

Summer 9-28-2017

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Non-Contact Sex Offenders and Public Perception
The Importance of Victim Type and Crime Location

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Abstract

It is estimated that 10% of Americans will be the victim of a non-contact sex offense in their lifetime. Non-contact sexual offenses include unsolicited exposure to sexual situations, verbal and behavioral sexual harassment, threats, and unsolicited use of a person's image in a sexual manner. This study will specifically look at exhibitionism, voyeurism, and frotteurism. Historically these sex crimes have been considered nuisance behaviors, however, some recent research suggests that these crimes may negatively impact the victims. This study experimentally examined people's perceptions of non-contact sex offenses and the type of consequences that should be incurred for these crimes. Further, we examined whether factors such as victim type and crime location may impact these perceptions. Overall we found that victim type did play a significant role in whether or not the participant considered the vignette a sex offense, but location played less of a significant role. These findings are discussed as they pertain to sex offender policy and treatment for non-contact sexual offenses.

Keywords: non-contact sex offenses, frotteurism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, punitive attitudes

Introduction

Sexual violence is a serious problem. A national (United States) survey done in 2012 found that about 18.3% of women and 1.4% of men reported being victims of rape at some point in their lives, while 5.6% of women and 5.3% of men reported being the victims of sexual violence other than rape, such as being forced to penetrate someone else, being sexually coerced, having unwanted sexual contact, or having non-contact sexual experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). The majority of research examining sex offending is focused on contact offenses such as rape and child molestation, while comparatively little research has focused on non contact sexual offenses such as frotteurism, voyeurism, and exhibitionism. Frotteurism is defined as a recurrent and intense sexual arousal from touching or rubbing against a nonconsenting person, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors. Voyeurism is defined as a recurrent and intense sexual arousal from observing an unsuspecting person who is naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors. Exhibitionism is a recurrent and intense sexual arousal from the exposure of one's genitals to an unsuspecting person, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013). As these non-contact sexual offenses are often perceived as "nuisance" behaviors, they often go undetected or unreported to authorities, however there is some recent research suggesting that these non-contact offenses are more than a nuisance and can have lasting impact on their victims (Clark, Jeglic, Calkins, and Tatar, 2016). Thus it is imperative to learn more about the prevalence, etiology and consequences of these non-contact sexual offenses.

Differences between Contact and Non Contact Sexual Offenses

Non-contact offenses include but are not limited to: unsolicited exposure to sexual situations, verbal and behavioral sexual harassment, threats, and unsolicited use of a person's image in a sexual manner, frotteurism, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. Contact sexual offenses include penetration, non-physically pressured unwanted penetration, and unwanted contact. Both contact and non-contact sexual offenses are considered to constitute sexual violence, as both types of offenses involve a lack of consent from the victim. Lack of consent can come in multiple forms including both refusal and inability to consent or to refuse. While non-contact sexual offenses are considered sexual crimes under the law, sometimes victims of non-contact sexual acts do not even know that such acts are being committed against them (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2014). This could be due to the lack of research and education surrounding non-contact offenses (Clark et al., 2016). This study will focus on frotteurism, exhibitionism and voyeurism – some of the most prevalent non-contact sexual offenses.

Characteristics of Non-Contact Offenses

Most non-contact sexual offenses take place in areas involving public transportation. For example, about half of both cases of exhibitionism and frotteurism occur in subway trains or platforms, and the other half occur in outdoor public areas. Perpetrators target these areas as people in these locales are often in close proximity to one another and these types of non-contact sex crimes can be committed with minimal chance of detection or they can escape into crowds (Clark et al., 2016). Interestingly, other types of sex crimes have a higher probability of having a private location rather than a public one (Colombino, Calkins, Levenson, and Jeglic, 2011). It should be noted

that what we know about these non-contact offenses is limited as the majority of victims of non-contact offenses are not aware that they have been victimized or they did not report the crime to the authorities. This could be due to a lack of education and public knowledge about what constitutes a non-contact offense. Victims of non-contact offenses are more likely to be female and young as they may be perceived as the most vulnerable targets (Clark et al., 2016).

Voyeurism is the most common paraphilia associated with law-breaking and has a lifetime prevalence of 12% of males and 4% of females. The prevalence of exhibitionism, however is not known. Among the general population it is estimated that about 2-4% of males and much lower percentage of females have engaged in exhibitionism. Frotteuristic acts may occur in up to 30% of the adult male population, but about 10-14% of adult men meet criteria for frotteuristic disorder (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013). A study done by Langstrom and Seto (2006) found that in a general population, respondents who reported voyeuristic tendencies were also more likely to report having a mental disorder. They also found support for a link between risk taking behaviors, as well as sexual risk taking, and voyeuristic and exhibitionistic behaviors. Johnson, Ostermeyer, Sikes, Nelseon, and Coverdale (2014) reviewed the literature on frotteurism and found four studies that looked at prevalence rates. They found in men prevalence rates for frotteuristic behaviors ranging from 7.9 to 35 percent across these studies. They looked at both the physical behavior and the fantasy behavior of frotteurism and noted that without asking about the two separately, there is a risk of overstating the prevalence of the disorder (Johnson et al., 2014). Another characteristic of these disorders is a high recidivism rate (Macpherson, 2003). It is important to note that although these offenders

are more likely to re-offend, they are not likely to escalate to more violent types of crimes (Macpherson, 2003; McNally and Fremouw, 2014).

