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


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We have searched for the annihilation of $e^+e^-$ into the exclusive channels $e^\pm\tau^-\pm\mu^-\tau^+$ 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 $\tau$ pair production. Our analysis yields 95%-C.L. cross-section limits of $\sigma_{ee}/\sigma_{\mu\tau}<1.8\times10^{-3}$ and $\sigma_{ee}/\sigma_{\mu\mu}<6.1\times10^{-5}$, where $\sigma_{ee}$ is the QED cross section for production of a lepton pair. This is the first high-$Q^2$ test of lepton-flavor conservation involving $\tau$ leptons.

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

Consequently, we have searched for the processes

$$e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^-\tau^+,$$

$$e^+e^- \rightarrow e^-\mu^+.$$  

(1)
(2)

We used a total of 226 pb$^{-1}$ for the analysis (1) and a total of 133 pb$^{-1}$ for the analysis (2). The data were...
taken with the Mark II detector\textsuperscript{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 $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^- (\mu^- \tau^\pm)$ is very distinctive: An energetic electron (muon) of beam energy recoils against a $\tau$. The $\tau$ 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 $E_{\text{min}}$ 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 $\mu$ mass is negligible at this energy) be larger than $E_{\text{min}}$.

Finally, we demand that the remaining one or three charged prongs (which we denote by the index “tag”) be consistent with a $\tau$ hypothesis. Here, the decay mode $\tau^- \rightarrow e^- \bar{\nu}_\tau \nu_\tau$ 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 consistent 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 $\tau$ 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 $F_{\text{eff}} = 16\%$, and a global efficiency for detecting an $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^- \tau^+$ event of $F_{\text{eff}} = 8.5\%$. 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 $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^- (\mu^- \tau^\pm)$ process are, first, $\tau$-pair production, where one $\tau$ subsequently decays via $\tau^- \rightarrow e^- \bar{\nu}_\tau \nu_\tau$, the (muon) electron 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 $\tau$ 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 $\tau$ decays via $\tau^- \rightarrow e^- \bar{\nu}_\tau \nu_\tau$, $e^+e^- \rightarrow e^- \tau^+$ 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 $5 \times 10^5$. 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 $e^+e^- \rightarrow \mu^+\mu^-$ and $e^+e^- \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^-$ channels, one electron and one $\tau$ (or $\mu$) may be emitted into the detector, while the conjugate pair escapes in the
respective forward directions. The cross section for these processes is very small ($\sigma_{\text{e}e} \sim 1$ 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 $>10^5$, 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 $\tau$-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 $<E> = E_{\text{beam}}$ and dispersion $\sigma_{\text{LA}}$, where $\sigma_{\text{LA}}$ 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 $\sigma_{\text{DC}}$, where $\sigma_{\text{DC}}$, the DC resolution, is $\sim 2.50$ GeV for $E_{\text{beam}} = 14.5$ GeV. On the other hand, the energy distribution of the electrons (muons) produced in the decays $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\nu_e\nu_\tau$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\nu_\mu\nu_\tau$) 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 $\tau$ 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 $E_{\text{cut}} \sim 13$ GeV and $E_{\text{cut}}^\mu \sim 10$ GeV. Since the shapes of the energy distributions for both the signal and the $\tau$ background are well understood, we expect our results to be stable when $E_{\text{cut}}$ 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 $\tau$-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 $\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\nu_e\nu_\tau$ ($\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\nu_\mu\nu_\tau$), 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 $i = 1, \ldots, n$; we define the likelihood function $L_e$ in terms of a parameter $a_e$ which describes the admixture of $\tau^+\tau^-(\tau^- \rightarrow e^-\nu_e\nu_\tau)$ events to a putative $\tau^+\tau^-$ sample in our data:

$$L_e(a_e) = \prod_{i=1}^{n} f(x_i,a_e) = \prod_{i=1}^{n} (1 - a_e) U^e_f(x_i) + a_e U^\tau_f(x_i).$$

Here, $U^e_f$ and $U^\tau_f$ are normalized functions describing the $(e\tau)$ signal and the $(\tau\tau)$ background, respectively. In exactly the same way, we define the likelihood function $L_\mu$ in terms of a parameter $a_\mu$ which describes the admixture of $\tau^+\tau^-(\tau^- \rightarrow \mu^-\nu_\mu\nu_\tau)$ 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 $a_e$ and $a_\mu$, we obtain upper limits to the lepton-flavor nondiagonal cross sections $\sigma_{e\tau}, \sigma_{\mu\tau}$ via the ratios

$$\sigma_{e\tau}/\sigma_{\mu\tau} = \sigma_e/\sigma_\mu = a_E F_{\text{eff}}/F_{\text{eff}},$$

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$E'_{\text{cut}}$</th>
<th>$a_{\tau} \pm \Delta a_{\tau}$</th>
<th>$F_{\tau}/F_{\tau i}$</th>
<th>$\sigma_{\tau}/\sigma_{\mu}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.02 ± 0.02</td>
<td>3.5 × 10^{-2}</td>
<td>2.1 × 10^{-3}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.07 ± 0.07</td>
<td>10^{-2}</td>
<td>2.1 × 10^{-3}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.12 ± 0.12</td>
<td>5 × 10^{-3}</td>
<td>1.8 × 10^{-3}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Minimizing the quantities $-\ln L_{L}(a_{\tau})$, $-\ln L_{\mu}(a_{\mu})$, we obtain our best estimates for the parameters $a_{\tau}$ and $a_{\mu}$. 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 $-\ln L_{L}(a_{\tau})$ minimization for different values of $E'_{\text{cut}}$.

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 $\tau$-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)

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

and (ii)

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

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 $r$. It leads to the observation of signal candidate events that are fully compatible with the rate expected from $\tau$-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 in terms of new (beyond the standard model) interaction energy scales $\Lambda_{\tau} > 1.6$ TeV and $\Lambda_{\mu} > 1.2$ TeV, respectively. These implications have been explored elsewhere.

By comparison, the best limit available from rare-decay data, $B(\tau^{-}\rightarrow e^{-}e^{+}\nu_{e} ) < 4 \times 10^{-5}$, translates into $\Lambda_{\tau} > 0.66$ 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.

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6References in this paper to a specific charge state are to be interpreted as also implying the charge-conjugate state.

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).


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

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