



# Book Review

The International Journal of Aging  
and Human Development  
0(0) 1–3

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DOI: 10.1177/0091415017740679

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Black, H. K., Groce, J. T., & Harmon, C. E. (2017). *The Hidden Among the Hidden: African-American Elder Male Caregivers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 192 pp. ISBN 9780190602321 \$65.00. (hbk)

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*The Hidden Among the Hidden: African American Elder Male Caregivers* seeks to paint a picture of the caregiving experience, as seen through an often-forgotten population of caregivers, older adult African American men. In general, male caregivers are rarely examined, although they comprise nearly a third to slightly less than a half of all caregivers (Kramer & Thompson, 2004). Often maligned by society as being uncaring toward and absent from their families (e.g., McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997), caregiving among African American men has been investigated even more rarely. The ethnographic narratives and other qualitative research reported in this book not only describe the caring, nurturing, and generative behaviors shown by 13 older Black male caregivers in the Philadelphia area but also explain why this highly prevalent role is often not captured in caregiving research (e.g., these behaviors are often seen as part and parcel of “being a good son,” and many do not recognize their duties as “caretaking”).

Throughout the book, the authors argue for the importance of better understanding this “hidden” population. First, African American elder male caregivers are often an integral part of their communities and their families. Second, the cultural upbringing of these men often leads them to be less likely to seek help and be less prepared, at least emotionally, to deal with caregiving (Kramer & Thompson, 2004). African American male caregivers, especially, may be at increased risk for psychological and physical health problems because they rarely broadcast their role or seek help with caregiving burdens (Pharr, Dodge Francis, Terry, & Clark, 2014). For these and other reasons, it is vital to understand more thoroughly and better equip this population.

Within the introduction, the authors go into great detail about the difficulties of conducting research within this population due to historical inequities, such as the Tuskegee experiments, slavery, and segregation (Pharr et al., 2014). The book also examines the history of African Americans in the United States as a whole, exploring possible explanations for feelings of vulnerability within this

people group. This comprehensive background regarding the historical factors leading up to the “hiddenness” of these caregivers helps readers to understand what it is like to be a member of such a disenfranchised group. Ultimately, the authors attribute much of the hiddenness to male gender theory (Thompson, 2004), which suggests that men should be quiet, stoic, and strong figures who do not burden others with their problems. However, they contend that since society engendered this feeling, it can also be changed via societal reforms (Martin, 2001).

The authors have done an excellent job of presenting their data in a format that is easily understood, entertaining, and cohesive. Their qualitative findings are grouped into seven topical chapters, addressing the issues of identity, generativity, suffering, coping, belief systems, caregiving as a journey, and the hiddenness of African American male caregiving. Each chapter opens with an introduction to the topic that grounds their findings within the theoretical literature and previous empirical results on the subject. For example, the generativity chapter discusses the definitions and theories of generativity by well-known theorists such as Erikson (1963) as well as research explaining that specific behaviors of generativity are grounded in one’s culture (e.g., Gelder, 2007). They also posit that generativity may extend not only to younger generations but also to older relatives and community members (Black, Groce, & Harmon, 2017, p. 67). The chapters then go on to present selections from a handful of caretakers’ narratives which highlight aspects of their caregiving associated with that topic and then wrap up the chapter with a summary that recaps the common themes seen in the narratives, tying them back to the theoretical foundations from the beginning of the chapter.

Overall, the authors do an excellent job of making the stories of their participants come to life and of describing the essence of the caregiving experiences for their interviewees. However, the book and the research presented do suffer from a few limitations. Foremost among these is the method of obtaining participants and the generalizability of the sample. The 13 men interviewed within the study were each chosen due to their being known by the authors as eligible caregivers and were each from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. It is unclear how generalizable these results would be to other African American older adult male caregivers (e.g., those living in the Deep South). Although, as the authors point out, recruitment in qualitative research is purposeful, rather than random, the fact that most, if not all, of these participants were personally known to the authors introduces a possible confound in the interpretation of the results.

Another limitation of the study is that although there was a relatively wide range of caregiver ages (62–87) and duration of caregiving (2–25 years), very few types of caregiving roles were reported. All but one of the men reported providing care for either his wife or mother/mother-in-law. The only exception was an individual who, in addition to caring for his mother-in-law, also routinely did chores for his elderly neighbors. It would be interesting for future research also

to address other caregiving roles provided by older adult African American men, such as caring for their disabled children, or those raising their grandchildren, which is another quickly increasing and understudied “hidden” population (Patrick & Tomczewski, 2008).

In summary, *The Hidden Among the Hidden* provides valuable insight into a vulnerable and understudied group of caregivers and tells their stories in an engaging and fascinating style. It is a theoretically grounded piece of much-needed research that fills a gap in our knowledge, and the authors have managed to gain the trust and genuine responses and reactions of a population that has been betrayed in the past and is sometimes hesitant to participate in research. The fact that the authors themselves have served as caregivers may have led them to appreciate better the struggles of the men they interviewed, and their diverse backgrounds and skills have led to their presenting their findings in a compassionate yet accurate manner.

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