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## **Flocking Together. An Indigenous Psychology Theory of Resilience in Southern Africa**

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Date of publication: October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Edition period: October 2019-February 2020

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**To cite this article:** Pukepuke, T. (2019). Flocking together. An Indigenous Psychology Theory of Resilience in Southern Africa. [Review of the book]. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 8(3),317-319.  
doi:10.17583/ijep.2019.4794

**To link this review:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2019.4794>

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# Review

Ebersöhn, L. (2019). *Flocking Together. An Indigenous Psychology Theory of Resilience in Southern Africa*. Switzerland: Springer.

Ebersöhn has harnessed the African principles of collectivism and reciprocity-of-care held within the concept of Ubuntu to highlight indigenous resilience responses to adversity. Resilience practices by communities are seen as a response to the acute and chronic adversity specific to the African experience; including health issues related to AIDs and tuberculosis, and subsequent pervasive community trauma of grief and loss. Ebersöhn provides the theoretical concept of Flocking as a relational interdependent adaptive response to the hardships experienced by indigenous African communities.

Ebersöhn alerts the reader to her close and long association with indigenous African communities, where much of her work in the field of resilience has relied on the deep set lived experienced of indigenous communities. Ebersöhn's individualistic psychological approach is coupled with her stated understanding of *her* difference, privilege and cultural disconnect; with references, footnotes and anecdotes to indigenous local African contributors to the project.

The unfolding stories of methodological challenge show how Ebersöhn has used participatory action research in sometimes unfamiliar environments; where she and the research team are differently distanced by race, ethnicity, geographic location, home language and culture. The use of personal reflexivity has been an effective tool by Ebersöhn who shows humility in her honest depictions of methodological moments between herself as a white researcher, while working with indigenous participants. Ebersöhn is able to recognise her privilege and 'outsider researcher' status that was at times offset by attempts by her research assistants to integrate

her into the communities by introducing her as ‘family’. Her accounts of data collection are peppered with stories of humility as she navigates the spaces that require collaborative responses with subsequent innovative solutions.

Ebersöhn’s impressive academic standing began under the influence of apartheid, and so is a reminder of the need for extra vigilance regarding historic, current and future privilege. Researchers would do well to consider the opportunity to privilege the indigenous voice through co-authorship with African/indigenous academics, research assistants and participants. Likewise, the term ‘indigenous researcher’ should be used with caution due to the confusing or ambiguous meaning.

By asserting the non-indigenous lens on Ubuntu there is likelihood of creating a distorted view of complex indigenous practices that are embedded in the lived experience of adversity and lack. It is not simply a community responding to their impoverished surroundings, or through an understanding of the socio-economic conditions that presupposes the systemic poverty of a community, and that in fact Ubuntu elements are deeply embedded in the psyche of these communities. The focus on *Flocking* also presupposes adaptation as the only means of change, naturally limiting the exploration in the research of resistance by indigenous groups to the socio-politico-economic forces at play.

Ebersöhn descriptive professorial touch has produced a densely written work with a strong theoretical approach. The work shines with indigenous stories of lived experiences in the face of adversity. For the non-indigenous researcher venturing into work with indigenous groups, geographically remote communities, and culturally different from themselves, the multitude of reflexive methodological stories provide a how-to guide of research methods. The book would have particular appeal for non-indigenous researchers wishing to explore in advance possible pitfalls of the ‘outsider researcher’ with communities dissimilar to themselves, and how the reflexive process can provide successful solutions.

The resultant stories from indigenous participants also provides the reader with clear examples of the way in which communities adapt to their circumstances, and will alert researchers and community workers alike to

successful adaptive techniques that may be transferred into other environments. For those in caring professionals the stories provide exemplars of resilience to provide sources of inspiration for practitioners and their communities wishing to find new and adaptive ways to bring about transformation.

This work is a formative exploration of shaping Ubuntu principles to fit with western psychological theory. It is redolent with the African experience, the enthusiasm and humour of the author, and the uplifting ways in which the indigenous preponderance to collectively seek to transform their own lives, and that of their communities.

### **References**

Ebersöhn, L. (2019). *Flocking together. An indigenous psychology theory of resilience in Southern Africa*. Switzerland: Springer.

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