



# The Recognition of Racial Prejudice and Suppression in the Minds of Young Adults

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## Introduction

Research Question: How unaware are young adults of their racial implicit prejudices and attempts to suppress them?

- People naturally divide the world into groups to better understand it and to feel more in control of what is happening around them (Mania, Jones & Gaertner, 2013).
- Simply because the explicit prejudices of racism and discrimination are not displayed as commonly anymore, does not imply all racial, implicit prejudices are gone. Explicit prejudices, or discrimination, can easily be hidden or completely avoided. Nevertheless, the way someone is taught to think from a young age is more difficult to change because of the “depth processing effect.”
- Strong neural pathways that control thoughts and attitudes are difficult to reject because they have a longer history of activation than rationalized beliefs and morals (Devine 1989).
- Because young children cannot recognize the prejudices they are taught, they have no way to consciously stop these neural pathways from forming and stop the spread of their implicit prejudices to other people (Devine 1989).

Hypothesis: Students with lower tested racial prejudices will be more aware of their own prejudice and try to suppress more than people with high racial prejudices, who will not be as aware of their prejudice or try suppress their prejudices.

## Background Information

**Prejudice** *noun* (pre-jə-dəs): preconceived judgement or opinion; an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics

- When testing the correlation between knowledge of stereotypes and level of prejudice, no significant difference was found between high-prejudiced and low-prejudiced individuals and their expressed knowledge of stereotypes (Devine, 1989).
- However, high prejudice was supported to be correlated with perceived lingering hostility and quicker appearance of hostility on black faces in a study performed by Hugenberg and Bodenhausen (2003).

### Biological Perspective

- All sensory information travels through the brain’s associative centers and midbrain that store memories, experiences, and knowledge. New information that refutes pasts beliefs, therefore, may be processed as an exception not as a contradiction (Campbell 1967).

### Behavioral Perspective

- People categorizing everything as an intellectual method of learning and organization to better understand the world around them.
- It is, also, assumed through frustration-aggression theory that some positive reinforcement is resultant when the in-group belittles the out-group (Campbell, 1967).

### Social Perspective

- There are micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of racism so it is extremely intertwined into societal norms.
- Racism, based on prejudice, is also a form of dominance in-group experiences that is continuously reinforced by a belief that the out-group is inferior (Mania, Jones & Gaertner, 2013).

## Methodology

### Participants

- Twenty-one people (n=21) participated from Central Magnet School in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
- Each participant was selected as a convenience sample from the Primary Investigator’s classes and from the school halls.
- The only qualification for people to participate was for their age to be between 14-24 years old.

### Materials

#### Survey

- Each participant took the survey titled “Implicit Prejudice Pre-Survey” written in Google Forms.
- The survey had two sections of questions – general demographic and self-reported prejudice.
  - The first survey section had eight questions asking for the participant’s “Participant Number” and nonidentifiable demographic information about the participant including their race, sex, age, religious practice, etc.
  - The second section asked participants to reflect on their implicit prejudices in social situations and their attempted suppression of these responses. All response prompts about prejudice were adapted from the *Motivation to Control Prejudiced Reactions*’ seventeen items with a Cronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = .81$  (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). Using a Likert scale, participants responded to each prompt rated 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### E-prime

The study’s experimental testing was conducted through E-prime Psychology Software as one continuous experimental test composed of three different trial sections. Section Trial 1 was a practice test to acclimate the participants to the E-prime software, to learn the key denotations, and to become more automatic with their responses. Section Trials 2 and 3 also used the “E” key for “good” and “I” key for “bad” and had the words corresponding to the hand used in their respective corners; however, the prompts were racially ambiguous images of black and white faces – meaning all features of the faces were exactly the same and not designed to reflect either race’s distinctive features.