According to Langstrom (2010), exhibitionism, voyeurism, and frotteurism should be considered disorders as opposed to paraphilias and these terms should be renamed to include “Disorder” after each one. The only time it should be labeled as a paraphilia is for clarification in research so that the reader can know what type of behavior the researcher is discussing. Currently, Paraphilia Not Otherwise Specified (NOS) is the most common diagnosis given to persons who commit sexual offenses, both contact and non-contact. To be diagnosed with paraphilia NOS, there must be a deviant method of sexual gratification established, a pattern of arousal that lasts more than six months, and the person must have acted on these urges or have distress caused from fantasizing about them. Again, the issue with this criterion is there have been many false-positives because disorders are being diagnosed solely based on history of behavior. However, it is hard to differentiate between what is a mental disorder and what is regular criminal activity (First & Halon, 2008).

History of Sex Offender Legislation

Sex offender legislation is based largely on crimes that have happened in the past. The “Wetterling Act” was created in 1994 and required that states enact a registration program for persons convicted of a sex offense against minors or sexually violent crimes or they would see a 10% reduction in federal funding. A national registry was also created that each state was required to participate in. The Wetterling Act was amended in 1996 to allow for public dissemination of registered information after the rape and murder of a 7-year-old named Megan by a twice-convicted offender, more commonly

known as “Megan’s Law” (Calkins, Jeglic, Zeidman, Beattey, & Perillo, 2014). In 2006 there was a revamp of sex offender legislation called the Adam Walsh Act (AWA), which included the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA). This created a nationwide online registry and notification system, and anyone who failed to register can incur further imprisonment. A tiering system was then created under SORNA to establish uniformity for the registration and notification systems. Tier I is the lowest level of classification and includes misdemeanor crimes, like failure to register and possession of child pornography. These offenders must be registered for 15 years. Tier II includes felony sexual abuse and sexual exploitation involving minors. These offenders must be registered for 25 years. Tier III is the highest classification level and includes sexual assaults, sexual contact with victims that are minors, kidnapping, and attempts or conspiracies to commit any of the aforementioned acts. These offenders must be registered for life (Calkins, Jeglic, Zeidman, Beattey, & Perillo, 2014). There have been several cases stating that registration is additional punishment, (examples include: *Smith v. Doe* (2003) & *Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe* (2003)), but the courts have upheld the registries and notification statutes (Calkins, Jeglic, Zeidman, Beattey, & Perillo, 2014).

Paraphilias and Sex Offender Legislation

According to SORNA, a sex offense is defined as an offense that involves a sexual act or sexual contact with another person. This includes offenses that involve penetration, sexual touching or contact with a person, and also offenses against minors that are considered offenses under federal guidelines. These include cases of voyeurism and solicitation. SORNA acts as a baseline for jurisdictions. They can enhance guidelines

as they would like. Again, SORNA was created to protect child victims of pedophilic offenses (Colbert, 2011). In regards to enhanced sex offender registration and notification, it was found that having a history of non-contact sex offenses on their record played a significant factor in determining whether or not they were selected for registration (Blasko, Jeglic, and Calkins, 2011). Non-contact offenders weren't required to register until the late 20th century. When they were required, in states such as California, they were required to be registered for life. Some may consider this "over-inclusion." SORNA was intended to make registration easier for states, but some believe that it has made life harder for these offenders, specifically re-integrating into society. These offenders, because they are registered for life, do not qualify for federal programs, which hinders their chances at getting housing and employment which leads to homelessness (Leon, 2011).

In a report done in 2011 by the United States Sentencing commission, the average sentence for sexual abuse offenders subjected to the mandatory minimum penalty was 235 months. Most non-contact offenders are repeat offenders that are in and out of prison with convictions like "persistent sexual abuse." After a period of time, judges can recommend them for civil commitment. While this is generally not common for non-contact sexual offenders it has occurred in more extreme circumstances where the offender has been apprehended for non-contact offenses more than 50 times (Associated Press, 2008). The two diagnoses that those committed of a sexual offense tend to be diagnosed with are pedophilia and paraphilia not otherwise specified (NOS) (2010). Levenson & Morin (2006) found that having either or both of these diagnoses was a significant predictor of civil commitment. There have been a few changes in the language

of the DSM-5, which have made it easier for non-contact offenders to be civilly committed. This includes the addition of “or behaviors” to the DSM-5 definition of criterion A for paraphilias. Now it can be concluded that a person might qualify as having a mental disorder based solely on their committing a sexual offense. This taken with the inclusion of having non-consenting victims in criterion B (i.e. voyeurism, exhibitionism, frotteurism, etc.; First and Frances, 2008), allows for people convicted of a non-contact sexual offense to be civilly committed. Again, this is reserved only for select offenders that are found to be dangerous to themselves or others.

