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Conceptions of personhood in Ghana: An emic perspective

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Abstract

There are marked differences between conceptions of personhood from an African perspective and those of the West. Whereas in the West, personhood is conceptualized in Kantian terms, made up of the metaphysical qualities by which personhood is granted, a normative conceptualization of personhood exists in Africa. These differential conceptions have largely come from philosophical reflections and, predominantly, from etic perspectives. This study explored the conceptions of personhood among the Ewes and Akans in Ghana. Using a semi-structured interview guide, seven (7) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in a community in the Eastern Region and another in the Volta Region of Ghana. Thematic analysis revealed three main moral frames from which personhood is conceived: communal, divine and interpersonal, which showed a pervasive consequentialist social ethic. Out of these three broad moral frames emerged four themes, namely: 1) the metaphysical, 2) normative, 3) performative, and 4) spiritual dimensions. Participants alluded to how personhood is attained and how it is lost. Contrary to the Western metaphysical notions of personhood, personhood among Ewes and Akans is agent-centred. The implications of these conceptions for psychological practice in Ghana are discussed.

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Introduction

Though self-concept has traditionally been studied in social psychology, the broader concept of personhood has received less attention in psychology despite the rich literature developed on this concept in philosophy and cognate fields. Though the facts of the roots of modern psychology steeped in philosophy (Coons, 1994) is without controversy, in its quest to be accepted as a science, psychology weaned itself off certain topics considered to belong to the humanities and resorted to the adoption of ontology and epistemology from the natural sciences with the associated reductionist mind-set (Martin & Bickhard, 2013). One of the consequences of such reductionist approach is the oversimplification of the complex life of humans and our consequent failure to optimally understand the whole person (Martin & Bickhard, 2013). Interestingly, Martin and Bickhard hold the view that the focus of disciplinary psychology is to be able to understand, describe, predict and control the behaviour of a person. The question is: how is the object of enquiry, the 'person', construed, and how does an understanding of personhood shape the focus of modern psychology?

There is no single, universal way of living or defining others and the self (Chaudhary & Sriram, 2020). Consequently, there are marked differences between conceptions of personhood from an African perspective and that of the West. Whereas in the West, personhood is conceptualized in Kantian terms, made up of the metaphysical qualities by which personhood is granted, a normative conceptualization of personhood exists in Africa, based primarily, on intense sociality, and concern for the wellbeing of others (Ikuenobe, 2006). These differential conceptions have largely come from philosophical reflections, and predominantly from etic perspectives. In agreement with Nwoye (2007), it is the view of this paper that the Western perspective cannot help to achieve a holistic understanding of how the non-Westerner defines who a person is. Holding the view that the behaviour of the non-Westerner must be understood and explained from their cultural and environmental context, this study, therefore, aimed, primarily, at exploring the conception of personhood among the Ewes and Akans.

Defining personhood

There have been various attempts to define personhood. Stetsenko (2013), for example, defines personhood as "the sets of ideas about what constitutes humanness, how people come to be the way they are, and what makes each person unique" (p. 181). This definition is in sync with the objective of this paper which is to holistically investigate the person who engages in behaviours that are systematically studied under concepts such as personality in mainstream psychology (Martin & Bickhard, 2013). Moreover, the focus of this definition is not limited to the individual and their uniqueness but what the society considers as making an individual a person. From the Western ontological perspective, all human beings are persons since they have metaphysical qualities, a

soul or rationality, will or memory (Sulivan, 2003). According to this view, the self is considered as independent and separate from other people. Consequently, the individual's independence and uniqueness are held important (Nelson, 2009). Geertz (1975), for instance, defined a person as "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotions, judgment, and action organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background" (p. 48). This understanding of a person appears to have informed the trajectory of the development of hegemonic psychology.

The above definition contrasts sharply with the African view. Menkiti (1984) posits that the difference between "the African view of man and the Western thought is that: in the African view it is the community which defines the person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory" (p. 172). An instance of this distinction is in what is called family in Western and African settings. Mbiti (2008) exemplifies this difference in his description of what families are when comparing Africa to the West: "For African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America" (p. 104). Thus, while a family denotes, to a large extent, the nuclear family among Europeans, family includes uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews, and nieces, not to mention grandparents, among Africans. It is, therefore, not uncommon for an African to have multiple grandparents depending on the number of siblings and other cousins of their own parents.

