

Insufficient Effort Responding in Experimental Philosophy, Part II: Survey

THOMAS PÖLZLER

Department of Philosophy, University of Graz, Austria

In the first part of this two-part blog post I explained how I think experimental philosophers *should* proceed with regard to insufficient effort responding (IER) in self-report surveys. Another interesting question is how they have *actually* proceeded. What do they know about IER? How big of a problem do they think it is? To what extent and in what ways do they attempt to prevent, detect, and deal with it? To shed light on these questions I developed and conducted an online survey. This blog post presents this survey and its results.

Participants

I invited all persons whose studies were tested by the X-Phi Replicability project, who gave presentations at the Buffalo Experimental Philosophy Conferences (2012 to 2018), who gave presentations at the German Experimental Philosophy Group Workshops (2015 and 2017), who gave presentations at the Meetings of the Spanish Experimental Philosophy Association (2017 and 2018), and who gave presentations at the last two conferences of the Experimental Philosophy Group UK (2017 and 2018). In total, 53 persons completed the survey. One person was excluded on grounds of responding without sufficient effort (as tested by completion time measures, attention checks and scale straightlining analyses).

Methods

At the beginning of the survey participants were informed about its purpose and received an explanation of IER. Then they were asked (1) how often they have used the IER prevention strategies that were mentioned in my first blog post in their experimental philosophy studies, (2) how often they have used the IER detection strategies explained in that post in their experimental philosophy studies, (3) how they have dealt with IER in their experimental

philosophy studies, and (4) some general questions regarding their experience in conducting (experimental philosophy) studies, their knowledge of IER, and their estimates of IER's effect on experimental philosophy studies.

Results

The following three charts present how the survey's participants have attempted to prevent, detect, and deal with IER in their experimental philosophy studies. [The charts are not included in this text version; they can be found in the online version of this blog post.]

Most interestingly with regard to my general questions, participants stated that they have explicitly discussed IER with their colleagues several times ($M = 3,44$), and have read some scholarly articles that address it ($M = 2,02$); in their view, IER only "somewhat" to "lowly" impacts the findings of their own and others' experimental philosophy studies (roughly to the same extent to which they believe it impacts self-report surveys in other areas of research); and in their estimate, 21,71% of subjects in their experimental philosophy studies engage in IER throughout at least a quarter of the tasks that they complete, and 15,53% throughout at least half of these tasks.

I had formulated several hypotheses about what predicts experimental philosophers' knowledge, usage, proper usage, and effect estimates regarding IER. It turned out that having a primary or secondary affiliation in psychology, cognitive science or some other science had a significant effect (more knowledge about IER, more usage of IER prevention and detection strategies). Having a degree in any of these fields had an effect too (more knowledge about IER). Yet, neither of these variables by themselves predicted whether an experimental philosopher *properly* addresses IER, i.e., in the way suggested in my first blog post. The variable that correlated most strongly with proper usage was knowledge about IER as such.

Discussion

Experimental philosophers appear to be somewhat aware of IER's threat to self-report surveys' validity and reliability, and often address it in appropriate ways. However, just like researchers in other areas, they have not done so in all cases.

As to IER's prevention, it is important to stress that using student samples is not an effective strategy, and that it might be recommendable to use carefulness/honesty declarations and, more importantly, CAPTCHAs. To detect IER experimental philosophers might want to draw more strongly on presenting subjects identical questions or items, and on post-hoc

analyses such as LongString Analysis and Scale Straightlining Analysis (where suitable). Finally, with regard to dealing with IER, I recommend to somewhat revise current practices in that experimental philosophers always exclude IER subjects, always report these exclusions, preregister their exclusion rules, and do not (or at least not fully) compensate IER subjects.

The statistical analysis suggests that the more experimental philosophers know about IER the more likely they are to properly address it in their studies. This knowledge may arise from a degree in psychology, cognitive science or some other science. Thus, if controlled for knowledge, such degrees turn out to predict that an experimental philosopher uses the most recommendable IER prevention and detection strategies, and deals with IER subjects in the most appropriate ways. But knowledge about IER can be acquired in different ways too. In line with my blog posts' and paper's motivation, it therefore seems important to raise awareness for IER among experimental philosophers.

Needless to say, the above results must be treated with caution. They are based on a small sample; despite my best effort some questions and items could surely have been formulated more properly; and my classification of IER strategies as appropriate/inappropriate is based on little and controversial evidence. Nevertheless, the survey hopefully provides at least a first rough glimpse into experimental philosophers' knowledge, consideration and assessment of IER.

Further Information

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If you are interested in a draft of my paper on IER in experimental philosophy (which includes more detailed explanations of the above survey) please contact me at [thomas.poelzler\(at\)uni-graz.at](mailto:thomas.poelzler@uni-graz.at).