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## Beyond Aesthetics: Exploring the Socio-Cultural Motivations behind Multiple Ear Piercings among Ghanaian Women

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### Abstract

This paper has examined the increasing trend of multiple ear piercings in women of Ghana who have gone beyond the superficial notion of beauty to explore the underlying socio-cultural meanings and inspirations. When it was a traditional or religious necessity to have one piercing, the practice has now become an individual and fashion expression due to a wide range of factors such as to express identity, adhere to current fashion, follow peer pressure, and be exposed to digital media content. In-depth interviews and visual observations were carried out on a purposively selected sample of young Ghanaian women who were aged between 18 and 35 using qualitative research approach. The results showed that to most of them, multiple ear piercings are not merely a form of decoration, but symbolic performances of independence, milestones of self-development, and a form of personal appearance. The participants tended to relate every piercing with an emotional incident, a change in life period or an attempt to regain control of their bodies. Further, peer networks, social media and celebrity culture were identified to have a significant impact on the decisions, and some women reported the tension between their piercing decisions and family or religious beliefs. On the whole, the paper has shown that ear piercing in Ghanaian women is an active cultural practice that echoes the changing ideas of womanhood, identity, and beauty in the modern society. It helps to expand the discourse of body politics, youth expression and the localisation of global standards of beauty.

**Keywords:** Ear piercing, Ghanaian women, identity expression, social influence, cultural transformation.

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### Introduction

The increase in popularity of multiple ear piercings amongst women in the modern Ghanaian society has been a commendable cultural and fashion trend that goes beyond choice of aesthetics into a more socio-cultural phenomenon. Historically, people used to be pierced on one ear in most Ghanaian cultures, as a rite of passage or cultural initiations (Opoku-Agyemang, 2014) <sup>[18]</sup>. But the growing popularity of women in modern society to have two, three, or more piercings in their ears is an indicator of a cultural change, where the personal expression, identity and contemporary factors are taking focus in body adornment.

This change cannot be considered on its own. It is conditioned through a complex association of social issues, such as peer pressure, fashion trends throughout the world, media representation, and changing views of femininity and individuality. Social media platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok are having an increasing impact on young Ghanaian women, particularly those in the urban settings, who follow the example of celebrities and influencers who demonstrate their fashion identity by means of elaborate ear piercings (Gyasi, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>. These platforms are not only the place of inspiration of style, but can be discussed as the place of bargaining personal and cultural identity in the globalised world.

In addition, the urge to have numerous piercings is normally accompanied with strong socio-psychological reasons, which may include the need to take control of the body, restore cultural traditions with a new twist, or fit in with a certain social group. Acheampong and Anarfo (2022) <sup>[1]</sup> state that such bodily practices as piercings and tattoos are becoming more popular among Ghanaian youth as their ways to express themselves and rebel against the strict traditional norms. To others it is a means of reconciling between values of the old and the new generation honouring the old and adopting the new.

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Peer pressure is also a major factor especially in school and university where fashion and conformity determines the decision making process. In such situations, more than one ear piercing can be regarded as stylish, trendy or as an indicator of being a sophisticated person. These impetuses are not that superficial; they are also linked to the changing gender standards, when Ghanaian women want to find new methods of emanating themselves in society visually and symbolically.

Moreover, body piercings have not been completely eliminated through spiritual and symbolic interpretations. Ear piercings are also considered a spiritual part of some ethnic groups, and the revival of various types of piercings could be an indication of a modern reenactment of the historical ways of body modification (Daitey & Bonnah, 2025) <sup>[9, 10]</sup>. This leads to a fusion of modernity and heritage such that the body is a canvas through which the individual and collective stories are told.

Although the multiple ear piercing is increasing in popularity, little academic work has been done to understand the socio-cultural reasons that contributed to the practice in Ghana. The majority of literature out there addresses general body modification or fashion trends in general and little has been addressed to this practice. Thus, this paper aims at bridging that gap by examining the complex causes of this phenomenon. It will explore the role played by tradition, identity, media, fashion, and peer forces as a whole in influencing the decision to embrace multiple ear piercings among the Ghanaian women regarding what this says about the larger cultural shifts within the Ghanaian society.