Ontologically, in the African communal setting the individual owes his existence to other people including those of past generations and his contemporaries (Nwoye, 2017); he or she is simply part of the whole. It is, therefore, the community that makes, creates, and produces the individual (Mbiti, 2008). This communal spirit, also referred to as Ubuntu, is aptly captured by Mbiti as "I am, because we are: and since we are, therefore I am" (2008, p. 106). He suggests that this "is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man" (p. 109). Opoku (1978) corroborates this view and asserts that the life of an individual without interaction with others and their evaluation renders an individual as subhuman. In this sense, an individual is considered a person primarily with reference to interpersonal relationships. Individuals in a group are expected to have a sense of responsibility and obligation towards the growth, progress and future of the group. It is for this reason that African societies socialise their young members to take care not only conscientiously and willingly of the self but also that of others (Nwoye, 2017).

The wider ramifications of the philosophical categories of individualism and communalism within the scope of their practical impact deserve some considerations. Such considerations are imperative on the basis that the individualistic-collectivist continuum, or better, the independent-interdependent continuum, is premised on cultural values and practices that evolve based on the experiences, worldview, and aspirations of a society (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2016). For instance, the Western

countries have not always been individualistic (Danziger, 2013). Western individualist culture evolved out of centuries of philosophising by scholars such as Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hume, Mill and Kant (Danziger, 2013; Enslin & Horsthemke, 2016). Over time, it became the dominant cultural value of the West. This conception of personhood unearths how the individual is considered and defines their status in the society and consequently become the foundation upon which the entire social structure and institutions are fashioned (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2016). Mead (2019) underscored this fact when he conceded that current Western individualism evolved out of a collective past centuries ago. Furthermore, Mead (2019) also asserted that the individualistic culture that many Americans take for granted is far less prevalent globally and that the practicality of the concept is being eroded particularly among low-income populations within the USA who are unable to meet their personal needs as they used to do.

It is true that globalisation and international relations between countries have minimised the claim of any culture as being exclusively individualistic or collectivist. However, it is also true that no matter what the effects of globalisation has been on the mixture of cultures, there has always been a dominant underlying philosophy that informs mainstream cultures. Consequently, the African and some Eastern cultures have been identified as collectivist cultures (Triandis, 2001). Being a communal culture, African societies eschew actions that undermine unity and retard the progress of the community. These values are reflected in Articles 35(6) and 35 (8) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana that frown upon nepotism and corruption, for instance. The 1992 Constitution regards the state as a unitary country made up of different ethnic groups. To this end, it criminalises practices such as nepotism that have the tendency to discriminate one ethnic group against another in the appointment of state officials since Ghana practices a partisan-based democracy.

Ethno-philosophies and psychology

Lassiter (1999) describes ethno-philosophy as formal efforts to systematically describe traditional African beliefs and practices. These practices include, but are not limited to, songs, folktales, dirges, and initiation rites. The Ghanaian culture, like many other African cultures, has a rich foundation in folktales, songs, proverbs, and wise sayings that also serve as key sites for generating understandings on personhood. An unfortunate development in the early encounter of the West with Africa was in the Europeans referring to the behaviour and cultures of the Africans they found strange and could not understand as "primitive" (Douglas, 2013). In so doing, the knowledge forms were downgraded to being informal, and religious traditions and customs demonised (Osafo, 2016).

With the consolidation of colonialism, African systems were replaced with European ones glorified as formal and scientific. African philosophies, pedagogy and unwritten epistemology were relegated to the background while Western philosophies and

ideologies were transmitted and promoted through the school systems introduced by the colonialist (Mosweunyane, 2013). In this way, the colonialists supplanted African ways of educating members of their society with their own forms of education (socialization) by introducing their own values, worldview, and curricular that do not solve African problems. This effectively downgraded African knowledge forms, philosophies and ingenuity that got replaced by the Bible, for instance, and learning to read and write a foreign language (Mosweunyane, 2013).

Arguably, the result of the Westernisation of education in Africa, in part, has led to the demeaning and abandonment of African philosophies in the development of knowledge, even if such knowledge is for the consumption of the African. Meanwhile, it is generally accepted that the Ghanaian culture, like many other African cultures, has a rich foundation in folktales, songs, proverbs, wise sayings, etc. that give some initial ideas on what it means to be a person (Wiredu, 1992).

