

Cognitive Mechanisms Behind the Memory-Undermining Effect of Feigned Crime-Related Amnesia

Citation for published version (APA):

Mangiulli, I. (2018). *Cognitive Mechanisms Behind the Memory-Undermining Effect of Feigned Crime-Related Amnesia*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University, Univ Bari Aldo Moro, University of Bari]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20180913im>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2018

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20180913im](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20180913im)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Download date: 19 Apr. 2024

Summary

Oftentimes individuals charged with severe crimes, such as homicide and sexual assault, claim amnesia for their deeds. Crime-related amnesia represents a way for defendants to (1) try to obstruct police investigations, (2) keep silent about a shameful offence, or (3) be rendered incompetent to stand trial. Because genuine amnesia following a crime is quite rare, the likelihood of pretending to suffer from memory loss (i.e., malingering) should be taken into consideration. Moreover, when perpetrators choose to simulate memory loss for their criminal acts, relevant crime-related information might be forgotten. That is, research has shown that feigning amnesia has a detrimental effect on the actual memory for a crime (also known as the memory-undermining effect of feigning amnesia).

The main purpose of the current dissertation was to experimentally investigate the mechanism behind the simulating amnesia effect. *Chapter 1* provides an introduction to the phenomenon of claims of crime-related amnesia. This chapter describes different types of amnesia, highlighting that claims of memory loss for severe crimes should (in most cases) be considered as a form of malingering. The relevance of crime-related amnesia for the legal system is also discussed. Finally, several hypotheses are given explaining why feigning leads to impairments in actual memory for a crime: (1) lack of rehearsal, (2) source monitoring confusion, (3) retrieval-induced forgetting.

Chapter 2 describes two studies that aimed to rule out the lack of rehearsal as the most likely explanation for the feigning amnesia effect. During the first memory phase, after being exposed to a violent mock crime video, participants were asked to either simulate amnesia (i.e., simulator group) or confess the crime (i.e., confessor group). A delayed testing-only control group was also involved (i.e., control group). After seven days, all participants were requested to genuinely recollect the crime event. Additionally, during the week between the first and second memory phase, some participants were provided with reminders of the crime in two different ways. In study 1, participants received visual cues related to the video via WhatsApp. Findings showed that visual reminders did not improve feigners' memory, meaning that confessors recollected the target experience better than simulators. In study 2, verbal cues were adopted, and this led to improved memory for the offence in simulators as well as confessors. Interestingly, simulators outperformed control participants in both studies. This supports the idea that memory decrements for feigners might not be due to lack of rehearsal.

In *Chapter 3* a study is described in which a mock crime video was used to study the effect of simulating amnesia on actual memory. Moreover, in this chapter, we tried to extend previous findings by investigating whether the memory-undermining effect of feigning amnesia is modulated by inner

speech activity. While inner speech traits were not found to be related to the simulators' memory decrements, this study showed that the effect of feigning amnesia on actual memory was smaller than that observed in previous research. That is, apart from a tendency to distort some crime-related information, perpetrators still had relatively intact memory for the crime.

Chapter 4 describes a study initiated to determine to which degree the simulating amnesia effect for a crime could be attributed to misattribution of the right source of information. Participants watched a mock crime video and they were instructed to either feign amnesia or confess the event. After one week, participants performed a personalized source monitoring task using the autobiographical Implicit Association Test (aIAT). Findings showed that simulators were able to discriminate the content of their self-generated feigned story of the crime from the original version. Moreover, they were faster than confessors at the aIAT task. These findings suggest that an implicit measure might be helpful in retrieving the source of some crime-related information and that simulators may preserve their memory for a crime despite previously feigning amnesia.

In *Chapter 5* a study is described that examined whether retrieval-induced forgetting (RIF) underlies the memory-undermining effect of feigning amnesia for a crime. After watching a mock crime, participants had to feign amnesia or confess to having committed that crime. Feigners were given retrieval practice instructions (i.e., retrieval-practice group) or no further instructions (i.e., simulator control group). Immediately and one day later all participants had to genuinely report the crime. Although simulators in the retrieval-practice group reported the largest amount of total information as a positive consequence of retrieval, the ratio for crucial crime-related details was lower than that exhibited by both simulator control and confessors. This study suggests that RIF might play a role in forgetting critical information in crime-related amnesia.

Finally, in *Chapter 6* the most important findings of the present dissertation are summarized. Theoretical and practical implications are provided, and avenues for future studies are described and discussed. Because the work reported in the current dissertation suggest that the feigning amnesia effect appears to be less solid than previously reported, further research on this phenomenon is needed. It is argued that the use of a non-invasive neuropsychological technique such as Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (i.e., TSM) might perhaps enhance ex-feigners' memory for the criminal experience.