

Eyelid

Jamie and her mom are two very different women. While Jamie speaks English, her mom speaks Mandarin. While Jamie microwaves her dinner, her mom sautés General Tso's for a whole restaurant.

(Microwave in background)

But a few days ago, Jamie found that they once shared one thing.

(Jamie) I was looking at some pictures of my mom when she was in high school with my cousin- because she's really pretty- and I noticed that she has eyes just like mine!

Her mom's eyes are different now- and bigger. Jamie's mom went under the knife twenty-four years ago in Taiwan. The surgery added a crease in each eyelid, making her eyes look bigger and wider. But Jamie refuses to get the surgery. Social psychologist June Chu says this generation gap between Jamie and her mom is common.

(Chu) There's a sense that I get from many Asian American women. They understand that they are never going to look mainstream no matter how much they do- and recognize that they have special abilities, talents in their own right without having to do anything but be themselves.

Jamie puts on make-up everyday, but she feels comfortable in her own skin. Chu says first generation immigrants are more likely to get this surgery than their children, and Koreans have a higher rate of this surgery than any other Asian American group. Pressure from family and society to look prettier and have bigger eyes is felt by many Asians. Among them, is one of Chu's friends.

(Chu) I know that a good friend of mine, who is Korean, has this ability to blink her eyes and make the fold appear. It's very fascinating to watch but her father tells her when they're taking family pictures, "do the eyelid thing."

Twenty-five-year-old SeJeong Kim doesn't have to do the eyelid thing. Unlike most Asians, she is one in four Koreans born WITH a fold. She says the pressure to get eye-fold surgery comes from an Asian standard of beauty.

(Kim) Korean women and Asian women in general are the one who is most worried about their face and how they look. So, they do more diet, they do more surgery if they can, for you know, their beauty.

But, the purpose of eye-fold surgery is not to look more Western. Girls want eye-fold surgery because applying make-up is easier on bigger eyes that have folds. Though this operation was once very common, fewer and fewer Asian Americans

are choosing to surgically widen their eyes. Chu says today Asian Americans have more pride in their heritage and their looks, and many like SeJeong Kim, believe there are other things more important than the size and shape of their eyes.

(Kim) Rather than just the way you look, how you think, and how you care other people and you know, your inner beauty is more important than the way you look.

Though the popularity of plastic surgery is on the rise in America, among Asians, the trend is dying down.

(Billie Holiday's "Them Their Eyes")

For Intern Edition, I'm Ko Im in Washington, D.C.