Public Attitudes Toward Contact Sex Offenders

Overall, people have more punitive attitudes towards those who commit sexual offenses than those who commit non-sexual offenses (Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). A possible explanation for this is that the public sees these non-contact sex crimes as a nuisance and not actual crimes, which makes non-contact offenses different from contact offenses (Clark et al., 2016). Another possible explanation is that the public has a schema for sexual violence that represents a “moral panic” (Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). Moral panic is a phenomenon where a social group exaggerates their fear of a threat and reacts in an irrational way over and over again (Hier, 2016). The public, in order to maintain a good, safe environment, is more likely to agree with longer sentencing in order to protect its citizens, especially children (Chui, Cheng, and Ong, 2015). In fact, laws created for “memorial purposes,” such as “Jessica’s Law” are based off of cases involving children and are often looked at negatively by judges, and seen as too harsh (Griffin & Wooldredge, 2009). One of the first studies to look at community punitive attitudes was Brown (1999). What she found was that most community members agreed that all

incarcerated sex offenders should receive treatment, but they were skeptical that treatment would impact recidivism. A reason for these negative attitudes could be because there is a stigma attached to sex offenders that contribute to public perceptions of their inability to be rehabilitated, so they must be punished (Payne, Tweksbury, & Mustaine, 2010). Another explanation is that people believe sex offenses do more harm to the victim than non-sexual, violent offenses (Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). A meta-analysis done by Willis, Levenson, and Ward (2010) on contact offenders found that across studies, people who have not had known contact with sex offenders have more negative attitudes because they are heavily influenced by the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media. This study also found that punitive attitudes are mostly determined by demographic factors such as age, education, and gender. Interestingly, these studies have not looked at how variables such as victim type and circumstances surrounding the offense affect punitive attitudes. There is a lack of research on punitive attitudes towards non-contact offenders. This could be due to a lack of understanding of what constitutes a non-contact sexual offense.

Take this together with the fact that non-contact offenders tend to have high recidivism rates (Macpherson, 2003), it can be suggested that people will hold more punitive attitudes towards non-contact offenders because they have high recidivism rates. As it stands currently, contact offenders and non-contact offenders are treated similarly with regard to sex offender legislation.

Study Overview

To date, most studies examining public perceptions of sex offender legislation have focused on contact sexual offenses. We know very little about how people feel

about those who commit non contact sexual offenses such as frotteurism, voyeurism, and exhibitionism and the factors that influence those perceptions such as the characteristics of the perpetrator, victim, or the degree of contact. Further, there is a dearth of research investigating how people feel about the type and extent of punishment for those who commit non-contact sexual offenses. Further, there is no research examining factors that impact perceptions of non-contact sex offenses. What is known is the victim type (young female) and locations type (public) most commonly associated with non-contact offenses through victim reporting (Clark et al., 2016). What is also known is that most other sex crimes occur in private spaces (Colombino et al., 2011). Thus the goals of this study are threefold: (1) to examine perceptions of non contact sexual offenses; (2) to study how factors such as victim and perpetrator gender and offense location influence these perceptions; and (3) to investigate the ways in which people perceive how sex offender legislation should apply to those who have committed a non contact sexual offense. Based upon previous research and research conducted on attitudes toward sex offender legislation for contact sex offenses it is hypothesized that: (1) participants will not perceive many of the non-contact offense scenarios as sexual offenses; (2) there will be a difference in offense reporting if the victim is a child and the offense occurs in a more intimate location; and (3) participants will not report these offenses.

Methods

Design

This is a 2x3 between subjects' design. The two independent variables were victim type (i.e. man, woman, or child) and closeness (i.e. intimate vs. public setting). In the seventh condition, the participant was given the vignettes as if they themselves were

the person experiencing each situation. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the seven conditions. Six of the conditions were manipulated by victim type and closeness to determine if there are significant differences between crime variables. The seventh condition was used to determine which vignettes were considered sexual offenses.

Procedure

Participants ($n=393$) were recruited from a large, urban Northeast university. The study was posted on a Research Experience Website and all university undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology class that has a research component were eligible to participate by clicking on the study link for the study titled "Personal Decision Making." Each participant was awarded one research credit for his or her participation. Participants were excluded if they were under 18 or if they could not speak English fluently. The intended sample size was 351 participants with approximately 50 participants per condition. The sample size was determined by using the program G*power. Entering an effect size of .15 and error probability of .05 determined a sample size of 351 with a power of .80. The final count of participants consisted of 393 participants ages 18-65 ($M=21.10$, $SD=5.371$), 74.8% female ($n=2239$) and 25.2% male ($n=77$), and were mostly Hispanic ($n= 186$, 47%) or White ($n= 58$, 15%). Out of all the participants, 78 out of the 393 (19.6%) reported being a victim of a sex offense.

Materials

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by the authors of this study. These vignettes were taken from stories about frotteurism, exhibitionism, and voyeurism in the media and

incidents that the researchers had personally experienced. The vignettes were read for content validity by experts in the field of sexual violence prevention. The authors chose to ask whether or not the participant considered the vignette a crime because of the notion that there is a lack of education surrounding non-contact offenses (Clark et al., 2016). They authors also chose to ask whether or not they would report the crime because historically it is has been known that victims tend to not report crimes (Clark et al., 2016). The authors also built in questions to mask the main purpose of the questionnaire (gathering info on non-contact sex offenses).

Vignettes

In each of the seven conditions, participants read through 20 different vignettes and answered questions based on each vignette. The vignettes consisted of events that may or may not be perceived as non-contact sexual offenses. The vignettes were manipulated by victim type and proximity, and one in which the participants were asked to imagine they were the ones experiencing the event. The participants were first asked whether or not they thought the vignette was a crime in the form of a yes/no question. They were then asked to select all the following that apply from: sex offense, disturbance of the peace, public indecency, and other. They were then asked whether or not they would report the crime, also in the form of a yes/no question (See Appendix A). Finally, they were asked an opened ended question asking them to explain why they made their decisions.