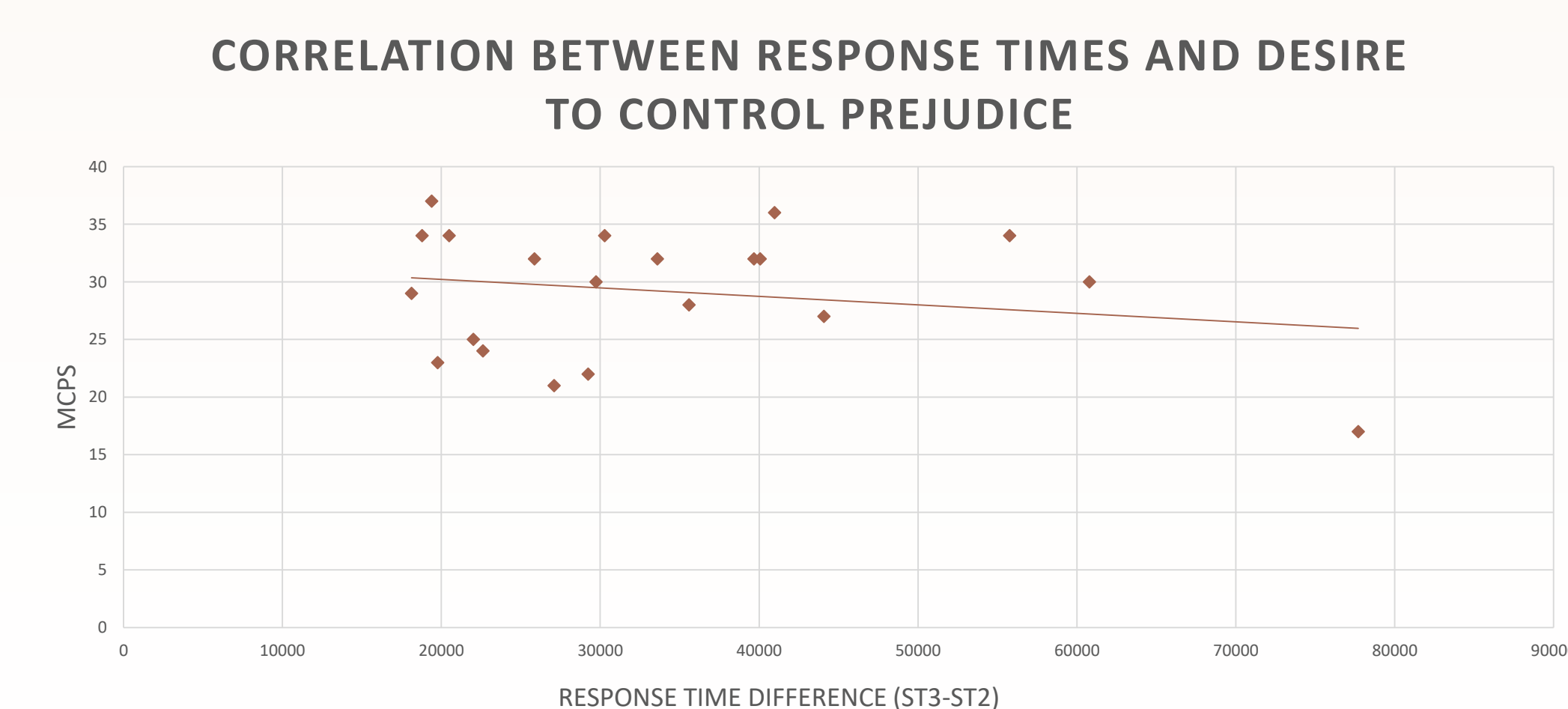
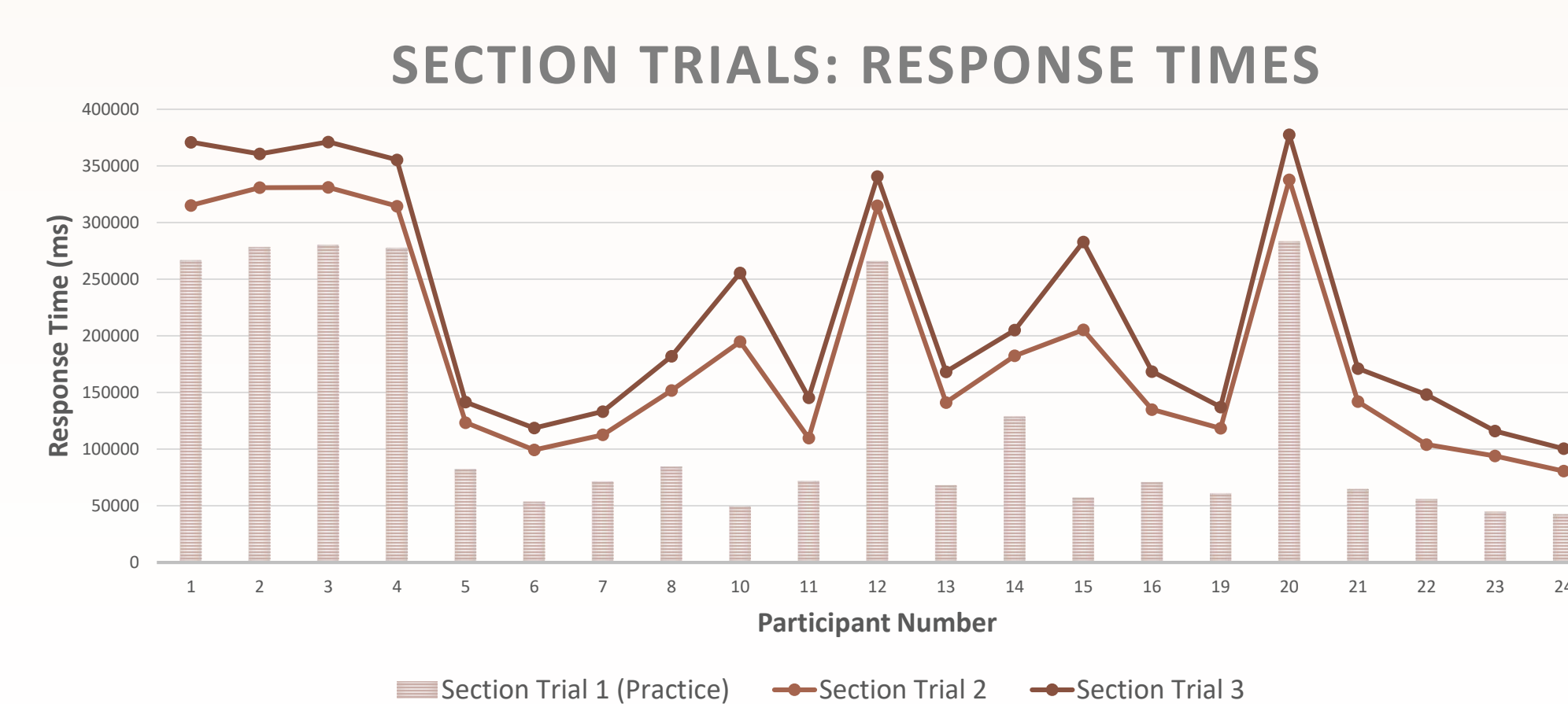


