexual consent, and sexual violence produces a unique form of gender-based sexual violence that is distinct from rape and other forms of sexual assault. Second, the act of stealthing

¹University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park, South Africa

Corresponding Author:

Sumayya Ebrahim, University of Johannesburg, Corner Kingsway and University Road, Auckland Park 2006, South Africa.
Email: sumayyae@uj.ac.za



blatantly disenfranchises women under the guise of sexual autonomy and sexual consent. The act of stealthing occurs under a pretense, when a woman has autonomously consented to sex with a condom, yet, she is deceived and surreptitiously coerced into partaking in condom-less sex. This deception and coercion deprives her of her rights to sexual and bodily autonomy and her right to control her sexual and reproductive choices, all without her knowing. Apart from sexual and reproductive rights, a man who stealth imposes on a woman's right to choose whose penis gets to have direct skin-on-skin contact with *her* vaginal walls.

At this stage, important parameters for this article are set. First, this article is a conceptual rather than an empirical article. Online commentary is used only to problematize the practice of stealthing and does not aim to serve as empirical data for the problem. The media commentary was not empirically validated for this article. Second, the article provides only a cursory exposition to the phenomenon, with the hope of generating further theoretical and empirical investigation in the field.

Given these parameters, the aim of this article is twofold. First, I aim to establish the phenomenon of stealthing as a construct worthy of scrutiny in the human and social sciences, specifically as it operates within the parameters of hetero-patriarchal sex. Related to this is how the act of stealthing distinctively assimilates sexual consent and the violation of sexual autonomy to produce an inimitable form of gender-based sexual violence. Second, I aim to expound the stealthing trend based on online popular culture reports and narratives of men who stealth (such as those that appear in blogs and online magazines), victims of stealthing, and readers' retorts to reports of stealthing. The online reports have been selected due to its pervasive and unsurpassed popularity in disseminating knowledge in popular culture. Furthermore, the media is often considered to be a site where others' and peoples' own sexuality is negotiated (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015).

Due to the deeply personal and sensitive nature of sex research, concerns have been raised about using human participants in researching sex and about protecting research participants when talking about sensitive and personal aspects of sexuality (Zago & Holmes, 2015; Zuch, Mason-Jones, Mathews, & Henley, 2012). A focus on publicly available online narratives of stealthing circumvents some of these concerns, yet provides accessibility to naturalistic information. Moreover, there are currently no mandatory ethical frameworks or guidelines that prevent the use of publicly available online data for research (Townsend & Wallace, 2017).

Academic discussion in the discipline of law propelled the practice of nonconsensual condom removal into the academic arena after a breakthrough publication by Brodsky (2017). The same publication has also been the primary source of reference for numerous popular culture expositions on the trend in the online environment (Anonymous, 2017;

Barns, 2017; Hosie, 2017; Huges, 2017; Maullin, 2017) and serves as a primary source in this article as well. In the academic arena, since Brodsky's (2017) article, most of the discussion of stealthing has been located in the legal disciplines because of the implication for sexual violence and because of the deception and violation that stealthing entails (Clough, 2018). However, it is important to note that similar constructs such as barebacking (the practice of having unprotected anal sex in same-sex partners, deliberately without a condom) and reproductive coercion can be found in the scholarship as well (Brennan, 2017; Klein, 2014). The latter is defined as behavior that interferes with the autonomous decision-making of a woman, with regard to reproductive health, and may involve, tampering with condoms, removing or replacing contraception such as the patch or pills, coercion to conceive, and/or coercion to continue or terminate pregnancy (Grace & Anderson, 2018).

However, stealthing, in this article, is conceptually different from stealthing as an act of sexual crime, deliberate HIV transmission, and or reproductive coercion. Stealthing as discussed in this article refers to nonconsensual and covert condom removal after agreement has been reached that intercourse is only to occur with a condom between two heterosexual partners, as reported in the media (Hosie, 2017; Huges, 2017; Maullin, 2017). Media and online reports of the trend are central to this conceptualization because the online exposés of the trend have preceded most academic discussion on the topic, barring Brodsky's (2017) publication. In addition, the media is understood to be a microcosm for what is happening in society and therefore can be a reasonable indicator for what is happening on the ground (Maydell, 2018).

The first section of the article considers the definition and conceptualization of the stealthing trend. This section includes a discussion of the practice historically, as well as an understanding of the construct as it is located within hetero-patriarchy. The second section of this article aims to establish how stealthing assimilates sexual consent and the violation of sexual autonomy to produce a novel form of gender-based sexual violence. Before closing, the third section of the article considers stealthing from cursory online narratives of perpetrators, victims, and third person's responses to reports of stealthing.

What is Stealthing?

