1) Lysistrata 430ff. (trans. S. Halliwell). The women repel the commissioner and his police force of Scythian archers. [The commissioners had recently been set up by the Athenians as bureaucrats with special administrative powers].

[The gates suddenly open and LYSISTRATA comes out.]
LYSISTRATA. No need to force the gates. I'm coming out voluntarily. Why use crowbars? It's not such tools you need but careful thought.
COMMISSIONER. How dare you, filthy bitch! Arrest her, archers! Seize her and tie her hands behind her back. [One ARCHER starts to approach her.]
LYSISTRATA. By Artemis! If he lays a finger on me, This public slave will get it in the eye. [The ARCHER hesitates.]
COMMISSIONER. You're afraid of her? Just grab her round the waist. [To another ARCHER] You help him too: I want her tied at once.

[As the second ARCHER moves forward nervously, an OLD WOMAN, carrying a basket of wool etc., steps out from the gates behind LYSISTRATA.]

OLD WOMAN A. By Pandrosos! Just lay a finger on her, And I'll trample you until the shit falls out. [The ARCHER backs off.] 440

COMMISSIONER. 'The shit'—what shocking language! [To the third ARCHER] Hey you, come here. Tie up this woman first, to stop her prattle.
OLD WOMAN B [appearing]. By Phosphoros! Just lay a finger on her, And you'll soon acquire a shiny blue-black eye. [This ARCHER too backs away.]
COMMISSIONER. What, another one! [To the fourth ARCHER] Quick, archer, here! Grab her.
I'll stop them coming out here to face me down.
OLD WOMAN' [emerging]. By Artemis goddess of bulls! Just take one step!
I'll tear your hair and make you scream to hell. [The final ARCHER retreats.]
COMMISSIONER [looking round]. What wretched fate! I've now used all my archers. We can't accept defeat at the hands of women: [To the ARCHERS] Get into line, you Scythians; be prepared to charge head-on.
LYSISTRATA. And when you do, you'll find That we too have our troops; four companies of warlike women, all waiting armed inside.
COMMISSIONER [raging]. Twist back their arms, you Scythians: truss them up. [The ARCHERS approach tentatively. LYSISTRATA calls to those inside.]
LYSISTRATA. Come, allied women, rush to our defence! You market-trading-vegetable-vending swarms, You tavern-keeping-bread-and-garlic wives, get hold of them and give them all a bruising. Call them the filthiest names, show no restraint! [Various women appear and repulse the half-hearted attack of the ARCHERS]
2) Obscenity. A Victorian Scholar called Thomas Mitchell remarked that the *Lysistrata* 'turns upon a proposal so gross, that we should not insult our readers with it' (*Quarterly Review* 9 (1813) 142). But note too that Shelley's 1820 satire *Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant* about George IV and Queen Caroline showed the influence of Aristophanic scurrility. See S. Halliwell *Aristophanes Birds and Other Plays* pp. lxi-lxiii for more on 18th, 19th and 20th century views and uses of Aristophanes.

![Comic scene on Apulian bell krater 400-380 BC. Museo Civico Archeologico, Milan.](image)

3) The (comic) lot of the Athenian wife

KALONIKE. Look, darling, they'll *come*. It's hard for women to leave the house. I dare say some are getting their husbands….up, or waking the slaves, or putting a baby to sleep, or maybe washing and feeding our little ones.

4) Lysistrata being moving and serious on sorting the city out and the effects of war on women and their children (510ff and 575ff.):

LYSISTRATA: We learnt precisely what you [men] did, and often in our houses we heard reports of bad mistakes in very serious business. Then, inwardly distressed, we'd wear a smile as we asked nicely: ‘What vote went through today? Perhaps to change the peace inscription?’ But all my husband ever said was ‘What’s it to you, then? Now hold your tongue.’ And so I did.

OLD WOMAN: Well, I never would have done do!

