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Juvenile Sex Offender Subgroups: Differences in Personality and Sexual Recidivism

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JUVENILE SEX OFFENDER SUBGROUPS:
DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY AND SEXUAL RECIDIVISM

By

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Introduction

Juvenile sex offenders have sparked the interests of many researchers in recent years. Most have found juvenile sex offenders are a heterogeneous group. In order to understand the causes of the delinquent behavior, treatment needs, responses to treatment, and recidivism risk, we need to identify more homogeneous subgroups within this diverse group of juvenile offenders. Some support has been found for dividing juvenile sex offenders into groups based on the age of their victims, labeling them as “child offenders” and “peer offenders” (Aebi, Vogt, Plattner & Steinhausen, 2012; Gunby & Woodhams, 2010; Hendricks and Bijleveld, 2004; Worling, 2001). This approach is similar to what is being done in the adult literature, dividing adult sex offenders into groups of “rapists” and “child molesters,” which has considerable scientific support (Glowacz & Born, 2013; Worling 2001).

The general results of studies of juvenile sex offender subgroups have shown there are differences between child offenders and peer offenders on many variables, such as psychological symptoms, nature of their offense, abuse history, and criminal history. First, on the basis of psychological differences, child offenders are more likely to have internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression (van Wijk, van Horn, Bullens, Bijlevel & Doreleijers, 2005; Worling, 2001). In contrast, peer offenders are more likely to have externalizing problems such as aggression and delinquency (van Wijk et al., 2005; Worling, 2001). Second, in relation to the actual offense, peer offenders are more likely to have used excessive force against their victim, are less likely to know their victim personally, and are more likely to victimize females. Child offenders are less likely to use force, more likely to know their victim, and their victim was more likely to be male (Glowacz & Born, 2013; Salter et al., 2003; van Wijk et al., 2005; Worling,

1995). Third, research has shown that abuse histories differ for these two groups (Dennison & Leclerc, 2011; Glowacz & Born, 2013; Salter et al., 2003; Worling, 1995); it has been found that child offenders are more likely to have been sexually abused than peer offenders. However, the results are mixed on whether child or peer offenders are more likely to be physically abused (Dennison & Leclerc, 2011; Glowacz & Born, 2013; Salter et al., 2003; Worling, 1995). As far as criminal history, peer offenders have more prior nonsexual adjudications than child offenders (Glowacz & Born, 2013; Worling, 2001).

Based on the differences listed, it is suggested there is growing evidence in order to classify juvenile sex offenders based on victim age. However, less is known about differences in personality and sexual recidivism between victim age subgroups. This study will examine these two potentially important factors for validating juvenile sex offender subgroups: personality and recidivism, as well as the relationship between the two.

Personality has been described as a set of stable characteristics an individual possesses, which shape thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Michalski & Shackelford, 2010). Differences in personality have been shown to predict criminality and later re-offense in juvenile delinquent. Characteristics such as impulsivity, aggression, extroversion, and low conscientiousness were all found to be related to delinquency in juveniles (Jolliffe, 2013; Mak, Heaven & Rummery, 2003; Veltri et al., 2014). Finding differences in personality between juvenile sex offender subgroups could help in understanding the motivation behind offending, as well as indicators of future offending. Identifying personality differences could also lead to the creation of more appropriate treatments as well as a better understanding of the possible responses to or outcomes of treatments.

When looking at juvenile sex offender personality differences, some studies formed groups based on personality characteristics and tested whether there were different percentages of child and peer offenders within each personality group. Other studies formed groups based on victim age and compared those groups on personality. In those studies that formed groups based on personality, the majority identified groups such as antisocial or impulsive, unusual or isolated, over controlled, aggressive, or conforming. Using measures such as the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI) and California Psychological Inventory, studies have not typically found significant differences in the proportions of child offenders and peer offenders within each personality group (Oxnam & Vess, 2008; Worling, 2001). In contrast to these studies, there were others that grouped juvenile sex offenders based on their victim's age. Some found no association between personality and victim age (Parks & Bard, 2006; Richardson, Kelly, Graham & Bhate, 2004). Others have found that child offenders were more likely to score higher on conforming, avoidant, dependent, and noncompetitive scales than peer offenders (Carpenter, Peed & Eastman, 1995; Glowacz & Born, 2013; Parks & Bard, 2006). On the other hand, peer offenders were more likely to score higher on forceful and impulsive scales (Glowacz & Born, 2013). Thus, the available findings suggest there may be important differences between child and peer offenders on personality characteristics.