Methods

Study design

This study adopted a reflexive thematic analysis qualitative design towards attaining a rich understanding of processes underlying participants' thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and actions as regards the subject of enquiry, personhood (Braun et al., 2019; Flick et al., 2004). With its naturalistic and interpretative focus, we chose the design also with the aim of inquiring into situated experiences and encounters that enable the conceptualisation of the concept of personhood within their shared lived context. For this reason, they entered without presuppositions likely to taint the mainly inductively focused data collection process.

Research setting

Two sites were selected for data collection for this study: Akwapim Tutu in the Eastern Region and Taviefe in the Volta Region of Ghana. Tutu is one of the Akwapim towns located about 38 Kilometres north of Accra. Tutu is situated in the Akuapem North District and has a population of about 4,935 inhabitants who are Akans (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Taviefe, on the other hand, is in the Ho Municipal area and about 9 kilometres from Ho, the capital town of the Volta Region. The about 4,500 population are Ewes of the Ewedome (northern Ewe) extraction. The participants for this study are mainly peasant farmers with a few of them engaged in petty trading.

Participants

Participants' ages ranged between 18–77 years old (youth 18-35; men/women 36-59; elders 60 and above). A purposive sampling was used to select the exact age ranges for

the groups and a convenient sampling was used to select participants who were willing and had the time to take part in the discussions.

Procedure

At Tutu, a contact person introduced the researchers to the linguist of the chief and elders. After the traditional community entry rites of offering drinks and introducing ourselves, permission was granted for the interviews. Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were formed involving the chiefs/elders, women only and two mixed gender groups including the youth. The mixed gender and youth groups were met at a hotel while the chiefs were met at the palace. The women only group were also met in the house of one of the women who is a traditional leader. Considering the local conditions at Taviefe, a retired civil servant who is a respected senior citizen was chosen as the contact person instead of the chiefs and elders and he helped to recruit all the participants for three FGDs. His house served as the meeting place for all the interviews after an agreement was reached with the elders to have the interviews there. As a preliminary psychological study into conceptions of personhood in Ghana, the four groups of focused discussions were designed to capture the thoughts and shared meanings of the different age groups on the topic.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct all seven FGDs. The interview guide was first written in English and given to independent translators from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana to translate into the Ewe and Akan languages. The research team reviewed the translations to ensure that the two texts agree before use. Two members of the research team who are native Akan speakers led the interviews at Tutu. Another two, Ewe language speakers of the team, led the discussions at Taviefe. The discussions took about one hour, forty-five minutes on average.

To ensure anonymity of the responses, participants were identified by numbers instead of using their names. Thus, before responding to a question, the participants first mentioned their given number as identifier. This same system was used in identifying participants during transcription. A coding formula was designed to differentiate participants and the group by using the language spoken, gender, group, and identification number. Accordingly, an Akan male youth respondent with identifier number five was coded as AMY5 while the counterpart who is an Ewe was coded EMY5.

Steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The first step was through communicative validation. Throughout the interviews, the interviewers summarised ideas expressed by the participants and asked for their approval to be sure that their views were correctly captured. In addition, four interviewers took part in the discussions with the different groups in the two regions. Finally, during the analysis, we had group discussions to agree on themes and the extracts that best support the themes.

Ethical considerations

Before the start of each interview, participants were reminded that they had the right to discontinue participation at any point during the interview process if they felt uncomfortable for any reason. All the interviews were voice recorded upon receiving consent from all members of the groups. Participants were assured that the audio-recordings would be kept strictly confidential and would be used only for research purposes. None of the participants discontinued participation after the start of the interviews. They were compensated with phone credits for the interview which lasted between an hour to almost two hours. This study is part of a broader study that is exploring personhood from the African context. Given its exploratory nature with no potential for causing any harm, the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) of the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana, waived the ethical clearance demands.

Data analyses

The recorded interviews were first transcribed into the local languages and later translated into English. The researchers, four of whom are experts in qualitative methodology, rated the translations to agree on contested meanings. They further reviewed the transcripts and reached consensus on the precision and meaningfulness of the translation. It was agreed that where a phrase, an expression, a statement, or a term did not directly translate into English, it was to be maintained in its original form alongside a literal English translation. Guided by an emic analytical standpoint, we adopted an experiential thematic analysis that focuses on the participants' point of view in terms of what the concepts mean to them and their experience of the concepts in their social world (Braun & Clarke, 2013). We followed the 6-stage analytic approach recommended by Braun and Clarke which are familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). We thoroughly discussed the emergent themes to reach consensus on key terms and three main moral frames from which Ewes and Akans conceive a person.

