

Why do conservatives let men off so easy in the great abortion debate?



REUTERS/Mike Blake

Draconian anti-abortion measures will go into effect in Ohio [on Tuesday](#), part of a broader national effort to incrementally [dismantle legal abortion by over-regulation](#). Barring judicial intervention, one of the consequences of the new measures will be the closing of Cincinnati's Planned Parenthood clinic, cutting millions of area residents off from their [sole remaining abortion provider](#), as well as from the [family planning and birth control services](#) the agency provides; Planned Parenthood is appealing the regulations, and responding with a nation-wide "Pink Out" day of protest, also on [Tuesday](#).

This concerted, coordinated attack on Americans' [constitutionally protected abortion rights](#) (and the further attack on birth control) isn't new, but has picked up pace and efficacy in recent years, with dozens upon dozens of new, increasingly onerous restrictions placed on women [across the country](#). And yet — for all the sound and fury (and [threats](#) and [murderous violence](#)) — there's one thing that America's anti-abortion activists never seem to recall: Babies require sperm.

Behind every woman attempting to prevent or terminate a pregnancy, there is a sperm-laden man. Temporarily putting aside both gender fluidity and the fact that one no longer need engage in actual heterosexual congress to make a baby (although, as a lesbian friend once said to me, "it's not like we get drunk & oops! Accidentally buy sperm"), there is simply no way to become pregnant without the involvement of male genitalia.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, [some 1.06 million abortions were performed](#) in the U.S. in 2011; according to University of Illinois professor Dr. Craig Niederberger, the average male ejaculation contains [about 200 million sperm](#) — by my calculations, that means more than 200 trillion sperm are involved in acts that ultimately lead to more than a million abortions every year. That's a lot of sperm, gents.

If the goal is to prevent abortion, and one believes (genuinely believes) that birth control is nearly as evil as abortion,

and one further believes (really, really believes) that women shouldn't be having sex outside of marriages into which children can be lovingly born and raised — then why the hell aren't you calling out your boys?

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Anti-abortion activists who don't spend 50 percent of their time insisting that men *stop sticking it in the ladies* and/or hectoring men-who-porked-women-who-had-abortions — well, these are anti-abortion activists who either don't know how baby-making works, or are hypocrites of the worst variety.



I suppose there might be a third option. I suppose it's possible that all of this anti-abortion, anti-birth control, anti-Planned Parenthood hullabaloo isn't *only* about a powerful belief that fertilized eggs have the same moral standing as actually-born-people (a belief which, as Bill Nye recently pointed out, [is patently ridiculous](#)).

I suppose it's possible — just possible — that there is some deeply rooted, society-wide, centuries-old misogyny at play. It may be that the people involved in trying to shame and legislate women away from full autonomy over our bodies and reproductive health also believe that women don't, in fact, deserve full autonomy over our bodies and reproductive health. These people may believe that anti-abortion activists know better than women — any women, anywhere, at any time in human history — precisely what women should do with our bodies. It's possible that the anti-abortion hullabaloo might be a little bit more about controlling women's bodies and sexuality than it is about revering human life. If it were entirely about revering human life, after all, I sense that the people so anxious to cut women off from safe, legal abortions would be far less anxious to cut them off from being able to [feed babies who have already been born](#).

Of course, I could be wrong. It could be that anti-abortion activists are, at this very moment, whipping up a big, splashy campaign to shame men into pre-marital celibacy. It could be that conservatives are poised to call on men to acknowledge their shared responsibility for any and all pregnancies. It might be that the GOP is planning a massive anti-rape initiative, alongside a drive for medical care so miraculously good that it prevents any pregnancy from ever threatening the life of the mother. There may be a budget in the works that serves to provide an unbreakable social safety net, one so strong that no American will ever have to choose between feeding the children she already has, and having a baby she may not be able to feed.

I will allow that, even if all this were so, I'd still advocate for women's essential right to make our own choices about our own bodies — but at least the anti-abortion movement could lay some claim to moral consistency, not to mention common sense.

As it is, you would think women spontaneously self-impregnate. Perhaps someone would be willing to send American conservatives a primer on how babies are made? I'll bet Planned Parenthood [could help with that](#).