It is also important we understand recidivism patterns, when attempting to validate juvenile sex offender subgroups. By researching and following offenders, the information we gather can lead to a better understanding of who is at the greatest risk of reoffending. If such differences do exist, it would suggest there is a different kind of criminality between the two groups. The majority of studies that have looked at juvenile sex offender recidivism have found that between 7% and 15% of juvenile sex offenders sexually recidivate (Caldwell, 2010; Nunes,

Firestone, Wexler, Jensen & Bradford, 2007; Skelton & Vess, 2008). In studies that look at sexual recidivism rates between child offenders and peer offenders, the results are mixed on who is at the greater risk. Some studies have found that child offenders have a greater inclination to sexually reoffend (Hendricks & Bijleveld, 2008; Kahn & Chambers, 1991; Parks & Bard, 2006), but others have found that peer offenders are the greatest risk for sexual recidivism (Nisbet, Wilson & Smallbone, 2004) and still others found that there were no significant differences between the two groups (Hagan, Gust-Brey, Cho & Dow, 2001).

Relationships between recidivism and personality characteristics have not been studied but are an interesting point on which to focus. The reason is there could be a link between personality characteristics that lead to later reoffending in either group. In general, there have been personality traits related to general criminal recidivism, such as poor social skills, impulsivity, isolation, aggression, and dominance (Boccaccini et al., 2007; Boccaccini et al., 2010; Hendricks & Bijleveld, 2008; Miner, 2002; Worling, 2001). In child offenders, personality traits such as their avoidance, which may be associated with internalizing disorders or poor social skills, may lead to sexual later re-offense. In contrast, the peer offenders' traits such as their forceful, delinquent, and impulsive personalities may be related to later sexual re-offense, as has been found in non-sexually offending delinquents.

There were four main goals to the current study. First, the study provides descriptive information about personality differences between child and peer offenders, as assessed by the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI) scales. The MACI is a widely used measure of personality and clinical symptoms in juvenile offenders. Second, the rates of sexual recidivism between child and peer offenders were compared. Third, associations between MACI scales and sexual recidivism for the full sample of sexual offenders were examined. Finally, personality, as

measured by the MACI, was examined as a mediator between subgroup (i.e., child vs. peer offender) and sexual recidivism.

Based on previous research findings, the hypotheses were that child offenders would score significantly higher than peer offenders on anxious, depressive, submissive, and introverted scales. Conversely, it was expected that peer offenders would score significantly higher than child offenders on egotistic, forceful, oppositional and social insensitivity scales. It was also expected that child offenders would be more likely to sexually recidivate than peer offenders. Finally, the mediating effect of personality on recidivism was exploratory and as such, specific predictions were not made.

Method

Sample

The data used in this study was from archival information of institutional files of 516 juveniles who were adjudicated for a sexual offense and were committed to a high risk, all male juvenile justice facility located in North Florida. All offenders were between the ages of 12 and 19. Juvenile sex offenders were divided into the subgroups of child offenders and peer offenders based on the method provided by a study performed by Kemper and Kistner (2010). Offenders were considered child offenders if the victim was twelve years or younger and was four or more years younger than the offender. Offenders were considered peer offenders if the victim was older than twelve or less than four years younger than the offender. Sex offenders who victimized both children and peers were excluded from this study.

Measures

Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory. The measure used in this study was the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI), a 160-item self-report measure that is designed to assess personality styles as well as significant problems in adolescents (McCann, 1999). There are 31 scales including personality scales, expressed concerns, and clinical syndromes. Moderate to strong internal consistency (.61 to .91) and test-retest reliability have been reported for each MACI scale. All offenders were administered the MACI during orientation into the facility in either an individual or group format. Afterwards, all protocols were computer scored.

