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Polish adaptation The State Self-Forgiveness Scale

Polska adaptacja The State Self-forgiveness Scale

- Skali Epizodycznego Przebaczenia Sobie¹

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Abstract: The aim of the reported study was to carry out adaptation of The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (Wohl et al., 2008). The instrument measures self-forgiveness of a specific transgression referring to the self or to another person. It consists of 17 items divided into two subscales: one related to self-forgiving feelings and actions, and the other to self-forgiving beliefs. The sample consisted of 444 participants (M age=27.8, SD=9.9). In order to determine psychometric properties of the scale, exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted (RMSEA 0.048, GFI 0.924, PCLOSE 0.556). To determine reliability of the measure, Cronbach's alpha (ranging from 0.80 to 0.86) and McDonald's omega (ranging from 0.79 to 0.86) were calculated. Internal consistency was examined using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale. The results allow to consider The State Self-Forgiveness Scale as a measure having good psychometric properties. The scale is recommended to be used to measure self-forgiveness both in scientific research and therapeutic programmes.

Keywords: self-forgiveness, Polish adaptation, The State Self-Forgiveness Scale

Abstrakt: Celem przedstawionych badań była adaptacja The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (Wohl i in., 2008) – Skali Epizodycznego Przebaczenia Sobie. Skala służy do pomiaru przebaczenia sobie konkretnej krzywdy, która dotyczy własnej osoby lub innych. W skład skali wchodzi 17 itemów tworzących dwie podskale określające uczucia i zachowania, a także przekonania wobec siebie mające świadczyć o przebaczeniu sobie. W badaniu udział wzięły 444 osoby (wiek M=27,8, SD=9,9). Dla określenia właściwości psychometrycznych została wykonana zarówno eksploracyjna analiza czynnikowa, jak i konfirmacyjna analiza czynnikowa (RMSEA 0,048, GFI 0,924, PCLOSE 0,556). W celu określenia rzetelności obliczono alfy Cronbacha (od 0,80 do 0,86) oraz omegę McDonaldsa (od 0,79 do 0,86). Oceniono również trafność wewnętrzną przy użyciu Skali Przebaczenia Heartland. Uzyskane wyniki pozwalają na uznanie Skali Epizodycznego Przebaczenia Sobie jako narzędzia o dobrych właściwościach psychometrycznych. Użycie skali rekomendowane jest w przypadku oceny przebaczenia sobie zarówno w badaniach naukowych, jak i praktyce psychologicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: przebaczenie sobie, polska adaptacja, Skala Epizodycznego Przebaczenia Sobie

1. Introduction

Self-forgiveness refers to transgressing against the self or against another person. According to this approach to self-forgiveness, a transgressor can be an offender and victim

¹ Artykuł w języku polskim dostępny jest na stronie:
<https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2021-4Mroz2.pdf>

at the same time. A similar dependence is true for a transgression. The transgression may relate to the transgressor or to another person being a victim. Doing a wrong to oneself may take place when, e.g. through abuse of psychoactive substances, the addicted person will damage their health, or as a result of a careless and risky action, he or she will suffer a loss of, e.g. his or her physical fitness, money or any other item being his or her property. Doing a wrong to another person may similarly involve self-forgiveness. This may happen when a person assumes responsibility for what had happened, feeling as an offender causing hurt to another person; for instance, when someone caused a road accident in which third parties were injured, or damaged a marital relationship as a result of adultery or making wrong decisions. A common denominator of the above-mentioned events is self-awareness involving self-condemning emotions, such as guilt and shame. In such a case, self-forgiveness is a possible strategy of coping with these emotions and it refers to conceptualizing forgiveness as an emotion-focused coping strategy and re-focus on positive values and regaining self-esteem (Griffin, Worthington, Davis, Hook, Maguen 2018).