Predecessors of stealthing can be traced back to the vigilance and emphasis of condom use in relation to controlling the spread of HIV in the 1990s in Britain (Huges, 2017). At this time, both heterosexual and homosexual men and women were diligent about condom use despite it detracting from reaching orgasm. Despite its hindrance to sexual pleasure, condom use was nonnegotiable. However, even in the climate of HIV fears, there existed a subcommunity of men who would be deceitful about condom use. According to Huges (2017)

Some women would realise they'd been deceived only when they stood up, before rushing into the shower and down to the STD clinic for a morning-after pill, desperately hoping that an early pregnancy was the most they'd ever have to contend with. Over 20 years later, "stealthing"—the monstrous act of removing a condom without a partner's consent—finally has a name, albeit a grotesquely flattering one. (pp. 1-2)

Around the world, women have varying degrees of sexual autonomy and agency, and it seems like the more deeply entrenched in hetero-patriarchal ideology a woman's sexuality is located, the less agency she has to negotiate the terms of sexual contact (Aniekwu & Atsenuwa, 2007; Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). However, even in more gender-equal societies, the sexual domination and oppression of women still play out, as the first prosecution for stealthing occurred because of an incident in 2015 in Switzerland (Gastaldo, 2017), which is reported to be one of the top 10 gender-equal societies in the world (Zahidi, 2015).

Following this incident, media exposure of stealthing has spiraled (Reiss, 2018). In addition, accounts of victims have emerged on numerous online platforms and exposés (Cogen, 2017; Edelstein, 2018; Huges, 2017; Maullin, 2017; Reiss, 2018). The online environment not only hosts narratives of victims but there also seems to be an online subcommunity of men coaching and encouraging other men to stealth (Brodsky, 2017). Online reports seem to indicate that non-consensual condom removal is widespread and that both women in heterosexual encounters (Brodsky, 2017) and men in homosexual encounters have experienced it (Klein, 2014). According to Stone (2017), it is also a growing trend in South Africa (SA). Nevertheless, the prevalence of stealthing in other sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries is yet to be established and may be difficult to ascertain because condom negotiation in SSA is subject to patriarchal power relations which obstructs the use of condoms in the first place (Aniekwu & Atsenuwa, 2007; Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017).

As indicated, there is meager scholarly inquiry into stealthing as a practice within hetero-patriarchal sex. The article by Brodsky (2017) seems to have set the groundwork for scholarly inquiry to the trend. Brodsky's (2017) work focused primarily on the legal ramifications of nonconsensual condom removal as it relates to consent and possible sexual violation. Issues of sexual consent and sexual anatomy and its intersection with sexual violence have also been discussed by Rubinfeld (2012) and Chiesa (2017). Until the 2015 Switzerland case, no one knew what to call the practice of nonconsensual and undisclosed condom removal because there has been no need to name or address this phenomenon, arguably not because it did not happen but possibly because the victims did not know how to process the event without a name. Naming this practice has allowed more women to talk about it (Brodsky, 2017; Hosie, 2017; Pugachevsky, 2017; Reiss, 2018; "What You Need to Know About 'Stealthing,'" 2017). In addition to naming this trend, increased media

attention and an increase in the number of women who have reported incidences of stealthing render it imperative to the human and social sciences not only because of its implications for gender oppression and gender-based sexual violence but also for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Brodsky (2017) argues that stealthing transforms consensual sex to nonconsensual sex. It also severs the boundaries between consent and autonomy as stealthing is a phenomenon, where consent is granted yet sexual autonomy is violated (Brodsky, 2017). According to Vidler (2017), sexual consent subsumes sexual autonomy. In the case of stealthing, the ability of women to act autonomously and with agency is violated when the condom is removed without her consent and or knowledge. The blurring of boundaries between consent and violation relegates stealthing to an act of violence according to Brodsky (2017). The issue of consent was centralized as a defining characteristic of sexual violence in a meta-analytic study by Bagwell-Gray, Messing, and Baldwin-White (2015). When a woman expresses her wish for a condom prior to sex and expresses her disapprobation of condom-less sex and yet her partner persists regardless, this can be construed as an act of sexual violence and of domination and power. Using online reports of both victims and perpetrators, Brodsky (2017) surmised that stealthing centers on gender violence and the execution of power. "Removing the condom is a way of asserting power," explains Brodsky. "[It's] a way of prioritizing [one's] desires and their will over the safety and autonomy of their partner" (Reiss, 2018, p. 12).

Despite the first reported case of stealthing occurring in a more gender-equal nation, gender and sexual violence is a global problem and is particularly rife in SSA countries, where intergenerational and transactional sex, in addition to patriarchal power, further limits women's sexual autonomy and agency. For instance, Bowman and Brundige (2013) report that in Zambia young girls are constantly exposed to sexual violence from an early age, with prevalence rates reported at 15% to 40%. This high prevalence exists despite the placement of age of consent laws that are meant to protect girls at vulnerable ages (Harrison et al., 2017).