Demographic Questions

After the questionnaire was complete, participants provided their demographic information, such as age, race, and gender, as well as how much media they consumed

and what crime shows they watched. They were also asked if they had been a victim of a sex offense. They then received a debriefing form upon completion that described the aim of the study and more information on how to get help if they or someone they know was a victim of a sex offense.

Results

Data Analyses

A factorial ANOVA was done with continuous dependent variables to determine if there was a difference between groups regarding whether or not incidents were considered a sex offense or another type of crime (disturbance of the peace, public indecency, and other) between the six conditions: male victim/ more personal, female victim/ more personal, child victim/ more personal, male victim/ less personal, female victim/ less personal, child victim/ less personal. A factorial logistic regression was done with the dichotomous outcome variables to determine if there was a significant difference between participants answering yes or no as to whether or not they thought each vignette was a crime, and whether or not they would report the crime. A Pearson goodness of fit test was done. A frequency table was done for the seventh condition where the participants were asked to answer the vignette questions as if they were the one experiencing these offenses (see Table 2).

The raw data consisted of the opinions of 393 participants for 20 items in the questionnaire. After running a factorial regression on the dichotomous dependent variables, the of vignettes endorsed as being a crime and as being reported were calculated and were then compared by conducting a Pearson goodness of fit test by victim type and intimacy. The results of the Pearson tests show a significant association

between a vignette being considered a crime and a victim type (see Table 1). There was also a significant association between a vignette being considered a crime and intimacy (see Table 1).

Closeness/Intimacy

The vignettes where closeness played a significant role in whether the participant thought the vignette was a crime included: people having sex in the bushes (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 1.609, p = .034$), an elderly man slapping someone on the behind (frotteurism) ($\chi^2= 2.659, p = .04$), undressing when someone is looking through a curtain at the victim (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 2.144, p = .001$), taking photos of victim kissing significant other (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 5.531, p = .003$), and a man with autism rubbing his penis on a piece of fabric (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 2.665, p = .00$). The vignettes where closeness played a significant role in whether the participant would report the crime included: undressing when someone is looking through a curtain at the victim (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 5.808, p = .028$) and taking photos of victim kissing significant other (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 3.981, p = .003$).

Victim Type

The vignettes where victim type played a significant role in whether the participant thought the vignette was a crime included: a woman flashing her breasts (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 5.823, p = .03$), a person offering \$20 if they can expose themselves to the victim (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 16.479, p = .00$), the victim getting sent unsolicited pictures of genitalia (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 13.667, p = .00$), undressing when someone is looking through a curtain at the victim (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 2.144, p = .02$), and someone taking photos of victim from across the way (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 0.814, p = .00$). The vignettes

where victim type played a significant role in whether the participant would report the crime included: a man exposing his penis on a subway platform (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2=5.204, p = .02$), a woman flashing her breasts (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 5.351, p = .004$), a person offering \$20 if they can expose themselves to the victim (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 32.226, p = .00$), the victim getting sent unsolicited pictures of genitalia (exhibitionism) ($\chi^2= 12.727, p = .00$), an elderly man slapping someone on the behind (frotteurism) ($\chi^2= 5.504, p = .034$), undressing when someone is looking through a curtain at the victim (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 5.808, p = .003$), someone taking photos of victim from across the way (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 1.406, p = .00$), and taking photos of victim kissing significant other (voyeurism) ($\chi^2= 3.981, p = .033$).

What Was Considered a Sex Crime

The seventh condition was used to assess whether or not these vignettes were considered crimes overall. Frequencies were looked at to see how many participants endorsed each vignette as a crime (see Table 2). About half of the vignettes were positively endorsed as being a crime with an overwhelming majority (>70%). The vignettes that held the overwhelming majority included: public fornication (exhibitionism), public masturbation (exhibitionism), touching (frotteurism), and “peeping tom” scenarios (voyeurism).

Open Ended Results

When reading through the open ended answers, the following trends were seen: could cause trauma to the victim, public setting, sexual harassment, consent, they were uncomfortable, they don't want to see that, it's against the law, it's inappropriate, children could be there, it's wrong, intent, and invasion of privacy. The open-ended

answers were coded for these 12 categories. The trends that were seen most often were public setting (13.5%), sexual harassment (10.2%), against the law (9.9%), and invasion of personal space (7.6%) (see Tables 3 and 4).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine what individuals perceive as non-contact sex offenses and what factors may influence their perception. The results show that victim type and intimacy of proximity do play a significant role in whether or not participants perceive certain acts as non-contact sex offenses and whether or not they would report these crimes. Overall, participants were more likely to consider the acts against child and female victims as sex crimes and they were also more likely to report in a more intimate setting.

The results that showed that victim type played a significant role in non-contact offenses are parallel to past research on contact offenses. For example, past laws have been created for “memorial purposes.” These laws are based off of contact sex offense cases involving children (Griffin & Wooldredge, 2009). The results from this study also show that children play a significant role in the participants’ decisions. These results also show that participants have more punitive attitudes towards offenders who commit offenses against children, which is consistent with the literature. Research has found that the public is more likely to agree with longer sentencing in order to protect its citizens, especially children (Chui, Cheng, and Ong, 2015). Similarly, participants were more likely to report these offenses if the victim type was a child in addition to considering these offenses as crimes.