### Literature Review

Body adornment in terms of piercing is not a current phenomenon and it has been entrenched in the different cultures of the world since many centuries. Traditional ear piercing is a tradition in Ghana particularly among the women. What has however varied a lot over the past few years is the rate and the reason behind the ear piercing as more and more Ghanaian women decide to get more piercings beyond the traditional one lobe. This literature review examines the historical, cultural, social and psychological aspects that put this new trend in perspective.

### Conservative views towards ear piercing in Ghana

Historically ear piercing in Ghana was a highly symbolic affair that could be associated with rites of passage, femininity and status in the society. In Akan and Ewe community, e.g., ears piercing of a girl baby denoted her integration in the family and preparedness to abide by the moral and societal demands of womanhood (Opoku-Agyemang, 2014) <sup>[18]</sup>. Such single piercings occurred frequently during childhood, which was the cultural continuation and identity transfer within the family.

According to Agyekum (2016) <sup>[3]</sup>, the kind and style of earrings worn by certain ethnic groups was also used to denote the social status or marital status. Although these conventional meanings have not entirely been forgotten, new interpretations at present portray a fusion of cultural and continuity as well as a fusion of cultural and reinvention. An ear piercing among many women today is still done in childhood, though the tendency to get second, third or even fourth piercing comes out strongly during adolescence or adulthood, and the intent is entirely different.

### Fashion, Media Influence and Trends Globally

Ghanaian women are greatly influenced by the trends in fashion and media on the practice of body modification. Instagram, Snapchat, or Tik Tok are flooded with the pictures of celebrities and influencers who wear several piercings as the elements of their personal style and brand (Gyasi, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>. The young women in Ghana who consume these images will tend to manipulate such aesthetics globally to meet the local fashion sense. As Adjepong and Anarfi (2021) <sup>[2]</sup> suggest, media exposure and changes in body self-expression among Ghanaians in urban areas are strongly correlated.

Multiple ear piercings have become synonymous with modernity, confidence and in a few instances rebellion due to globalisation of fashion trend. Contrary to previous generations who might have considered more piercings as dirty or even un-couth, the young people today are increasingly identifying with it as part of their beautification and expression of identity. Availability of piercing studios in such cities as Accra and Kumasi and accessibility to up-to-date jewellery also lead to the popularity explosion.

### Construction of identity and Expressing Self

In addition to fashion, several ear piercings are also more often regarded as the proclamation of individuality and the declaration of individual agency. According to Acheampong and Anarfo (2022) <sup>[1]</sup>, body modification in Ghanaian youth (such as piercings) is a process of often defying the traditional norm and carving individual personal identities. The trend is in line with the global changes where the body is considered a canvas on which stories and self-expression are done (Atkinson, 2004) <sup>[6]</sup>.

The trend has been noted especially among the university students and young professionals in Ghana who wear the piercings not just to demonstrate their aesthetic value but also to show independence, creativity, or group membership. According to some studies based on interviews, women who have several piercings tend to relate their piercings to their empowerment, confidence and their freedom to choose the way in which they want to project themselves to the world (Boaten and Owusu, 2019) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### Peer and Social Influences

Peer pressure is a critical factor in the process of making piercing decisions, particularly in adolescents and young adults. Within school and tertiary settings, social groups can be a source of trend spreading in which acceptance and adoration may be conditional upon a shared fashion and grooming. Kugbey *et al.* (2021) <sup>[14]</sup> argue that young people in Ghana are likely to follow the group norms when it comes to dressing and body modification to receive social acceptance or approval.

In most instances, several piercings are promoted by peers or celebrities and this social support serves as an influencer to others to do the same. The need to blend or be considered as fashionable can thus not be ignored in explaining the popularity of this trend.