Madiba and Ngwenya (2017) contend that the hegemony of patriarchy in SSA renders women defenseless against gender and sexual violence and limits the bargaining power that they have to negotiate sexual relations and condom use, which invariably threatens their sexual and reproductive health (Fiaveh et al., 2015). Although socially constructed and culturally sanctioned power relations between men and women mediate the terms on which women engage in sexual relationships, sexual agency is important in how women manage dominant masculinities and their own sexual and reproductive health (Fiaveh et al., 2015). In the process of sexual negotiation, the practice of stealthing ushers in a novel praxis in what constitutes a sexual offense. In the context of stealthing, safe sex was negotiated under the guise of

sexual autonomy, yet this autonomy and consent were violated to produce an act of gender-based sexual violence.

Madiba and Ngwenya (2017) report that in patriarchal societies the mere suggestion of a condom is seen as challenging male authority. Similarly, a study in SA investigating sexual violence and HIV risk revealed that women who experienced sexual coercion were six times more likely to have inconsistent condom use (Aniekwu & Atsenuwa, 2007). However, even in more egalitarian countries, such as the United States, African American women were nine times more likely to be threatened with physical abuse when they asked their partner to use condoms (Aniekwu & Atsenuwa, 2007). There are exceptions to the challenges of negotiating condom use; for example, Fiaveh et al. (2015) suggested that women in Ghana and some parts of SA are able to successfully negotiate condom use. However, it seems that even in contexts when women can autonomously negotiate condom use, such as the case in Switzerland, the practice of stealthing filches the agency of women, because their decision to engage in sex with a condom is overruled by their partners, without them knowing. This raises the question of how much of sexual autonomy and agency do women really have?

Stealthfully Violated

The preceding section examined precursors to stealthing and provided a discussion of the origin of the construct and located it within hetero-patriarchy. The next section examines the practice at the nexus of sexual autonomy, sexual consent, and sexual violence. Stealthing blurs the boundaries between sexual consent and sexual violation (Brodsky, 2017). It also blurs the boundary between sexual coercion and sexual compliance (Shaw, 2015). The issue of consent is one of the primary parameters that must be considered in stealthing. Understanding consent is important as it helps distinguish between voluntary sexual contact and sexual assault. There are differing scholarly opinions and critiques of the construct (Croskery-Hewitt, 2015; Hust, Rodgers, & Bayly, 2017). Consent in itself is difficult to define with some scholars writing about consent without defining it (Scott & Graves, 2017). Scott and Graves (2017) problematize the lack of knowledge about consent and how to communicate it, especially if it has the potential to lead to sexual violence. Without having a clear guideline of what constitutes consent, stealthing compromises what constitutes willful sex. From Scott and Graves's (2017) critique, it is noted that it is not only consent but also the communication of that consent that is important. In terms of stealthing, the consent and the communication of that consent were present for intercourse to begin. However, the consensual sex was conditional on the use of a condom. The nonconsensual and covert removal of the condom violates the terms and conditions of that sexual contact. Brodsky (2017) argues that being duped into engaging in condom-less sex falls within the arena of sexual offenses and is akin to rape.

The popular slogan of "no meaning no" indicates that when a woman resists or says no, it should be taken seriously. In the context of stealthing, the woman says yes to sex but no to condom-less sex. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) reviewed different types of consent (such as affirmative consent, consent via explicit agreement, and consent as an internal state of willingness), yet none of these address the conditions that stealthing arises in. It would seem like the issue around nonconsensual condom removal is not sufficiently addressed in the sexual consent literature.

Muehlenhard et al. (2016) and Hust et al. (2017) report that the complexity of consent is embedded in gendered sexual scripts. Issues around consent in the Global North seem to differ to issues around consent in SSA. Sexual violence is prevalent globally; however, certain localities in the Global South report higher rates of sexual violence compared with the rest of the world (Bowman & Brundige, 2013), especially sexual violence involving issues of consent. Indeed, socio-cultural contexts have nuanced variations of what constitutes consent. For instance, *lobola* or bride price in SA renders consent to sex inconsequential (Singleton, 2012). Croskery-Hewitt (2015) argue that consent is an essential part of a liberal individualist understanding of autonomy, yet consent in itself is a deeply gendered notion particularly where sexual penetration is involved, as sex is usually seen ". . . as something men do to women" (Croskery-Hewitt, 2015, p. 620). Croskery-Hewitt (2015) explores two different types of autonomy: positive and negative autonomy. Positive autonomy refers to an individual determining the activities he or she wishes to pursue. Negative autonomy refers to whether to have sex in the first place. By this definition, stealthing imposes on positive autonomy, as the woman engaged in sex autonomously (positive autonomy) but she did not agree to condom-less sex (negative autonomy). In this context, the positive and negative consent can essentially be understood as an agreement to a certain action, whereas the negative is a disagreement to a certain action.