For the purpose of this study, all twelve personality scales (introversive, inhibited, doleful, submissive, dramatizing, egotistic, unruly, forceful, conforming, oppositional, self-demeaning, and borderline tendency) were used as well as three expressed concerns (sexual discomfort, peer insecurity and social insensitivity) and five clinical syndromes (substance-abuse proneness, delinquent predisposition, impulsive propensity, anxious feelings, and depressive affect).

Sexual recidivism. Sexual recidivism data were obtained from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and their contributing agencies throughout the state of Florida. Information regarding criminal records including arrests and conviction records can be found through Florida's Computerized Criminal History (CCH). Sealed records, including juvenile records and expunged records, are not included in the database; therefore the resulting data are from the adult corrections system. FDLE employees searched for each juvenile based on their first and last name on May 2, 2011, for offenses occurring after their release from the juvenile correctional facility. Each offender was then verified by middle name and date of birth. In this study, only convictions for sexual offenses, such as sexual battery or sexual assault, were included in the recidivism data.

Procedure

Archival institutional files were reviewed and coded by graduate students at the Florida State University. The data were double entered into a computer program by trained undergraduate students.

Data Analysis

A statistical analysis program, SPSS, was used to analyze the data. The sample was divided into peer offenders and child offenders. The groups were then compared on demographic and criminal history variables using independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests.

In order to compare the groups on MACI scales, t-tests were used. For comparing recidivism rates, because of the two categorical variables, it was appropriate to use logistic regression to determine the relationship between subgroups and sexual recidivism. In this comparison, the dependent variable was whether or not the offender committed another sexual offense and the independent variable, or covariate, was the group that the offender is a part of: child offender or peer offender.

The mediating effect of personality on rates of sexual recidivism was planned using a logistic regression with the independent variables of subgroup and personality scales and dependent variable sexual recidivism. To successfully determine there is a mediating effect present, there are four steps that must be followed. First, it should be seen that there is a relationship between subgroup membership (i.e., child or peer offender) and sexual re-offense rates. If this is present, then it should be seen that subgroup membership and personality are related. Assuming these two relationships are present, a third relationship between personality and sexual re-offense rates needs to be present. Finally, it must be established that personality

mediates the relationship, by examining whether the relationship between sex offender subgroup and sexual recidivism is significantly reduced when personality is added as a predictor (Kenny, 2013).

Results

Of our 511 participants, 367 were categorized as child offenders and 144 were categorized as peer offenders. See Table 1 for a summary of demographic and criminal history information. Sixty percent of the sample was Caucasian and 37% was African American. The average age for the first interaction with the juvenile legal system was 12.85 years ($SD=2.13$), the average age at admission to the current juvenile justice facility was 15.58 years ($SD=1.39$), and the average total commitments to juvenile facilities, including the current commitment, was 1.41 ($SD=.77$). The criminal history shows that the average number of total adjudications was 5.79 ($SD=5.62$), the average number of adjudications for nonsexual crimes was 4.38 ($SD=5.59$), and the average number of adjudications for sexual crimes was 1.43 ($SD=1.09$).

When comparing the two groups, child offenders were older than peer offenders at the time of their first referral, $t(504) = 2.56, p < .05$; but were younger than peer offenders at the time of admission to the facility, $t(507) = -2.47, p < .05$. Child offenders had fewer commitments to a juvenile justice facility than peer offenders, $t(507) = -1.95, p = .05$. Peer offenders had a greater average of total adjudications, $t(507) = -2.83, p < .05$; and total nonsexual adjudications, $t(507) = -2.9, p < .05$. There were no significant differences between the groups in regards to sexual adjudications, number of victims, or race.

The average scores for the subgroups and percentage of juvenile sex offenders who scored in the clinical range for each MACI scale are provided in Table 2. Scores on the MACI

scales were compared between child offenders and peer offenders using independent samples t-tests. Child offenders scored higher than peer offenders on introversive, $t(509) = 2.50, p < .05$; inhibited $t(509) = 2.34, p < .05$; submissive, $t(509) = 2.29, p < .05$; and sexual discomfort, $t(512) = 2.29, p < .05$. Peer offenders scored higher than child offenders on dramatizing, $t(509) = -2.24, p < .05$; egotistic, $t(509) = -2.39, p < .05$; social insensitivity, $t(509) = -3.28, p < .05$; and delinquent predisposition, $t(509) = -2.18, p < .05$. The two groups did not have statistically significant differences on any other MACI scales.