Crimes with a female victim were also more likely to be considered sex offenses, which is consistent with the literature. Past literature on non-contact offenses found that victims of these offenses are more likely to be young, females. This could be because offenders see young females as timid and less likely to retaliate. Also, most offenders of these types of crimes are males (Clark et al., 2016). These results also showed that when the victim was young or female, participants were more likely to both consider the offense a crime and report the crime.

Also similar to past research on non-contact offenses, people were not likely to report these offenses regardless of victim type or intimacy. Past research looked at victim reporting (Clark et al., 2016) and found that victims are not likely to report, especially to the authorities. This study looked at witness reporting and whether or not the participants considered the vignettes crimes. Again, this is important because it shows that there is a lack of education on what constitutes a non-contact offense and what resources the public has to report these offenses. An alternative reason for lack of reporting these offenses is that people see these acts as a nuisance rather than a crime (Clark et al., 2016). Perhaps, some of these offenses are daily occurrences for people in urban areas since these crimes are most likely to happen in populated areas, such as public transportation (Clark et al., 2016). Clark and colleagues (2016) found that most of the reported non-contact offenses took place in crowded, public areas. Other studies such as Colombino et al. (2011) found that most sex crimes, mostly contact offenses, take place in private settings. Since past research suggests that non-contact offenses take place in public, and contact offenses take place in private, this study looked to see if a public versus a more private setting would influence whether or not people saw these offenses as crimes and whether or not they

would report them. What was found was the crime setting did play a role, showing that crimes outside of the regularly thought of settings will be considered crimes as well.

Non-contact offenses are considered crimes in both public and private settings.

The vignettes that included frotteurism were more likely to be considered a crime. This finding is interesting considering that voyeurism is the most prevalent disorder (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013). Though there is known prevalence for frotteurism, there is no known prevalence for exhibitionism. Many of the crimes that included exhibitionistic behavior were also very likely to be considered crimes. This could be because they included sexual acts as well as the involvement of explicit genitalia, which is an aspect in all contact sex crimes, and as we know, people are more punitive towards offenders of sex crimes than any other type of crime (Rogers and Ferguson, 2011).

This study is not without its limitations. One limitation of this study is that it was a self-administered survey meaning that participants took the study online in an uncontrolled environment and at the participants' discretion. This is a limitation because the researchers could not control how and when the participants took the study. Therefore, the researchers were unable to control for distractions and time. However, this method was used in previous research (Clark et al., 2016). Another limitation is that the sample was taken from undergraduate students from an urban, Northeastern University, which may not be generalizable to the entire population, especially considering that these offenses are more common in urban, more populated environments. A final limitation is that the vignettes were created by the researchers and were not standardized or tested for validity.

Future studies should look at a larger, more diverse sample to generalize findings across states and regions. Future studies can also test the internal validity of the questionnaire. Further research should also look at whether these results are due to lack of education, or other reasons that have not yet been ascertained. Research should also be conducted to learn the prevalence of exhibitionism.

The implications of this study are that victim type and crime setting does play a significant role in whether or not people perceive non-contact acts as sex offenses and whether or not they would report these offenses to either family members or to the authorities. This study is the first study to look at public perception of non-contact sex offenses. It adds to the non-contact sex offense literature, which in the past has been limited. This study confirms that non-contact offenses with child victims will be seen as worse than similar crimes with adults. It also confirms that a non-contact offense where the victim is female is a significant factor when considering the offense a crime as well as in reporting. Perhaps the public, as well as offenders, see these victims as more vulnerable (Clark et al., 2016) and that they should be protected. Non-contact offenses, just like contact offenses, have low reporting. However, in the case of non-contact offenses it could be due to lack of education, because participants did not even consider all of these vignettes crimes to begin with. This is important because it shows a deficit in knowledge in the public. If the public is not aware that a crime has been committed against them, then they are unable to know that they are in fact a victim and should be able to report these crimes. Similarly, these offenders are different from contact offenders, and should be treated differently as well. These findings are important because it helps lawmakers and psychologists understand what the public perceives non-contact

offenses to be and how best to educate them in the future. Based on these findings, laws should be changed based on actual evidence rather than public opinion and reactionary emotions to singular cases. Non-contact sex offenses are crimes and need to be taken seriously. The public should be educated on these offenses through national ads and public service announcements. They should also be taught in schools' sex education programs as well as my parents, especially since children's wellbeing is the foundation of sex offender legislation as it currently stands.