### Spirituality, Tradition, and Cultural Reinterpretation

Although modernity takes center stage in most discussions on multiple ear piercings, there are still the spiritual and cultural aspects that still exist, though in subtle ways. Agyekum (2016) <sup>[3]</sup> points out that a certain number of Ghanaian women continue to perceive the body adornments as symbolic and associated with the spiritual protection or

blessing. In others, piercing more than once can be re-contextualised in a spiritual context, e.g. adorning with certain ear jewellery to keep away bad spirits or to heal.

This mixture of spiritual customs and modern aesthetic ambitions depicts a kind of hybridity of culture that is gaining momentum in the Ghanaian urban life. It also addresses a larger deviation in which modern youths still have a bond with heritage but update it to fit the contemporary tastes.

### **Necessity of the Localised Study**

Although multiple ear piercings are becoming more popular in Ghana, scholarly studies that specifically address the practice are scarce. A lot of literature around is more inclined to study a broad subject of body modification, fashion trends, or gender expression without a particular focus on ear piercings. This paper aims to fill this gap by narrowing down to the motives, meanings, and consequences of multiple ear piercings among Ghanaian women in the various social settings.

### **Methodology**

Through this section, the approach, design, population, sampling strategies, data collection processes and validation strategies that will be used in this study are outlined. The methodology was constructed with extreme care to facilitate rich and contextual insights into the motivations of several ear piercings among Ghanaian women, especially in their own voices.

### **Research Approach**

The research design used in the study is qualitative research design, this is best suited in a study focusing on the lived experiences, perceptions, and cultural meanings that the participants attributed to their body modification practices. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) [8], qualitative research is most suitable in research studies that aim at understanding what the individuals or groups of people have in mind about a social or human issue. As the objective of the research was neither to measure tendencies nor to quantify them, in this way, it was possible to more subtly delve into personal lives to understand what socio-cultural driving factors inspired people to pierce their ears many times.

### **Research Method**

The qualitative framework involved the application of a phenomenological approach. This approach allowed the researcher to investigate and describe the common experience of the women who had been pierced on their ears many times and dwell on their subjective interpretation and the social context of their decisions (Moustakas, 1994) [16]. By using in-depth interviews, the participants were able to think over what motivated them, what influenced them, and perceive the reaction of the society to their decisions.

### **Population for the Study**

The population used in this research was the Ghanaian women between the ages of 18 to 35 years with two or more ear piercings. This is the age group selected as this is a generation that is more exposed to the modern trends, world media and a changing social norm. Applying the study to urban centres, namely Accra and Kumasi, other places that are more prone to the trends of fashion and social diversity, the study concentrated on the two.

### **Sampling Technique**

The participants were recruited through a purposive method of sampling, as only the people who met the criteria and were ready to share their experiences were included in the study. Patton (2015) [19] explains that purposive sampling is useful in cases where the researcher is interested in individuals that have certain traits or an understanding of the topic. Snowball sampling was also used to inform the sampling process whereby the initial participants were used to refer other people in their networks who equally met the inclusion criteria.

A total of 20 subjects were chosen and this was enough to saturate the data since same themes started being identified in subsequent interviews.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to collect data, which ensured flexibility in the interviewer to explore deeper into the responses of the participants, not forgetting that major themes would be covered. The interviews took a duration of 30-60 minutes and were either in English or Twi depending on the preference of the respondent. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed word-to-word, with the consent of the participants. There were also field notes to document non-verbal communication and the situation of the discussions. Information Authentication and reliability.

In order to provide the credibility of the findings, a number of strategies were used:

Coherence was ensured by the use of member checking, in which the subjects were given a summary of what they had said so as to verify their own accuracy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) [15].

- The transferability was also improved through the rich and thick description of the study setting and background of the participants that enabled the reader to know the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings.
- Dependability was also achieved by keeping a detailed account of research process such as decisions made during data collection and analysis.
- Confirmability was ensured by having an audit trail of the tape of interviews, transcriptions, notes of coding and notes of analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The approval of the institutional review board was sought out. Each participant was informed about the study goal and his or her right to confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation. The informed consent was obtained before the interviews in the form of written consent.

