

# Violation of Homogeneity of Variances: A Comparison Between Welch's *t*-Test and the Permutation Test

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#### Abstract

A substantial amount of psychological research use statistical tests to compare means. A widely used method to do this is the parametric *t*-test. However, the *t*-test has many assumptions, whereas nonparametric tests such as the permutation test have fewer assumptions. Despite this, nonparametric tests are not widely used in psychological research. Nonetheless, studies have compared the *t*-test and permutation test against each other. Studies that compared the tests were not focused on comparing the tests when there is variance heterogeneity, large sample sizes, and unequal group sizes. In this study, a simulation study was performed to compare the permutation test and Welch's *t*-test in terms of the homogeneity assumption. This study used a range of sample sizes representative of psychological research along with varying group ratios. When there is variance homogeneity, the tests perform equally well. When there is variance heterogeneity and equal sample sizes, the tests performed equally well for the large sample sizes. However, when there is variance heterogeneity and unequal sample sizes, the type I error of the permutation test was much higher or much lower than  $\alpha = 0.05$ . This is due to the violation of the permutation test's assumption of exchangeability. Welch's *t*-test is not affected by variance heterogeneity. Thus, Welch's *t*-test should be preferred if there is variance heterogeneity and its other assumptions are met. The permutation test is preferred if there is variance homogeneity or if the assumptions of Welch's *t*-test are not met and there variance heterogeneity but equal sample sizes.

*Keywords:* Welch's *t*-test, permutation test, variance homogeneity, variance heterogeneity

# **Contents**



#### <span id="page-4-0"></span>**Introduction**

In psychological research, population means are often statistically compared against each other, a widely used method to compare means is the *t*-test (**Edgington**, 1974; [Goodwin & Goodwin, 1985;](#page-22-2) [Skidmore & Thompson, 2010\)](#page-24-0). The first introduced and most commonly used *t*-test is Student's *t*-test [\(Howell, 2009;](#page-22-3) [Student, 1908\)](#page-24-1). Student's *t*-test has 3 central assumptions, namely, independence, homogeneity of variances, and normality. These assumptions must be met in order to use the test. An alternative to Student's *t*-test, which has fewer assumptions, is Welch's *t*-test [\(Welch, 1947,](#page-24-2) [1938\)](#page-24-3). Welch's *t*-test does not assume homogeneity of variances. Student's and Welch's *t*-test, are parametric tests.

An alternative to the parametric *t*-test is the nonparametric permutation test [\(Fisher, 1937\)](#page-22-4). Nonparametric tests have fewer assumptions than parametric tests. Despite this, the permutation test is used less often than the *t*-test in psychological research [\(Edgington, 1974;](#page-22-1) [Goodwin & Goodwin, 1985\)](#page-22-2). As these tests should not be used if their assumptions are not met, their assumptions are discussed in the following sections.

#### <span id="page-4-1"></span>**Assumptions of the** *t***-test**

The *t*-test has several assumptions. First, it assumes independent errors. Which means that the residuals should not be able to be predicted above chance. Second, it assumes that the sampling distribution is normal. Another assumption is that there are no outliers. As the means of the groups are compared, an outlier can greatly skew the mean, which can lead to incorrect conclusions. Finally, there is the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Variance  $(\sigma^2)$  refers to the way the scores are distributed around the mean. Homogeneity of variances means that the variances across groups are considered equal. This assumption is important because if the scores in one group were spread differently, compared to the second group before any treatment was given, then these groups are no longer comparable [\(Salkind, 2010\)](#page-23-0).

Some studies show that the *t*-test is robust against violations of its assumptions (e.g.,

[Sawilowsky & Blair, 1992;](#page-23-1) [Bradley, 1978\)](#page-22-5). It is believed that the *t*-test is robust against non-normality if the sample size is greater or equal to 30. The *t*-test is believed to be robust against violation of the assumption of homogeneity if the group sizes are approximately equal. If the assumption of homogeneity is violated, and the group sizes are not equal, Welch's *t*-test can be used as it does not assume homogenous variances [\(Howell,](#page-22-3) [2009;](#page-22-3) [Delacre, Lakens, & Leys, 2017\)](#page-22-6).

#### <span id="page-5-0"></span>**Assumptions of the permutation test**

There are two kinds of probability models, namely the randomization model and the population model. In the randomization model, the subjects are randomly assigned to a condition. In the population model, subjects are randomly sampled from a population [\(Ernst, 2004\)](#page-22-7). The name permutation test is often used to refer to both the randomization model and population model because in many cases they are equivalent to each other. The two tests are also referred to as the randomization test and the permutation test, respectively (Nichols & Holmes,  $2002$ ).

The randomization and permutation test assume exchangeability, which has different implications for the tests. One implication is the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA) [\(Rubin, 1980\)](#page-23-3). In an experiment, subjects/units *i* can be exposed to treatment *j*. Therefore,  $Y_{i_j}$  is the observed effect of unit *i* in treatment *j*. In this experiment, each unit is only part of one treatment group at a time. Thus,  $Y_{i_1}$  and  $Y_{i_2}$  cannot be observed at the same time. Inferences must be made about the value that was not observed. The effect of treatment 1 on unit *i* should be independent of the effect on other units in any treatment group; otherwise, SUTVA will be violated [\(Rubin, 1980\)](#page-23-3).

Another implication of exchangeability is that the variances are homogeneous. If the groups have different variances, then the groups are not interchangeable. Thus, variance heterogeneity leads to a violation of exchangeability [\(Huang, Xu, Calian, & Hsu, 2006\)](#page-23-4).