The mean age of the offenders was 17.17 years ($SD=1.33$) at the time of release from the correctional facility. A t-test shows that the subgroups did not differ for the age of release. Sexual recidivism data were missing for two child offenders, resulting in a sexual recidivism sample of 509 offenders. There were a total of 35 sexual recidivists, for an overall sexual recidivism rate of 6.87%. Of the total child offenders with recidivism data ($n=365$), 8.76% sexually recidivated ($n=32$) and of the total peer offenders, 2.08% sexually recidivated ($n=3$). Of the 35 sexual recidivists, 91.43% were child offenders and 8.57% were peer offenders. Date of release was missing for one child offender. The average time between date of release and date of sexual recidivism was 4.07 years ($SD=3.03$). Child offenders sexually recidivated sooner than peer offenders (3.69 years vs. 7.92 years), $t(32) = -2.48, p < .05$.

Logistic regression was used to predict sexual recidivism with sex offender subgroup as the covariate. The logistic regression model comparing subgroups on sexual recidivism was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 8.87, p < .05$. According to the Wald criterion, subgroup reliably predicted sexual recidivism $\underline{z} = 6.06, p < .05$. The odds ratio indicates that child offenders were 4.5 times more likely to sexually recidivate than peer offenders.

In order to look at the mediating effect of personality on recidivism, the previously outlined steps were followed. First, a t-test was used to determine that there is a relationship between subgroup and some MACI scales. Next, logistic regression was used to find that there is a relationship between subgroup and sexual recidivism. Logistic regression was used again to predict sexual recidivism with each MACI scale as a covariate. The logistic regression model was not significant, $\chi^2(30) = 34.53$, $p = .26$, showing that the MACI scales do not predict sexual recidivism. Furthermore, point biserial correlations between MACI scales and sexual recidivism were examined, but did not yield any significant results. The correlations can be found in Table 3. Because these scales were found not to predict sexual recidivism, the mediating effect of personality on the relationship between subgroup and sexual recidivism was not tested.

Discussion

By identifying homogenous groups within the population of juvenile sex offenders, we can better understand the causes of sexual offending, sexual recidivism, and treatment needs. It has become evident that there may be significant differences between those who offend against peers (i.e., peer offenders) and those who offend against children (i.e., child offenders) on many variables, including psychological symptoms, criminal behavior, and abuse history. But, little is known about two potentially important factors, personality and sexual recidivism, that would provide insight into the validity of those two subgroups.

For this study, juvenile sex offenders were separated into child and peer offender subgroups based on the victims' ages. The goals of this study were to compare child offenders and peer offenders on personality and on sexual recidivism rates; to test the relationship between personality and sexual recidivism; and to determine if personality had a mediating effect on the

relationship between the subgroups and sexual recidivism. The results of this study give support to the classification of juvenile sex offenders based on victim age. Specifically, significant differences were found between child and peer offenders in regards to personality and sexual recidivism, in a large sample with a long follow-up.

It is important to highlight that personality in juvenile sex offenders has not been frequently studied and few firm conclusions can be drawn about personality differences between child and peer offenders and how those may be related to risk for recidivism. However, the differences in personality found in this study between the two subgroups generally aligned with the predictions, as well as existing research. Child offenders scored higher than peer offenders on MACI scales measuring introversive, inhibited, and submissive behavior, as well as sexual discomfort. Higher scores on these scales suggest that child offenders are more likely to show internalizing symptoms, including anxiety and low self-esteem, have more problems getting along well with peers, feel more disliked and isolated, are dependent and more rule-abiding, and are more uncomfortable with sexual behavior or thoughts of sex than peer offenders. These findings are generally consistent with previous findings that child offenders are more likely to have internalizing disorders (van Wijk, van Horn, Bullens, Bijlevel & Doreleijers, 2005; Worling, 2001), are more likely to be avoidant and conforming (Carpenter, Peed & Eastman, 1995; Glowacz & Born, 2013; Parks & Bard, 2006), and more likely to exhibit social skills deficits as compared to peer offenders.