COMMISSIONER [*to latter*]: you would have earned a thrashing, then.

LYSISTRATA: And that’s why I kept quiet. But later on we’d learn about an even worse decision. And then we’d ask: ‘How can you, husband, all be quite so crazy?’ He’d scowl at me and tell me I should stick to spinning yarn if I didn’t want a battered head.
‘Just leave the war to menfolk’. [Nb this is a quote from Hector to Andromache at Homer *Iliad* 6.492].

**COMMISSIONER:** Precisely what he should have said.

**LYSISTRATA:** But how, benighted fool, was it ever right we weren’t allowed to give you good advice?

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**LYSISTRATA:** *proceeding to demonstrate from the basket.*

To start with, treat the city
As women do a filthy fleece, by washing off the grease when stretching it and picking out the nasty, prickly bits. Next, find the ones who club together and press themselves all tight in quest for power: then comb them out, and pluck off all their heads. Now fill your basket with communal fabric of goodwill, with room for everyone, including well-disposed outsiders, and even debtors to the state; there’s space to mix them in. Then don’t forget the colonies sent out abroad by Athens: you ought to recognize that each is like a flock of wool. Then take together all these strands, from all these different sources, and draw them, bind them into one great mighty ball of wool, from which to weave a nice warm cloak for all the city’s people.

**COMMISSIONER:** How shocking that these women spin out all this woolly nonsense! They’ve played so small a part in war.

**LYSISTRATA:** ‘So small’, repulsive blockhead! We pay a double price for war.

For first we bear our children,
And send them out as fighting troops, but—

**COMMISSIONER.** Silence! Don’t stir trouble.

**LYSISTRATA:** Then, when we should be finding joy and pleasure in our marriage, We sleep alone, because of war. And it’s not just wives who suffer. Think of the maidens growing old, unmarried. How it grieves me!

**COMMISSIONER:** And don’t men too grow old?

**LYSISTRATA:** Of course, but things are rather different. Even a grey-haired man can find a youthful bride to many.

5) **A theory about Lysistrata:** in Greek, Lysistrata means ‘dissolver of armies’: an obviously appropriate name for her. At the time when the *Lysistrata* was produced (411), the position of priestess of Athena Polias - the highest appointment that any woman could hold in Athens - was occupied by a woman called Lysimache. Lysimache means ‘dissolver of battle’. Lysistrata hopes that one day she and her fellow-activists ‘will be known among the Greeks as Lysimachai’ (554). Did Aristophanes want to invest his heroine with some of the religious authority an Athenian priestess? She also reminds us of Athena.

6) **Sophocles Antigone** 504ff.

**Antigone:** And yet, how could I have won a nobler glory than by giving burial to my own brother? All here would admit that they approve, if fear did not grip their tongues. But tyranny, blessed with so much else, has the power to do and say whatever it pleases.

**Creon** You alone out of all these Thebans see it that way.

**Antigone** They do, too, but for you they hold their tongues.
Creon [510] Are you not ashamed that your beliefs differ from theirs?

Antigone No, there is nothing shameful in respecting your own flesh and blood.

Creon Was not he your brother too, who died in the opposite cause?

Antigone A brother by the same mother and the same father.

Creon Why, then, do you pay a service that is disrespectful to him?

Antigone The dead man will not support you in that.

Creon Yes, he will, if you honour him equally with the wicked one.

Antigone It was his brother, not his slave, who died.

Creon But he died ravaging this land, while he fell in its defence.

Antigone Hades craves these rites, nevertheless.

Creon But the good man craves a portion not equal to the wicked man’s.

Antigone Who knows whether this is not right in the world below?

Creon You do not love someone you have hated, not even after death.

Antigone It is not my nature to join in hate, but in love.

Creon Then, go down to hell and love them if you must. While I live, no woman will rule me.

7) Euripides’ Medea 472ff.