In the randomization model, most implications of exchangeability are usually fulfilled, because participants are randomly assigned to the groups and should, therefore, be thought of as interchangeable. For the population model, there is no random assignment; therefore, exchangeability cannot be directly assumed. Thus, the population model also assumes that the distributions of the two groups have approximately the same shape (Nichols  $\&$  Holmes, 2002).

To conclude, there is a subtle difference between the two tests in terms of who the population is. In this study, the randomization model is used. Thus, the assumption of exchangeability is met as long as the variances are equal. The randomization model is chosen because the population model is often not used in psychological studies. Convenient sampling is used instead, which is not possible in the population model ( $\mathbb{F}$ ife, 2013). Thus, using the randomization model in this thesis is a closer approximation of current psychological research.

#### <span id="page-6-0"></span>**Literature review**

In this section, existing literature comparing the permutation test and the *t*-test is reviewed. [Toothaker](#page-24-4) [\(1972\)](#page-24-4) wrote a dissertation on comparing the permutation *t*-test with Student's *t*-test and the Mann Whitney U test. He performed a simulation study using normally distributed data with equal variances and sample sizes ranging from 2 to 5. The study concluded that the permutation *t*-test does not outperform Student's *t*-test and the Mann Whitney U test and the latter two should be preferred when comparing means.

[Ludbrook and Dudley](#page-23-5) [\(1998\)](#page-23-5) compared the permutation test with the *t*-test and *F*-test in Biomedical Research. They found that researchers in this field often choose an *F*-test or *t*-test instead of a permutation test even if the assumptions are not met. They conclude that exact permutation or randomization tests should be preferred in biomedical research.

[Hughes](#page-23-6) [\(2010\)](#page-23-6) conducted a simulation study, where she compared the two-sample *t*-test with the two-sample exact permutation test. She used six non-normal distributions, tested at three different significance levels, and the sample sizes ranged from 2 to 6. She concluded that the permutation test should be preferred, especially if power is essential for a study.

Most relevant to this thesis is the simulation study performed by [Mendeş and](#page-23-7) [Akkartal](#page-23-7) [\(2010\)](#page-23-7). They compared the ANOVA *F*-test and Welch's *t*-test with the permutation *F*-test and the permutation Welch's *t*-test. They used 3 different distributions, 5 different group sizes ranging from 5 to 15 and 3 different group variances namely, equal variances  $(\sigma_1^2 = 1, \sigma_2^2 = 1, \sigma_3^2 = 1)$ , a small deviation  $(\sigma_1^2 = 1, \sigma_2^2 = 1, \sigma_3^2 = 4)$ and a larger deviation  $(\sigma_1^2 = 1, \sigma_2^2 = 1, \sigma_3^2 = 9)$ . By comparing these groups, they observed the effects of non-normality and heterogeneity. They concluded that when the assumption of homogeneity and normality is violated, the permutation *F*-test should be used. When the assumption of normality is violated, but equal variances are assumed, then the permutation Welch's *t*-test should be used.

There are some gaps in the existing literature. For instance, little attention has been devoted to large sample sizes when comparing the *t*-test with the permutation test. All reviewed studies used small sample sizes, the largest group size being 15. These sample sizes are not representative of current psychological studies. According to the study from [Kühberger, Fritz, and Scherndl](#page-23-8)  $(2014)$ , only 14.9% of studies had a sample size of 15 or smaller. Mendes and Akkartal  $(2010)$  looked at the effect of different group sizes. However, the most substantial deviation between groups was 10. Larger deviations between group sizes when comparing the two tests have not been studied. Additionally, only one study compared the two tests when the homogeneity assumption is violated [\(Mendeş & Akkartal,](#page-23-7) [2010\)](#page-23-7).

This research aims to fill these gaps, focusing on the comparison between the permutation test and Welch's *t*-test when there is variance homogeneity or variance heterogeneity. Furthermore, as large sample sizes are not explored in previous research, this study will include small as well as large sample sizes to investigate whether they lead to different conclusions. Unequal group sizes have also not been widely researched. However, it is essential to consider because unequal group sizes can affect the tests,

especially for the permutation test [\(Huang et al., 2006\)](#page-23-4). This study uses equal as well as unequal sample sizes.

The tests are compared in terms of type I and type II errors. All statistical tests may lead to errors. Type I error is when  $H_0$  is rejected when it should not have been. Type II error is when  $H_0$  is not rejected when it should have been. If the type II error decreases, the power of a test increases. The power is the probability that  $H_0$  is rejected when  $H_1$  is true. The type I error of a test is often set to  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and a power of 0.80 is considered to be high enough [\(Howell, 2009\)](#page-22-3). In this study, the type I and type II error is calculated using a simulation study.

Welch's *t*-test is chosen because it provides more reliable type I error rates when the assumption of homogeneity of variance is not met. Compared to Student's *t*-test, Welch's *t*-test loses some statistical power. However, the loss of power is minimal. Thus, Welch's *t*-test is a favorable alternative to Student's *t*-test [\(Delacre et al., 2017\)](#page-22-6).

The goal of this thesis is to provide a relevant comparison between the tests, where the results can be applied in current psychological research. To achieve this goal, small and large sample sizes that are often used in psychology were chosen, and the randomization test, which is more common in psychological research, was used.

#### <span id="page-8-0"></span>**Research questions and hypothesis**

In this section, the hypothesis and research questions of this study are discussed. Welch's *t*-test does not assume variance homogeneity, but the permutation test does (Boik) [1987\)](#page-22-9). Thus, it may be hypothesized that Welch's *t*-test performs better than the permutation test when there is variance heterogeneity. However, it is still important to investigate the effects of the tests when there are homogeneous variances, especially whether the type II errors of the tests are similar. Moreover, it is interesting to test whether equal sample sizes affect the performance of the permutation test. According to Huang et al. (2006), if the data is normally distributed, and the sample sizes are equal, the permutation test is not affected by unequal variances.