1.1. Self-forgiveness - conceptualization

The end of the twentieth century has marked the beginning of empirical interest in psychology of forgiveness, including forgiveness of others and of oneself (Enright, 1996). One of the earliest definitions of self-forgiveness was provided by Enright (1996: 155) who described it as “a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself”. Enright's approach is focused on self-forgiveness as a process. During the entire process of self-forgiveness, one gradually discovers self-compassion, accepts responsibility for the committed wrong and takes actions intended to minimise consequences of a transgression and compensate for the wrong. Additionally, the person forgiving oneself is dealing with transformation of guilt into a more self-accepting attitude (Windsor, 2017).

In another approach represented by Dillon (2001), self-forgiveness is perceived as entailing the release of negative feelings directed at oneself and replacing them with self-respect in the context of the committed wrongs. This is consistent with a hedonic path to self-forgiveness presented by Woodyatt and her colleagues (Woodyatt et al., 2017). Self-forgiveness conceptualized in this manner assumes that overcoming negative emotions and thoughts can lead to well-being (Pandey et al., 2020). Self-forgiveness is possible owing to eliciting self-compassion. This is ensured by therapeutic interventions aimed at increasing self-forgiveness, decreasing self-criticism or proneness to shame or guilt (Germer and Neff, 2019).

A shortcoming of this approach to self-forgiveness is that one can easily reduce negative emotions, which consequently may decrease motivation to assume responsibility

for the committed wrong. This is confirmed in the study by Fincham and May (2020) who found that individuals with high level of self-forgiveness as conceptualized in the hedonic approach were less empathic, and more prone to blame their victims by showing anger and suggesting that their victims' responses are exaggerated. Woodyatt (2017) pointed to the possibility to conceptualize self-forgiveness in relation to Eudaimonism. This approach focuses on construing self-forgiveness as entailing taking responsibility for committed wrongs, recognition of one's improper actions and coping with the accompanying negative emotions. According to Woodyatt and her colleagues (2017), this is connected with social-moral identity resulting from the need to believe that one is a good person and despite the offence, he or she continues to belong to a given group.

The authors of the adapted The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (Wohl, DeShea and Wahkinney, 2008) on the other hand, defined self-forgiveness as a positive shift in feelings, actions and beliefs about oneself. This conceptualization of self-forgiveness is based on the approach to forgiving others developed by McCullough (2009), where positive affect to the wrongdoer resulted in a higher propensity to forgive. What is more, self-forgiveness is associated with decreased rumination, lower level of guilt and shame, self-contempt, if not self-repulsion or self-punishment (Wohl et al., 2008).

1.2. Positive and negative outcomes of self-forgiveness

According to Judeo-Christian beliefs, and within the field of philosophy, self-forgiveness is presented as responsibility, moral bond with other people and commitment to change, therefore as something positive (Webb, Bumgarner, Conway-Williams, Dangel, Hall, 2017) In psychology, the ability to forgive oneself is associated with admitting to actions contrary to one's own standards and with decreased guilt, shame, self-contempt or self-punishment (Webb et al., 2017). It should be noted, that one cannot speak of self-forgiveness without accepting full responsibility for an action appraised as inappropriate. Otherwise, we are dealing with pseudo-forgiveness.

Pseudo self-forgiveness refers, among others, to such processes as excusing oneself from the wrongdoing, denying or distracting responsibility for the committed wrong.

The approach in question allows to avoid negative emotions, reflections on the committed offence, or engaging in reconciliation (Woodyatt, Wenzel, 2013; Prabhakar et al., 2020). True self-forgiveness on the other hand, is a difficult process involving acceptance of one's responsibility for the transgression and cognitive transformation of guilt-related issues. This favours emergence of pro-social changes in one's behaviour, which enhances reconciliation, or other beneficial actions, such as abandonment of the wrongdoing.

Researchers investigating self-forgiveness issues point to the fact that in some situations self-forgiveness may improve one's well-being and one's self-esteem, but in other it may deteriorate the welfare (Wohl, Thompson, 2011).