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Table 1

Chi-Square Results

<u>Vignette</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Pearson Chi-Sq.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>Sig. Victim Type</u>	<u>Sig. Intimacy</u>	<u>Paraphilia</u>
A man approaches you on an [empty/crowded] subway platform, opens his jacket and exposes his penis to [a man/woman/child].	Do you consider this a crime?	4.34	0.227	0.65	0.188	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	5.204	.02*	0.023*	0.849	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is standing outside of [a crowded bar/their home] when all of a sudden a drunk woman comes up to you and flashes her breasts.	Do you consider this a crime?	5.823	0.448	0.03*	0.304	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	5.351	0.148	0.004*	0.825	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is walking in their neighborhood [alone/with friends] when all of a sudden a car passes by and one of the passengers "moons" (exposes his/her buttocks) them.	Do you consider this a crime?	1.6	0.659	0.636	0.829	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	0.861	0.835	0.08	0.596	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is sitting in a [crowded/empty] movie theater when they look over and notice someone masturbating a few seats away from them.	Do you consider this a crime?	5.995	0.112	0.929	0.089	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	11.584	0.009*	0.295	0.363	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] sees a naked man running [through the	Do you consider this a	0.848	0.838	0.542	0.576	Exhibitionism

streets/through their backyard]	crime?					
	Would you report this crime?	6.994	0.072	0.712	0.444	Exhibitionism
Someone offers [a man/woman/child] \$20 if they can expose himself/herself to them [via the internet/in person]	Do you consider this a crime?	16.479	0.001*	.0*	0.295	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	32.226	.0*	.0*	0.323	Exhibitionism
Someone sends [a man/woman/child] unsolicited pictures of their genitals [just to them/to all their contacts]	Do you consider this a crime?	13.667	0.003*	.0*	0.173	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	12.727	0.005*	.0*	0.484	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is [at a neighborhood event/babysitting] when they see their neighbor who they know has autism rubbing his penis directly on the fabric of a tablecloth.	Do you consider this a crime?	2.665	0.446	0.497	.0*	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	1.482	0.686	0.35	0.061	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is in a [public park/ in their backyard] when they see a couple having sex behind a bush. They are fully naked.	Do you consider this a crime?	1.609	0.657	0.557	0.034*	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	1.515	0.679	0.431	0.46	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is walking [down the street/in their backyard] when you see a man urinating between parked	Do you consider this a crime?	2.985	0.394	0.988	0.727	Exhibitionism

cars.	Would you report this crime?	2.198	0.532	0.457	0.604	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is waiting [at the bus stop in the suburbs with other people/in their driveway] when they notice a man masturbating on a bench across the street.	Do you consider this a crime?	3.793	0.285	0.076	0.54	Exhibitionism
	Would you report this crime?	8.066	0.045*	0.935	0.488	Exhibitionism
[A man/woman/child] is [walking down a crowded street/at their mailbox], when an elderly man slaps them on their behind as he passes.	Do you consider this a crime?	2.659	0.447	0.118	0.04*	Frotteurism
	Would you report this crime?	5.504	0.138	0.034*	0.109	Frotteurism
[A man/woman/child] is on a [crowded/empty] subway when they feel an erect penis on their hip and feel the person rocking back and forth on them	Do you consider this a crime?	2.314	0.51	0.249	0.22	Frotteurism
	Would you report this crime?	0.685	0.877	0.62	0.079	Frotteurism
[A man/woman/child] gets off a [crowded/empty] subway and reaches into their back pocket and feel something wet, they realize that someone had ejaculated on them.	Do you consider this a crime?	2.828	0.419	0.664	0.683	Frotteurism
	Would you report this crime?	0.47	0.925	0.378	0.851	Frotteurism
[A man/woman/child] is in a [crowded/empty] public bathroom when someone starts rubbing against you while you are	Do you consider this a crime?	2.828	0.419	0.664	0.683	Frotteurism

washing your hands at the sink.	Would you report this crime?	0.47	0.925	0.378	0.851	Frotteurism
[A man/woman/child] is undressing in their [bedroom in the suburbs/ public dressing room] when they see someone looking at them through the [window/curtain].	Do you consider this a crime?	2.144	0.543	0.02*	0.001*	Voyeurism
	Would you report this crime?	5.808	0.121	0.003*	0.028*	Voyeurism
[A man/woman/child] is in a [NYC apartment/public dressing room] when they notice someone is taking photos of them from [a room across the street/ an adjoining room].	Do you consider this a crime?	0.814	0.846	.0*	0.727	Voyeurism
	Would you report this crime?	1.406	0.704	.0*	0.635	Voyeurism
[A man/woman/child] is emailed photos of themselves naked in their bedroom. You realize that someone hacked into your computer's camera and watched you.	Do you consider this a crime?	3.771	0.287	0.931	0.5	Voyeurism
	Would you report this crime?	1.844	0.605	0.281	0.152	Voyeurism
[A man/woman/child] is kissing their significant other while [sitting on a park bench in Central Park/ on their front porch] when they notice someone taking pictures of them.	Do you consider this a crime?	5.531	0.137	0.089	0.003*	Voyeurism
	Would you report this crime?	3.981	0.264	0.033*	0.003*	Voyeurism
[A man/woman/child] is [outside of a crowded bar/ walking down the street in their neighborhood] when someone starts screaming and cursing at them. It takes the bouncer asking	Do you consider this a crime?	0.685	0.877	0.143	0.504	Control
	Would you report this	0.187	0.98	0.905	0.919	Control

him to leave for him to stop.	crime?					
[A man/woman/child] is on [a crowded subway car/ empty subway car] when a woman starts to pole dance on one of the poles	Do you consider this a crime?	8.078	0.044*	0.254	0.762	Control
	Would you report this crime?	8.795	0.032*	0.989	0.426	Control
[A man/woman/child] is [on a crowded bus/ going into their apartment] when a man leans in and whispers "nice ass" in their ear	Do you consider this a crime?	7.8	0.05*	.0*	0.187	Control
	Would you report this crime?	5.728	0.126	.0*	0.592	Control

