

Abortion, America and a history of #sexstrikes

Earlier this month, the movie star Alyssa Milano suggested that women go on a #sexstrike in response to new laws restricting abortion in Georgia. But is it really a good idea?



Re-sisters: "I'm calling for a #SexStrike. Pass it on," tweeted Alyssa Milano this month. © Getty

"Our reproductive rights are being erased," the actress Alyssa Milano tweeted on 11 May. "JOIN ME by not having sex until we get **bodily autonomy** back." It has been retweeted 15,000 times.

Milano was responding to new laws restricting abortion in the US. Georgia has become the fourth state to pass a "heartbeat bill" which bans abortion after **six weeks** of pregnancy. Alabama passed a law which made it illegal for doctors to perform abortions unless the mother's life is in danger.

The laws will probably never go into effect. The idea is that they will eventually make it to the Supreme Court. This will give judges the chance to overturn **Roe v. Wade**, the decision

which legalised abortion in America.

Milano argued that the new laws are "completely outrageous". She said that a "bold response is required". By going on a sex strike, women can draw attention to the issue and take back control of their bodies.

A sex strike is not a new idea. In the 1600s, **Iroquois** Native American women boycotted sex until they were allowed a say in whether to go to war.

More recently, Leymah Gbowee won the Nobel Peace Prize after she convinced women to campaign for an end to **Liberia's civil war** in 2003, in part by suggesting a sex strike.

Strike out

but it is up to individual states to legislate on the specifics. For now, women can still get abortions in Alabama and Georgia.

Q: What do we not know?

A: Whether the Supreme Court will decide to

Could this help to reverse the abortion bans in America? Many people have made fun of the idea. Anti-abortion campaigners point out that a sex strike will ultimately mean fewer abortions overall. Meanwhile, feminists say it suggests that women only have sex for men, or to make babies.

But the lawmakers banning abortion are already trying to control women's bodies, argues Milano. Why shouldn't women take back that control in order to make a point? Besides, the aim is to draw the attention to the issue. In that sense, it has already been a success.

reconsider **Roe v. Wade** in the near future. If it did, we also do not know what the judges would decide.

Q & A

Q: What do we know?

A: The Supreme Court's **Roe v. Wade** decision protects a woman's right to have an abortion,

YOU DECIDE

Is a sex strike a good idea?

ACTIVITIES

When does life begin? The "heartbeat" laws are based on the premise that it begins when the first flutter of a heartbeat can be detected. Some argue that it begins at conception; others that it starts at birth. Discuss as a class.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born."
 Ronald Reagan

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



WORD WATCH

Bodily autonomy – Control over your body.

Six weeks – This is the earliest point at which doctors can detect the heartbeat in a fetus.

Roe v. Wade –

The decision was made based on the 14th amendment to the US constitution, which protects the right to privacy. The judges ruled that this gave women the right to choose to have an abortion without government interference.

Iroquois – A group of Native American tribes

from Northeastern America.

Liberia's civil war – This was the African country's second civil war, and it lasted from 1999 to 2003.



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