The research question of this thesis is: How does the permutation test compare to Welch's *t*-test? The following sub-questions are explored to answer the research question.

- How does the permutation test compare to Welch's *t*-test under no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances?
- What is the effect of sample size, on the performance of the permutation test and Welch's *t*-test, under violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances?
- What is the effect of unequal group sizes, on the performance of the permutation test and Welch's *t*-test, under violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances?

In the following sections, the design of the simulation, the critical results, the discussion, and conclusion are reported.

#### <span id="page-9-0"></span>**Methods**

To compare Welch's *t*-test (in further sections referred to as *t*-test) and permutation test, a simulation study was conducted using the programming language R [\(R Core Team,](#page-23-9) [2018\)](#page-23-9). The type I and type II errors of the *t*-test and permutation test were estimated and compared against each other. In the following subsections, Welch's *t*-test and the permutation test are explained. This is followed by the design of the simulation, namely, the chosen sample sizes, effect sizes, means, and standard deviations. Finally, the implementation of the simulation is described.

#### <span id="page-9-1"></span>**Description of Welch's** *t***-test**

Welch's *t*-test tests the null hypothesis that the means of two groups are equal. Let there be two groups X and Y; the null hypothesis is  $H_0$ :  $\overline{X} = \overline{Y}$ . Let  $\overline{X}$  denote the mean of group X and  $\overline{Y}$  denote the mean of group Y. The t statistic is calculated with the following equation:

$$
t = \frac{\overline{X} - \overline{Y}}{\sqrt{\frac{s_X^2}{N_X} + \frac{s_Y^2}{N_Y}}}
$$
 (Welch (1938))

Let  $s<sup>2</sup>$  denote the variance and  $N$  the sample size. To calculate the degrees of freedom (df), Welch's *t*-test uses the Satterthwaite-Welch adjustment:

$$
df = \frac{\left(\frac{S_X^2}{N_X} + \frac{S_Y^2}{N_Y}\right)^2}{\left(\frac{S_X^2}{N_X}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{S_Y^2}{N_Y}\right)^2}
$$
\n(Satterthwaite (1946))

Finally, the *t* statistic and df are used to get the *p*-value and test the null hypothesis using the *t*-distribution.

#### <span id="page-10-0"></span>**Description of the permutation test**

The steps to perform a permutation test are as follows: suppose there are two groups,  $X_i$  and  $Y_j$ ,  $i = 1, ..., n$  and  $j = 1, ..., m$  observations for each group. From these groups, the test statistic is calculated. Different test statistics can be calculated, such as Pearson r or the mean difference  $\overline{X} - \overline{Y}$ . Subsequently,  $X_i$  and  $Y_j$  are pooled together to form one new group. Re-sample from this group and form two new groups  $X*_i$ ,  $Y*_j$ . Calculate the test statistic. Repeat this procedure  $k$  number of times (e.g.,  $k = 10000$ ). This forms a test distribution. The null hypothesis can be tested under this distribution. If the null hypothesis is true, all the possible pairings of the re-sampled groups are equally likely [\(Anderson & Robinson, 2001;](#page-22-10) [Legendre & Legendre, 1998\)](#page-23-11).

In this study, a linear permutation test was performed, with the test statistic in the following form:

$$
T = \sum_{n=1}^{n} c_i z_i
$$
 (Fay and Shaw (2010))

Let  $z_i$  denote a scalar or k x 1 vector, and  $c_i$  denotes a scalar.  $z_i$  is the group membership.  $c_i$  is the score.

#### <span id="page-10-1"></span>**Sample size (***N***)**

To simulate data with a normal distribution, a sample size (*N*), effect size (*ES*), mean  $(\mu)$ , and standard deviation  $(\sigma)$  are needed. Two different groups were simulated each time. The following strategy was used to choose the sample sizes of both groups. For the first group, sample sizes that are relevant to psychology were chosen with the data provided by [Kühberger et al.](#page-23-8)  $(2014)$ . They randomly sampled 1000 articles to investigate whether effect size is independent of sample size in psychological research. The sample sizes of the 529 articles that met their criteria, were analyzed in this study, and three were chosen for the simulation. First, a small sample size often used in psychology, namely  $N = 10$ . Less than 10% of the articles had a sample size that is smaller than 10 (8.9%). Second,  $N = 60$ , a medium sample size. Almost half of the sample sizes were smaller than or equal to 60 (47.6%). Finally, a large sample size  $N = 1000$ , with only 10% of the reported sample sizes larger than it. The size of the second group  $(N_2)$  varied relative to the size of the first sample. The following percentages for the ratio  $N_2/N_1$  were used: 1, 1.25, 1.5, 1.75, .75, .5, .25. This was motivated by the aim of this research, to investigate equal sample sizes (condition 1) as well as violations with differing degrees of severeness and direction (see Table  $\boxed{1}$ ).

#### <span id="page-11-0"></span>**Effect size (***ES***)**

 $ES$  is the standardized mean difference between two groups [\(Coe, 2002\)](#page-22-12). If there is a strong effect, the *ES* will be large, which means that the probability that the statistical test is significant is also large. Therefore, different effect sizes have different implications. In this thesis *ES* 0.0 and Cohen's three benchmark effect sizes were chosen, namely a small  $ES$  of 0.2, a medium  $ES$  of 0.5 and a large  $ES$  of 0.8 [\(Cohen, 2013\)](#page-22-13).

