

Ethical Reasoning

Women who dress provocatively invite sexual assaults. They have only themselves to blame for it.

Laying out the argument first, let us first try to comprehend whether it is a valid one. The first sentence: “Women who dress provocatively invite sexual assault” can be written in the form of “If A, then B”, where A refers to dressing provocatively and B refers to inviting sexual assaults. So if a woman dresses provocatively, then she invites sexual assaults. The second sentence: “They have only themselves to blame for it” is the conclusion, that it is the fault of the woman that she was sexually assaulted. She is the one to blame.

P1: If women dress provocatively, they invite sexual assaults.

P2: A woman dressed up provocatively.

P3: The woman was sexually assaulted.

Conclusion: **Only the woman is to blame**, not the assaulter.

This argument is certainly not valid. The only conclusion that is valid is that “**the woman invited the sexual assault**” (considering, for now, that the premises are sound). So if a woman dressed up provocatively, then she invited the sexual assault. That is a correct conclusion making it a valid argument. But the final conclusion is that only the woman is to blame, which is invalid as **none of the premises actually talk about who is to blame**. Just because the woman invited the sexual assault does not necessarily imply that she is the one to blame. **The person who was invited can also be the culprit!** So the premises are incomplete, making the argument invalid. We can make this argument valid by inserting missing premises. The crucial point missing here is that if the woman did invite an assault, the assaulter accepted the invitation, so he could be the culprit as well! So whom do we blame, the inviter or the invitee? We could add the following premises: “If the woman invited the assault, the invitee is not to blame” and “if the invitee is not to blame, then one must blame the inviter”. So the argument becomes:

P1: If women dress provocatively, they invite sexual assaults.

P2: A woman dressed up provocatively.

P3: The woman was sexually assaulted.

P4: **If the woman invited the assault, the invitee is not to blame at all.**

P5: **If an assault does happen, and if the invitee is not to blame, then one must blame the inviter.**

Conclusion: From P1, P2 and P3, we see that the woman invited the sexual assault. Then taking P4 and P5 into account, we conclude that the woman is to blame.

This argument is valid, as the conclusion is logically drawn from the five premises. Without P4 and P5, it would certainly have been invalid. Now let us try to comprehend the soundness of the argument as well, by questioning the truthfulness of the premises. The first issue is with the usage of the word 'invite'. To invite here means to provoke someone and give rise to a strong reaction in someone deliberately. But do women really invite a sexual assault? Women dress up provocatively either because they feel happy that they look beautiful, or because they want to impress someone with their figure. It is a scientifically proven fact that straight men are sexually attracted to women, especially when visibly exposed to bare skin. So yes, women who dress up provocatively invite attention and attraction, but they certainly do not invite any assault. No woman (unless she is suicidal or not in her right mind) would want to get raped or sexually assaulted. The problem lies in the mind of the assailant, who gets provoked at the sight of the woman and decides to assault her. To make the premise sound, we need to add the word '**unwillingly**'. So if we were to make just a tiny change and say: "Women who dress provocatively unwillingly invite sexual assaults", then the premise is sound because the assailant gets provoked at the sight of the woman and decides to assault her.

The main problem with the argument here, however, is that it blames the woman for the assault. If the woman invited the assault, she is the one to blame and not the attacker. This is certainly not a sound premise. The woman did dress up provocatively, for whatever reason. She did evoke the sexual feelings of the assailant, and unintentionally was assaulted. But it was the assailant who physically assaulted her! He was the one who raped her and tortured her, which was very painful and traumatising for the woman. The woman didn't want to be raped, but he assaulted her against her will, which is a wrong thing to do. Therefore, whether the woman is to be blamed or not, **he must definitely be blamed!** It is incorrect to say that women have only themselves to blame for the assault.

P1: Doing anything against someone's will is a wrong thing to do. (Assuming both parties involved here are adults).

P2: The woman did not want to be raped.

P3: The attacker raped her, against her will

Conclusion: The attacker performed a bad action.

The one who performs the bad action must be blamed. Here, the attacker sexually assaulted the woman against her will and therefore, must be blamed at least partially, if not completely. Hence, the argument is not sound, because at least some (if not all) of the blame must be attributed to the attacker.