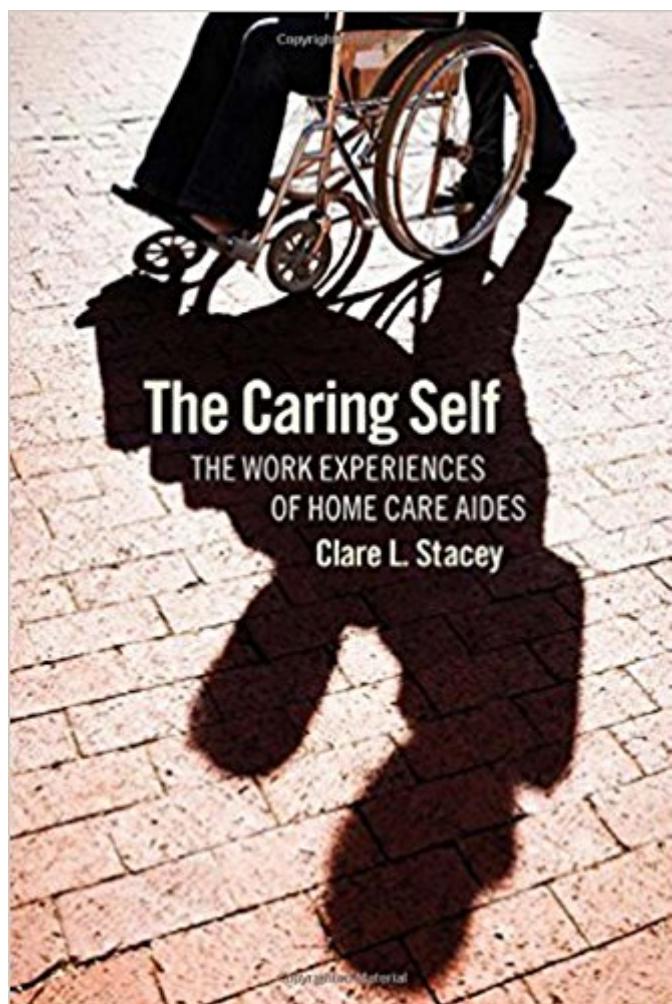


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# The Caring Self: The Work Experiences Of Home Care Aides (The Culture And Politics Of Health Care Work)



## Synopsis

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were approximately 1.7 million home health aides and personal and home care aides in the United States as of 2008. These home care aides are rapidly becoming the backbone of America's system of long-term care, and their numbers continue to grow. Often referred to as frontline care providers or direct care workers, home care aides—disproportionately women of color—bathe, feed, and offer companionship to the elderly and disabled in the context of the home. In *The Caring Self*, Clare L. Stacey draws on observations of and interviews with aides working in Ohio and California to explore the physical and emotional labor associated with the care of others. Aides experience material hardships—most work for minimum wage, and the services they provide are denigrated as unskilled labor—and find themselves negotiating social norms and affective rules associated with both family and work. This has negative implications for workers who struggle to establish clear limits on their emotional labor in the intimate space of the home. Aides often find themselves giving more, staying longer, even paying out of pocket for patient medications or incidentals; in other words, they feel emotional obligations expected more often of family members than of employees. However, there are also positive outcomes: some aides form meaningful ties to elderly and disabled patients. This sense of connection allows them to establish a sense of dignity and social worth in a socially devalued job. The case of home care allows us to see the ways in which emotional labor can simultaneously have deleterious and empowering consequences for workers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Clare Stacey's beautifully written sociological study of home health care workers in California and Ohio, *The Caring Self*, probes the nature of home health care work itself and the motivations of the workers. . . . Her wonderful, qualitative study of home care aides, which draws on interviews with 33 women, shows how deeply the relational component of care shapes the experiences of the job." *¶* Candace Howes, *Women's Review of Books* (May/June 2012) "By choosing to focus on an occupational group that has been largely invisible, Stacey reveals some unique aspects of emotional experiences and management among home care aides but also show how their emotional experiences are affected by their crisscrossing social locations. In so doing, she demonstrates how emotional resources are enabling home care workers to fulfill the values that authentically underlie their caring selves at the same time that framing their jobs in emotion-laden terms exempts them not just from higher pay and benefits, but from large-scale social policies guaranteeing worker protections." *¶* Citation by the Recent Contribution Award Committee (Emotions Section, American Sociological Association) "Given the low wages and lack of benefits, it should come as no surprise that more than half the PCAs in the United States receive some form of public assistance such as Medicaid, cash welfare payments, or food stamps (PHI, *Caring in America*, 2011). Equally unsurprising, very few PCAs are represented by a union. Beyond these broad descriptive strokes, we know little about this burgeoning workforce. But thanks to Clare Stacey's terrific new book, *The Caring Self*, we are beginning to learn. . . . Stacey's work vividly illustrates the humanity behind the dismal statistics on the care workforce. It is a profound revelation." *¶* Carrie R. Leana, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (July 2012) "Clare L. Stacey's in-depth interviews of home health care workers, each of whom constructs an account of a 'caring self,' lets us see behind the statistics. Here we see how poorly paid and marginalized workers positively construct their work and their lives. This book is thus a valuable contribution to understanding the lives of home health care workers, the unsung heroes of contemporary health care." *¶* Joan C. Tronto, University of Minnesota "This beautifully rendered portrait of home care aides illuminates a poignant paradox: the very commitments that lend meaning and dignity to care work often leave caregivers vulnerable to exploitation. Clare L. Stacey deftly situates her qualitative research within a larger critique of public policies that disrespect and discourage home care provision." *¶* Nancy Folbre, University of Massachusetts Amherst "Bringing the voices of home aides back into the conversation about long-term care, *The Caring Self* advances sociological

analysis on the relationship between work and identity formation. In offering a compelling argument for the revaluation of companionship as labor, it deepens our understanding of emotion work and the self-perceptions of those who tend to others out of an ethic of service rather than for monetary reward alone. In doing so, Clare L. Stacey helps explain why the union strategy of linking better wages to better care is so powerful and why wage gains without recognition of the dignity of the work are not enough."Ã¢â€¢ Eileen Boris, Hull Professor and Chair, Department of Feminist Studies, University of California Santa Barbara, coeditor, *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*

Clare L. Stacey is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Kent State University.

This book is an excellent read. Full of compassionate stories and great quotes from those interviewed! I recommend it to everyone.

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