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Life As Gift: Spiritual Narratives of Elderly African-American Women Living in Poverty

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Abstract

Fifty elderly African-American women living in poverty were interviewed for a research project entitled, "Chronic Poverty and the Self in Later Life." Using four representative case studies from the 50 respondents, this article explores how their spirituality informs their ability to cope with poverty. A key theme emerging from the women's narratives is that their relationship with God, perceived as personal, reciprocal, and empowering, allows them to take an active and positive stance in viewing and interpreting the circumstances of their life. Their spirituality imbues their hardship with meaning, engenders self-esteem, keeps despair at bay, and grants hope for rewards both in this life and the next.



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