Table 2

Percent Considered Crime

<u>Vignette</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
You are in a public restroom when you notice something unusual about the coat hook on the back of the bathroom stall. You realize that there is a hidden camera in there. Do you consider this a crime?	96.49% (N= 55)	3.51% (N= 2)
You are on a crowded subway when you feel an erect penis on your hip and feel the person rocking back and forth on you. Do you consider this a crime?	94.83% (N=55)	5.17% (N= 3)
You are waiting at the bus stop in the suburbs with other people when you notice a man masterbating on a bench across the street. Do you consider this a crime?	92.86% (N= 52)	7.14% (N= 4)
You get off a crowded subway and reach into your back pocket and feel something wet, you realize that someone had ejaculated on you. Do you consider this a crime?	92.86% (N= 52)	7.14% (N= 4)
You are walking around in your underwear in your NYC apartment when you notice someone is taking photos of you from a room across the street. Do you consider this a crime?	89.29% (N= 50)	10.71% (N= 6)
You are in a public bathroom when someone starts rubbing against you while you are washing your hands. Do you consider this a crime?	87.72% (N= 50)	12.28% (N= 7)
You are sitting in a movie theater when you look over and notice someone masterbating a few seats away from you. Do you consider this a crime?	87.50% (N= 49)	12.50% (N= 7)
You are walking down a crowded street. As an elderly man passes you, he slaps you on your behind. Do you consider this a crime?	85.96% (N= 49)	14.04% (N= 8)

You are in a public park when you see a couple having sex behind a bush. They are fully naked. Do you consider this a crime?	83.93% (N= 47)	16.07% (N= 9)
You are undressing in your bedroom in the suburbs when you see your neighbor looking at you through your window. Do you consider this a crime?	70.18% (N= 40)	29.82% (N= 17)
Someone sends you unsolicited pictures of their genitals. Do you consider this a crime?	69.64% (N= 39)	30.36% (N= 17)
You are on a crowded bus when a man leans in and whispers "nice ass" in your ear. Do you consider this a crime?	59.65% (N= 34)	40.35% (N= 23)
You are walking down the street when you see a man urinating between parked cars. Do you consider this a crime?	55.36% (N= 31)	44.64% (N= 29)
Someone offers you \$20 if they can expose himself/herself to you. Do you consider this a crime?	54.39% (N= 31)	45.61% (N= 26)
You are kissing your significant other while sitting on a park bench in Central Park when you notice someone taking pictures of you. Do you consider this a crime?	52.63% (N= 30)	47.37% (N= 27)
You are walking in your neighborhood when all of a sudden a car passes by you and one of the passengers "moons" (exposes his/her buttocks) you. Do you consider this a crime?	49.12% (N= 28)	50.88% (N= 29)
You are at a football game when a streaker runs across the field. Do you consider this a crime?	46.43% (N= 26)	53.57% (N= 30)

You are standing outside of a crowded bar when all of a sudden a drunk woman comes up to you and flashes her breasts. Do you consider this a crime?	44.64% (N= 25)	55.36% (N= 31)
You are at a neighborhood event when you see a neighbor who you know has autism rubbing his penis directly on the fabric of the tablecloth. Do you consider this a crime?	32.14% (N= 18)	67.86% (N= 38)
You are outside a crowded bar when someone starts screaming out and cursing at you. It takes the bouncer asking him to leave for him to stop Do you consider this a crime?	31.58% (N= 18)	68.42% (N= 39)
You are on the subway when a woman starts to pole dance on one of the poles. Do you consider this a crime?	15.79% (N= 9)	84.21% (N= 48)
You are emailed photos of yourself naked in your bedroom. You realize that someone hacked into your computer's camera and watched you. Do you consider this a crime?	100.00% (N= 57)	0.00% (N= 0)
A man approaches you on an empty subway platform, opens his jacket and exposes his penis to you. Do you consider this a crime?	98.21% (N= 55)	1.79% (N= 1)

Table 3

Open Ended Trends Present By Vignette

	Trauma	Public	Sexual Harassment	Consent	Uncomfortable	Don't Want To See That	Against The Law	Inappropriate	Children Could Be There	Wrong	Intent	Invasion of Personal Space
Subway Flasher	12	54	37	17	4	16	28	22	25	10	12	5
Woman Flashing Breasts	5	40	13	11	1	8	26	10	18	8	2	1
Mooning	5	35	11	7	3	9	18	13	10	7	3	2
Austistic Child Couple Having Sex in Bush	0	11	2	0	2	1	3	7	8	7	42	0
Public Urination	3	116	2	2	4	5	28	7	47	7	3	0
Streaking	2	51	2	1	1	1	43	5	13	5	9	0
Screaming at Bar	4	63	4	4	2	9	40	11	28	6	7	11
Movie Theater Masturbation	2	7	9	0	0	0	13	2	2	4	1	0
\$20 For Flashing	4	140	11	1	9	7	21	16	28	9	3	0
Unsolicited Pictures	1	3	14	13	0	0	64	10	12	9	4	0
Subway Pole Dance	3	2	36	30	1	7	24	13	25	6	9	2
Bench Masturbation	0	7	3	0	2	1	10	6	9	4	1	0
Elderly Man Slap Behind	3	133	11	2	11	13	34	12	40	12	2	0
Rubbing in Bathroom	0	1	82	35	2	0	11	19	10	10	3	9
Erect Penis on Subway	1	13	69	46	6	0	15	13	8	9	11	23
Kissing SigOther	1	23	96	26	3	0	14	11	16	8	11	9
Ejaculate on Subway	0	17	5	64	1	0	12	4	2	5	5	44
Nice Ass Comment	0	27	49	24	5	0	15	15	14	15	4	9
Looking Through Curtain	3	1	74	3	18	0	6	13	10	6	2	5
Pictures Undressed	0	1	13	9	6	0	16	5	5	6	2	92
Emailed Naked Photos	0	4	13	62	0	0	31	5	6	12	1	73
	0	0	9	20	1	0	75	0	4	7	5	136