Beres and MacDonald (2015) further argue that the concept of freedom is at the core of contemporary understanding of consent. Inherent to this is the freedom from coercion. Stealthing posits an inimitable action that sidesteps freedom and autonomy due to the nonconsensual and deceitful removal of the condom. Beres and MacDonald (2015) caution, however, as indicated earlier, that consent and freedom in the context of hetero-patriarchal sex are problematic because of the social context and gendered power relations in which it operates. The gendered power differentials between men and women make women giving free consent problematic.

Hust et al. (2017) surmise that the interactional feminist perspective provides a framework for explaining how gender differences affect negotiation of sexual consent, placing the emphasis on hegemonic power differentials between men and women that are socially constructed and reproduced. These socially informed power differentials result in

gendered sexual scripts that position men as initiators and women as gatekeepers of sex and produce dominant sexually aggressive men and subordinate sexually pleasing women. Related to this, Hust et al. (2017) assert that hegemonic hetero-patriarchal gendered nuances of sexual consent may contribute to sexual violence.

According to Vidler (2017), “ostensible consent” refers to a situation where sex was consensual when it occurred, without negative outcomes or malevolence intended. If a situation as the latter later becomes sexual assault or violation of sexual autonomy, it occurs retrospectively. This seems to aptly account for stealthing, as the condom-only sex was consensual when it began, realization of the violation of the agreement to engage in condom-only sex occurs retrospectively upon discovering that the condom was removed (or not used). The retrospective sense of violation is demonstrated by a number of victims in the last section of the article.

Criminal sex laws guard sexual consent and violation (Brodsky, 2017; Vidler, 2017). According to Vidler (2017), sexual autonomy is recognized as a fundamental right that criminal sex laws aim to protect, as promulgated by Cairo Consensus and Beijing Declaration (Cohen & Richards, 1994). A violation of the right to sexual autonomy and agency to have protected sex occurs in stealthing. Furthermore, the violation of that right compromises and disenfranchises women’s sexual and reproductive health and choices, as elucidated by the examples in the next section.

The act of stealthing is inextricably fraught with fraud and deception. Sexual interactions involving fraud and deception vitiate consent and violate autonomy (Vidler, 2017). It has been further insinuated that it is not only the physical act involving (or on occasion not involving) a condom that is violent but the deceit involved in stealthing is also equivalent to violence, as it manipulates the women into acting against their own free will. An empirical investigation by Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) revealed several findings that have a bearing on stealthing. First, male aggression and deception were found to be an integral part of acquiring heterosexual sex. Aggression and deception are entrenched in hetero-patriarchal sexual scripts, despite increasing representations of women as sexually assertive and autonomous (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Second, resistance from women is seen as mere token resistance (where a woman rejects sexual advances due to the dominant script of women as sexual gatekeepers). Importantly, if her resistance is perceived as token resistance, her refusal of sexual engagement is often dismissed (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Similarly, men may interpret (or pretend to interpret) a woman’s insistence on condom-only sex as mere token resistance. Third, Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) found that once sex is underway, no further consent or negotiation is warranted. In fact, further consent and negotiation is actually avoided to minimize the possibility of the women refusing.

Jozkowski and Peterson’s (2013) results presents several possibilities for stealthing. First, they conclude that deceptive behavior may account for the nonconsensual sexual events that occur, as it does in stealthing. The authors report that men admitted to deception or making woman believe that sex was unintentional, as a way to obtain nonconsensual sex without getting caught, such as “Just stick it in and if she objects, pretend like I had done it by mistake” (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013, p. 520). Vidler (2017) states in relation to deception, that in the context of sexual activity, autonomy requires a person to demonstrate that their right to make an autonomous choice about their sexual activity was breached. According to this understanding, stealthing then would represent a deceitful violation of a woman’s autonomy as her right to make an autonomous choice was not only breached, but was breached without her knowing. Second, Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) report that many men willingly engage in sexual aggression and violence using a degree of physical force (“I would just push her down, use my strength to get her head down there. Then she would have no choice but to do it” (p. 520)) and their body position to gain the sexual outcome they desire. In stealthing, men are often reported to simply go ahead with sexual intercourse without a condom despite a woman’s resistance. Third, Jozkowski and Peterson’s (2013) findings of no further consent being necessary once sex is underway account for the nonconsensual removal of the condom, despite it being a violation of what was agreed between the partners at the outset. Some of these points are elaborated on in the next section.

