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Religiosity and Attitudes Towards LGBT People

Relationship Between Religiosity and the Sexual Prejudices Towards Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that religious people tend to have negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people. The current study is based off of Sanders’ (2008) study on the effect of religiosity on attitudes towards homosexuality. Forty adults participated in the study: 20 religious and 20 non-religious as well as 20 young adults and 20 older adults. Each participant completed three tasks: Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975), reading and answering questions to a passage provided and The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974). Using a three-way between-subjects analysis of variance, it was found that there was a significant main effect of religiosity and the scores measuring homophobia ($F(1, 32) = 22.60, p < 0.05$). No other main effects or interactions were found. Further discussion to the results will be discussed.

Keywords: Motivation, religiosity, age, attitudes, LGBT

There has not been a substantial amount of research on the relationship between religiosity and the attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people. LGBT awareness has been increasing over the past couple decades, and although many people are comfortable and accepting of them, not all are. It is often believed that religious people tend to have negative attitudes towards LGBT people because of their beliefs and the things that the Bible say, including, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor
swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, New International Version). Many religious people hold to verses like this tightly, and their attitudes are then shaped differently towards people who commit these “sins”. Many religions teach about staying away from these things and even the people who do these things, because that could lead them to undesired deception and temptation. Being religious does shape a person’s attitudes to virtually everything in life. This shaping of attitudes is not a bad thing, but it can be harmful in some ways, as it can lead to stigma, discrimination and ultimately affect someone’s well being if they are personally affected by those attitudes. Even though today many more people are accepting of LGBT people, religious people are still thought to be one of the strongest groups of people to enforce negative attitudes towards them.

Rosik, Griffith and Zenaida (2007) did a study on homophobia and conservative religion. They had students at a Christian university do three different surveys that measured their attitudes towards celibate versus sexually active homosexuals. First, the students did a survey that assessed their attitudes specifically towards homosexuals that were either celibate or sexually active and towards single heterosexuals who was sexually active. Next, they did another survey that measured homophobic attitudes directly towards gay men and lesbian women. Finally, they did a survey that measured their religious commitment. On top of the surveys, the students were asked if they considered themselves Christian or not. The researchers found that even though most of the students reported to be Christian, not all of them were considered religious by the religious scale. They found that the religious students had negative attitudes towards homosexuals, and
showed even stronger negative attitudes towards them if they were sexually active versus celibate. However, the attitudes towards the heterosexuals who were sexually active showed similar results, revealing that sexual behaviour may have played just as strong of a role as behaviour towards someone’s sexual orientation (Rosik et al., 2007). They also found that there were no differences in the gender of the religious people in the reflections of their attitudes found towards homosexuals, as well as there was no significant difference found between the views of lesbian women versus gay men.

Rosik et al. (2007) found that there were implications for the participants’ behaviour. Specifically for their study, they found that the participants who had strong beliefs toward specific sexual behaviours reflected on how they then viewed gay men and lesbian women. They were more accepting of the celibate homosexuals than the sexually active homosexuals and heterosexuals. They also found that the participants displayed the greatest negative attitudes towards questions that dealt with the moral aspect of viewing gay men and lesbian women over the social aspect (Rosik et al., 2007). The researchers believed that the term homophobia had a negative effect on the way the participants could have been viewing the surveys, so they suggested that a softer word be used and recommended sexual prejudice. Sexual prejudice will be used instead of homophobia in this study. They believed that further research should consider a better “language” for questioning people about homophobia because it was such a sensitive topic. They understood that there was not too much other research about this at the time, and could not make any
definite statements from their study because of doing their analysis with a correlation, but believed that their work was a step for future studies.