Interestingly, numerous studies have shown that self-forgiveness may have adverse effect on human behaviour. This is, among others, due to emotional relief which diminishes one's motivation to change one's actions. In the study conducted in a group of tobacco smokers, Wohl and Thompson (2011) asked participants questions about their assessment of the harm caused by smoking, whether they forgive themselves and whether they are ready to quit smoking. The results showed that the more smoking was assessed as harmful, the more the respondents were ready to quit smoking. When self-forgiveness was included however, it turned out that the more forgiving of smoking they were, they reported to be less ready to quit smoking. In another study examining the relationship between self-forgiveness and procrastination, self-forgiveness of postponing execution of a given task was associated with lower level of procrastination of a similar task in the future. Self-forgiveness through reduction of negative affect decreased procrastination, however only when procrastination before the first task was assessed as relatively high (Wohl, Pychyl and Bennett, 2010).

On the other hand, research examining relationships between self-forgiveness and health have pointed to favourable impact of self-forgiveness. In the study by Liao and Wei (2015), self-forgiveness showed a negative association with perceived stress and symptoms of depression among students. Self-forgiveness conceptualized as emotion-focused coping may be helpful in reducing guilt or discordance emerging as a result of the experienced discrepancy between one's personal values and actual actions (Davis et al., 2015).

Therefore, self-forgiveness may bring positive effects, but it can also serve as a pretext to harm others or oneself again (Peterson, 2017).

1.3. Measuring self-forgiveness

Self-forgiveness can be measured as dispositional and state forgiveness. Dispositional self-forgiveness refers to the way an individual perceives himself or herself as a forgiving person, without relating to a specific transgression. Therefore, it is a proneness, trait determining acting, thinking and feeling irrespective of time and type of event, showing how self-forgiving a given person finds himself or herself to be. State self-forgiveness on the other hand, refers to forgiveness of self for a specific wrong that occurred in specific time. Empirical studies have used a number of measures to determine the level of dispositional or state self-forgiveness.

Two scales measuring disposition to forgive including subscales measuring self-forgiveness were adapted onto Polish grounds; these are the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Kaleta, Mróz, Guzewicz, 2016) and The Forgiveness Scale developed by Toussaint and

colleagues and adapted by Charzyńska and Heszen (2013). The Heartland Forgiveness Scale is based on the cognitive concept referring to forgiveness as a disposition to transform negative thoughts, feelings and actions into neutral or positive ones (Thompson et al., 2005). Polish version of the HFS scale (Kaleta, Mróz, Guzewicz, 2016) arrived at a different structure than the original measure. Each of the original subscales, i.e. forgiveness of self, others, and of situations beyond anyone's control was further divided into two scales: positive scale - referring to positive feelings, thoughts and actions toward the transgressor, and a scale of reduced unforgiveness referring to minimizing negative emotions, attitudes and actions toward oneself, others and circumstances. Psychometric properties of the scale, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.50 and 0.81 depending on specific subscales, allow to use it as a reliable measuring tool.

Another scale measuring forgiveness adapted by Charzyńska and Heszen (2013) includes three subscales: forgiveness of oneself, forgiveness of others and feeling forgiven by God. Just like in the case of HFS, the structure of the measure differs from the structure of the original instrument (Toussaint et al., 2001). The seeking forgiveness subscale was removed from the Polish version, referring to taking the initiative to being forgiven and to forgive. In the Polish instrument, the self-forgiveness scale includes two items, whereas self-forgiveness is conceptualized as a disposition to release oneself from unpleasant emotions, e.g. guilt for the committed wrongs. The Polish scale has good psychometric properties - Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.65 to 0.91 depending on the subscale.

Regrettably, there is no Polish instrument available measuring solely self-forgiveness, both as dispositional and state self-forgiveness.

Polish researchers have used, among others, the Differentiated Process Scale of Self-Forgiveness (Woodyatt, Wenzel, 2013). The scale measures disposition to forgive oneself and includes three subscales: self-punitiveness - 4 items, pseudo self-forgiveness - 3 items and genuine self-forgiveness - 3 items. The original instrument had satisfactory psychometric properties pointing to a three-factor model: Cronbach's alpha for the self-punitiveness subscale was 0.85, for pseudo self-forgiveness 0.81 and for genuine self-forgiveness 0.85.