While it may be conceded that stealthing is a violation of consent (Lanquist, 2017), it can also be conceded that stealthing may not have the same degree of force in the act in the same way rape does, as the sex itself was consensual. Brodsky (2017) reports that women who were previously raped and subsequently stealthed believed that the two acts are different. However, there seems to still be a connection between the two, and as an act of gender-based sexual violence, stealthing is often overlooked as a form violence (Brodsky, 2017). At the juncture of violence, Brodsky (2017) further states that nonconsensual condom removal is a motivated form of sexual violence. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) add that sexual assault is understood to occur when a man chooses to pursue sex despite understood nonconsent. In terms of stealthing, the sex act is transformed from consent to assault because the prerequisite agreement was violated. Not only does the above argument deftly place stealthing as a motivated form of sexual violence, it also establishes stealthing as a practice of hegemonic masculine dominance over female sexuality and reproduction.

Stealthing Stories

Having discussed the origin and conceptual underpinnings of the stealthing trend, I now discuss cursory online narratives as an avenue to better understand the trend as it is

practiced in heterosexual relationships. The online environment, with its publicly available data, provides an accessible avenue to gauge the real-life experiences of victims and perpetrators of stealthing and to better understand stealthing as praxis without the concerns associated with sex research carried out with real participants. A reading of the online narratives indicates, first, that stealthing is a distinctly masculine practice intended on subjugating the sexual and reproductive rights of women. Second, the accounts suggest that women who were stealthed experience perplexing emotional responses, a sense of violation and fear of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Male power and dominance also characterized their subjective experiences. Finally, readers' responses to stealthing indicate that stealthing seems to occupy a precarious position as a potential sexual violation according to most readers.

The Men Who Stealth

The online environment provides both information and cautionary warnings on the practice of stealthing and also houses platforms where men teach other men how to stealth, as well as provide encouragement and praise for men who stealth (Brodsky, 2017; Huges, 2017). Brodsky (2017) states that the online subcommunities and instructions are rooted in misogyny and the hegemonic power of masculinity. Similarly, Du Toit (2014) agrees that sexual domination over women and girls, expressed through sexual violence, becomes a central marker of masculinity. Masculinity and the gendered performance and scripts of sexuality are embedded in the practice of stealthing. In the online environment, stealthing is discursively constructed around male instinct and natural male right (Brodsky, 2017; "What You Need To Know About 'Stealthing,'" 2017). Stealthing has been described by men who practice it as an ". . . 'art'—one that increases their own sexual pleasure, provides a thrill for getting away with something risky, and 'gives women what they deserve'" ("The Side Of 'Stealthing' That No One's Talking About," 2017, p. 1).

Many online sources feature the story of an American man who has been given the pseudonym of Brendan (Barns, 2017; "Why I stealth," 2017) who has openly admitted live on radio to stealthing his sexual partners. The man stated simply that he does it because it ". . . feels better with no condom on . . ." (Barns, 2017, p. 3). The prioritizing of sexual pleasure despite the risks and the wishes of a sexual partner was also recorded by "What You Need to Know About 'Stealthing,'" (2017). When he was asked about the risks associated with condom-less sex, Brendan, while conceding that there was a risk, stated that ". . . there's a risk crossing the road and we all do that" ("Why I stealth," 2017, p. 18). The stealther's comment indicates his disregard for both his and his partner's sexual health and also trivializes the act and its consequences.

In addition to the pursuit of sexual pleasure, other men have reported that the "thrill of degradation," along with the belief that they have the right to "spread their seed," was among other rationale given for the practice ("What You Need to Know About 'Stealthing,'" 2017, p. 7). Additional comments such as "Who wants sex, should also want the sperm of the man. That is an instinct, a right; not to deny" (Buzinski, 2017, p. 3) reveal the dominant narratives of masculine sexuality.

Statements such as ". . . right to spread their seed . . ." ("What You Need to Know About 'Stealthing,'" 2017, p. 7), "that is an instinct" (Buzinski, 2017), and it "feels better with no condom on" (Barns, 2017, p. 3) are reflective of the dismissive attitude that stealthers have toward their partners rights and wishes. It is also reflective of them prioritizing their own sexual gratification at the expense of their own health and their partner's health and wishes. Most importantly, the natural male right discourse evident in stealthing is indicative of hegemonic male dominance and power.