In the present study, peer offenders scored significantly higher than child offenders on MACI scales including dramatizing, egotistic, social insensitivity, and delinquent predisposition. Higher scores on these scales suggest that, compared to child offenders, peer offenders are more likely to be overly-confident and self-assured, bully others, be abrasive, impulsive, and attention

seeking, intentionally hurt others, and break rules and laws. This is consistent with past research that has found that peer offenders were more likely to hold pro-criminal attitudes, have externalizing disorders (van Wijk et al., 2005; Worling, 2001), and be impulsive and previously delinquent (Glowacz & Born, 2013; Worling, 2001).

These findings have possible implications for the treatment and prevention programs used for juvenile sex offenders. Patterns seen in these offenders suggest the behaviors or reasons that contribute to sexual offending may differ between the subgroups. Though, in this study, child offenders were found to have previously committed nonsexual crimes, the data suggest that child offenders may commit sexual crimes because they are potentially less socially skilled, have less access to peers, are more isolated, more uncomfortable with sexual behaviors and acts, and more introversive. Alternatively, it is possible that peer offenders' sexual offenses could stem from general delinquency. Given these potential differences in contributions to their sexual offending, the groups may benefit from different types of treatment. Specifically, child offenders may benefit from treatment programs that aide in improving social skills and interactions with age-appropriate peers, increasing self-esteem, and increasing sexual knowledge and comfort. In contrast, peer offenders may benefit from a treatment program focused on reducing delinquent attitudes and increasing pro-social attitudes and behavior.

In addition to differences in personality, differences were found in sexual recidivism rates. Sexual conviction recidivism data were collected through FLDE's computerized system and included recidivism data with a greater amount of time between release and recidivism searches than is typical within the juvenile sex offender subgroup literature. Compared to previous studies in this area with recidivism follow-up of between 20 months and 85 months (Hendricks & Bicklefeld, 2008; Kahn & Chambers, 1991; Nisbet, Wilson & Smallbone, 2004;

Parks & Bard, 2006), this study had an average recidivism follow-up of 102 months. The overall sexual recidivism rate was 6.9%, which is consistent with past research rates of between 7% and 12%. When looking at the sex offenders who sexually recidivated, child offenders were 4.5 times more likely to do so than peer offenders. This lends further support to emerging research that has found child offenders to be more likely to sexually recidivate than peer offenders (Kahn & Chambers, 1991; Kemper & Kistner, 2007; Hendriks & Bikleveld, 2008; Parks & Bard, 2006). These findings are consistent with the adult literature, which has found child molesters are more likely to sexually recidivate than rapists (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). Knowing which subgroup of juvenile sex offender is at greatest potential risk for sexually reoffending can aid in recognizing behaviors or characteristics that lead to sexual re-offense as well as tailor treatments to better treat offenders.

This study did not find a relationship between personality, as measured by the MACI, and sexual recidivism. The MACI is a widely used, reliable measure of personality in adolescents and there were a wide range of scores in the clinical and non-clinical ranges of most subscales in this study. However, this measure of personality may not have captured the personality characteristics that are related to sexual re-offense. At this time, there are few known predictors of sexual re-offense in juvenile sex offenders primarily because of the low base rate of sexual recidivism adjudications. There may still be characteristics related to personality that could explain or be contributing factors to sexual re-offense. The adult sex offender literature has found that there are two factors that are related to adult sex offenders risk for sexual recidivism: psychopathy and sexual deviance. These two factors generally lack stability and are often difficult to measure in juveniles. Future research should look at early indicators of psychopathy and sexual deviance so that we may predict those who are at a greater risk for sexually

reoffending. Specifically, researchers may look at aspects of emerging psychopathy such as pathological lying, manipulation for personal gain, lack of remorse, and sensation seeking as these may be an indication of who may be a higher risk for sexual recidivism. Researchers may also want to look at possible indicators of sexual deviance, such as those who victimize male children, use force, and show unusual sexual behavior as other possible indicators of who may be a higher risk for sexual recidivism.