Another scale conceptualizing self-forgiveness as a moral virtue and measuring self-forgiveness of a specific transgression is the Enright Self-Forgiveness Inventory (Kim, Volk, Enright, 2021). ESFI includes six subscales measuring positive and negative affect toward the self, positive and negative thoughts toward the self, and positive and negative action toward the self. In addition, the scale features a five-item scale for measuring pseudo self-forgiveness.

State self-forgiveness can also be measured using The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (Wohl et al., 2008). It is a 17-item scale measuring self-forgiving feelings, actions and beliefs. This paper reports on works on the Polish adaptation of this scale. So far as measuring dispositional self-forgiveness in Polish is possible using the subscales of the Heartland

Forgiveness Scale (Kaleta, Mróz, Guzewicz, 2016) or Toussaint's Forgiveness Scale (Charzyńska, Heszen, 2013), no instrument measuring state (self)forgiveness available in Polish - TRIM (Kossakowska, Kwiatek (2017), as well as EFS and DTFS (Mróz, Kaleta, Sołtys, 2020) offers such subscales. Therefore, it was concluded that adaptation of the scale measuring state self-forgiveness will enable development of research on forgiveness in the Polish population.

While developing The State Self-Forgiveness Scale, Wohl and colleagues (2008) assumed that it is necessary to create an instrument measuring self-forgiveness of a specific transgression. SSFS is focused on the self-referent processing. The respondent refers to his or her own feelings, actions and beliefs about themselves in the context of specific offences.

The authors referred their observations to earlier research and theoretical approaches, e.g. to McCullough (2009) which showed that positive affect to the wrongdoer induced higher probability of forgiving the wrong. Similarly beneficial attitudes to the self were to provide grounds for self-forgiveness of a specific transgression (Wohl et al., 2008).

The scale consists of 17-items including two subscales: Self-forgiving feelings and action (SFFA) and Self-forgiving belief (SFB). In the original version, Cronbach's alpha for SFFA subscale was 0.86, whereas for SFB 0.91 (Wohl et al., 2008).

2. Aim of the study

The aim of the study reported in the paper was to determine psychometric properties of the Polish version of The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (Wohl et al., 2008). The original instrument has good psychometric properties and includes two subscales: Self-forgiving feelings and actions and Self-forgiving beliefs.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample included 444 participants (295 women, 147 men, 3 individuals indicated their gender as 'other'). Mean age was 27.80 years (SD=9.92), the oldest participant being 62 and the youngest 18 years old. The study was conducted on-line using an electronic questionnaire created via Google Forms. Link to the questionnaire was uploaded on different social media forums. The study was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore it was not possible to conduct it in stationary conditions. Participants were informed about the study being conducted on an anonymous basis and about possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. They were asked to recall a transgression from the past in which they were the transgressor. In the questionnaire, the respondents did not provide any details of the recalled transgression.

3.2. Measures

Two measures were used in the study.

The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (SSFS) (Wohl et al., 2008). Respondents rate their responses on a 4-item Likert scale, where 1 means “not at all”, and 4 means “completely”. The scale consists of 17 items divided into two subscales. The first scale, Self-forgiving feelings and actions, evaluates one’s feelings and actions following the transgression. It is composed of 8 items (4 of which need to be re-encoded). The second scale, Self-forgiving beliefs, consists of 9 items evaluating self-forgiving beliefs following the transgression. Psychometric properties of the scale are presented in the Results section.

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS, Thompson et al., 2005; Kaleta, Mróz, Guzewicz, 2016). HFS is a multidimensional self-report measure used to evaluate dispositional forgiveness. Participants rate their responses on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (almost always false of me) to 7 (almost always true of me). The scale has 18 items. The original version of the scale includes three subscales, whereas the Polish version has a different structure. Results obtained during the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have shown that the hierarchical nine-factor model exhibited the best fit. Ultimately, the scale includes two major subscales: Positive Forgiveness (benevolent thoughts, feelings and actions) and Reduced Unforgiveness (reducing hostile thoughts, feelings and actions). Each subscale features three additional subscales measuring forgiveness of others, of self and of situations beyond anyone’s control. The higher the score, the more forgiving a person tends to be. Cronbach’s alpha (internal reliability) ranged from 0.70 to 0.81.