Sanders (2008), for her 2280E project, did a study on the effect of religiosity on attitudes towards homosexuality. She believed that religious people had negative attitudes towards homosexuals over non-religious people. She focused heavily on the religious aspect by looking at the fundamentalism, emphasis and the intrinsic and extrinsic attitudes of religious people and seeing how that affected their attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women. Sanders gave her participants three tasks: pictures and questions regarding the images, a religiosity scale, and a homophobic scale. She showed the participants either pictures of heterosexual or homosexual couples (either male or female) with questions to analyze their attitudes. She also made up her religious scale based off of past scales. Her homophobic scale was the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, created by Herek in 1988. She also took into account the demographics, ethnicity and gender of all the participants. She found that her results showed a main effect between the homosexual images versus the heterosexual images. Past that, she did not find a main effect for religiosity and no interaction was found. She believed that her insignificant results were due to the fact that her sample did not have enough religious people and that since there was a tight age range, there was possibly not as much differentiating beliefs toward homosexuality, since younger people are from a more liberal generation (Sanders, 2008). She concluded that a more controlled sample of religious versus non-religious people and possibly different measurements could yield significant results.
The current study is a replication of Sander’s study with some changes. All the scales were changed and the religious scale was given first instead of second. The sample was much more controlled to have an equal amount of religious and non-religious people. A new variable, age, was also added since Sander’s believed that a wider range of age would take into account that the younger generation was known to be more liberal and the older generation to be more conservative. The study was done to show that religious people display a sexual prejudice towards LGBT people over non-religious people, as well as older adults would have stronger sexual prejudice than younger adults.

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants were 40 adults (20 young adults, 20 older adults) that lived in Southwestern Ontario. Majority of the participants were Caucasian. Most of the young adults were students from the University of Western Ontario and its affiliates. Most of the older adults were from the workplaces of the researcher’s parents. In addition, many of the religious participants were found from North Park Church, a nondenominational church. The ages of the young adults varied from 19 to 30 years old and the ages of the older adults varied from 40 years old and onward. There were 23 males and 17 females in this study.

**Materials**

**Salience in Religious Commitment Scale.** The scale was created by Roof and Perkins (1975) to measure how important it was to a person to be religious. The scale was used in other studies to measure the relationship between religiosity
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and racial prejudice. The scale consisted of three questions that focused on intrinsic religiosity, and for each question the participants had to choose the statement that they thought applied best to their religious beliefs (Hill & Hood Jr., 1999). The test scores ranged from 3 to 11, with 11 being considered the most religiously salient. According to Roof and Perkins, a score of 10 or 11 meant religiously salient, but with the large number of nine’s scored on this scale, nine was also considered to be religiously salient in the current study. The scale had an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.72 and the researchers relied on face validity and found that when correlated with another religious scale, there was a correlation coefficient of 0.81 (Hill & Hood Jr., 1999).

Control and experimental passages. The second measurement was the passages read by the participants, made up by the researcher. The control passage was about sleep and the disadvantages from not getting enough. The experimental passage was about LGBT people and how they needed support because of the harmful effects that come from a lack of it. Both passages were of about equal length. The passages had two questions at the end that the participants had to either disagree or agree with. These passages were used to try to show that the scores would be fairly consistent in the control passage, but not necessarily the experimental one. As well, the experimental passage should then show a positive effect on The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974) scores by producing lower results. The passages and questions can be found in Appendix A.

The Riddle Scale. Dorothy Riddle created the scale in 1974 to measure the various types of attitudes towards LGBT people. The various attitudes that were
measured included repulsion, pity, tolerance, acceptance, support, admiration, appreciation and nurturance (Riddle, 1974). The different attitudes were reflected by how people scored on different questions of the scale (these attitudes were not used for the study). There were 16 questions, and for each question, the participants had to either disagree or agree with them on a scale of one to five. There was no clear cut way given on how to score the scale other than that the first four questions were to be reverse scored. This meant that a lower score would reveal homophobic attitudes and a higher score would reveal more positive and supportive attitudes. For this study, all of the questions except questions one to four and seven were reverse scored. This was so that a higher score would reveal homophobic attitudes towards LGBT people and a lower score would reveal more positive and supportive attitudes. Question seven was not reverse scored because it was thought that if people were to be accepting of LGBT people then they should disagree to the statement. The scores ranged from 16 to 80. There seems to be reliability and validity to the measure, however no specific values were found.

**Other measures.** Gender, age and the question, “Do you believe in God?” was asked of all participants and was added to the beginning of the Salience in Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975). The information gathered for these can be found in detail in Appendix B.

**Procedure**

The participants were asked to partake in the study and were emphasized that the study contained sensitive material and questions containing personal information, so not participating or dropping out at any time was acceptable. They
were told the study would take no longer than 10 minutes of their time. If the participants still chose to proceed, a consent form was given to them to read and sign. They were told they were going to be completing three tasks. The first task given to them was the Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975). After that, the participants were randomly assigned to either the control (sleep) or experimental (about LGBT people) passage to read and fill out. The third task was then given, which was The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974). Once completed, the participants were given a debriefing form and were thanked for their time and cooperation.