#### <span id="page-11-1"></span>**Mean**  $(\mu)$  and Standard deviation  $(\sigma)$

The standard normal distribution was chosen for one group, thus  $\mu_1 = 0$  and  $\sigma_1 = 1$ . The  $\sigma_2$  was altered to simulate variance homogeneity or heterogeneity, when there is variance homogeneity, the variances of both groups are equal  $(\sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2)$ . However, when there is variance heterogeneity,  $\sigma_1^2 \neq \sigma_2^2$ . Six different deviations were chosen to simulate heterogeneity,  $\sigma_2$  was either smaller or larger than  $\sigma_1$  by 25%, 50%, 75% and 300% (see

Table  $\boxed{2}$ . To calculate  $\mu_2$ , let

$$
\overline{\sigma} = \sqrt{\frac{\sigma_1^2 + \sigma_1^2}{2}}
$$
 (Bonett (2008))

$$
\mu_2 = \overline{\sigma} * ES
$$

To conclude, when the two groups were created, the means were compared with both Welch's *t*-test and the permutation test. Then, the type I and type II error of each test was estimated. When testing for type I error, the *ES* was 0.0. If the *p*-value of the *t*-test or permutation test was smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05$ , then the test committed a type I error. For type II error, the *ES* was either 0.2, 0.5 or 0.8. If the *p*-value of either test was larger than  $\alpha = 0.05$ , then there was a type II error. After calculating the type I or type II errors, the McNemar test was used to check whether there is a statistically significant difference between Welch's *t*-test and the permutation test [\(McCrum-Gardner, 2008\)](#page-23-12).

#### <span id="page-12-0"></span>**Implementation**

This section describes how the simulation was implemented and performed. Each simulation was repeated 10000 times. The data was simulated using rnorm(). Welch's *t*-test was performed using the t.test() formula in R with the argument var.equal set to False. The permutation test was performed using the library *perm* [\(Fay & Shaw, 2010\)](#page-22-11). The Monte Carlo sampling technique was used during the permutation test. Ideally, all permutations are performed in a permutation test. However, with larger sample sizes, the number of permutations becomes very large. Therefore, the Monte Carlo sampling technique should be used. This technique randomly chooses test statistics from the permutation distribution. From this random sample, the *p*-value for the permutation test can be calculated [\(Ernst, 2004;](#page-22-7) [Hastings, 1970\)](#page-22-15). The code for the simulation is included on [https://github.com/rushkock/sim\\_study\\_thesis/tree/master/src/simulation](https://github.com/rushkock/sim_study_thesis/tree/master/src/simulation).

<span id="page-13-0"></span>Table 1 *Group sizes used during the simulation*

Sample Size	Group Ratios		
Small $N = 10$			
Condition 1	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 10$		
Condition 2a	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 8$		
Condition 2b	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 13$		
Condition 3a	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 5$	Table 2	
Condition 3b	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 15$		<i>Standard Deviatio</i>
Condition 4a	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 3$		in the simulation
Condition 4b	$N_1 = 10 : N_2 = 18$		
Medium $N = 60$		$\sigma_1$	$\sigma_2$
Condition 1	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 60$	1.00	1.00
Condition 2a	$N_1 = 60$ : $N_2 = 45$	1.00	0.75
Condition 2b	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 75$	1.00	1.25
Condition 3a	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 30$	1.00	0.50
Condition 3b	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 90$	1.00	1.50
Condition 4a	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 15$	1.00	0.25
Condition 4b	$N_1 = 60 : N_2 = 105$	1.00	1.75
Large $N = 1000$		1.00	3.00
Condition 1	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 1000$		
Condition 2a	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 750$		
Condition 2b	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 1250$		
Condition 3a	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 500$		
Condition 3b	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 1500$		
Condition 4a	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 250$		
Condition 4b	$N_1 = 1000 : N_2 = 1750$		

*Standard Deviations used*

#### <span id="page-14-0"></span>**Results**

The full results can be found in Appendix  $\overline{B}$ , which also includes a digital version. The data analysis was performed using Python [\(Python Core Team, 2015\)](#page-23-13). The code for the data analysis can be found on [https://github.com/rushkock/sim\\_study\\_thesis/](https://github.com/rushkock/sim_study_thesis/tree/master/src/features/python_data_analysis) tree/master/src/features/python data analysis. Appendix  $\overline{C}$  contains a few of the plots used to visualize the data, and the URL to find the rest. In this section, the important results are discussed.

When there is no violation of homogeneity of variances, almost no statistically significant differences between the tests were found (Table [3\)](#page-14-1). Both the *t*-test and the permutation test maintained a correct type I error  $(\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01))$  in almost all conditions. The type I error of the permutation test was significantly better than the *t*-test in 1 out of 84 conditions. In this condition  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 3$ , there was an absolute significant difference of 0.0176 between the type I error of the tests  $(p < 0.001)$ . For type II error, a significant difference between the tests was found in 8 out of 84 conditions. All these conditions had a *p*-value of 0.01 or smaller. The type II error of the *t*-test was significantly better than the permutation test in 4 conditions. In these 4 conditions,  $N_1 = 10$ , but  $N_2$  and *ES* varied. In the conditions where the permutation test was significantly better, *N*1*, N*2, and *ES* varied. However, important to mention is that the significant differences were mostly found for the larger effect sizes (*ES* = 0.5 and 0.8). To conclude, there was much variation between these 4 conditions.

<span id="page-14-1"></span>Table 3

*Conditions with a statistically significant difference between the permutation test and Welch's t-test when there was variance homogeneity*

			$N_1$ $N_2$ $ES$ $\sigma_1$ $\sigma_2$ perm t-test p-value dif	
			10 3 0.0 1.0 1.0 0.0481 0.0657 0.000 -0.0176	
			10 3 0.2 1.0 1.0 0.9430 0.9333 0.009 0.0097	



" $N_1$ " and " $N_2$ " are the sizes of the two groups. " $ES$ " is the effect size. An effect size of 0.0 represents a type I error. Effect size 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 represent type II errors.  $"\sigma_1"$  and  $"\sigma_2"$  are the standard deviations of the two groups. The column perm contains the number of errors for the permutation test. The "*t*-test" column contains the number of errors for the *t*-test. The column "*p*-value" gives the *p*-value from the McNemar test comparing the permutation test with the *t*-test. The column "dif" is the difference between errors for the *t*-test minus the errors of the permutation test. Thus, a negative value indicates that the permutation test outperforms the *t*-test.