### **Results and Discussion**

The interviews with 20 Ghanaian women provided the data that has led to several major themes that cannot be attributed only to the socio-cultural reasons that influenced the choice of women in acquiring multiple ear piercings. The following are these themes:

#### **Demonstration of Individuality and Liberty**

Most respondents explained numerous ear piercings as an individual decision based on identity creation and self-

identification. The choice was a way of reasserting possession of their bodies, to some of them, especially in a society where beauty among women is usually controlled by conventional standards. Respondents stressed the fact that their piercings represented not only decorations, but also visible symbols of independence, creativity, and individuality.

One respondent shared:

“The second piercing and the third piercing was not about beauty when I made the decision. I was simply saying, I have a choice on what to do with my body. It gave me courage.”



Source: By Researcher, 2022

**Fig 1:** Close-up photo of a participant's ear showcasing three piercings with different styles of earrings—each representing a different phase of her life.

This finding aligns with the argument by Atkinson (2004) [6], who states that body modifications such as piercings often serve as "bodily texts" through which people narrate their identities. Participants also linked their piercings to their personalities—some choosing minimalist studs for a subtle look, while others preferred hoops and cuffs to reflect boldness.

The data suggests that multiple ear piercings, while aesthetic on the surface, are deeply tied to individual journeys of self-definition, especially among women navigating changing gender in Ghana

#### **Social Media and Celebrity Culture Influence.**

One of the most prevailing themes was the powerful role of social media and worldwide celebrity-culture. Almost the participants cited as having been inspired by personalities on such platforms as Instagram and TikTok where celebrities and influencers could display ear jewellery trends.

One participant said:

“I was looking at a picture of Rihanna having approximately five piercings and it seemed so strong. That image stuck with me. I did not imitate her, but the fact that she was daring made me realise I could be daring as well.”(Participant 13, Age 22,

This fact is in line with the thesis presented by Atkinson (2004) [6], who says that body modification like piercings can be an important text where individuals describe their identities. The respondents also associated their piercings with their personalities as some picked tiny studs so that they would be able to have a conservative appearance and others wore hoops and cuffs to display daring.

The information indicates that various ear piercings, which look aesthetical at the outset, have close relationship with personal experiences of self-definition, particularly among women who negotiate through evolving gender roles in the urban Ghanaian society.

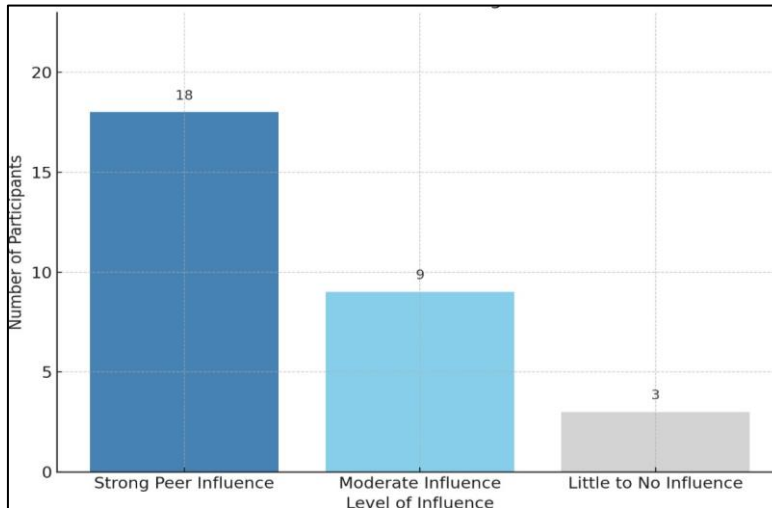
Kumasi)

The participants also reported that trending forms of body modification were frequently shown to them through social media algorithms and thus become more desirable and normalized. This is indicative of the findings by Daitey, *et al.* (2025) [9, 10] that social media in Ghana is a catalyst of fashion particularly to young people who want to acquire modern identities.