Table 4

Open Ended Trends Total

Trauma	49
Public	749
SexualHarassment	565
Consent	377
Uncomfortable	82
DoNotWantToSeeThat	77
AgainstTheLaw	547
Inappropriate	219
ChildrenCouldBeThere	340
Wrong	172
Intent	142
Invasion of Personal Space	421

Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. A man approaches you on an empty subway platform, opens his jacket and exposes his penis to you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

2. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

3. Explain Your decision

4. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

5. You are standing outside of a crowded bar when all of a sudden a drunk woman comes up to you and flashes her breasts. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

6. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

- Sex Offense
- Disturbance of the Peace
- Public Indecency
- Other

7. Explain Your decision

8. Would you report this crime?

- Yes
- No

Personal Decision Making

9. You are walking in your neighborhood when all of a sudden a car passes by you and one of the passengers “moons” (exposes his/her buttocks) you. Do you consider this a crime?

- Yes
- No

10. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

- Sex Offense
- Disturbance of the Peace
- Public Indecency
- Other

11. Explain Your decision

12. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

13. You are at a neighborhood event when you see a neighbor who you know has autism rubbing his penis directly on the fabric of the tablecloth. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

14. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

15. Explain Your decision

16. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

17. You are in a public park when you see a couple having sex behind a bush. They are fully naked. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

18. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

19. Explain Your decision

20. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

21. You are walking down the street when you see a man urinating between parked cars. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

22. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

23. Explain Your decision

24. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

25. You are at a football game when a streaker runs across the field. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

26. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

27. Explain Your decision

28. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

29. You are outside a crowded bar when someone starts screaming out and cursing at you. It takes the bouncer asking him to leave for him to stop. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

30. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

31. Explain Your decision

32. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

33. You are sitting in a movie theater when you look over and notice someone masturbating a few seats away from you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

34. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace Other

Public Indecency

Other

35. Explain Your decision

36. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

37. Someone offers you \$20 if they can expose himself/herself to you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

38. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

39. Explain Your decision

40. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

41. Someone sends you unsolicited pictures of their genitals. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

42. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

43. Explain Your decision

44. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

45. You are on the subway when a woman starts to pole dance on one of the poles. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

46. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

47. Explain Your decision

48. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

49. You are waiting at the bus stop in the suburbs with other people when you notice a man masterbating on a bench across the street. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

50. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

51. Explain Your decision

52. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

53. You are walking down a crowded street. As an elderly man passes you, he slaps you on your behind. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

54. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

55. Explain Your decision

56. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

57. You are in a public bathroom when someone starts rubbing against you while you are washing your hands. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

58. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

59. Explain Your decision

60. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

61. You are on a crowded subway when you feel an erect penis on your hip and feel the person rocking back and forth on you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

62. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

63. Explain Your decision

64. Would you report this crime?

Yes

You are kissing your significant other while sitting on a park bench in Central Park when you notice someone taking pictures of you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

66. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

67. Explain Your decision

68. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

69. You get off a crowded subway and reach into your back pocket and feel something wet, you realize that someone had ejaculated on you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

70. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

71. Explain Your decision

72. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

73. You are on a crowded bus when a man leans in and whispers "nice ass" in your ear. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

74. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

75. Explain Your decision

76. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

77.

You are undressing in your bedroom in the suburbs when you see your neighbor looking at you through your window. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

78. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

79. Explain Your decision

80. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

81. You are walking around in your underwear in your NYC apartment when you notice someone is taking photos of you from a room across the street. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

82. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

83. Explain Your decision

84. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

85. You are emailed photos of yourself naked in your bedroom. You realize that someone hacked into your computer's camera and watched you. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

86. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

87. Explain Your decision

88. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

89.

You are in a public restroom when you notice something unusual about the coat hook on the back of the bathroom stall. You realize that there is a hidden camera in there. Do you consider this a crime?

Yes

No

90. If yes, check all of the following that you think apply:

Sex Offense

Disturbance of the Peace

Public Indecency

Other

91. Explain Your decision

92. Would you report this crime?

Yes

No

Personal Decision Making

Demographic Questions

93. What is your age?

94. What is your biological gender?

Male

Female

95. What is your race?

- Asian
- Black
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Other

96. What is your major?

97. What criminal t.v. shows do you watch?

98. How much media do you consumer per day?

- None
- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- More than 10 hours

99. Have you been victimized by a contact or non-contact sexual offense? (Ex. engaged with sexually without your consent)

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

100. Name