As hypothesized (Section Research questions and hypothesis), when there is variance heterogeneity, the permutation test did not have a type I error of  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$  in almost all conditions. This is referred as a failure of the test in further sections. In Table  $\overline{A}$ a small overview of the results for the type I error of the small sample sizes is displayed. The results for the remaining sample sizes are qualitatively the same. For the conditions where the standard deviation of group 1  $(\sigma_1)$  is 3.00, and group 2  $(\sigma_2)$  is 1.00; the *t*-test always performs at  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ . In contrast, the type I error of the permutation test greatly exceeds  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$  when  $N_1$  is smaller than  $N_2$  ( $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 13$ , 15 or 18). An example of this is seen in Table  $\frac{1}{4}$ , when  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 13$ , the type I error of the permutation test is 0.082. As the difference between  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  gets larger, the type I error of the permutation test also gets further away from  $\alpha = 0.05$ . An example of this is seen when  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 18$ , the type I error of the permutation test is  $\alpha = 0.126$ .

However, when  $N_1$  is larger than  $N_2$  ( $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 8$ , 5 or 3), the type I error of the permutation test is a lot smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ . When  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 3$ , the type I error of the permutation test was  $\alpha = 0.009$  (Table [4\)](#page-16-0). This pattern of failure is consistent for all violations of homogeneity where  $\sigma_1$  is larger than  $\sigma_2$  ( $\sigma_1 = 1.25, 1.50, 1.75$ ) or 3.0 and  $\sigma_2 = 1.0$ ).

# <span id="page-16-0"></span>Table 4 *Simulation results for ES 0.0 under violation of homogeneity, where*  $\sigma_1 = 3.0$  *and*  $\sigma_2 = 1.0$

							$N_1$ $N_2$ $ES$ $\sigma_1$ $\sigma_2$ perm t-test p-value	dif
	10 10						$.0$ $.3.00$ $.1.00$ $.059$ $.054$ $.0.000$ $.0.005$	
10	8				$.0 \quad 3.00 \quad 1.00 \quad .038$	.050	0.000	$-0.013$
10	13						$.0$ $3.00$ $1.00$ $.082$ $.052$ $0.000$ $0.031$	
10	$5^{\circ}$					$.0 \quad 3.00 \quad 1.00 \quad .023 \quad .050$	0.000	$-0.027$
10	15					$.0 \quad 3.00 \quad 1.00 \quad .106 \quad .054$	0.000	0.052
10	3					$.0 \quad 3.00 \quad 1.00 \quad .009 \quad .049$	0.000	$-0.040$
10	18	.0	3.00	1.00	.126	.049	0.000	0.078

See Table  $\overline{3}$  for further explanation on column names.

When  $\sigma_1$  is smaller than  $\sigma_2$  ( $\sigma_1$  = 0.25, 0.50 or 0.75 and  $\sigma_2$  = 1.0), the *t*-test performed once again at  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ , but the permutation test did not. The type I error of the permutation test greatly exceeds  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$  when  $N_1$  is larger than  $N_2$  $(N_1 = 10 \text{ and } N_2 = 8, 5 \text{ or } 3)$ . An example of this is given in table  $\overline{5}$ , the biggest type I error rate was  $\alpha = 0.222$ , for the condition where  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 3$ . However, when  $N_1$ is smaller than  $N_2$  ( $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 13$ , 15 or 18), the type I error of the permutation test is a lot smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ . The smallest type I error rate from Table [5](#page-17-0) was  $\alpha = 0.015$ , for the condition where  $N_1 = 10$  and  $N_2 = 18$ . Thus, the permutation test fails in opposite directions when  $\sigma_1 < \sigma_2$ , compared to when  $\sigma_2 < \sigma_1$ .

<span id="page-17-0"></span>Table 5



					$N_1$ $N_2$ $ES$ $\sigma_1$ $\sigma_2$ perm t-test p-value dif	
10					10 .0 0.25 1.00 .059 .052 0.000 0.007	
10	8				$.0 \quad 0.25 \quad 1.00 \quad .086 \quad .052 \quad 0.000 \quad 0.034$	
10	13				$.0 \quad 0.25 \quad 1.00 \quad .029 \quad .047 \quad 0.000 \quad -0.018$	
10	$5\,$			$0.025$ $1.00$ $0.155$ $0.057$		$0.000 \qquad 0.098$
10	15				$.0 \quad 0.25 \quad 1.00 \quad .022 \quad .048 \quad 0.000 \quad -0.025$	
10	3			$.0 \quad 0.25 \quad 1.00 \quad .222 \quad .065$	0.000	0.158
10	18				$.0 \quad 0.25 \quad 1.00 \quad .015 \quad .048 \quad 0.000 \quad -0.033$	

*Simulation results for ES* 0.0 *under violation of homogeneity, where*  $\sigma_1 = 0.25$  *and*  $\sigma_2 = 1.0$ 

See Table [3](#page-14-1) for further explanation on column names.

The permutation test does not have a correct type I error rate when there is variance heterogeneity, regardless of how large the differences in variance are. The failure is stronger when the sample sizes deviate more from each other. Welch's *t*-test maintains almost the same type I error across all conditions. These findings are consistent across all sample sizes (see Appendix [B\)](#page-28-0). Considering that the permutation test does not have a correct type I error rate in the conditions with variance heterogeneity, the type II error of the permutation test is not further explored for these conditions.