The Experience Project (which was a website that has been subsequently shut down) contained several accounts of stealthers and comments to stealthing (Brodsky, 2017). The comments on the site demonstrated prevailing discourses of male dominance and power. The site contained a dialogue between both men and women where it seems that a portion of women have been co-opted into the natural male right discourse, as evidenced by the following comments. "It's a man's instinct to shoot his load into a woman's *****. He should never be denied that right" (Brodsky, 2017, p. 188; Jalili, 2017, p. 13). A female reader concurred with this statement and replied that "As a woman, it's my duty to spread my legs and let a man shoot his load into my wet ***** whenever he wants" (Brodsky, 2017, p. 188; Jalili, 2017, p. 13). To this, a man responded, "Oh I completely agree with this. To me you can't have one and not the other, if she wants the guy's ***** then she also has to take the guy's load!!!" (Brodsky, 2017, p. 188; Jalili, 2017, p. 14). In addition to their right to ejaculate inside a woman, stealthers believed that men are entitled to impregnate women "That's how god created the universe, we are born to do it" (Brodsky, 2017, p. 188).

Huges (2017) reports that not only the men in the online forums disregard their victims' reproductive freedom, sexual autonomy, and agency, but also they are in fact stimulated by it. According to Huges (2017), the subjective pleasure men take from stealthing is a show of not only their dominance and power but also their propensity to dehumanize their female partners. Stealthing is believed to make men ". . . feel powerful and masculine" (Huges, 2017, p. 5). The comments cited in this section emphasize traditional masculine discourses of power, domination, aggression, and uncontrollable sexual instincts. Discourses of masculinity are also evident in how women report experiences of stealthing.

The Women Who Are Stealthed

From the perspective of women who have been stealthed, perplexing emotional responses, a sense of violation, fear of STDs, and male power and dominance dominated their subjective experiences. Emotional responses seem to center on feelings of confusion, anger, betrayal, and disrespect. Simultaneously, there is also a sense of violation reported by most stealthed victims.

According to Brodsky (2017), most women who report incidences of stealthing indicate their confusion by statements such as “I’m not sure this is rape, but . . .” (p. 183). A sense of confusion is reported by most victims. Reiss (2018) reports one victim trying to make sense of the event in the following narration:

He had finished inside me. As angry as I was, I struggled to reconcile how violated I felt with how much I liked him. I’m ashamed to say it, but at the time, I shrugged it off. I even tried to spin it as a compliment. A sign of impending monogamy, perhaps? (p. 3)

Women seem to struggle with the act of stealthing because they autonomously consented to the sex, and although they were violated, their emotional attachments to their partner further complicated how they processed the act. However, in the negotiation, they consented to protected sex only. Having the condom covertly and nonconsensually removed also leaves women with feelings of anxiety and anger. “My first time involved a guy sneaking off his condom. It resulted in fear, anger, anxiety and of course, 3 hours in the emergency birth control and STD clinic” (Cogen, 2017, p. 15). The knowledge that they were stealthed leaves women feeling violated, disrespected, and shocked. It also makes them fearful about their sexual health and safety:

I was aware of what was happening, but I didn’t say anything at the time—I felt way too intimidated and nervous. I remember just hoping that it would be over soon, and feeling shocked that he would have such little disregard for me or his wife’s health, since I could have had an STD that he might pass to her. It completely changed how I felt about him and that encounter. I went from enjoying myself to feeling violated and dirty. (Anonymous, 2017, p. 8)

Another victim reported that:

I saw him put on the condom but he kept adjusting himself. I didn’t notice anything when he finally put it back in I was facing away. The only reason I noticed is that when he finally came I could feel it between my legs. When that happened I was confused and he had a horrified look on his face. I asked him if the condom broke and then I saw it on the ground and he said he took it off. (Cogen, 2017, p. 10)

In addition to confusion, anger, and anxiety, feelings of being violated dominated victim experiences. “I had this

happen at a guy’s house. I left mid-sex I never saw the guy again. I sorta felt like I was raped” (Cogen, 2017, p. 11). Reiss (2018) reports,

Instinctively, a part of me that knew I had been violated, or at least deceived, but it wasn’t in a violent, fisticuffs kind of way. I wasn’t in pain. And that’s part of what’s so tragic about situations like this: Because I wasn’t bleeding or bruised . . . (p. 5)

The sense of violation experienced by victims of stealthing is multifaceted as victims report a violation of their bodily autonomy as well as a violation of trust in the partner. Brodsky (2017) states that victims experienced stealthing as disempowering and as a demeaning violation of the sexual agreement. Brodsky (2017) added that in addition to the violation, women felt that their concerns and reactions to the stealthing were dismissed by the partners. Victims felt like their agency was removed and that their wishes were completely disregarded, as well as their rights to police and control their own reproductive and sexual health:

I left his flat feeling violated. I had consented to having sex with him, but his taking off the condom without my knowledge took that consent away. I felt humiliated, ashamed, dirty. Like I didn’t have a say over what happened to my body, like I had been sexually assaulted. (“What You Need to Know About ‘Stealthing,’” 2017, p. 5)