Besides, the intention to experiment with piercings was also stimulated by peer conversation on WhatsApp and Tik Tok about challenges involving fashion and body art. The majority of participants however explained that although social media gave them inspiration, their ultimate choice was a very personal one and depends on the way the appearance made them feel not necessarily following the trends.

#### **Peer Pressure and Seeking Social Acceptance**

One of the reasons that were mentioned by the participants was friends and peer groups which encouraged the participants to have more than one ear piercing. At school, in a university, or workplace, most of them said that they felt encouraged (or even pressured) to have a piercing after they saw friends with multiple piercings.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Fig 2: Peer Influence on Piercing Decision: Number of participants citing friend-based encouragement or influence.

A participant stated:

“In the case of my entry into the university I saw that many girls had multiple piercing. It was natural and I did not want to appear out of date. So I had mine done as well.”

This fashion highlights the notion of piercings as forms of social money. To other women, it was a way of fitting or a way of indicating that they were aligned to a certain group or trend. Some others told how piercings made them feel better during social events or stylish with their peers.

Kugbey *et al.* (2021)<sup>[14]</sup> claim that the behaviour of Ghanaian youth is mostly adjusted depending on the social acceptance, which is why this observation confirms this belief in the framework of personal grooming. The pressures, however, were not necessarily always external, to some it was their

own groups’ comparisons, the desire to be as bold, or to make a statement of fashion with their peers.

**The Tradition and Modernity: Negotiating**

One of the most informative things that were found is how respondents referred to their piercings as a combination of old and new. Certain women revealed that their grandmothers or mothers did single piercing due to either cultural or symbolic reasons, they perceived multiple piercings as a means of keeping that tradition modern and still continuing the tradition.

One participant noted: My grandma has a single piercing and it is a part of our culture. I possess four, yet I still feel like being connected to her. It is something similar to what she did, but modernized (Participant 09, Age 28, Kumasi)



Source: By Researcher, 2022

Fig 3: Cultural Evolution of Ear Piercing: From Traditional One-Pierce Norms to Contemporary Multi-Pierce Styles Among Ghanaian Women.

This observation is in line with Agyekum (2016) <sup>[3]</sup>, who pointed out that younger generations are redefining traditional body adornments as cultural artefacts as well as contemporary fashion. The participants did not see a conflict in the modernisation of traditional symbols, they believed that their bodies could somehow pay a tribute to the past and, at the same time, address the present.

Interestingly, although the majority of respondents indicated that they were not judged at home, some respondents indicated opposition to the older members of the family which resulted in discussions about the difference in the way the generations perceived the meaning of beauty, freedom,

and respectability.

### Symbolic and Emotional Meaning

Interestingly, a few of them used personal and emotional connotations to their piercings. Indicatively, some few women mentioned that every piercing was a significant event in their lives- a graduation, a break-up, or a new job. These piercings were donned as memory badges.

My second piercing was done after the death of my father. It is tiny, yet it recalls me of that season and how I was able to get over it. (Participant 16, Age 26, Accra)



Source: Photographed by Researcher, 2023

Fig 4: Caption: Assorted ear styles from participants showing diverse combinations for weddings, and casual outings.

This theme gives more psychological meaning to the dialogue. Although body modifications are perceived as frivolous or cosmetic, this observation is consistent with the claim by Acheampong and Anarfo (2022) <sup>[1]</sup> that the body art in Ghana may have therapeutic or symbolic value to the youth going through emotional complexity.

It also displays the concept of Atkinson (2004) <sup>[6]</sup> that the body is a canvas of lived experience. Participants also saw their ears not only as a location of beautification, but of memory, pain and growth that could be inscribed and carried quietly.

### Consciousness of Fashion and Beauty

Another prompt that was identified by the participants as a strong motivator of multiple ear piercings is the aesthetic satisfaction and the fashion flexibility that it provided. Women said that more piercings allowed them to change the jewellery they wore, mix types of earrings, and change their appearance depending on the occasion.

One participant shared:

I have three piercings, which I can play with studs, hoops, and cuffs. It renders me fashionable and contemporary particularly when I wear at events.