There are both limitations and strengths to this study. Because this study only included males sentenced to a high-risk facility, the findings may not generalize to female juvenile sex offenders or less criminally delinquent males. Second, we did not have access to measures of psychopathy or sexual deviance, which are two known predictors in the adult literature in regards to sexual re-offense. Last, the alpha level was not adjusted to account for the multiple comparisons with the MACI, which may have increased the likelihood of finding significant differences between child and peer offenders by chance. Due to this being one of few studies that compares personality between the subgroups, it was considered to be exploratory and thus opened the door to future research.

One of the greatest strengths is the follow-up into many of the offenders' adult lives. In many studies, the short time between release and follow up is a limitation. Second, data were available for a large sample of juvenile sex offenders. Last, we used the MACI, which is a widely known and valid measure of personality.

Replication of this study with personality measures that evaluate the juveniles for psychopathy and sexual deviance may lead to a clearer depiction of differences in personality, that may help us better understand sexual recidivism patterns. Continued long-term follow up would be beneficial to ensure that the entire recidivist population is evaluated. By including a

measure examining range of personality characteristics and following juvenile sex offenders for long periods of time, we may increase the likelihood that we can find a predictor to sexual recidivism and improve treatment and risk prediction.

Table 1

Demographic and Criminal History Means and Standard Deviations for Child and Peer Offenders

Variable	Child Offenders	Peer Offenders	<i>t</i>	df
Age at First Referral	13.23 (2.04)	12.60 (2.31)	2.56*	511
Age at Admission	15.58 (1.33)	16.06 (1.50)	-2.47*	512
Total Commitments	1.24 (.72)	1.53 (.87)	-1.95*	510
Total Adjudications	3.34 (5.48)	5.08 (5.82)	-2.83*	511
Total Nonsexual Adjudications	3.27 (.93)	4.76 (1.42)	-2.90*	511
Total Sexual Adjudications	1.45 (5.47)	1.39 (5.72)	.56	512

* $p < .05$

Table 2

MACI Scores for Child and Peer Offender Subgroups

MACI Scale	Child Offenders	Peer Offenders	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	% in Clinical Range
Introversive	56.43	51.77	2.52*	512	15.5
Inhibited	55.50	50.57	2.34*	512	19.2
Doleful	52.07	51.10	.434	512	20.9
Submissive	62.30	59.19	2.14*	512	18.0
Dramatizing	53.44	57.63	-2.36*	512	12.7
Egotistic	49.93	54.08	-2.53*	512	4.5
Unruly	58.23	60.89	-1.40	512	20.2
Forceful	31.59	35.37	-1.72	512	5.5
Conforming	56.18	56.07	.06	512	13.1
Oppositional	55.65	56.57	-.52	512	11.7
Self-Demeaning	42.65	41.52	.53	512	17.8
Borderline Tendency	37.68	36.29	.69	512	6.1
Sexual Discomfort	59.24	55.08	2.29*	512	12.9
Peer Insecurity	55.13	50.77	1.80	512	27.2
Social Insensitivity	58.81	64.59	-3.28*	512	17.6
Substance Abuse Proneness	44.18	47.29	-1.17	512	15.7
Delinquent Predisposition	64.13	68.06	-2.20*	512	28.6

Impulsive Propensity	52.27	53.07	-.34	512	22.7
Anxious Feelings	63.24	59.99	1.65	512	23.1
Depressive Affect	56.40	52.09	1.57	512	32.9

* $p < .05$

Table 3

Point Biserial Correlations Between MACI Scales and Sexual Recidivism

MACI Scale	Pearson Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
Introversive	.013	.776
Inhibited	-.005	.917
Doleful	.001	.975
Submissive	-.400	.364
Dramatizing	-.004	.922
Egotistic	-.023	.605
Unruly	.004	.921
Forceful	.048	.281
Conforming	-.055	.216
Oppositional	.000	.998
Self-Demeaning	-.003	.946
Borderline Tendency	.001	.980
Sexual Discomfort	.065	.146
Peer Insecurity	.008	.857
Social Insensitivity	-.011	.809
Substance Abuse Proneness	.036	.415
Delinquent Predisposition	.020	.652
Impulsive Propensity	.032	.467
Anxious Feelings	.011	.812

Depressive Affect	.018	.690
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* $p < .05$

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