### Procedure

- Participants were given a card with their participant number when they arrived and sat at a desktop computer.
- The participants first took the “Implicit Prejudice Study: Pre-Survey.”
- Next, they were given instructions about what to expect during Section Trials 1, 2, and 3 in E-prime and began testing.
- All participants were thanked for their participation and had any remaining debriefing questions answered as they left the testing site. The participants were also offered a chocolate chip cookie as compensation for their time.

## Results

- Because the data set was small initially, any outliers could not simply be cut from the set, so to account for the was one positively skewed outlier, the highest and lowest response time difference vales were changed to equal the next highest and next lowest value, respectively.
- The graph shows a weak negative correlation between response time differences and the Motivation to Control Prejudice survey scores.
- People who scored higher in the Motivation to Control Prejudice survey had lower individual response time differences between ST2 and ST3, but there was no significant trend in the difference between total average participant response times in ST2 verses ST3. The study was determined to be inconclusive because the hypothesis was not clearly supported nor denied.



## Discussion

- There was no strong correlation found between awareness of prejudice and participants’ attempts to suppress prejudice.
- The data implied many of the participants were already aware of their subconscious prejudices and possibly have more practice rejecting their learned racial prejudices daily than the study design considered.
- These results are important because they show the next step of racial prejudice suppression and rejection is already a conscious thought for some in the tested participants.

## Limitations

- Small sample size
- Limited testing time
- Three participants’ partial scores were excluded
- Self-serving bias possible in survey responses

## Future Study

- Focus on one demographic among young adults, not just test based on age
- Use more participants
- Switch Section Trial 2 and Section Trial 3 testing orders for a random sample of participants to limit the practice effect
- Separate questions written and verified for this study instead of using adapted questions from Dunton and Fazio’s *Motivation to Control Prejudice* survey questions (1997).

## References

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