Furthermore, as expected, when the sample sizes get larger, less significant differences are found between the tests. In the conditions where the sample size of group 1 is large (*N*<sup>1</sup>  $= 1000$ , there were no significant differences between the two tests for effect size 0.5 and 0.8 (Table [B3\)](#page-14-1).

Finally, when the group sizes were equal both the permutation and Welch's *t*-test maintained a correct type I error rate  $(\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01))$  in almost all conditions. This was regardless of sample size. In the larger sample sizes  $(N_1 = 60 \text{ or } 1000)$ , there were almost

no statistically significant differences found between the tests when the group sizes were equal. In contrast, for the smaller sample sizes  $(N_1 = 10)$ , there were many statistically significant differences between the tests for both type I and type II errors. Which test had a better type I or type II error depended on the  $\sigma_1$ , this was as follows: the type I error of the *t*-test was significantly higher than the permutation test for the conditions where  $\sigma_1$  = 3.0 and 0.25. The type II error of the *t*-test was significantly higher than the permutation test for the conditions where  $\sigma_1 = 0.75$ , 1.0, and 1.25. The type I error for the permutation test was significantly higher than the type I error of the *t*-test for  $\sigma_1 = 0.75$ . The type II error of the permutation test was significantly higher than the *t*-test for  $\sigma_1 = 0.25, 0.50$ , 1.75, and 3.0. To conclude, when the sample sizes are large, and the group sizes are equal, the two tests perform equally well.

#### <span id="page-18-0"></span>**Discussion**

This simulation study compared the permutation test and Welch's *t*-test. The variances, sample sizes, and group ratios were altered to investigate their effect on the tests. The results suggest that when there is variance homogeneity, both tests perform equally well in terms of type I as well as type II errors. However, as hypothesized, when there is variance heterogeneity, the permutation test did not have a correct type I error rate  $(\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01))$ . This is referred as a failure of the permutation test. The exception to this failure was for the conditions with equal group sizes. Variance heterogeneity does not affect Welch's *t*-test. This suggests that Welch's *t*-test should always be chosen because regardless of the variance, it always performs well, whereas the performance of the permutation test depends on the variance and group ratios.

However, as Welch's *t*-test assumes normality, which the permutation test does not, the permutation test might be beneficial when there is variance homogeneity, but data is not normally distributed. In most conditions, with variance homogeneity, no statistically significant differences were found between the tests, except for 9 conditions. However, there was no pattern between these 9 conditions. This indicates that these differences could be

due to false positives of the McNemar test. It can be concluded that both tests perform equally well when there is no violation of homogeneity.

The permutation test does not have a correct type I error rate when there is variance heterogeneity and unequal sample sizes. This is due to the violation of the assumption of exchangeability. Previous research has also reported this failure [\(Huang et al., 2006;](#page-23-4) [Boik,](#page-22-9)  $1987$ ). In Appendix  $\overline{A}$ , a detailed explanation is given to explain why the permutation test fails. To summarize, a permutation test calculates the mean of two groups. It then re-samples two groups and compares them to the original groups. This is repeated multiple times to form a test distribution. The null hypothesis is then tested under this distribution. To be able to do this, the permutation test assumes exchangeability, that the differences between the groups are not due to extraneous variables such as preexisting differences or measurement errors. However, when there is variance heterogeneity this is not true, there are preexisting differences between the groups. The assumption of the test is violated, so it acts unpredictably. It can be conservative in some situations, liberal in others. The failure of the test depends on the  $\mu$  and  $\sigma$  of the groups.

However, when the sample sizes are equal, the permutation test is protected against the failure (see Appendix  $\overline{A}$ ). With equal sample sizes, the permutation test and *t*-test should perform equally well, regardless of homogeneity (Appendix [B\)](#page-28-0). Consistent with this, the results show that the permutation test had a correct type I error in all conditions with equal sample sizes. However, only when the sample sizes were large  $(N_1 = 60 \text{ or } 1000)$ , did the tests perform equally well. There were almost no statistically significant differences between the tests for both type I and type II errors in these conditions. In the small sample sizes  $(N_1 = 10)$  many significant differences were found both for type I and type II errors, this depended on the  $\sigma^2$ . However, no pattern was found in these differences. Given the protection that equal sample sizes offer, if there is variance heterogeneity with non-normality, the permutation test can be chosen over Welch's *t*-test.

Finally, as the sample size gets larger, fewer differences were found between the tests.

This is to be expected because the larger the sample size, the easier it is for a test to detect a difference. Both tests commit less type I and type II errors. In this case, both tests perform well, and it is harder to find a significant difference between them.

#### <span id="page-20-0"></span>**Limitations**

The variances are known during this simulation, but in most cases, the true variances are unknown, which makes the suggestion to choose the permutation test when there is variance homogeneity difficult to follow. If the variances are unknown, it may be safer to choose Welch's *t*-test or make sure the group sizes are equal.

In this study, many conditions were used, and this is a limitation because some conditions become redundant. An example is using both upwards and downwards deviations of group sizes, whereas the group ratio stays the same (Table  $\overline{1}$ ). It also makes data analysis more complicated.

Another limitation is the choice of tests, a nonparametric test that is not affected by a violation of homogeneity may have been a fairer comparison for Welch's *t*-test. Further research should perform the simulation with a nonparametric test that is not affected by homogeneity, such as the permutation Welch test [\(Janssen, 1997\)](#page-23-14).

Moreover, the goal of this study was to present relevant results for current psychological research. However, the sample sizes that were chosen to represent current psychological research are from studies more than 10 years ago. Thus, a more recent literature search should have been conducted to choose the sample sizes.

