The rate of suicide in the African-American (or black) population is somewhat of a paradox. The social circumstances of this group would lead one to predict high rates of suicide. Instead, despite recent increases in the rates of suicide among African-American youth, the rate of suicide continues to be lower among African Americans than among whites. In fact, of the 15 leading causes of death in the United States, suicide is the only example of a dramatically lower death rate for blacks than for whites.

Kevin Early begins with the hypothesis that the church in the African-American community is a protective social community that reduces the risk of suicide. In so doing he builds on Durkheim's notion that although suicide is a classic expression of individual behavior, it is nonetheless constrained by larger social forces. Specifically, Durkheim indicated that the absence of integration into religious communities or other social groups would increase an individual's risk for suicide. Early's focus on protective resources is a strength that balances the all too common focus on deficits and pathological conditions in the black population.

Early garnered evidence from participant observation, face-to-face interviews with 30 black clergy, and a survey of 220 attendees at black church services. However, the analysis does not sufficiently capitalize on the potential contribution of this multimethod approach. For example, the pastors' reports that they seldom, if ever, addressed suicide from the pulpit could have been compared to the findings from a content analysis of the sermons that Early had observed. Similarly, the data from the survey of church members are not particularly well integrated into the book. The marginals for the survey items are reported in a separate chapter. There is no attention to the reporting of subgroup differences in the distribution of survey responses, and it is not clear how much this final analysis chapter adds to the overall book.

Early concludes that the black church plays a critical role in reducing suicide. However, he is not sufficiently critical of his data. He appears to accept at face value the assertions made by the clergy. The book accepts at the outset the notion that the black church is central in the African-American community. It is noted that this centrality is repeatedly asserted by the ministers in interviews with them. Moreover, the survey of church members indicate that they share their minis-