Findings

Key terms

This study aimed at exploring how the Akans and Ewe people of Ghana conceive personhood. The study revealed that the Akans and Ewes have a complex, multidimensional conception of personhood. Among the Ewes, the words *amegbetor* and *ame* were used interchangeably for human beings in general and for a person. In this case, however, the word *amegbetor* was used in reference to human beings biologically. *Ame*, on the other hand, was used in multiple ways to refer to a person and personhood

by adding *nyenye* (to be) to form the noun *amenyenye* (personhood) literally to imply 'being a person'. To the interviewees, a person means, among other things, someone who is God-like, kind, compassionate, helpful, respectful, obedient to societal norms and an active participant in communal activities. The same goes for the Akans where a person is referred to as *onipa*. A human being is referred to as *ɔdasani* in Akan. However, this term was used often in pejorative terms to mean 'one to be afraid of' or 'bad person', someone that can get you into trouble, one who is not helpful, not truthful, is dishonest, to be feared, a spoiler, and a gossip.

Certain qualifiers were also used to denote a good person. In Akan, it is *nipa paa*, literally meaning 'very much a person', as if to say that such a person is more of a person than other persons. The Ewes qualify a good person with the action-oriented word *amewɔnutefe* which literally means someone who does what is right. Both Ewes and Akans describe a good person in terms such as, 'not difficult to relate to', 'not troublesome', 'someone you can reason with', 'someone agreeable', 'no evil mind', 'not stubborn' and 'not like half cooked cassava'. Conversely, a bad person among the Akans is referred to as *nimpan* connoting an empty human being. The Ewes use the negative form of the word used for a good person to describe a bad person, *amemawɔnutefe*. The *ma* after *ame* indicate the negation.

Moral frames of personhood

Three main moral frames from which personhood is conceived emerged from the analysis of the data, including communal, divine, and interpersonal, which showed a pervasive consequentialist social ethic. The findings point to the communal basis of personhood whereby the individual is considered void without communal endorsement. A person is also conceptualised to be endowed with divine qualities and therefore must exhibit those godlike characteristics to be acknowledged as a person. This, however, appears to reflect more of Christian perspectives as man being created in the image of God. Additionally, to be regarded as a person depends on how one relates to other people in the community or groups they belong to. Findings from an experiential thematic analysis reveal four themes. These themes that arise mainly from the three moral frames and underpin their conceptions are metaphysical, normative, performative, and divine/spiritual. Besides these four main themes, participants also mentioned how personhood is attained and could be lost.

Metaphysical

Both Akans and Ewes hold a metaphysical view of personhood. The view was that all persons are first and foremost human beings who are embodied and have mental capabilities as illustrated below:

> "My view is that, when we talk of a person, we refer to this body that we are all seeing, that has breath which holds the body together, and has a makeup as we are hearing each other talk together" (EME2).

> "Yes, a person is human being like all other people. When we say that, this human being is a person, it means he shares the same thought with you. The way you perceive him to be, that's how it truly is. Oh, we say this person is a good fellow because the thoughts behind what he is doing suit what you think of persons" (AFE4).

Other participants agree with this view. Thus, persons are basically biologically constituted, a necessary condition.

Normative

Within the normative, personhood is explained in terms of moral capacity and ability to live by societal norms – duties and obligations. To be accorded personhood status requires conducting oneself as expected of persons as illustrated in the quotes below:

> "Being a person has to do with what qualities you have as a human being. It concerns the qualities in an individual that is in line with norms of the group or community that the individual belongs to" (EMM2).

It is implied in the quote that certain behavioural and characteriological outcomes are expected from each person within the community and that these outcomes must of necessity accord with societal rules and norms before ascriptions of personhood can be made. One is therefore not accorded personhood if one's behaviour runs counter to rules and social harmony. As such, *"Amea nye nutefewɔla" (a person is one who is faithful) (EFW2)*. Another Akan participant had the following to say:

> "It depends on the person's understanding. If you are discussing something with the person and you can easily come to an understanding with the person, you can see that this person is *onipa paa*. What you tell the person s/he understands and what s/he tells you; you also understand. I mean you both think alike" (AMM4).

