



112 The MMPI-2 Test and Response Times: Evaluating Dissembling Behavior in the Field of Forensics

Ignazio Grattagliano, MD*, University of Bari, Piazza Cagnola, 3/B, Casamassima, Bari 70010, ITALY; Vito Martino, MD, p.za G. Cesare, Bari 70124, ITALY; Andrea Lisi, PsyD, p.za G. Cesare, Bari 70100, ITALY; Ylenia Massaro, PhD, p.za G. Cesare, Bari 70124, ITALY; Andrea Bosco, PhD, Via Giulio Petroni 19, Bari, ITALY; Filippo Campobasso, PhD, p.za G. Cesare, Bari 70124, ITALY; and Roberto Catanesi, MD, p.za G. Cesare, Bari 70124, ITALY

After attending this presentation, attendees will more fully comprehend and appreciate the importance and utility of the computerized version of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) test and its ability to identify dissembling behaviors in subjects who undergo forensic psychiatric testing.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that dissembling behaviors have an important influence on forensic psychiatric evaluation results, and the need for reliable and valid diagnostic instruments is of the utmost importance.

In the course of their work, experts in the field of forensics must evaluate not only the validity of what has been reported to them, but also the validity of the reporting. The relationship between the subject and the forensic science specialist is influenced by a series of elements which may alter the genuineness of a diagnosis (e.g., the examiner's style, the rigid and constrictive nature of the exam, the repercussions of the outcomes of the exam, the need for the results to be reported to a third party, and the tendency of evaluated subjects to dissemble). Concealment of a syndrome represents a problem in the diagnostic process that results in an increase of false negatives. A dissembler is a person who is well-aware of the truth, but denies it by mentally managing two conflicting affirmations.

In the field of legal medicine and forensics, it is necessary to recognize the limits of subjectivity and clinical observations. The use of psychodiagnostic instruments, in these cases, appears to be indispensable. The MMPI-2 test is the principle instrument, possessing indices which are able to root out concealing behaviors in subjects who are being examined.¹

"Lying and concealing" behaviors are accompanied by verbal and non-verbal elements, including such paralinguistic clues as body language.² "The latency period" plays a particularly interesting role among the various forms of non-verbal behavior and is often considered to be a non-verbal sign that the subject is probably lying.³

Beginning with the hypothesis that one can expect a longer response time by dissemblers because of their need to "manage mental information," the goal was set to verify potential information in connection to response times on the MMPI-2 test items as an instrument that can identify concealing behaviors.

This study was conducted using the computerized version of the MMPI-2, which is able to automatically calculate response times.

Fifty-nine males and 17 females were enlisted and subdivided into four groups based on the reasons for which they underwent legal medical assessment: candidacy for a driver's license; suitability to carry a firearm; appropriateness for a particular job; and fitness to be a parent. These subjects were compared to a control group made up of voluntary subjects deemed to be clinically healthy and not influenced by ulterior advantages or interests regarding the completion of the test. This group was controlled for number, age, and level of education.

The usefulness of response times in identifying "dissemblers" from the control group was evaluated by applying the Student's *t*-test. The variables analyzed were the clinical, control, content, and supplementary scales of the MMPI-2, in addition to the total time needed to complete the entire protocol.

Preliminary results show how the distribution of average response times is differentiated between experimental and control subjects. The experimental group, on average, needs more time, as compared with the control group on scales which analyze psychological, clinical, and behavioral constructs of the MMPI-2. These early results seem to be encouraging and indicate a need for similar studies with larger sample sizes in order to increase the statistical significance.

References:

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