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Journal

Physical Review Letters, 66(8)

ISSN

0031-9007

Authors

Gomez-Cadenas, JJ
Heusch, CA
Abrams, G
et al.

Publication Date

1991-02-25

DOI

10.1103/physrevlett.66.1007

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Search for Elastic Nondiagonal Lepton-Pair Production in e^+e^- Annihilation at $\sqrt{s} = 29$ GeV

J. J. Gomez-Cadenas,⁽³⁾ C. A. Heusch,⁽³⁾ G. Abrams,⁽²⁾ C. E. Adolphsen,⁽³⁾ C. Akerlof,⁽⁴⁾ J. P. Alexander,⁽¹⁾ M. Alvarez,⁽⁵⁾ D. Amidei,⁽²⁾ A. R. Baden,⁽²⁾ J. Ballam,⁽¹⁾ B. C. Barish,⁽⁶⁾ T. Barklow,⁽¹⁾ B. A. Barnett,⁽⁷⁾ J. Bartelt,⁽¹⁾ D. Blockus,⁽⁸⁾ G. Bonvicini,⁽⁴⁾ A. Boyarski,⁽¹⁾ J. Boyer,⁽²⁾ B. Brabson,⁽⁸⁾ A. Breakstone,⁽⁹⁾ J. M. Brom,⁽⁸⁾ F. Bulos,⁽¹⁾ P. R. Burchat,⁽³⁾ D. L. Burke,⁽¹⁾ F. Butler,⁽²⁾ F. Calvino,⁽⁵⁾ R. J. Cence,⁽⁹⁾ J. Chapman,⁽⁴⁾ D. Cords,⁽¹⁾ D. P. Coupal,⁽¹⁾ H. C. DeStaebler,⁽¹⁾ D. E. Dorfan,⁽³⁾ J. M. Dorfan,⁽¹⁾ P. S. Drell,⁽²⁾ G. J. Feldman,⁽¹⁾ E. Fernandez,⁽⁵⁾ R. C. Field,⁽¹⁾ W. T. Ford,⁽⁵⁾ C. Fordham,⁽¹⁾ R. Frey,⁽⁴⁾ D. Fujino,⁽¹⁾ K. K. Gan,⁽¹⁾ G. Gidal,⁽²⁾ L. Gladney,⁽¹⁾ T. Glanzman,⁽¹⁾ M. S. Gold,⁽²⁾ G. Goldhaber,⁽²⁾ L. Golding,⁽²⁾ A. Green,⁽¹⁾ P. Grosse-Wiesmann,⁽¹⁾ J. Haggerty,⁽²⁾ G. Hanson,⁽¹⁾ R. Harr,⁽²⁾ F. A. Harris,⁽⁹⁾ C. M. Hawkes,⁽⁶⁾ K. Hayes,⁽¹⁾ D. Herrup,⁽²⁾ T. Himel,⁽¹⁾ M. Hoenk,⁽⁶⁾ R. J. Hollebeek,⁽¹⁾ D. Hutchinson,⁽¹⁾ J. Hysten,⁽⁷⁾ W. R. Innes,⁽¹⁾ M. Jaffre,⁽²⁾ J. A. Jaros,⁽¹⁾ I. Juricic,⁽²⁾ J. A. Kadyk,⁽²⁾ D. Karlen,⁽¹⁾ J. Kent,⁽³⁾ S. R. Klein,⁽¹⁾ A. Koide,⁽⁹⁾ W. Koska,⁽⁴⁾ W. Kozanecki,⁽¹⁾ A. J. Lankford,⁽¹⁾ R. R. Larsen,⁽¹⁾ B. W. LeClaire,⁽¹⁾ M. E. Levi,⁽²⁾ Z. Li,⁽⁶⁾ A. M. Litke,⁽³⁾ N. S. Lockyer,⁽¹⁾ V. Lüth,⁽¹⁾ C. Matteuzzi,⁽¹⁾ J. A. J. Matthews,⁽⁷⁾ D. I. Meyer,⁽⁴⁾ B. D. Milliken,⁽⁶⁾ K. C. Moffeit,⁽¹⁾ L. Müller,⁽¹⁾ J. Nash,⁽¹⁾ M. E. Nelson,⁽⁶⁾ D. Nitz,⁽⁴⁾ H. Ogren,⁽⁸⁾ R. A. Ong,⁽¹⁾ K. F. O'Shaughnessy,⁽¹⁾ S. I. Parker,⁽⁹⁾ C. Peck,⁽⁶⁾ A. Petersen,⁽¹⁾ M. Petradza,⁽⁴⁾ F. C. Porter,⁽⁶⁾ P. Rankin,⁽⁵⁾ B. Richter,⁽¹⁾ K. Riles,⁽¹⁾ P. C. Rowson,⁽²⁾ D. R. Rust,⁽⁸⁾ H. F. W. Sadrozinski,⁽³⁾ T. Schaad,⁽¹⁰⁾ T. L. Schalk,⁽³⁾ H. Schellman,⁽²⁾ W. B. Schmidke,⁽²⁾ A. S. Schwarz,⁽³⁾ A. Seiden,⁽³⁾ P. D. Sheldon,⁽²⁾ J. G. Smith,⁽⁵⁾ A. Snyder,⁽⁸⁾ E. Soderstrom,⁽⁶⁾ D. P. Stoker,⁽⁷⁾ R. Stroynowski,⁽⁶⁾ R. Thun,⁽⁴⁾ G. H. Trilling,⁽²⁾ R. Tschirhart,⁽⁴⁾ C. de la Vaissiere,⁽²⁾ R. Van Kooten,⁽¹⁾ H. Veltman,⁽⁴⁾ P. Voruganti,⁽¹⁾ S. R. Wagner,⁽⁵⁾ P. Weber,⁽⁵⁾ A. J. Weinstein,⁽⁶⁾ A. J. Weir,⁽⁶⁾ S. Weisz,⁽³⁾ S. L. White,⁽⁵⁾ E. Wicklund,⁽⁶⁾ D. R. Wood,⁽²⁾ D. Y. Wu,⁽⁶⁾ and J. M. Yelton⁽¹⁾