The respondents said that they selected the aesthetics not only by trends but by the willingness to match various hairstyles, clothes, and make-up. Others also considered the ear a sort of a canvas, which resembled the idea of body art as a form of aesthetic self-expression as put forward by Atkinson (2004) <sup>[6]</sup>.

This observation can be referred to as similar to what Okonkwo (2010) <sup>[17]</sup> noted that African women are turning to fashion such as body adornments as a means of self-

confidence and visual branding. Ear piercings present a discreet fashion statement in a place or environment where beauty and modernity are becoming inseparable (Amankwah- Amoah, 2016) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Further, the interviewees considered their piercings cheap and temporary in contrast to other forms of beauty (including tattoos or body modeling). This availability made them attractive particularly to students and young professionals.

### Religious and Ethical Stressors

Although majority of the respondents accepted their piercings, some of them admitted that there was constant internal or external tension due to religious ideologies. Many of the women cited that their churches or Christian groups disapproved of multiple piercing describing it as secular or insubordinate.

One participant revealed:

“My first two piercing experiences had my pastor preaching against piercing, which is why I nearly did not get my third piercing. However, I also have realised that it is a personal religion and God listens to the heart, not ears.” (Participant 05, Age 23, Kumasi)

Some others talked about walking the fine line, taking the earrings off to go to church or getting smaller, less noticeable forms of studs when getting to see more conservative members of the family. This selective display reveals how women have been active negotiators of identity on spiritual and moral systems.

This observation is indicative of Gyekye (1996) <sup>[13]</sup> concept that Ghanaians tend to have a dual culture that is of one one foot, they have straddled modern lives, and on the other foot,

they have followed traditional or religious cultural values. It also reflects the observation of Appiah (2015) <sup>[5]</sup> that Ghanaian young people often redefine the expectations of religion to be in tune with the freedoms of a person.

Those that were morally judged reported that they took comfort in self-acceptance and peer support. This strengthened the premise that piercing choices frequently create larger ethical discussions, so that ear is not only a location where ornamentation is made, but also a location where social deals are struck.

### Discussion

This work aimed at investigating the socio-cultural reasons as to why multiple ear piercing is gaining momentum among the Ghanaian women. Several important themes were developed through detailed interviews and the thematic analysis. Each of these themes is discussed reflectively in the following discussion and their experiences of the participants connected to the existing literature and cultural realities.

#### Acting on Personal Identity and Autonomy

The ability of people to express themselves through the use of multiple ear piercings as a statement of personal identity and independence was one of the most powerful messages that came out of the participants. The piercings were an act of reclaiming of body agency, particularly in young women who are negotiating traditional gender expectations. This is in agreement with the writings of Atkinson (2004) <sup>[6]</sup> who said that body modification is an embodied resistance, a method by which individuals write their stories on their bodies.

This finding in the Ghanaian setting where the society to date, lays significant emphasis on the way women look and act, is an indication of a subtle but significant shift to individual self-determination. A lot of the participants interpreted their piercings as a decision that they made on their own conditions not to get approval, but to affirm. The concept that beauty should be adjusted to hereditary standards was questioned, and the space was opened in which women could express themselves and be more fluid. This is an indication of change of generation in Ghanaian women whereby they are redefining their role in the society not by vocal rebellion but by sensual, bodily expressions of freedom.

#### Effects of the Social Media and the Celebrity Culture

The power of the online platforms and the role of the celebrity icons was reflected in the way the participants explained their choices in piercing. The social media, particularly Instagram, Tik Tok, pin boards, and similar platforms, were critical in promoting and popularizing the idea of multi-piercing. This confirms the claim by Gyasi (2020) <sup>[12]</sup> that fashion trends among Ghanaian youth are becoming more influenced by the online space as opposed to more conventional and local norms.

Nevertheless, the answers of the participants also point out an essential exception the social media did not trigger blind following. Instead, it was a visual suggestion board upon which the participants chose things that appealed to their personalities. They did not just imitate the looks of celebrities but modified those concepts to fit their own identities, usually mixing them with local modes of style.