This quotation relates to the infringement of women’s rights to police their own reproductive and sexual autonomy. According to Brodsky (2017), in addition to feeling confused, disrespected, and violated, victims report that unwanted pregnancies and STDs were among their primary concerns once they learn that they were stealthed. This is evident in comments such as:

My first time involved a guy sneaking off his condom. It resulted in fear, anger, and anxiety and of course 3 hours in emergency birth control and STD clinic. You are not subject to unprotected sex you do not want, consent should be informed for both parties. (Cogen, 2017, p. 15)

My roommate was having sex with someone she was seeing and suddenly I heard her yelling and a door slammed and her kicking him out. I asked what happened and she said she realised he took the condom off and came inside her. We left right then to get Plan B, and luckily her STDs came back clean. (Cogen, 2017, p. 23)

Women’s comments to stealthing are not merely reactive as women are also reflexive of the practice of stealthing. Many women realized that the act of stealthing centers around male power and control over women. Discourses of male dominance and uncontrollable sexual instincts are also evident in this victim’s account. The victim explained that stealthing

... must be about power and control. I think there are some men that care more about using condoms and others that see them as "optional." I think stealthing is definitely a way for men to have control over the other person. It clearly shows they have a lack of respect. (Anonymous, 2017, p. 11)

This victim's account concurs with Brodsky's (2017) findings. Themes of masculinity and exertion of dominance and control of women's bodies and sexual and reproductive choices are evident in women who have been stealthed. Reiss (2018) describes how one woman conceived her child from a stealthing incident. Reiss (2018) recounts the experience of a woman who was pursued by a man for several months despite her rejecting his advances. On one occasion, she reported that the man in question forced himself on her and she had to insist that he wear a condom. He refused. "Toward the end he said, 'I just put a baby in you, please don't kill it.' Later I found a dry condom near a pillow" (Reiss, 2018, p. 10). The aftermath of the incident was equally confusing for the victim as she was told by her family that "It wasn't rape, he just took the condom off" (Reiss, 2018, p. 11). Similarly;

When my ex did it, I felt like he was disrespecting me and purposely doing something that he knew I didn't want. But I was especially anxious when I was getting tested for STDs at my annual gynaecological visit after the second time. However, I didn't take a pregnancy test during either occasion. Luckily, I had been on birth control and in both instances, the men pulled out before finishing. (Anonymous, 2017, p. 9)

These narratives account for the sense of ownership and entitlement men believe they have over women's bodies and their sexual and reproductive choices. A woman reported that "... when he was finished, I said something along the lines of, 'You could have asked before taking the condom off.' I remember him replying that I would have just said no . . ." (Anonymous, 2017, p. 6). This relates to Jozkowski and Peterson's (2013) findings of men deliberately avoiding seeking any additional consent for anything further and instead opt for just going ahead to acquire the sexual outcome they desire. According to Hosie (2017),

Survivors [of stealthing] describe non-consensual condom removal as a threat to their bodily agency and as a dignitary harm . . . You have no right to make your own sexual decisions . . . You are not worthy of my consideration. (p. 7)

Collectively, women experience stealthing as emotionally perplexing and distressing and as a violation and domination which deprives them of their rights to sexual autonomy and agency.

Responses to Stealthing Narratives

An impression of vicarious responses to the stealthing trend is useful in gauging the significance of the act, presumably

without bias. A report by Weiss (2016), profiling readers' responses to an online report of a woman's experiences of being stealthed, suggests that people are clear on what stealthing is:

The bottom line is your boyfriend prioritized his temporary sexual pleasure over your health and safety. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew it was wrong. He knew it could ruin your life. He just doesn't care. He's OK with ruining your life to orgasm. Personally, I would break up with him. A partner who doesn't respect you or care about you is one not worth having. (p. 6)

Weiss (2016) further reports a reader stating that:

Taking off a condom without letting you know is rape. Not kinda rape, not sort of rapey, not a pale shade of sexual assault, it's RAPE. . . . Pretty much all evil people make their SOs incredibly happy. . . . He risked you feeling violated and feeling raped for the rest of your life . . . for coming. This guy is trash and no amount of "being nice" can excuse this sh*t. (p. 9)

OP, that is rape. It's legally referred to as "rape by deception." That's when the sex you consent to is not the sex that you get. (p. 10)

The quotations of these bystanders reflect that the act of stealthing is unequivocally akin to rape. Yet, concurrently there are readers' responses such as that reported by Reiss (2018) where a family member of a victim of stealthing stated "It wasn't rape, he just took the condom off" (Reiss, 2018, p. 11).