3.3. Statistical analysis

The State Self-Forgiveness Scale was translated into Polish by three independent translators. To determine psychometric properties of the scale, the authors used IBM SPSS software (exploratory factor analysis, Pearson’s *r*), OMEGA macro to calculate reliability of the scale and AMOS macro (confirmatory factor analysis).

4. Results

4.1. Factor structure of the State Self-Forgiveness Scale

We have assessed the factor structure of the Polish version of SSFS. Participants were randomly divided into two groups, which is consistent with the assumption not to make too many calculations in the same sample (van Prooijen, van der Kloot, 2001). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted for results obtained in the first group. Upon consideration of the Kaiser criterion and the scree plot, a two-factor structure was obtained presenting (1) Self-forgiving feelings and actions and (2) Self-forgiving beliefs. The results are presented in Table 1. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, using the results obtained in the

second group ($\chi^2 = 352.716$, $df=118$, $p<.001$). The goodness-of-fit indicators showed that the model including two subscales presented an adequate fit to the data: RMSEA 0.048, GFI 0.924, PCLOSE 0.556 (Bedyńska, Książek, 2012; Januszewski, 2011). PCLOSE indicator was above 0.05, which as pointed out by Januszewski (2011), provides particularly significant information about the goodness-of-fit when using CFA. Since the model with two subscales exhibited satisfactory psychometric properties, and the assumption was to confirm the original version, only one model was tested.

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis

item		Factor 1SFFA	Factor 2SFB
	I consider what I did that I was wrong, I ...		
1	...feel compassionate toward myself	.88	
2	... feel rejecting of myself (R)	.81	
3	...feel accepting of myself	.79	
4	... feel dislike toward myself (R)	.74	
5	... show myself acceptance	.76	
6	... show myself compassion	.79	
7	...punish myself(R)	.58	
8	... put myself down (R)	.62	
	As I consider what I did that was wrong. I believe I am ...		
9	... acceptable.		.87
10	... Okey		.89
11	... awful (R)		.68
12	... terrible (R)		.79
13	... decent		.82
14	... rotten (R)		.74
15	...worthy of love		.60
16	... a bad person (R)		.74
17	... horrible (R)		.81
KMO=,825; $\chi^2=2062,80$; $p=,001$			

Reliability of the State Self-Forgiveness Scale and both subscales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. Cronbach's alpha for the total SSFS was 0.86, for the Self-forgiving feelings and actions subscale 0.80 and for the Self-forgiving beliefs subscale 0.85. McDonald's omega for the total SSFS was 0.86 for the Self-forgiving feelings and actions subscale 0.79 and for the Self-forgiving beliefs subscale 0.84.

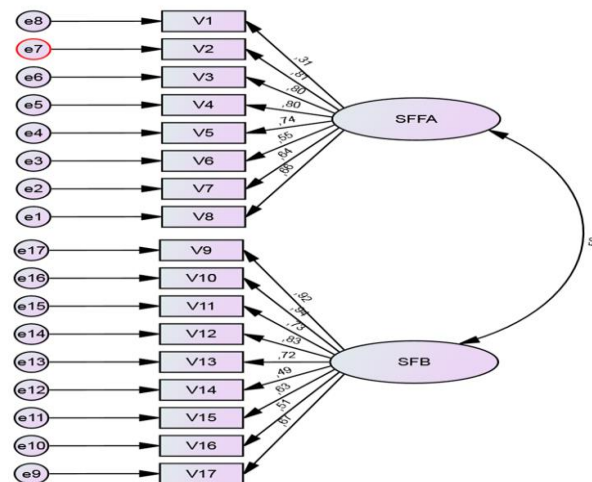


Fig. 1.

Results of confirmatory factor analysis of The State Self-Forgiveness Scale; SFFA Self-forgiving feelings and actions; SFB Self-forgiving beliefs.

4.2. Internal consistency

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Polish adaptation by Kaleta, Mróz, Guzewicz, 2018) was used to evaluate internal reliability of SSFS. The results of correlations between the scales are presented in Table 2. Obtained results show that both SSFS subscales - Self-forgiving feelings and actions and Self-forgiving beliefs were positively associated with all HFS subscales.