This is an indication that globalisation is actually not eliminating local culture but engaging it dynamically. The practices of global beauty trends are not passively followed

by Ghanaian women, instead they are selecting their identities by exposing themselves to the worldwide beauty culture, filtering the trends by their cultural values and stories.

#### Peer Influence and Social belonging Statement

The peer influence factor proved a powerful social motivation factor in the choice to have repeated piercings. To most participants, their social context, especially campuses and workplaces provided them with an aesthetic standard, which they were obliged to achieve. This is reminiscent of the results of Kugbey *et al.* (2021) <sup>[14]</sup>, who reported the strong impact of peer norms on self-image and decision-making of youth in Ghana.

Funny enough this influence was not always felt as pressure. Instead, it was commonly characterized positively, as inspiration or encouragement. Friends were used as sounding boards or companions in piercing decisions in other instances, making the act a communal bonding and self-discovery.

This brings out the larger aspect of fashion and body decoration in ensuring that a sense of community and identity in peer groups. Piercings, especially in the culture where belonging is important, became more than expressions of individuals, but also social expressions that allowed those involved to feel accepted, relevant, and fashionable in their groups.

#### The art of negotiation: Tradition and Modernity

Some of the participants talked of their piercing decisions as a compromise between old and new cultures. Though ear piercing has been a cultural practice in Ghana even though it was traditionally practiced in only one of the ear lobes, as a sign of femininity and maturity, those involved added further piercings to it and considered it as modernising their culture without necessarily throwing it away.

This observation confirms the argument made by Agyekum (2016) <sup>[3]</sup> to the effect that body adornments within the Akan and greater Ghanaian culture possess a multifaceted interpretation, which changes with time. Participants were keen on cultural continuation, as most of them mentioned that their mothers or grandmothers had single piercings and that they wanted to continue this legacy- albeit in a more reinvented way.

These adjustments indicate the extent to which the contemporary Ghanaian women are striking a balance between meeting their cultural needs and the liberty to make their own choices. Such a duality of both tradition and innovation is a characteristic trend of the modern youth culture and identity is both an inherited and created one.

#### Symbolic and Emotional Value

In addition to aesthetics and fashion, an eye opener was the emotional attachment that the participants gave to their piercings. Some of the women associated each piercing with some life event, such as happiness or sorrow, healing, and success. These incredibly personal stories resonate with the idea that was put forward by Atkinson (2004) <sup>[6]</sup> in defining the body as a practice of inscribing memory, where the scars, piercings, and tattoos become a reminder of the life experiences.

In Ghana where emotional expression is not always culturally acceptable, particularly among women body art may be proving to be a silent but nonetheless effective escape. They

used their ears as participants; memory keepers - writing down losses, transitions, or victories in a way they alone were able to make sense of. This provided their piercings with many layers of symbolic meaning significantly more than meets the eye.

These results also contribute to the fact that Acheampong and Anarfo (2022) <sup>[1]</sup> note that body modification in Ghana is usually therapeutic and assist the young population in complex emotional processing. To these women, piercing was not an outward but an inward process, a process of space holding to heal, grow and nurture.

### **The Fashion Consciousness and Aesthetic Appeal**

The choice to have numerous piercings was majorly fashion based to most participants. Piercings were versatile in that they could change their appearance, match earrings to clothing or just make a statement in a crowd. This is in line with the observation made by Okonkwo (2010) <sup>[17]</sup> of the contemporary African women as strategic fashion consumers, who consider beauty and fashion as a means to demonstrate confidence and status.

The most interesting part was, though, how piercing was not perceived as a shallow fashion but as a considered personal image. Participants looked selectively about their appearance; they made ear jewelry selections that conveyed mood, personality, and event. This is an indication that body decoration is being promoted to wearable art in urban Ghana. Earrings were also attractive because of their availability when compared to other fashion products. Respondents observed that earrings are inexpensive and can be changed all the time unlike hairstyles or expensive designer clothes making multiple piercings a brilliant and clever trend. Such practical but expressive aspect shows the extent to which style is incorporated into the daily life and self-perception.