(Mark II Collaboration)

⁽¹⁾Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94309

⁽²⁾Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and Department of Physics, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720

⁽³⁾University of California, Santa Cruz, California 95064

⁽⁴⁾University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

⁽⁵⁾University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309

⁽⁶⁾California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125

⁽⁷⁾Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland 21218

⁽⁸⁾Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405

⁽⁹⁾University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

⁽¹⁰⁾Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

(Received 6 April 1990)

We have searched for the annihilation of e^+e^- into the exclusive channels $e^\pm\tau^\mp$ and $\mu^\pm\tau^\mp$ at $\sqrt{s} = 29$ GeV, using 226 and 133 pb^{-1} , respectively, of data taken with the Mark II detector at the SLAC storage ring PEP. The resulting candidate sample is compatible with the expected background from τ pair production. Our analysis yields 95%-C.L. cross-section limits of $\sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} < 1.8 \times 10^{-3}$ and $\sigma_{\mu\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} < 6.1 \times 10^{-3}$, where $\sigma_{\mu\mu}$ is the QED cross section for production of a lepton pair. This is the first high- Q^2 test of lepton-flavor conservation involving τ leptons.

PACS numbers: 13.10.+q, 11.30.Hv

It has long been understood that the appearance of lepton-flavor-violating terms in lepton-lepton or lepton-nucleon interactions is likely to be a telling feature of physics beyond the standard model, just as the observation of flavor-changing currents in the quark sector has profoundly affected our understanding of hadronic interactions. Lepton flavor, like quark flavor, is not a conserved quantity protected by an established gauge principle. Although a number of low-energy and low-momentum-transfer studies have established impressive limits on a possible nonconservation of lepton flavor involving electrons and muons, it has been repeatedly pointed

out¹ that no such studies exist at high Q^2 or high energy, and that the inclusion of heavy flavors may well be more sensitive.² A number of models would find lepton-flavor mixing involving the (heavy) τ lepton a natural place to look for new information on the family structure phenomenon.³⁻⁵

Consequently, we have searched for the processes⁶

$$e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+, \quad (1)$$

$$e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+. \quad (2)$$

We used a total of 226 pb^{-1} for the analysis (1) and a total of 133 pb^{-1} for the analysis (2).⁷ The data were

taken with the Mark II detector^{8,9} at the SLAC storage ring PEP at a center-of-mass energy of $\sqrt{s} = 29$ GeV.

