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## Why are women sexually assaulted? <sup>[1]</sup>

Hi Alice,

I was wondering what the main reason is behind women getting sexually assaulted. Is it because of the way they dress, the way they act, or how easily tricked they are? Do girls say something provocative that entices the male to engage in sexual assault?

Thanks Alice!

### Answer

Dear Reader,

**Sexual assault is never the survivors fault — period — regardless of what the person is wearing or how they behave.** Implying that a survivor of assault has any control over whether the crime occurred, based on how they were dressed or acting, distracts from the actual person(s) responsible for the assault — the assailant (or perpetrator). There are misconceptions that assault can be prevented by clothing or behavior, but sexual assault is precipitated solely by the actions of the attacker.

Often, individuals who commit sexual assault or rape seek dominance or power over another person. Sexual assault is really not about sexual gratification, but about power, domination, punishment, humiliation, and control.

Sexual assault is defined by unsolicited, unwanted, and nonconsensual acts by the perpetrator(s). According to NY State Law, lack of consent occurs when forcible compulsion is used to force contact and/or behaviors against someone's will and **it is a crime**. Forcible compulsion includes physical force, the threat of physical force, the threat to kidnap, and the inability of an individual to indicate a lack of consent due to being unconscious, mentally incapacitated, or physically disabled. Rape, nonconsensual physical touch, and other types of unwanted sexual attention are all types of sexual assault.

Sexual assault is more common than some might expect. The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) <sup>[2]</sup> reports that one in four college women report surviving sexual assault or rape on campus. While the media often portrays perpetrators of sexual assault as strangers,

most survivors of assault report knowing their attacker. Regardless of the identity of the perpetrator, the survivor's pain and suffering as a result of sexual assault often last much longer (from months to years) than the act itself. In addition to recovering from any physical trauma, some survivors of sexual assault struggle with depression, substance abuse, and sleep disturbances. Everyday activities like self-care, employment, and/or school work may also be significantly impacted.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, it is important to know about options for support. It is the survivor's right to choose (or not choose) a course of action following sexual assault. These options can include: reporting the crime to the police, seeking medical attention, and/or counseling services. If the survivor is a university student, another set of options are also available: reporting the incident to campus safety, pursuing campus judicial action against the perpetrator, and/or requesting specific considerations for current academic or living arrangements to ensure personal safety.

Making these decisions can be challenging and overwhelming. However, a counselor or campus sexual violence support office can be a great source of support and guidance through the decision and healing process.

There's also room for allies in the healing process for survivors and the prevention of sexual violence. You can also learn about how to be a supportive ally and about community efforts to reduce sexual violence by looking into educational and activist resources such as the [Anti-Violence Project](#) [3], [RAINN](#) [4], [Safe Horizon](#) [5], and [Students Active for Ending Rape](#) [6].

Alice!

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