Results

All 40 adults were used for analysis. The results of the study are shown in Figure 1. The figure shows that a three-way, between-subjects analysis of variance (N=40) revealed that there was a significant main effect of religiosity on the scores of the Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974), $F(1, 32) = 22.60, p < 0.05$. This showed that religious people did, in fact, score higher than the non-religious people, which meant that they showed a strong sexual prejudice against LGBT people. However, there was no main effect of the control passage versus the experimental passage on the outcome of the scores on The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974), $F(1, 32) = 0.81, p > 0.05$. There was also no main effect of age on the scores, $F(1, 32) = 1.55, p > 0.05$. On top of this, no interaction was found between religiosity and age $F(1, 32) = 1.70, p > 0.05$, religiosity and the passages $F(1, 32) = 0.02, p > 0.05$, age and the passages $F(1, 32) = 0.27, p > 0.05$, and religiosity, age and the passages, $F(1, 32) = 0.22, p > 0.05$.

An analysis of variance summary table can be found in Appendix C.
Figure 1. Results of the three-way, between-subjects analysis of variance. The mean scores from the Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974) range from 16 to 80 (16 being the lowest score possible) and show a significant effect for religiosity. No other effects or interactions were found with age or the passages.
A one-tailed, independent-samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between the scores of the religious ($M=10.3$, $SD=0.98$) and non-religious ($M=4.95$, $SD=1.96$) people on the Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975), $t(38) = 10.92$, $p < 0.05$. The test was found to have some validity in separating people as either religious or non-religious.

Although there were insignificant results for the passages, t-tests were done to tell if there was validity to them. A one-tailed, independent-samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between the scores of the control passage ($M=4.8$, $SD=0.41$) and the experimental passage ($M=3.25$, $SD=1.62$), $t(38) = 4.15$, $p < 0.05$. A second one-tailed, independent-samples t-test also revealed that there was a significant difference between the scores of the control passage ($M=4.8$, $SD=0.42$) and the experimental passage ($M=2.2$, $SD=1.55$) for the religious people, $t(8) = 5.12$, $p < 0.05$. A third one-tailed, independent-samples t-test also revealed there was an insignificant difference between the scores of the control passage ($M=4.8$, $SD=0.42$) and the experimental passage ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.82$) for the non-religious people, $t(8) = 1.71$, $p > 0.05$. This shows that the religious people did not agree with the passage about LGBT people nearly as often as non-religious people did, which was expected and that there was some validity to the passages.

**Discussion**

The overall results of this study did not support the notion that being both religious and older in age shows strong sexual prejudice towards LGBT people. However, it was found that religious people are more sexually prejudiced than non-religious people. Rosik et al. (2007) only used students who were religious in their
study, but they found that they showed sexual prejudices towards gay men and lesbian women. This past research supported the main effect of religiosity found.

Age was added as a variable into the study to see if there would be stronger sexual prejudices towards LGBT people from older adults. Older adults are considered to be more conservative, while younger adults are considered more liberal. Past studies did not compare young adults to older adults, but they did recognize it could have been an affecting factor, so it seemed like a plausible idea. A possibility for why the age differences did not work out could have been because of the wide range of ages for the older adults. If an adult was older than 40, then they were used for the study, however, a tighter age range may have been more effective. Also, the older generation could be influenced by the younger generations more liberal attitudes and therefore not finding an effect between the ages. As well, a lot of attention towards LGBT people and awareness for support and acceptance is directed to the younger generation, so the older generation may simply not care as much or understand why the topic is such a big deal to the younger generation.

Sander's (2008) study showed insignificant results between being religious and showing negative attitudes towards homosexuals. She believed that was due to the fact that her sample did not have a strong mix of religious and non-religious people. To control for that in this study, there was purposely a less randomly selected sample and many participants were specifically asked to take part in the study. The religious people were mostly non-denominational or Dutch reformed, so there wasn’t a variety in the different types of religions, unlike with Sander’s study. The study was just too small to try to use many different religions. The sample size
of the study, therefore, was not large enough. Even though 40 participants were used, that only left five participants to each condition. Ideally there should have been at least 10 participants in each condition. There was an insignificant interaction found between religiosity and age, however the results looked like they could have been promising, so more participants could have yielded significant results. Also, with more participants, people from a vast amount of different religions could have been used to see if different religions show different sexual prejudices towards LGBT people.