Performative

This is a theme that appears to emerge directly from the previous. Under this theme, personhood is conceived not only as values, character, or behaviour, but also in terms of practical role performances that in themselves are subject to societal and communal evaluation. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the person as a metaphysical entity and the community. This relationship is however skewed towards

the community and the person owes allegiance to participate in expected communal engagements. Such performances do validate one's personhood and nourishes the roles the person plays as facilitative and not a threat to social bonds. If there is a threat, the threat affects the person's integrity as a moral person whose space in the social contract must be expunged. The extracts below are illustrative of this:

> "Oh, the elders say "***ame le ame me***" figuratively meaning that you may be a human being but not be a person. An individual who displays personhood is one who helps others and is willing to freely share what s/he has with others. If the individual has a business, s/he employs his/her people to work to earn a decent living" (EMM3).

> "We call some people "*atemanmuhunu*" (useless persons). They live in the community but are worthless. They are empty humans. They are the ones who cannot help you when you are in trouble. But if you have someone in the community who does not empathise with others, does not contribute to communal work, even funerals, he or she does not attend. These are the ones we call useless persons in the community" (AFE1).

The above quote connotes the evaluative components of personhood. That is, who one is depends largely on what one does, which is evaluated in line with the norms of the group. Merely possessing qualities without expressing them to promote the communal good does not grant one the status of a person.

The Divine/Spiritual

Personhood conceived from the divine/spiritual perspective reflects the notion that to be a person is to have God-like characteristics. The Ewe and Akan conceptions of personhood are deeply steeped in their cosmology. While the Akans relate personhood to the *sunsum (Spirit)* and *okra (Soul)*, the Ewes link it to *bome* and *se,* the life driving force of God (Dzobo, 1992). However, it appears Christian influences may be responsible for how the belief is expressed in modern times:

> "I want to borrow from the story of how man was created from the bible. God said let us make man to be like us. The question is, what is God's nature that he wants to make man to be like him? How can we be like God so that all the characteristics of God which can be identified will be found in us? If those things about God can be found in you, then you can be called a person … Without those traits, you cannot be called a person. You may be a human being alright but without those characteristics you will not be a person" (EMM1).

> We glean from the quote a view that suggests that humans are made in the image of God and God is good as reflected in earlier publications (Adjei, 2019;

Gyekye, 1995; Majeed, 2017) who pointed to the Akan idea of the spiritual component of persons. By implication, there must be a spark of God in each human that should make humans intrinsically good. Based on this premise, it is asserted unequivocally in the voice above that not possessing and/or demonstrating attributes that are God-like such as love, kindness, politeness, empathy, helpfulness, among others, does not make an individual a person.

Discussion

This study set out to explore how personhood is conceived by the Ewes and Akans of Ghana. Thematic Analysis reveals the multidimensional nature of personhood conceptions among the people; metaphysical, normative, performative, and divine/spiritual. The prevailing view is normative: that is, personhood is conferred based on one's contribution to promoting the wellbeing of others and the community in general. The normative views give personhood a performative emphasis and is agency oriented. This, therefore, means that the metaphysical dimension, although necessary, is not a sufficient condition allowing personhood to be ascribed to someone. It is also interesting to note that the thought pattern of human beings is an essential component of personhood among the Akans and Ewes as it is considered closely connected with body functions and therefore morally evaluated as either good or bad. This finding collaborates the action-oriented nature of the mind as pointed out by Dzokoto (2020). The views sharply contrast with the Western view that is rooted in Kantianism. Kant held an ontological view of personhood that influenced contemporary Western conceptions of who a person is (Nelson, 2009). Apparently, Gyekye (1992), in his critique of Menkiti's (1987) exposition on personhood, seems to share the same perspective as Kant when he insists that human beings cannot fail at attaining personhood for not being able to meet certain standards and norms set by the community. This, he [Gyekye] believes is because all humans are inherently persons. Menkiti (1984), on the other hand, clearly subscribes to the empirical functionalism view of personhood which ascribes personhood to humans based on meeting the expectations and norms of society.