One bystander commented to a report of stealthing by saying that:

I think [the term "stealthing"] brings attention to this disrespectful act and emphasizes how frequently it occurs. If stealthing has happened to you, know that you are not alone. Just because you accepted the original terms of the sexual act does not mean you necessarily have to accept any changes that are made to these terms while the sexual act is taking place. What your partner did was wrong, and I hope that they at least acknowledged this wrongdoing and righted their ways, rather than victimizing you further with their arm-twisting, belittling tactics. (Pugachevsky, 2017, p. 10)

The above comment reveals how naming the act has had positive consequences, as it has allowed more women to come forward. For victims and third persons, stealthing occupies a precarious position at best, unlike perpetrators of stealthing, who seem to view the act as par for the course in gaining the sexual outcomes that they desire.

Stealthing: Future Directions

The scope of this article was limited to a conceptual understanding of stealthing. Online reports of the construct were

used to problematize the phenomenon as a practice that warrants empirical analysis. Through this article, first, I aimed to establish the phenomenon of stealthing as a construct worthy of scrutiny in the human and social sciences, specifically as it occurs within heterosexuality. This article has showed how stealthing distinctively assimilates sexual consent and the violation of sexual autonomy to produce an inimitable form of sexual violence located within hetero-patriarchy. Second, utilizing online popular culture narratives, I expounded the practice from the view of men who stealth, victims of stealthing, and readers' retorts to reports of stealthing.

Victim experiences to being stealthed have revealed the sense of violation and disregard that they experience from their partners. Stealthing contravenes women's bodily and sexual agency. Women are led to believe that they are engaging in protected sex driven by their own volition, yet under the facade of their own freedom and autonomy, they are stealthfully violated. This violation diminishes their sexual and reproductive integrity despite a subjective sense of liberation and empowerment to have initiated the use of a condom in the first place. To this end, it would seem like as long as sex is something that men do to women, in line with dominant sexual scripts in hetero-patriarchal relationships, women's sexual and reproductive rights will be at risk of being violated.

The one avenue that may have an impact is to criminalize the act of stealthing. The violation in stealthing associates the act with other sexual offenses such as rape, as was concluded in the 2015 Switzerland case (Brodsky, 2017). However, even if guarded by law, this process may inadvertently disenfranchise women further because of the difficulty a woman may have in categorically proving that she was stealthed. In SSA, there seems to be few, if any, such cases to have reached the legal justice system. Deciding whether nonconsensual condom removal is akin to rape is legally complex and consensus has yet to be reached globally, recognizing stealthing as a crime. Currently, there are laws in the United Kingdom and certain states in United States, Switzerland, Sweden, and Canada where stealthing has been criminalized ("The Side of 'Stealthing' That No One's Talking About," 2017). According to *Northglen News* (2017), stealthing is sexual assault and is a crime based on SA's Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act of 2007). Media reports, in contrast to academic rhetoric, take a more definitive stance, with many SA reporters outrightly calling stealthing rape (Jadezwi, 2017; Reeves, 2017; Stone, 2017).

While its status as a crime is yet to be established, the practice of stealthing bears heavily on the agency of women to control their own bodies, lives, and futures. Stealthing poses preventable risks to women for STDs and unwanted pregnancies. These risks strongly contradict the global initiatives mentioned at the opening of this article that enfranchise and prioritize the sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women. The act of stealthing, as performed by individual men at a micro level, independently contravenes global

initiatives toward enfranchising women. This is indicative of the understated level of hegemonic power that individual men hold, such that even global and international policies have little control or influence over masculinity and male dominance over female sexuality and reproduction.

Academic engagement on stealthing within the human and social sciences is scarce. This article presents some orientation of stealthing in the field of gender and sexuality within the human and social sciences in the same way Brodsky's (2017) paper ushered in the practice of stealthing in the discipline of law. The arguments presented in this article were limited to a conceptual understanding of the trend only. The concept of stealthing also raises further questions of the ideological differences between sex with and without a condom, outside frames of STDs, and unwanted pregnancy. The action of stealthing as a practice warrants its own empirical investigations and further conceptual and theoretical attention in the same way other acts of gender and sexual violence have garnered attention.

Notwithstanding the systematic analysis of textual and empirical data, particularly on women who have been stealthed, suggestions for future directions include further theoretical and practical reflections on the phenomenon in homosexual partnerships, the implications on sexual health for the men who stealth and their partners, and on stealthing as it may occur within the context of sex work. In addition, further theoretical considerations to understand the practice beyond hetero-patriarchy, sexual scripts, and theories of agency and consent are needed. Finally, stealthing necessitates further judicial engagement not only in SSA but globally as well.

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Author Biography

Sumayya Ebrahim is an academic and a practising psychologist. She is extensively involved in the professional training of psychologists at the department. Her research interests lie primarily in media representations of gender, sex, rape, pornography, infertility and the body.