In this study, the randomization model was chosen because it is most often used in psychology. However, in some cases, the population model is used. Future research may perform the simulation under the population model to compare with the randomization model.

Finally, future research should compare the tests in terms of other assumptions such as non-normality. Not many studies investigate the difference between the tests when the assumptions of no outliers and independence are violated.

#### <span id="page-21-0"></span>**Conclusion**

To conclude, when there is no violation of homogeneity, both tests perform equally well. If there is variance heterogeneity and equal group sizes, both tests perform equally well in the larger sample sizes. When there is variance heterogeneity and unequal group sizes, the permutation test does not have a correct type I error rate  $(\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01))$ . Based on these findings, if there is variance homogeneity, but the other assumptions of the *t*-test such as normality or independence are not met, the permutation test is recommended. Welch's *t*-test is recommended if there is variance heterogeneity and the other assumptions are met. If there is variance heterogeneity and the other assumptions of Welch's *t*-test are not met, the permutation test is recommended given the sample sizes are large and equal.

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#### Appendix A

<span id="page-25-0"></span>In this appendix, the results are explained with the explanation from Huang et al.(2006). They used a re-sampling with replacement example. Their study can explain the results in this thesis as follows: say a simulation is performed with group X and Y. Both groups have a normal distribution  $N(\mu, \sigma^2)$ . The means are compared against each other. The null hypothesis is  $H_0: \mu_x = \mu_y$ . The test statistic to test this hypothesis can be described with  $T = \overline{X} - \overline{Y}$ . The true sampling distribution of T is shown with the equation:

$$
N(0, \frac{\sigma_x^2}{m} + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{n})
$$
\n<sup>(1)</sup>

Where *m* is the number of scores in group *X* and *n* is the number of scores of group *Y* . After re-sampling, the observation can be in group X or Y. The chance of being in group X with  $\sigma_x^2$  is  $\frac{m}{m+n}$ . The chance of being in group Y with  $\sigma_y^2$  is  $\frac{n}{m+n}$ . Thus, Equation 1 can be written as follows:

$$
\frac{\frac{m}{m+n} * \sigma_x^2 + \frac{n}{m+n} * \sigma_y^2}{m} + \frac{\frac{m}{m+n} * \sigma_x^2 + \frac{n}{m+n} * \sigma_y^2}{n}
$$
(2)

$$
\frac{\frac{m}{m+n} \times \sigma_x^2}{m} + \frac{\frac{n}{m+n} \times \sigma_y^2}{m} + \frac{\frac{m}{m+n} \times \sigma_x^2}{n} + \frac{\frac{n}{m+n} \times \sigma_y^2}{n} = \tag{3}
$$

$$
\sigma_x^2(\frac{1}{m+n} + \frac{m/n}{m+n}) + \sigma_y^2(\frac{n/m}{m+n} + \frac{1}{m+n}) =
$$
\n(4)

$$
\left(\frac{1}{n}\right)\sigma_x^2 + \left(\frac{1}{m}\right)\sigma_y^2 = \tag{5}
$$

$$
\frac{\sigma_x^2}{n} + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{m} \tag{6}
$$

After re-sampling, the sampling distribution is thus:

$$
N(0, \frac{\sigma_x^2}{n} + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{m})
$$
\n<sup>(7)</sup>

If the variances are equal, then the true null distribution (Equation 1) is the same as the re-sampled distribution (Equation 7). Say  $\sigma_x^2 = 1$  and  $m = 6$  and  $\sigma_y^2 = 1$  and  $n = 4$  then the two distributions are the same.

$$
N(0, \frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{4}) == N(0, \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{6})
$$
\n(8)

However, if group X and Y had unequal variances  $(\sigma_x^2 = 1 \text{ and } \sigma_y^2 = 3)$ , the distributions are only equal if  $m = n$ . Say  $m = 6$  and  $n = 6$ .

$$
N(0, \frac{1}{6} + \frac{3}{6}) == N(0, \frac{1}{6} + \frac{3}{6})
$$
\n(9)

In the case that the groups had unequal variances and unequal sizes, then the permutation test acts liberal or conservative depending on which variance each group has. The permutation test is liberal when the smaller variance is paired with the largest group size, and the larger variance is paired with the smaller group size. Liberal means that it results in a value much larger than  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ . Say  $\sigma_x^2 = 1$ ,  $m = 6$  and  $\sigma_y^2 = 3$ ,  $n = 4$ .

$$
N(0, \frac{1}{6} + \frac{3}{4}) \tag{10}
$$

If the smaller variance is paired with, the smaller group size then the permutation test is conservative. Conservative being that it results in a value much smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05(\pm 0.01)$ . Say  $\sigma_x^2 = 1$ ,  $m = 4$  and  $\sigma_y^2 = 3$ ,  $n = 6$ .

<span id="page-26-0"></span>
$$
N(0, \frac{1}{4} + \frac{3}{6}) \tag{11}
$$

Applying this knowledge to the findings of this thesis, this also occurs. First, when there is variance heterogeneity, but the group sizes are equal, the permutation test does not fail (Equation 9). Furthermore, when there is variance heterogeneity with unequal sample sizes, the permutation test fails (Equation 10 and Equation 11). If we take the results from Table  $\mathbf{4}$  as an example, where  $N_1 = 10$ ,  $\sigma_1 = 3.00$  and  $N_2 = 13$ ,  $\sigma_2 = 1.00$  we get a liberal error rate namely  $\alpha = 0.082$ .

$$
N(0, \frac{3^2}{10} + \frac{1^2}{13})
$$

The condition where  $N_1 = 10$  and  $\sigma_1 = 3.00$   $N_2 = 8$  and  $\sigma_2 = 1.00$  had a conservative error rate namely  $\alpha = 0.038$ .

$$
N(0, \frac{3^2}{10} + \frac{1^2}{8})
$$

However, a liberal or conservative error rate is not correct and indicates a failure of the permutation test. This failure was hypothesized because the assumption of exchangeability is violated when there is variance heterogeneity.