Event selection and background suppression.—The process $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-(\mu^-)\tau^+$ is very distinctive: An energetic electron (muon) of beam energy recoils against a τ . The τ provides a well-defined signature: One of three charged prongs, plus missing energy and momentum that are carried off by undetected neutrinos. Consequently, the initial event sample was subjected to the following selection procedure.

We demand either two or four charged prongs in a back-to-back, 1-vs-1, or 1-vs-3 topology. The tracks are required to project into a cylindrical volume of radius 1 cm and half length 3 cm around the nominal collision point parallel to the beam axis, to be within the angular region $|\cos\theta| < 0.68$ in order to guarantee a good measurement of the charged track's energies and momenta, to have transverse momenta with respect to the beam axis of at least 150 MeV/c, and to add up to zero net charge. In addition, there must be significant missing energy, $E_{\text{miss}} > 2$ GeV, and transverse momentum, $P_{\perp\text{miss}} > 1$ GeV, to account for the unobserved neutrinos.

Next, we demand that the track of highest energy be identified as an electron or as a muon, respectively, with energy close to the beam energy. In the case of the 1-vs-3 topology, the highest-energy track and the three-prong system must be recoiling against each other. Since at $\sqrt{s} = 29$ GeV the liquid-argon (LA) calorimeter has a much better resolution than the drift chamber (DC), we use the former to measure the energy of the electron in the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ analysis; the $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ analysis relies only on the DC. The energetic electron of the process $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ is identified by imposing the criteria $E_e > E_{\text{min}}$ and $(E/P)_e \geq 0.7$, where E_e, P_e are the electron candidate energy (measured by LA) and momentum (measured by DC), and E_{min} is a cut energy close to that of the beam, e.g., $E_{\text{min}} = 10$ GeV. The energetic muon of the process $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ is identified by requiring that the candidate track hits be found within 2-rms standard deviations of the trajectory expected of a muon with beam momentum, in all four layers of the muon system, and that the track energy (which is taken to be equal to its momentum, since the μ mass is negligible at this energy) be larger than E_{min} .

Finally, we demand that the remaining one or three charged prongs (which we denote by the index "tag") be consistent with a τ hypothesis. Here, the decay mode $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$ is not accepted in the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ analysis, since it leads to a configuration (two electrons in the final state, one of them with full beam energy) that can easily be confused with radiative Bhabha events, one of the major backgrounds to this process. Similarly, for the analysis $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$, we do not accept the decay mode $\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\bar{\nu}_\mu\nu_\tau$, in order to avoid the radiative muon-pair production background. Therefore, in the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ analysis, the tag tracks must be con-

sistent with a *nonelectron* hypothesis. This is realized by our requiring that any energy deposition in the calorimeter be small, $E_{\text{tag}} < 2$ GeV; by limiting the maximum track momentum to $P_{\text{tag}} < 10$ GeV; and by imposing a low E/P ratio, $(E/P)_{\text{tag}} < 0.5$. In the $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ analysis, the 1-vs-1 topology has to verify that the tag track must be consistent with a *nonmuon* hypothesis. A track is defined as not a muon if it does not hit the number of muon layers expected from its momentum. In the cases of the 1-vs-3 topology we also demand that the invariant mass of the three-prong system be smaller than the τ mass, and use a pair-finding algorithm to reject events that appear to be produced by photon conversion. With these selection criteria, our Monte Carlo study shows a global efficiency for detecting an $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ event of $F_{e\tau} = 16\%$, and a global efficiency for detecting an $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ event of $F_{\mu\tau} = 8.5\%$. The geometrical acceptances and the strict criteria for accepting a tag are the main limitations of our efficiency.