Although there was reliability in The Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975), the validity was based off of face validity. Also, because the scoring was changed for the study, the true reliability and validity could have been affected. However, separating religious from non-religious did not seem to be a problem in the study, and so it is unlikely that this could have caused any of the problems.

Past researchers did not use passages as the independent variable. Rosik et al. (2007) used a scale to measure attitudes specifically towards celibate versus sexually active homosexuals. Sanders (2008) used pictures of homosexual and heterosexual couples to measure the attitudes of how people felt about seeing them. The passages that were given to the participants to read were made up for the study, so the passages have no real reliability or validity. The t-tests did show the expected results between the non-religious and religious people for how they would answer the questions, which revealed some validity, however it had no effect or produce any sort of interaction on the scores of The Riddle Scale (1974). The reason
that neither a scale nor pictures were used for this study was to tone down the sexual component. Rosik et al. found that some religious people have strong views about sexual behaviour, so that had an affect on the attitudes towards even the pictures of the heterosexual couples which would have taken away from what was trying to be studied. The passages were not effective in an effect and had no interaction with religiosity and age, but they were effective for finding the difference between how religious people felt about LGBT people versus non-religious people.

The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974) is not the most common scale used to measure homophobia, although it has known reliability and validity. The problem with this scale is that again, the scoring for the study was changed, so that could have affected the outcome of scores. As well, there are different versions of this scale online, which put into question as to which was the original and the most accurate version of the scale. In hindsight, it was not the best scale to use to test for homophobia. As well, a lot of the questions consisted of two statements, and many of the participants found that they would agree with one of the statements but not the other, so they found it hard to answer some of the questions accurately. Several participants chose neutral/not sure for almost all their options just because they felt they could not properly answer the questions due to the way they were asked. This could have been a reason as to why there were insignificant results. Also, the first four questions were supposed to be the reverse score of the rest, but some of the other questions seemed like they should have been reversed as well. Siding with Rosik et al. (2007), it is hard to find an accurate scale to assess homophobia when it is such a sensitive topic and it is hard to ask the “right” kinds of questions. Although
the scale showed a main effect with religiosity, there were no other main effects or interactions found with the scale. The scale was unfortunately not a very good dependent variable as a result.

On the Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975), the question “Do you believe in God?” was added. This was done to see how many people say they believed in God, even though they were not considered religious according to the scale. The results for this can be found in Appendix B. The question showed that 60% of non-religious people said they believed in God, even though they did not have any sort of other religious commitment in their lives. This is an implication because it shows that even though someone may not be considered religiously committed, they still may have some sort of faith, which that on its own can shape a person’s attitudes.

The study deals with a lot of sensitive content and is considered controversial. Just because a person is considered religious, does not mean that they are going to be sexually prejudiced towards LGBT people and vice versa. Although there was only one religion (Christianity) being used for the study, different denominations under that religion all have different attitudes towards LGBT people. Some denominations are very accepting of them and some are completely against them. Even then, people still have their own personal beliefs even if they are committed to a religion that believes something else. The study was not done to try to bash out on religiosity, but to try to see how it plays a role in real life problems. LGBT people should not be treated differently and in hurting ways just because of who they are, and even if someone does not believe in that, it does not give them the
right to show sexual prejudice. On the flip side, LGBT people do not have the right to bash all religious people and assume that they all hate them and do not accept them because of their beliefs. There will probably never be full acceptance from religious people towards LGBT people and vice versa, however, it is important to do studies like these to raise awareness of the sexual prejudices.

If this study were to be done again, changes would have to be made. The Salience of Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975) would have to be replaced. Even though it produced the expected results and had reliability and validity, many participants who were non-religious found they did not like the scale because the options on the scale only gave them a choice of minimum religious commitment and some pointed out that they had none. The passages would have to be replaced too. Looking back at what past researchers did, the reason for focusing on sexual behaviours is probably the best way to use the manipulated variable. Rosik et al. (2007) made a point that religious people tend to have stronger negative attitudes towards the moral aspect of people being LGBT than the social aspect. In this study, many of the participants found that they liked LGBT people and do not treat them any differently, however the whole sexual component was considered wrong. Many of the religious people said, “Love the person, hate the sin”. The experimental passage, at the least, would have to be changed to a more sexual passage about LGBT people. If this led to stronger attitudes, there could be a possible effect found then on the homophobia scale. Or, the possibility of using pictures like Sanders (2008) did could be effective as well, since she found a main effect for them. The Riddle Scale (Riddle, 1974) would most definitely be replaced.
Finding a scale on homophobia is hard to find because there is so much sensitivity around those types of questions. The scale is quite old, so there has possibly been more effective and sensitive scales created since then and it would be effective to use a new one. If age were to be taken into account again, it would be important to note if the participant considered himself or herself conservative or liberal to see if that was the main reason for different views. Also, a wider range of religions would be interesting, because it would give a broader scope of how different religions view the LGBT population.