It is important to note that the idea of individualism has not always been the cultural practice of the West. This is evident in the work of Beattie (1980, p. 313) when he stated unequivocally that earlier Western European writers such as Levy-Bruh, Marcel Maus and Jacob Burckhart had expressed concern about the emerging concept of 'individual self-awareness' which they considered unnatural to human experiences. Thus, the significance of the collective has always played a central role in defining the status of the individual members. Furthermore, even in individualistic cultures, individual members do not have unbridled rights against the community just as the individual is not squeezed out because of the collective. Invariably, the valued unalienable human rights are expected to be exercised within the accepted social norms, values and ideals of responsibility and

respect of other people. Thus, human rights go alongside responsibilities. Members of any group are, therefore, expected to exhibit behaviours that promote communal wellbeing. The findings of this study go beyond the definitive positions of both Menkiti (1984) and Gyekye (1988) and point to the fact that though the Ewes and Akans think of personhood in functional terms, they also insist on the ontological reality of personhood.

Implications

From the findings of this study, it is clear that from the perspectives of the participants, being a person is first and foremost dependent on one's conduct. In essence, the value and importance of a person is not only to be biologically embodied but to bea moral person. A common refrain that runs through all the group discussions is that not all human beings qualify to be called persons because a person is someone who behaves as expected of human beings. The Ewe expression for this conception is *ame le ame me,* literally meaning a morally grounded person. The Akans may say *yɛwɔ nnipa ɛna yɛ wɔ onimpan*. The *onimpan* literally means an empty person who is void of societal norms. An individual, thus, risks losing their personhood status without these norms and values. Among the Ewes and Akans, therefore, to be regarded as a person and accorded the full rights as a citizen requires living according to the norms. This, therefore, requires building systems that will help to mould the accepted behaviours in the young members of the Ghanaian society in line with the traditional norms and conceptions of personhood.

The findings leave some implications including the need for psychological practice to incorporate this emic understanding of a person in its work with the people. For instance, beyond individually based therapies, there is the need also to go beyond the individual towards understanding how a person's behaviour influences and is influenced also by the context within which they live. This orientation to psychological practice, although a core value of community psychology, a contextually grounded community psychological practice needs to go beyond Westernised theories to formulating theories about the community-individual dyad from an emic perspective. Further, findings from this study also add strength to calls for incorporating spirituality and religion to modern psychological practice to understand how religion and spirituality, which are cultural forms, manifest in people's behaviour and how they can be harnessed to understand and to help individuals in their local communities.

More importantly, the emic conceptualisation of personhood has an enormous implication for a rethinking of key concepts of citizenship and citizenship behaviours towards building competent communities and promoting psychological sense of community among people. For instance, mainstream definitions of citizenship hinges basically on birth, adoption, parentage, marriage, and naturalisation. Findings from this study seem to suggest that merely being a citizen on the basis of these citizenship requirements may not be enough to ground an individual in a typical traditional

community as a person. This is because contribution to community welfare, harmonious living with others and being conscientious both for community and others' wellbeing might be used as an indicator of one's community membership. Based on this formulation, a 'foreigner' who is community- and others-minded is likely to be granted the status of a person in a community more than an indigene who shows less of those community values. These possibilities further the quest to explore in detail the association between local conceptions of personhood, citizenship, and citizenship behaviours in future studies.

Strength and limitations

This study although narrow in terms of its focus on only two communities in Ghana, is seminal and sheds important light and inspire effort for future studies to examine how such emic conceptions of personhood influence people's understanding of citizenship and citizenship behaviours, mental health and persons who suffer mental illness and other psychological and civic concepts. Given that an orientation towards enacting practical help to others, being community-minded, and possessing Godly virtues are key requirements participants appear to point to as necessary conditions for conferment of personhood. Future studies will need to deepen the understanding, for instance, on how those who are unable to perform such community functions on account of suffering some adversities in life are viewed and reacted to by others. In addition, Christian influences on modern conceptions of personhood must be further explored.

Conclusion

This article reveals the multidimensional nature of personhood gleaned from an emic perspective from two diverse ethnic groups in Ghana. We take cognisance of the rapid urbanization of Africa and the attendant mix of cultures into consideration. In this regard, one cannot describe Ghana as an exclusively collectivist society. Gated communities and high-walled houses keep neighbours out of everyday life in many urban areas. Somehow, individualism can be said to be alive in Africa today. Nonetheless, it can be argued that communal bonding and welfare remains the main strand of social life. Contrary to the Western metaphysical notions of personhood, personhood among Ewes and Akans is agent-centred, that is performative and evaluative, and based primarily on actions and consequences of one's behaviour. These conceptions have implication for psychological practice towards making the discipline of psychology culturally sensitive to the persons it studies and seeks to help.

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