Next, we estimate the impact of different backgrounds. The two major backgrounds to the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-(\mu^-)\tau^+$ process are, first, τ -pair production, where one τ subsequently decays via $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\bar{\nu}_\mu\nu_\tau$) and the electron (muon) is at the end point of its energy distribution; and second, radiative QED-pair production. By this we mean radiative Bhabha scattering and radiative muon-pair production events that simulate a τ topology. Lastly, there is a small background due to events of the type $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^+e^-\gamma\gamma$ ($\gamma\gamma \rightarrow \mu^+\mu^-$ or $\tau^+\tau^-$). Multihadronic events are found to be negligible.

The radiative pair production events are a potentially serious background, especially in the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ analysis, since radiative Bhabha events, due to the t -channel production, have a very large cross section ($\sigma_{\text{Bhabha}} \sim 1700$ pb for $|\cos\theta| < 0.68$). To reduce it to a negligible level, we take advantage of the fact that $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ events are characterized by missing energy and momentum. Since we do not select events in which the τ decays via $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$, $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ events will have *one and only one* identified electron. We estimate the cuts in missing energy and missing transverse momentum to suppress the background by a factor of 10^4 . It is further suppressed by a factor > 50 by our permitting only one electron in the event, as explained above, for a total reduction by at least 5×10^5 . The effectiveness of the cuts is illustrated in Fig. 1. The level of suppression of radiative muon pairs in the $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ sample is at least as good as that achieved above. Also, only the s channel contributes to muon-pair production with a cross section that is more than a factor of 10 smaller in the angular range considered.

In other possible QED background, "photon-photon scattering" into the $e^+e^-\mu^+\mu^-$ and $e^+e^-\tau^+\tau^-$ channels, one electron and one τ (or μ) may be emitted into the detector, while the conjugate pair escapes in the

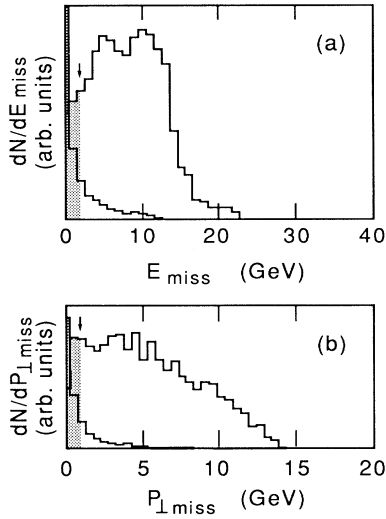


FIG. 1. Missing energy and momentum for the signal ($e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$) and the radiative Bhabha background (Monte Carlo-generated distributions): (a) E_{miss} and (b) $P_{\perp \text{miss}}$. The arrows mark the cuts; the shaded regions correspond to events rejected by the cuts described in the event selection and background suppression section.

respective forward directions. The cross section for these processes is very small ($\sigma_{ee\mu\mu} \sim 1$ pb for the high electron/muon invariant masses needed to pass our cuts). We estimate that at most one such event makes it into our final data sample.

Backgrounds due to multihadronic events are suppressed by a factor $> 10^6$, since their probability for exhibiting a topology with one very energetic electron recoiling against one or three charged tracks is practically zero.

The most important background is τ -pair production. To suppress it, we impose a cut as high as possible on the energy of the electron (muon) candidate. Its efficiency is limited by the detector resolution. The final-state electron energy distribution for the $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ process, can be crudely approximated by a Gaussian (with a radiative tail) with mean value $\langle E \rangle = E_{\text{beam}}$ and dispersion σ_{LA} , where σ_{LA} is the LA calorimeter resolution; for $E_{\text{beam}} = 14.5$ GeV, $\sigma_{\text{LA}} \sim 0.75$ GeV. Likewise, the muon energy distribution in the case of the $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ process can be approximated by a Gaussian of dispersion σ_{DC} , where σ_{DC} , the DC resolution, is ~ 2.50 GeV for $E_{\text{beam}} = 14.5$ GeV. On the other hand, the energy distribution of the electrons (muons) produced in the decays $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\bar{\nu}_\mu\nu_\tau$) is linear near the end point. Thus, we impose a cut $E_{\text{cut}} = E_{\text{beam}} - r\sigma$, where r is selected to maximize the τ background rejection while keeping a reasonable efficiency for the signal. The optimum value of r turns out to be $r=2$, leading to a cut $E_{\text{cut}}^e \sim 13$ GeV and $E_{\text{cut}}^\mu \sim 10$ GeV. Since the shapes of the energy distributions for both the signal and the τ background are well understood, we expect our results to