### **Religion and Moral Conflicts**

Although there is a rising trend of having more than one ear piercing, some participants told of religious or moral dilemma. In some Christian societies and particularly the conservative ones body alterations such as extra piercings are discouraged. Those who were in such religious sects referred to either hiding their piercings in church or receiving reproach on the part of church leaders and relatives.

This is in line with the claim by Gyekye (1996) <sup>[13]</sup> that a good number of Ghanaians live with a cultural dualism that is, they are attempting to balance the traditional or religious demands with the modern values. Whereas some respondents were not afraid to understand their faith more personally, others struggled with the feeling of guilt or fear of being judged.

The result of these strains, though, was strength. The participants had solutions to retain their beliefs, as well as, their own expression. By so doing, they transformed the concept of spirituality in their own fashion- they demonstrated that the idea of religious devotion did not necessarily conflict with personal style. This shows that there is a perpetual cultural debate in Ghana regarding the limits of morality, modernity, and body freedom.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed at identifying the latent socio-cultural driving factors that contribute to the increasing popularity of multiple ear piercings among Ghanaian women. Although ear piercing is not a new concept in Ghana, as a cultural practice usually introduced by a single piercing in each ear, the

present study indicated that modern Ghanaian women are adopting multiple piercings in their ears with much deeper motive than appearance or style. The results revealed a delicate, highly individual, and intergenerational-socially entrenched practice that is also indicative of general changes in identity, autonomy, social norms, and generational values. One of the main themes that came out was the need to express individual identity and independence. Most respondents considered their piercings as being conscious, symbolic, little but strong statements of self-identification in a world that still has pressures about how women are expected to appear or how they ought to act. In this respect, various ear piercings turned into the means of control over the body and a creation of an original identity and a celebration of the personal development or achievements. These women did not appear as agents of trends but instead as considerate guardians of their looks and stories.

The power of the social media and celebrity culture cannot be dismissed. Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest have exposed the global aesthetics to the young Ghanaians and they have discovered how to experience beauty plural and unconventional at times in many folds. The study however found that women were not merely copying the influencers, but in fact, they were localizing the global trends in a way that made sense in their local settings, cultural sensitivity, and tastes. The virtual world, therefore, serves as an intermediary, rather than an alternative to cultural expression.

Influence of peers and the necessity to belong to a social group were also a big factor. In the social environment, like the university, workplaces, friend circles, multiple piercings are often hardly explained other than as peer pressure.

Rather, it was a community affair a way to exchange fashion experiences and connect with each other in the exploration of the norms of the beauty. One of the most sensitive themes was presumably the negotiation between tradition and modernity. Although the cultural values that the participants were inheriting included those they passed down by their parents and elders, they also had to redefine them in accordance with the contemporary ideals of freedom and creativity. The cultural balancing act is an expression of how the Ghanaian woman in the present day is not only grounded but also recreated living by the traditions even though she is accepting change.

The study had a certain depth attributed to it through the emotional and symbolic meanings of each piercing. Certain piercings symbolized recovery of trauma, the recollection of a loved one, or the commemoration of individual success. This observation implies that the practice of adornment is frequently a strongly therapeutic and imaginatively invigorating affair despite lack of apparent expression to an external observer.

Naturally, one of the driving forces was fashion. Respondents enjoyed the flexibility with which multiple piercings provided in fashion and self-representation. However, even in the style, they wore clothes with a purpose, trying to be creative, self-confident, and amazing without the need to contradict personal principles.

Lastly, the study also revealed the moral and religious issues that were forced to be faced by some of the participants. The act of piercing was in conflict with religious teachings or the conservative family values to some. However, despite such moments of conflict, members were resilient enough to negotiate how they would still be able to keep both their faith and their own sense of style.

To sum up, several ear piercings in Ghanaian women are much more than a fad in beauty. They are a mirror of changing identities, changing social relations and a silent claim to independence in the fast-modernising society. Although this is an outwardly visible practice, the meaning within it is rich and should be noted as a symbol of the modern Ghanaian womanhood with all its complexity.

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