Further research in this area could be done as well. There is a large amount of literature on the effects of religiosity and attitudes towards many different things including sex, drinking, education, jobs, etc. The views on LGBT people are just a newer topic. However, the effects of attitudes towards LGBT people are not too extensively researched although it is increasing with time. It would be interesting to redo the current study but flip it entirely. So, the study would be the effects of LGBT people on attitudes towards religiosity. It is possible that the attitudes are just as negative as those of LGBT people to religious people.

In spite of the problems and the limitations, the study still yielded a main effect between religiosity and the scores on homophobia. Religious people do show more sexual prejudices than non-religious people do to the LGBT community. A more sensitive and implicit way of testing the effects of sexual prejudice could possibly be the change that is needed for this study. Overall, the study revealed that even though people typically live in a very accepting and supportive area, there are
still people who have their strong beliefs against certain things, like LGBT people, and it will affect how they act and treat them.
References


Appendix A

Read the following passage and then answer the questions below. Please circle only one answer for each of the questions.

Stephen Fry once said, “At least 260 species of animals have been noted exhibiting homosexual behaviour but only one species of animal ever, so far as we know, has exhibited homophobic behaviour – and that’s the human being.” Lesbians, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people are being more accepted by society, but they still experience a lot of stigma and discrimination. Because of this, they face higher rates of depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders. They also face a higher risk of suicide and substance abuse. Support and acceptance from family, friends, workplaces and neighborhoods is necessary for LGBT people because they deserve to live in a world where they are allowed to be who they are. They can’t help that they were born this way.

How interesting did you find this passage?

1 extremely not interesting

2 neither/unsure

3 interesting

4 very

Do you agree with this passage?

1 strongly disagree

2 neither/unsure

3 agree

4 strongly
Read the following passage and then answer the questions below. Please circle only one answer for each of the questions.

Everyone wants to maintain good health, and sleep is an essential part of that. Many people don’t realize how important quality sleep is on physical and mental health. It is a time when the body and brain get restored to prepare a person for the next day ahead of them. The recommended amount of sleep that an adult should have each night is about 7 to 8 hours. Not getting enough sleep has short-term and long-term effects. Short-term effects include being less productive at work or school, being irritated and moody, and not being able to make decisions as well. Long-term effects include the risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and obesity.

How interesting did you find this passage?

1 extremely not interesting
2 neither/unsure
3 interesting
4 very interesting

Do you agree with this passage?

1 strongly disagree
2 neither/unsure
3 agree
4 strongly agree
Appendix B

Table 1

Summary of Gender, Age and Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Young Adult Religious</th>
<th>Young Adult Non-Religious</th>
<th>Older Adult Religious</th>
<th>Older Adult Non-Religious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>6 males</td>
<td>6 males</td>
<td>7 males</td>
<td>4 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 females</td>
<td>4 females</td>
<td>3 females</td>
<td>6 females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>22.3 years old</td>
<td>23.1 years old</td>
<td>49.1 years old</td>
<td>49.3 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in God?</td>
<td>100% yes</td>
<td>40% yes</td>
<td>100% yes</td>
<td>80% yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Summary of Analysis of Variance

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial η²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>2,689.600</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,689.600</td>
<td>22.602*</td>
<td>0.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>184.900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>184.900</td>
<td>1.554</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage</td>
<td>96.100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.100</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity*Age</td>
<td>202.500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>202.500</td>
<td>1.702</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity*Passage</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2.500</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*Passage</td>
<td>32.400</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32.400</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity<em>Age</em>Passage</td>
<td>25.600</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.600</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>3,808.000</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>119.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,041.600</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Significant at the p < 0.05 level.