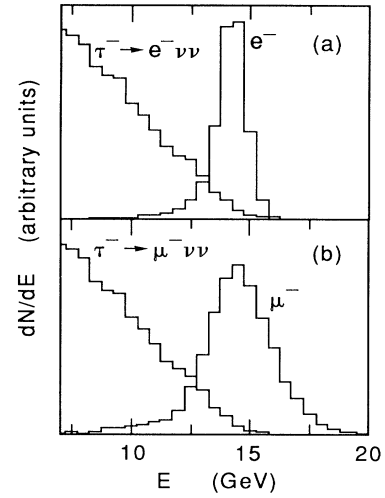


FIG. 2. Energy spectrum of the signal and the background (a) for the process $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ and (b) for the process $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$. Notice that the electron energy in distribution (a) is measured with the LA, while the muon energy in distribution (b) is measured with the DC. The normalization of the distributions is arbitrary.

be stable when E_{cut} is varied.

Maximum-likelihood fit.—Subsequent to the application of all cuts, we perform a maximum-likelihood fit to the electron (muon) energy distribution. For the only relevant background passing the cuts, the τ -pair background, we obtain a roughly Gaussian distribution for the signal by fitting Bhabha scattering and muon-pair distributions from our data. For the decays $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\bar{\nu}_\mu\nu_\tau$), we fit Monte Carlo data that incorporate the detector resolution and radiative corrections. This is illustrated in Fig. 2.

Assume now that our data sample has n events of energies x_i , with $i=1, \dots, n$; we define the likelihood function L_e in terms of a parameter α_e which describes the admixture of $\tau^+\tau^-$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$) events to a putative τ^+e^- sample in our data:

$$L_e(\alpha_e) = \prod_{i=1}^n f(x_i, \alpha_e) = \prod_{i=1}^n (1 - \alpha_e) U_b^e(x_i) + \alpha_e U_s^e(x_i).$$

Here, U_s^e and U_b^e are normalized functions describing the ($e\tau$) signal and the ($\tau\tau$) background, respectively. In exactly the same way, we define the likelihood function L_μ in terms of a parameter α_μ which describes the admixture of $\tau^+\tau^-$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\bar{\nu}_\mu\nu_\tau$) events to a possible $\tau^+\mu^-$ signal. A detailed description of the application of the likelihood method to this problem is given in Ref. 10.

From the determination of α_e and α_μ , we obtain upper limits to the lepton-flavor nondiagonal cross sections $\sigma_{e\tau}, \sigma_{\mu\tau}$ via the ratios

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} &= \sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\tau\tau} = \alpha_e F_{\tau\tau}/F_{e\tau}, \\ \sigma_{\mu\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} &= \sigma_{\mu\tau}/\sigma_{\tau\tau} = \alpha_\mu F_{\tau\tau}/F_{\mu\tau}. \end{aligned}$$

Table I. Limits of $\sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu}$ (at 95% C.L.): E_{cut}^e is the electron energy above which relative populations are evaluated. $\Delta\alpha_e$ is the standard deviation of the parameter α_e , as resulting from the likelihood calculations. The other quantities are explained in the text.

| E_{cut}^e | $\alpha_e \pm \Delta\alpha_e$ | $F_{\tau\tau}/F_{e\tau}$ | $\sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu}$ |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 10 | 0.02 ± 0.02 | 3.5×10^{-2} | 2.1×10^{-3} |
| 12 | 0.07 ± 0.07 | 10^{-2} | 2.1×10^{-3} |
| 13 | 0.12 ± 0.12 | 5×10^{-3} | 1.8×10^{-3} |

Here, $F_{\tau\tau}$ and $F_{e\tau}, F_{\mu\tau}$ are the efficiencies for τ -pair backgrounds and for the two types of signal events.

