Giscombe – Superwoman Schema questionnaire

**GISCOMBE** **SUPERWOMAN SCHEMA (SWS) QUESTIONNAIRE**

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**Giscombe Superwoman Schema Questionnaire:** The Giscombe Superwoman Schema Questionnaire (G-SWS-Q) includes 35 items and the following five subscales: an obligation to present an image of strength, an obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to vulnerability, intense motivation to succeed, an obligation to help others; Participants are instructed to use the following response options: *this is not true for me*, *this is true for me rarely, this is true for me sometimes*, and *this is true for me all of the time. P*articipants also rate how much the situation bothers them: *very much* to *not at all*. The G-SWS-S has exhibited excellent psychometric properties for African American women across educational backgrounds and age ranges (Cronbach’s alpha range for subscales 0.79 0.89), test-retest reliability (*r* = 0.89); positively and significantly associated with CM risk, depression, perceived stress, sedentary behavior, and sleep disturbance.6

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**Synopsis:**

African American women experience disproportionately high rates of psychological stress-related chronic health conditions, such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes. Research studies designed to understand and address stress-related chronic health conditions in African American women have been limited by the use of stress concepts and measures that have not incorporated a more comprehensive picture of the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and sociohistorical dynamics of African American women’s physical and emotional health.

The Superwoman Schema (SWS) Conceptual Framework and Superwoman Schema Questionnaire were developed through mixed-methods research with funding support from the American Psychological Association, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the National Institutes of Health (National Institute of Nursing Research and National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities) to understand how postures of resilience and self-efficacy, adaptively adopted as a means to survive life adversity, may also serve as potentially maladaptive contributors to chronic stress-related health conditions.1-3 A demographically-diverse sample of African American focus group participants described their lived experiences of experiencing and coping with stress, as well as the associated resilience, and risk factors including stress and delayed health-promoting behaviors.1 Analyses of these data resulted in the identification of five SWS characteristics: the obligation to project an image of strength, the obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to admitting vulnerability or accepting help from others, the motivation to succeed despite limited resources, and the prioritization of caregiving over self-care.1

Perceived benefits of SWS were identified, including preservation of self, family, and community, as well as perceived liabilities such as stress embodiment, stress embodiment, and stress-related coping responses and health behaviors that may increase the risk for interpersonal strain and chronic health conditions. Based on the empirically grounded SWS Conceptual Framework, SWS characteristics are influenced by sociohistorical factors, such as racial and gender stereotyping and oppression, lessons from foremothers on how to survive, past experiences with mistreatment or abuse, dissatisfaction with unfulfilled promises of support, and spiritual values that may reinforce quiet endurance of life’s adversities.

In three quantitative and qualitative studies with demographically diverse African American women from various regions in the United States, items were developed from the original SWS focus group research and psychometrically evaluated (n=48; n=561; n=130).6 The five-factor structure of the Giscombe SWS Questionnaire was confirmed, consistent with the SWS conceptual framework. The Giscombe SWS Questionnaire,6 has strong psychometric properties (internal consistency and validity), with positive associations among SWS and subjectively reported race-related, gender-related, and generic stressors, the use of food to cope with stress, poor sleep quality, and physical inactivity, and obesity – all factors associated with increased CM risk.6 More recent investigations of SWS in African American women have revealed significant associations among SWS characteristics and indicators of cardiometabolic risk (e.g., allostatic load, biological aging).4-10