But you did well to come, for it will relieve my feelings to tell you how wicked you are, and you will be stung by what I have to say. [475] I shall begin my speech from the beginning. I saved your life—as witness all the Greeks who went on board the Argo with you—when you were sent to master the fire-breathing bulls with a yoke and to sow the field of death. [480] The dragon who kept watch over the Golden Fleece, sleeplessly guarding it with his sinuous coils, I killed, and I raised aloft for you the fair light of escape from death. Of my own accord I abandoned my father and my home and came with you to Iolcus under Pelion, [485] showing more love than sense. I murdered Pelias by the most horrible of deaths—at the hand of his own daughters—and I destroyed his whole house. And after such benefits from me, o basest of men, you have betrayed me and have taken a new marriage, [490] though we had children. For if you were still childless, your desire for this marriage would be understandable. Respect for your oaths is gone, and I cannot tell whether you think that the gods of old no longer rule or that new ordinances have now been set up for mortals, [495] since you are surely aware that you have not kept your oath to me. O right hand of mine, which you often grasped together with my knees, how profitless was the suppliant grasp upon us of a knave, and how we have been cheated of our hopes! But come now—for I will share my thoughts with you as a friend [500] (yet what benefit can I expect to get from you? Still I will do it, for you will be shown up in an uglier light by my questions)—where am I now to turn? To my father’s house, which like my country I betrayed for your sake when I came here? Or to the wretched daughters of Pelias? A fine [505] reception they would give me in their house since I killed their father. This is how things stand: to my own kin I have become an enemy, and by my services to you I have made foes of those I need not have harmed. That, doubtless, is why you have made me so happy in the eyes of many Greek women, [510] in return for these favors. I, poor wretch, have in you a wonderful and faithful husband if I am to flee the country, sent into exile, deprived of friends, abandoned with my abandoned children. This is splendid praise for a new bridegroom, [515] that his children are wandering as beggars, and she who saved him likewise. O Zeus, why, when you gave to men sure signs of gold that is counterfeit, is there no mark on the human body by which one could identify base men?
8) The Guardian newspaper Feb 9th 2011

‘Do sex strikes ever work? (by Kira Cochrane)
A senator in Belgium has proposed a sex strike as a way of ending the country's lengthy negotiations around forming a new government. But will it work?

You can't blame the Belgians for considering radical measures. Their elections were held 243 days ago, politicians still can't agree on forming a government, and as a result, unlikely proposals are being made to end the impasse. It's been suggested men should stop shaving in protest, and this week Socialist senator Marleen Temmerman proposed that age-old remedy: a sex strike. "I call on the spouses of all negotiators to withhold sex until a deal is reached," she says.

Temmerman as inspired partly by Lysistrata, the Greek play in which Aristophanes' heroine calls for women to abstain from sex to end the Peloponnesian war. In the play, the gesture is successful. But the question of whether sex strikes are generally effective calls up mixed, murky results.

In Pereira, Colombia, in 2006, the girlfriends of gang members held a widely publicized "strike of crossed legs" vowing to give up sex until their partners gave up violence. Last year, the city's murder rate saw the steepest decline in Colombia, down by 26.5%. Then in Naples, Italy, in 2008, women formed a similar strike against the notoriously dangerous New Year fireworks displays; in 2011, yet another man died and 70 people were injured at the event. Was one strike a long-term success, one not? It's impossible to say. These aren't, thankfully, the only measures to have been taken against these issues.

One sex strike lauded as a straightforward triumph was held in Kenya in 2009, when women's organizations protested against political infighting. "After just one week there was a stable government," Temmerman says. So are sex strikes the way forward? It seems unlikely. While it's understandable that women might assert political power this way – and a form of sexual control too – in communities where they're marginalized, sex strikes are also clearly problematic, reasserting old ideas of men as sexually predatory and essentially entitled to sex, while women must protect their honour at all costs, and can only effect change through their bodies. Back to the debating chamber, I'm afraid.