Minimizing the quantities $-\ln[L_e(\alpha_e)]$ and $-\ln[L_\mu(\alpha_\mu)]$, we obtain our best estimates for the parameters α_e and α_μ . We performed detailed studies which showed that the limits thus obtained depend only very slightly on the cutoff energy. This is illustrated in Table I, where we show the results of the $-\ln[L_e(\alpha_e)]$ minimization for different values of E_{cut}^e .

In Fig. 3, we show the electron (muon) energy distribution for the events passing all the cuts in our data and in a Monte Carlo-generated τ -pair event set that is equivalent to our total integrated luminosity. The distributions are seen to be fully compatible. Our analysis yields the limits (i)

$$\sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} < 1.8 \times 10^{-3} \text{ at 95\% C.L.}$$

and (ii)

$$\sigma_{\mu\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\mu} < 6.1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ at 95\% C.L. ,}$$

where the reduced stringency of the second limit is due entirely to limitations of the Mark II detector.

In summary, we report on the first quantitative investigation of a high- Q^2 lepton-flavor-changing process involving only leptons, and including the third-generation τ . It leads to the observation of signal candidate events that are fully compatible with the rate expected from τ -pair production. Our limits [(i) and (ii)] on the cross sections for the processes $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$, $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+$ can be interpreted in a standard theoretical framework^{1,2} in terms of new (beyond the standard model) interaction energy scales $\Lambda_{e\tau} > 1.6$ TeV and $\Lambda_{\mu\tau} > 1.2$ TeV, respectively. These implications have been explored elsewhere.^{1,10} By comparison, the best limit available from rare-decay data, $B(\tau^- \rightarrow e^-e^+e^-) < 4 \times 10^{-5}$, translates¹¹ into $\Lambda_{e\tau} > 0.66$ TeV. It should be noted that studies comparable to ours but performed at the Z^0 pole need a greatly enhanced data sample in order to reach a sensitivity comparable to that reported here.^{1,10}

This work was supported by Department of Energy Contracts No. DE-AC03-76SF00515 (SLAC), No. DE-AC03-81ER40050 (California Institute of Technology), No. DE-AM03-76SF00010 (University of California, Santa Cruz), No. DE-AC02-86ER40253 (University of Colorado), No. DE-AC03-83ER40103 (University

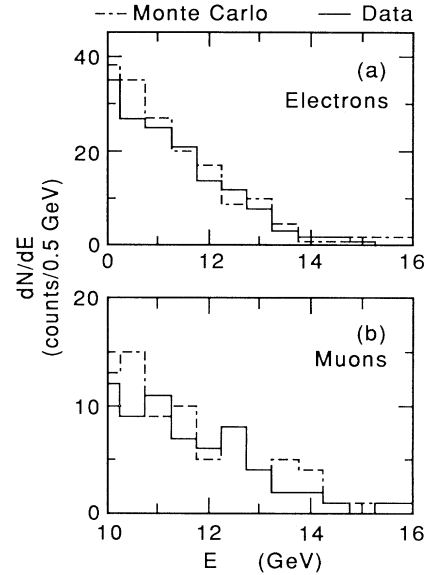


FIG. 3. Energy distributions for the events passing all cuts: (a) electron energy and (b) muon energy.

of Hawaii), No. DE-AC02-84ER40125 (Indiana University), No. DE-AC03-76SF00098 (LBL), and No. DE-AC02-84ER40125 (University of Michigan), and by the National Science Foundation (Johns Hopkins University).

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⁷This is because the energies of the muons in analysis (2) are measured using the DC, while the energies of the electrons in the analysis (1) are measured using the LA. While the quality of the data was good for the LA for the 226 pb⁻¹ used in the analysis (1), only 133 pb⁻¹ of data had the high-quality DC information needed for analysis (2).

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¹¹The convention we follow here is a comparison of the interaction scales Λ for the process $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\tau^+$ and m_W for the process $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\bar{\nu}_e\nu_\tau$.