**SWS Conceptual Framework/Questionnaire Refereed Citations (published by Woods-Giscombe et al.):**

1. **Woods-Giscombé, C.L.** (2010). Superwoman Schema: African American women’s views on stress, strength, and health. *Qualitative Health Research, 20,* 668-683.
2. **Woods-Giscombé, C. L.,** & Black, A. R. (2010). Mind-body interventions to reduce risk for health disparities related to stress and “strength” among African American women: The potential of mindfulness-based stress reduction, loving kindness, and the NTU therapeutic framework. *Complementary Health Practice Review, 15,* 15-31*.*
3. Black, A. R. & **Woods-Giscombé, C. L.** (2012) Applying the Stress and “Strength” Hypothesis to Black women’s breast cancers delays. *Stress and Health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress, 28,* 389-396.
4. **Woods-Giscombe, C. L.,** Carthron, D., Robinson, M., & Devane-Johnson, S. & Corbie-Smith, G. (2016). Superwoman Schema, stigma, spirituality, and (culturally) sensitive providers: Factors influencing mental health service utilization in African American women. *Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions Diversity: Research, Education, and Policy, 9,* 1124-1144*.*
5. **Woods-Giscombe, C. L.** (2018). Reflections on the development of the Superwoman Schema Conceptual Framework: An intersectional approach guided by African American womanist perspectives. *Meridians,* *16(2),* 333-342. DOI: 10.2979/meridians.16.2.14.

**Woods-Giscombe, C. L**., Steed, T. C., Allen, A., Li, Y., Lackey, C., & Black, A. R. (2019). The Giscombe Superwoman Schema Questionnaire: Psychometric properties and associations with mental health and health behaviors in African American women. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 40,* 8, 672-681, DOI: [10.1080/01612840.2019.1584654](https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2019.1584654)

Allen, A. M., Wang, Y., Chae, D. H., Price, M. M., Powell, W., Steed, T., Black, A., Dhabhar, F. S., Marquez-Magana, L., & **Woods-Giscombe, C. L.**  (2019). Racial discrimination, the superwoman schema, and allostatic load: exploring an integrative stress-coping model among African American women. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, (1457),* 104-127. doi: 10.1111/nyas.14188

1. Sheffield-Abdullah, K. A., & **Woods-Giscombe, C. L.** (2021). Perceptions of the superwoman role and distress among African American women with pre-diabetes.*Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* – Social Determinants of Health Special Issue. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2020.09.011>
2. Perez, A.D., Dufault, S.M., Spears, E.C., Chae, D.H., **Woods‑Giscombe, C.,** & Allen, A.M. (2022). Coping with Racism: ’Is Superwoman Schema the female version of John Henryism?’ *Social Science & Medicine.*
3. Thomas, M. D., Mendez, R. M., Zhang, Y., Wang, Y., Sohail, S., Chae, D. H., Márquez-Magaña, L., Sellers, R., **Woods-Giscombe, C. L.,** & Allen, A. M. (2022). Superwoman Schema, racial identity, and cellular aging among African American women. *The Gerontologist*, gnac005. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnac005

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | If you checked the **TRUE** box, please indicate how undesirable or disturbing this statement is for you by checking one of the boxes below. |
| 1. I try to present an image of strength. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I have to be strong. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I feel obligated to present an image of strength at work. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I feel obligated to present an image of strength for my family. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I display my emotions in privacy. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I keep my feelings to myself. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. My tears are a sign of weakness. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |

**Giscombe - SWS Questionnaire Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**INSTRUCTIONS: The following is a list of items that may or may not be relevant for you. Some of the questions may sound similar, but each is important. Please read and complete each item to the best of your ability using the response scale provided.**

Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | If you checked the **TRUE** box, please indicate how undesirable or disturbing this statement is for you by checking one of the boxes below. |
| 1. I keep my problems bottled up inside. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I hide my stress. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. Expressing emotions is difficult for me. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. It’s hard for me to accept help from others. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I have a hard time trusting others. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I wait until I am overwhelmed to ask for help. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. Asking for help is difficult for me. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |

**INSTRUCTIONS: The following is a list of items that may or may not be relevant for you. Some of the questions may sound similar, but each is important. Please read and complete each item to the best of your ability using the response scale provided.**

Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | If you checked the **TRUE** box, please indicate how undesirable or disturbing this statement is for you by checking one of the boxes below. |
| 1. I resist help to prove that I can make it on my own. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. If I want things done right, I do them myself. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I accomplish my goals with limited resources. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. It is very important to me to be the best at the things that I do. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. No matter how hard I work, I feel like I should do more. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I put pressure on myself to achieve a certain level of accomplishment. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I take on roles and responsibilities when I am already overwhelmed. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |

**INSTRUCTIONS: The following is a list of items that may or may not be relevant for you. Some of the questions may sound similar, but each is important. Please read and complete each item to the best of your ability using the response scale provided.**

Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | If you checked the **TRUE** box, please indicate how undesirable or disturbing this statement is for you by checking one of the boxes below. |
| 1. I take on too many responsibilities in my family. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I put everyone else’s’ needs before mine. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I feel obligated to take care of others. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. When others ask for my help, I say yes when I should say no. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I neglect my health (e.g., I don’t exercise or eat like I should).   In what specific ways do you think that you neglect your health? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I neglect the things that bring me joy. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I feel guilty when I take time for myself. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |

**INSTRUCTIONS: The following is a list of items that may or may not be relevant for you. Some of the questions may sound similar, but each is important. Please read and complete each item to the best of your ability using the response scale provided.**

Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | If you checked the **TRUE** box, please indicate how undesirable or disturbing this statement is for you by checking one of the boxes below. |
| 1. The struggles of my ancestors require me to be strong. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I keep my problems to myself to prevent burdening others. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I do things by myself without asking for help. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. The only way for me to be successful is to work hard. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I am a perfectionist. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. There is no time for me, because I am always taking care of others. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |
| 1. I have to be strong because I am a woman. | * This is **NOT TRUE** for me   **GO TO NEXT QUESTION** | This is **TRUE** for me   * Rarely * Sometimes * All the time | **This bothers me:**   * Not at all * Somewhat * Very much |

**INSTRUCTIONS: The following is a list of items that may or may not be relevant for you. Some of the questions may sound similar, but each is important. Please read and complete each item to the best of your ability using the response scale provided.**

**Subscales Items – 35 Item Scale**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Items** | **Items** |  |
| **Obligation to Present an Image of Strength** | 6 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 29, 35 | **SWS subscale scores for endorsement should be summed and/or a TOTAL SWS (35-item) value should be summed. The SWS appraisal scores should be averaged (see next page).** |
| **Obligation to Suppress Emotions** | 7 | 5,6,7,8,9,10,30 |
| **Resistance to Being Vulnerable** | 7 | 11,12,13,14,15,16, 31 |
| **Intense Motivation to Succeed** | 6 | 17,18,19,20,32,33 |
| **Obligation to Help Others (Prioritization of Caregiving Over Self-Care)** | 9 | 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34 |

Table 1. Cronbach’s alpha of SWS—Each Subscales. Giscombe RWJF Project Internal Consistency Results\_ (N=130)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Subscales** | **Items** | **Cronbach’s alpha** |
| Total SWS Scale (35 items) |  | 0.95 |
| Obligation to Present an Image of Strength | 1, 2, 3, 4, 29, 35 | 0.81 |
| Obligation to Suppress Emotions | 5,6,7,8,9,10,30 | 0.85 |
| Resistance to Being Vulnerable | 11,12,13,14,15,16, 31 | 0.82 |
| Intense Motivation to Succeed | 17,18,19,20,32,33 | 0.72 |
| Obligation to Help Others (Prioritization of Caregiving over Self Care) | 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34 | 0.89 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RESPONSE** | **VALUE** | **It is recommended that researchers use average scores for each SWS subscale.**  **Subscales:**  Strength (6 items):  0-6 Low  7-12 Moderate  13-18 High  Suppress (7 items):  0-7 Low  8-14 Moderate  15-21 High  Resistance (7 items):  0-7 Low  8-14 Moderate  15-21 High  Motivation (6 items):  0-6 Low  7-12 Moderate  13-18 High  Help (9 items):  0-9 Low  10-18 Moderate  19-27 High  **If SWS subscale items are summed to create one SWS total (NOT Recommended), these categories can be used:**  **0-35: Low SWS**  **36-70: Moderate SWS**  **71-105: High SWS** |
| This is **NOT TRUE** for me | 0 |
| This is TRUE for me **RARELY** | 1 |
| This is TRUE for me **SOMETIMES** | 2 |
| This is TRUE for me **ALL THE TIME** | 3 |

**SWS Scale Scoring Instructions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RESPONSE** | **VALUE** | **SWS appraisal items should be averaged.** |
| This bothers me **NOT AT ALL** | 0 |
| This bothers me **SOMEWHAT** | 1 |
| This bothers me **VERY MUCH** | 2 |