

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A commentary on Wendell Ferrari, Pedro Alexandre Costa, Marcia Thereza Couto & Marcos Nascimento (25 Mar 2025): Invisible Victims: Addressing the Sexual and Health Consequences of Stealth Breeding for Brazilian Gay Men, *Journal of Homosexuality*, DOI:10.1080/00918369.2025.2480766.

Dear Editor,

I have just finished reading the study by W. Ferrari et al. (2025), which explores the context of stealth breeding among gay men in Brazil, with great satisfaction but also with a heavy heart. I commend the authors for an organized and clearly written study that sheds light on the dangers of using dating apps, as well as the importance of consent, power and gender dynamics, vulnerabilities and challenges that gay men face in dealing with institutional violence and stigma, and the toll on their mental health.

Sexual health can be described as a state of physical, mental and social well-being that requires a positive approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, with the goal of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences free of intimidation, discrimination and violence. For this to be achieved and maintained, the sexual rights of every person must be respected, protected and fulfilled (WHO, 2022).

The authors begin by clarifying and distinguishing concepts that are essential to their analysis, whether by describing what stealth breeding is, or the practice of barebacking, or what "bug chasing" and "gift-giving" mean. Clarifying these concepts leads us to several issues, such as impulse control, lack of responsibility in sexual practices, and the abandonment and violence against oneself, which leads us to the following question: How can we help these people who feel the need to put themselves at risk and who have already abandoned themselves in some way?

In fact, stealth breeding is a violation of established consent, something that works for both parties regardless of sexual role (W. Ferrari et al. 2025). We live in an increasingly hedonistic and individualistic society where any form of accountability is seen as oppressive. The lack of empathy and the entitlement to another's body ultimately justifies any form of retribution and human rights violations that constitute sexual and gender-based violence. Dating apps have changed the paradigm of how people form

emotional relationships and what they value as important (Sang et al., 2021). A culture of emptiness and disposability has been created which, combined with the use of Prep, has in some ways, trivialized the way the body is seen. Because society is not prepared to deal with the specific health needs of most sexual and gender minorities, an episode of unprotected sex introduces even more entropy in the form of stigma that prevents these people from seeking the help they need (Schwartz et al., 2021). There is a social judgement and a forced internalization of guilt and shame, given that the sexual encounter was sought with the sole purpose of being disposable. Communication and assertiveness are fundamental throughout the process, nonetheless, it appears to exist specific dominance patterns that mirror heterosexual dynamics in terms of expectations, behaviors and acceptance of the one being penetrated, which assume a less masculine and more submissive position, leading to mutual pleasure through domination. However, this exposure to casual sex brings other public health concerns unveiling the fact that most likely this regime of sexual satisfaction will be reproduced with many others with no exclusivity. This brings us to a darker and deeper reality that reveals the inability to form healthy affective relationships.

It was palpable the way the victim's vulnerability manifested: even though there was a clear violation of a safe sexual practice, they kept going which made me question the following: was the domination itself a form of coercion? Was the serological status questioned before the sexual act? If there is no knowledge about the person, would the information still be legitimate? Where did the sexual violence take place?

As the authors disclosed, one of the issues addressed was gay men's access to health care and how this path is riddled with judgments, discrimination and prejudices, labeling the victims responsible for a situation that they sought out and therefore seen as less capable men and deserving of abuse. From a psychological perspective, we can ask ourselves: What is the problem? Was this influenced by the fact that these men were younger and had a certain naiveté/fantasy about what they would find? Is fragility associated with a context of low self-esteem and depression from personal experiences? How are object relationships being constructed and managed? Not only was alarming that the participants recognized that they were not engaging in protected practices and continued to do so, but the fact that they did not identify as victims of sexual violence. Even within the gay population, there is still a heteronormative model in which the

concept of sexual violence only applies to women, and it is not seen as something that can be experienced by any individual regardless of their sexual and gender identity. In fact, the lack of identification with the concept of sexual violence means that it is a phenomenon difficult to measure (W. Ferrari et al. 2025).

Interpersonal relationships are now mostly established through apps, allowing anonymity and the fulfillment of fantasies without constraints (Qu et al., 2021). The stigmatization and repression of sexual experiences of gay men throughout life can be configured as asymmetrical and can lead to risky behaviors lacking structure/experience in building healthy relationships. However, regardless of the many issues that may arise from this study, the central focus is consent: their choice to protect themselves and mitigate the danger of casual sex was taken away from them. Casual settings end up sending the message that the victim loses the right to their autonomy, largely due to the binary view that does not see the breach of consent as a violation.

Educating health professionals and advocating for these people has never been more important than today, as we face the harmful consequences of technology and artificial intelligence that accentuate these people's vulnerabilities in the way they see themselves and relate to others and internalize violence and abuse.

REFERENCES

Joseph Schwartz, Josh Grimm, Rick Zimmerman & Meredith Clement (2021): Information Seeking and MSM's Beliefs about PrEP and Condoms, *Health Communication*, DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2021.1876323.

Qu J, Shen S, Sun IY, Farmer AK, Xue J. Sexting Victimization Among Dating App Users: A Comparison of U.S. and Chinese College Students. *J Interpers Violence*. 2022 Oct;37(19-20):NP17109-NP17132. doi: 10.1177/08862605211028281.

Sang JM, Egan JE, Meanley SP, Hawk ME, Markovic N, Bear TM, Matthews DD, Bauermeister JA. Expectations and beliefs: How single young gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men envision romantic relationships. *J Community Psychol*. 2021 Aug;49(6):1732-1747. doi: 10.1002/jcop.22522.

Wendell Ferrari, Pedro Alexandre Costa, Marcia Thereza Couto & Marcos Nascimento (25 Mar 2025): Invisible Victims: Addressing the Sexual and Health Consequences of Stealth Breeding for Brazilian Gay Men, Journal of Homosexuality, DOI:10.1080/00918369.2025.2480766.

WHO (2022). Redefining sexual health for benefits throughout life <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-02-2022-redefining-sexual-health-for-benefits-throughout-life>.