

Response strategies of instructed malingerers during forced choice testing

Citation for published version (APA):

Orthey, R. (2019). *Response strategies of instructed malingerers during forced choice testing: new measures and criteria to detect concealed knowledge and feigned cognitive deficits*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190625ro>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2019

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20190625ro](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190625ro)

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.
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VALORIZATION ADDENDUM

Innovation

The novel contributions of this thesis lie in the conceptualization of malingerers' response strategies to defeat the Forced Choice Test and the development of additional criteria based on those strategies. Originally, malingerers were believed to simply avoid selecting correct answers leading to test scores lower than expected by chance performance. The problem here is that this response strategy applies to only half of the malingerers in a typical experiment. The presence of other response strategies has been mentioned before, but has never been formalized. This thesis extends the original model of malingerers' response strategies to incorporate these additional response pattern. In particular it defines intentional randomization and endorsement of correct answers as potential response strategies and a reflection on the relationship between the detection accuracy of the Forced Choice Test and the prevalence of these three subgroups.

Especially innovative is the introduction of two conditions under which the runs test has diagnostic value. The runs test measures the alternations between correct and incorrect answer alternatives and has been proposed as a suitable measure for random responding (e.g. Verschuere, Meijer, & Crombez, 2008). However, previous experiments failed to identify malingerers using this test (see Verschuere et al., 2008; Jelicic, Merckelbach, & van Bergen, 2004). In this thesis, it was demonstrated that the runs test either requires a large test size (see Chapter 5) or a specific change in the Forced Choice Test paradigm (see Chapter 4). These simple manipulations increased the diagnostic validity of the runs test, and can be easily implemented in practice by the relevant target groups such as neuropsychologists.

Another innovation in this thesis is the proposed response bias criterion based on perceived difficulty for randomising behaviour. The idea is simple, examinees who understand that their final test score has to fall within levels of chance know that they must select correct and incorrect answers. This presents malingerers with the challenge of deciding when and under what circumstances to select the correct answer alternatives. The new criterion is based on the idea that the process that leads to a test score within chance performance can be influenced in order to become systematic and therefore distinguishable from actual chance performance. In Chapter 5 malingerers produced six times as much test patterns outside chance performance than would be expected by a truly random process and the likelihood of their response patterns had a good diagnostic value.

Relevance

The data and conclusions from this thesis bear significance to both academics and practitioners. Academics can profit from the extended definition of malingerers' response strategies and the proposed underlying mechanism. A direct benefit of the distinction of various response strategies is that more specific hypothesis can be generated and that statistical tests can be conducted per subgroup, as the non-normal distribution of the combined sample limits the credibility of the typically employed analyses. Furthermore, the data presented here suggests that future research should focus on developing new criteria sensitive to randomization behaviour instead of the traditional underperformance criterion. Hence, this thesis provides academics with an overview of malingerers' behaviour and acts as a foundation for the development of new criteria and manipulations to increase the detection accuracy of the Forced Choice Test.

For practitioners, this thesis demonstrates easy to implement new criteria sensitive to intentional randomisation. These criteria can be used to increase the detection accuracy of the Forced Choice Test, because the largest subgroup of malingerers follows a randomisation strategy and hence avoids detection through the traditional underperformance criterion. Furthermore, the reflection on the non-normal distribution of malingerers' test responses and its relation to single cut-off point detection accuracy can aid practitioners in better determining what test results should be considered as malingered performance. In particular, the data presented here calls the 5% cut off point that is traditionally applied into question. As suggested earlier the choice for this cut off was likely convention in the field rather than empirical observation. Consequently, practitioners are invited to reconsider this choice of cut off. For example, a much more conservative 1% cut off would yield a similar detection accuracy for malingered performance while greatly reducing the false positive rate.

Future Directions

Future directions must prioritize the applicability of the Forced Choice Test. As it stands, the test can only be constructed for cases that provide large amounts of information that the examinee must remember. Although the recommended minimum test length varies from 12 (Van Oorsouw, & Merckelbach, 2010) to 25 (Denney, 1996), many crimes/events do not fulfil this requirement and therefore the use of the Forced Choice Test is limited to few selected cases.

