

# Women of color struggle with 'ideal' hairstyling

■ Many black women face dilemmas when trying to make their hair fit into the standard

By Caron Alarab  
Oregon Daily Emerald

In a hair care world where "straight, shiny and easy to manage" is the ideal, women with naturally coarse hair struggle with issues ranging from damaging products to limits on what activities or pastimes can be enjoyed considering a hairstyle.

"It's not socially acceptable to have black hair," said Black Women of Achievement member Sharitha McKenzie, "Like there's a certain way you're supposed to look."

McKenzie, a freshman student of color, said one focus of recent BWA efforts has been the battle with the image of "ideal" hair and how it affects the black woman's pride. Members had planned on hosting a BWA Hair Care Day for youth and other community members of color at 6 p.m. Friday in the Multicultural Center, she said.

However, the event conflicted with the Oregon State University Juneteenth Celebration, hosted by the Eugene-Corvallis chapter of black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha. Many members of BWA are also members of AKA.

"We wanted to promote maintenance and self-esteem building for

women who struggle with their hair everyday," she said. "Some people don't understand how much of an effect it has on the lifestyles of women of color."

McKenzie said black women used to resort to grease as a treatment, which clogs pores and doesn't allow the hair to grow. Two preservation tactics she said she has used for hairstyles are sleeping on her face and staying out of the rain.

"It prevents black women from doing things they want," she said, "Especially if you don't have a perm or a relaxer."

McKenzie said the dilemma of hair care for all women is that the very chemicals that straighten, shine and relax the hair from day to day actually severely damage it in the long run.

"A lot of people wonder why black women usually have short hair," she said. "The problem is so simple and so complex at the same time."

Conditions caused by certain styling techniques and products that pull excessively on the hair, such as straightening and perms, result in breakage of the hair shaft and an undamaged scalp, which causes the hair to split and break off at short lengths instead of grow.

"Every hairstyle has a consequence," she said.

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Thomas Patterson Emerald

Hair is a statement of pride for freshman Sharitha McKenzie, who says it's one way she affirms her African American heritage.

# UO CyberSisters program links young women with technology

■ Women mentors provide a way for middle school girls to get involved with science and technology through projects

By Mikhael Romain  
for the Emerald

University women who have space in their fall schedules and

creative energy to spare can fill some of their free time by becoming a mentor to middle school girls looking to learn more about technology.

The CyberSisters program creates friendships between University women and middle school girls by pairing them to engage their minds in technology and science.

"Culturally and socially, research shows that girls begin to self-select themselves out of math, science and technology subjects because they feel they are incapable. We are trying to change that," said Ann Fuller, director of CyberSisters.

The CyberSisters program originated in Eugene in 1997 from a

program called "EMPOWER!" designed to mentor girls from low-income families. There are two sessions per year, one in the fall and one in spring. Mentors are selected from both the University and Oregon State University, and they can petition for college credit.

The mentor and protégé initially meet face-to-face to get acquainted and exchange ideas for the project, and are then encouraged to communicate via e-mail twice a week. The pair have 12 weeks to collaborate and create a final project that they present to an audience of peers, family and teachers.

The goal of the project is to combine the protégé's interests with technology. All projects this year were Web sites, though there is no limit on what the project can be. The Web sites the pairs created were diverse. One showcased a student's poetry and illustrations, another classified and documented a student's rock collection, and a third illustrated the Chinese Zodiac.

Mackenzie Johnson, a University geology graduate student and mentor, said she liked being part of a program encouraging girls in science.

"I've never met an 11-year-old-girl excited about science," Johnson said. "It makes me feel good to work with someone interested in what I'm interested in."

Fuller said any student can participate in the program, and one goal of CyberSisters is to get young

girls acquainted with technology and computers, regardless of their interest in math and science.

"It gets girls to start to think about using computers in their lives in any medium," Johnson said.

Elaina Lindsay, a 12-year-old middle-school student and CyberSisters protégé, said her favorite part of the program was "meeting new people and hanging out."

*"It gets girls to start to think about using computers in their lives in any medium."*

Mackenzie Johnson  
geology graduate student

Heather Wright, a University graduate student and Lindsay's mentor, said CyberSisters was a learning experience for her as well.


Lindsay "had so many questions about geology. It was amazing how much she knew," said Wright. "She just soaked up everything I said."

Fuller said CyberSisters' mission is to encourage young girls and increase the number of women role models in technological and science fields.

"It was a fun way of learning," Lindsay said.

The deadline to apply to be a mentor for the fall session is Oct. 1. For more information, visit cyber-sisters.org.

Mikhael Romain is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.



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