## Appendix B

## <span id="page-28-0"></span>Digital results:

[https://github.com/rushkock/sim\\_study\\_thesis/tree/master/src/features/csv](https://github.com/rushkock/sim_study_thesis/tree/master/src/features/csv)

# Table B1

*Simulation results for sample size 10 and its deviations*



















See Table  $\overline{\textbf{3}}$  for explanation on column names

Table B2

*Simulation results for sample size 60 and its deviations*

$N_1$	$N_2$	ES	$\sigma_1$	$\sigma_2$	perm	${\mathrm t}_t est$	$p$ -value	dif
60	60	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.049	.050	1.000	$-0.000$
60	45	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.051	.050	1.000	0.000
60	75	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.050	.050	1.000	$-0.000$
60	30	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.049	.050	1.000	$-0.001$
60	90	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.050	.050	1.000	$-0.001$
60	15	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.049	.051	1.000	$-0.001$
60	105	$.0\,$	1.00	1.00	.050	.051	1.000	$-0.000$
60	60	$.2\,$	1.00	1.00	.808	.806	0.335	0.001
60	$45\,$	$\cdot$ 2	1.00	1.00	.826	.825	1.000	0.001
60	75	$.2\,$	1.00	1.00	.796	.797	1.000	$-0.001$
60	30	$.2\,$	1.00	1.00	.852	.851	1.000	0.000
60	90	$\cdot$	1.00	1.00	$.775\,$	.773	1.000	0.002
60	15	$\cdot$	1.00	1.00	.896	.899	1.000	$-0.004$
60	105	$\cdot$ .2	1.00	1.00	.764	.765	1.000	$-0.001$
60	60	$.5\,$	1.00	1.00	.225	.224	0.335	0.001
60	$45\,$	$.5\,$	1.00	1.00	.292	.291	1.000	0.002
60	75	$.5\,$	1.00	1.00	.186	.184	1.000	0.001
60	30	.5	1.00	1.00	.396	.404	0.009	$-0.008$
60	90	.5	1.00	1.00	.153	.152	1.000	0.001
60	15	.5	1.00	1.00	.600	.619	0.000	$-0.018$
60	105	.5	1.00	1.00	.135	.134	1.000	0.001
60	60	.8	1.00	1.00	.009	.009	1.000	0.000
60	45	.8	1.00	1.00	.019	.020	1.000	$-0.001$















60	75	$.5\,$	3.00	1.00	.168	.217	0.000	$-0.049$
60	30	.5	3.00	1.00	.501	.272	0.000	0.229
60	90	.5	3.00	1.00	.134	.212	0.000	$-0.078$
60	15	.5	3.00	1.00	.826	.338	0.000	0.488
60	105	.5	3.00	1.00	.111	.202	0.000	$-0.091$
60	60	.8	3.00	1.00	.008	.008	1.000	$-0.000$
60	45	$.8\,$	3.00	1.00	.021	.012	0.000	0.009
60	75	$.8\,$	3.00	1.00	.005	.009	0.000	$-0.004$
60	30	$.8\,$	3.00	1.00	.065	.016	0.000	0.049
60	90	$.8\,$	3.00	1.00	.003	.009	0.000	$-0.006$
60	15	.8	3.00	1.00	.330	.031	0.000	0.298
60	105	.8	3.00	1.00	.002	.006	0.000	$-0.004$

see Table  $\boxed{3}$  for explanation on column names



1000 750 .8 1.00 1.00 .000 .000 1.000 0.000

Table B3 *Simulation results for sample size 1000 and its deviations*

<u>.</u>















1000	1250	.5	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	500	.5	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1500	.5	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	250	$.5\,$	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1750	.5	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1000	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	750	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1250	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	500	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1500	$.8\,$	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	250	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000
1000	1750	.8	3.00	1.00	.000	.000	1.000	0.000

See Table  $\overline{\mathbf{3}}$  for explanation on column names

<span id="page-55-0"></span>

*Conditions with variance homogeneity and equal sample sizes*



See Table  $\overline{\mathbf{3}}$  for explanation on column names

#### Appendix C

<span id="page-56-0"></span>All figures used in the data analysis can be found on



*Figure C1* . The number of significant differences between the permutation test and *t*-test for each group ratio.



Number of significant differences between Perm & T-test per standard deviation Sample size  $= 10$ 

*Figure C2* . The number of significant differences between the permutation test and *t*-test for each standard deviation.



The group ratios where the t-test outperforms the permutation test Sample size =  $10$ 

*Figure C3* . The number of significant differences for the permutation test and *t*-test for each group size.

![](_page_59_Figure_1.jpeg)

The standard deviations where the t-test outperforms the permutation test<br>Sample size = 10

The standard deviations where the permutation test outperforms the t-test Sample size  $= 10$ 

![](_page_59_Figure_4.jpeg)

*Figure C4* . The number of significant differences for the permutation test and *t*-test for each standard deviation.

![](_page_60_Figure_1.jpeg)

![](_page_60_Figure_2.jpeg)

*Figure C5*. Significant differences between the two tests for the sample size of group  $1 = 10$ and its deviations visible on the x-axis

![](_page_60_Figure_4.jpeg)

*Figure C6*. Significant differences between the two tests for the sample size of group  $1 = 60$ and its deviations visible on the x-axis

![](_page_61_Figure_1.jpeg)

*Figure C7*. Significant differences between the two tests for the sample size of group  $1 =$ 1000 and its deviations visible on the x-axis