Table 2. Correlations between the State Self-Forgiveness Scale and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Self-forgiving feelings and actions	.45**	.60**	.48**	.45**	.21**	.48**	.49**	.56**	.13**	.47**
2 Self-forgiving beliefs	1	.42**	.29**	.29**	.16**	.25**	.39**	.42**	.14**	.33**
3 Total HFS		1	.79**	.65**	.56**	.71**	.84**	.72**	.54**	.70**

4	Positive forgiveness			1	.86**	.69**	.86**	.34**	.33**	.18**	.27**
5	Positive self-forgiveness				1	.36**	.70**	.23**	.31**	.01	.22**
6	Positive forgiveness of others					1	.36**	.25**	.14**	.34**	.11*
7	Positive forgiveness of situations						1	.32**	.34**	.10*	.31**
8	Reduced unforgiveness							1	.82**	.68**	.84**
9	Reduced self-unforgiveness								1	.29**	.63**
10	Reduced unforgiveness of others									1	.33**
11	Reduced unforgiveness of situations										1

*p>0.05 **p>0.001

4.3 Self-forgiveness and age

In order to examine whether there are any relationships between age and self-forgiveness, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated which showed no statistically significant differences.

Table 3. Correlation between age and the State Self-Forgiveness Scale

	Self-forgiving feelings and actions	Self-forgiving beliefs
Age	.06	.03

5. Discussion and Summary

Self-forgiveness is a difficult and complex construct, both in practical and empirical terms. Measurement and observation of multi-faceted psychological experiences, such as self-forgiveness, is difficult due to the nature of the process and references to different time frames, wrongs and individuals. Therefore, availability of multiple instruments and supporting constructs is very important, in order to be able to explore self-forgiveness in the most reliable manner.

Polish adaptation of The State Self-Forgiveness Scale involved evaluation of psychometric properties of the instrument in a number of steps. First, exploratory factor

analysis was conducted, to identify the factor structure of the measure. It was found that, just like the original version, the measure includes two subscales corresponding to the Self-forgiving feelings and actions, and Self-forgiving beliefs. In order to obtain empirical confirmation of the model in the EFA, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted which confirmed the previously obtained structure.

The adapted State Self-Forgiveness Scale is a reliable instrument measuring self-forgiveness of a specific transgression, especially with regard to self-forgiving feelings and actions, and self-forgiving beliefs. This was confirmed by the values of Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. The measure can be used in scientific research and applied in therapeutic practice to verify progress in achieving self-forgiveness, among others, in addiction treatment programmes.

The State Self-Forgiveness Scale has been used in multiple studies. For instance, in research among individuals abusing alcohol where it turned out that self-forgiveness measured using SSFS and preceded by an intervention enhancing self-forgiveness decreases guilt and favours sobriety (Scherer et al., 2011). Absence of self-forgiveness proved to be significantly related with anger among divorcees (Rhode-Brown, Rudestam, 2011).

It would be recommendable to revisit various fields of research where self-forgiveness proved to be significant for, e.g. romantic relationships (Pelucci, Paleari, Regalia, Fincham, 2013) or mental health (Pandey et al., 2020). Previous studies have shown that self-forgiveness is conducive to less intense symptoms of depression and anxiety (Pandey et al., 2020), or to satisfaction from the relationship with the partner in romantic relationships (Pelucci et al., 2013). Availability of the Polish instrument measuring state self-forgiveness will enable to conduct Polish research in this area, which until present has formed a considerable gap.

Limitations

The reported study has some limitations. First, there was no control over the transgression to which self-forgiveness was related. Although this intervention was intentional in order to demonstrate a more universal use of the adapted measure, control over the transgression would allow to determine whether the measure is reliable irrespective of the reason for the transgression. The fact that the study was conducted online is another limitation that prevented the control over authenticity of responses. It should be assumed however, that this form of research is becoming increasingly popular and that it allows to collect an extensive body of data likely to eliminate random responses.

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