

KIM: RON CADIZ; STYLIST: KIM DEBUS; HAIR AND MAKEUP: MARA LEVARE FOR ARTISTSBYTIMOTHYFRIANO.COM; ANN TAYLOR DRESS.

SERENA KIM, 34

“I wanted to be prettier, and that was impossible, it seemed, with a single-fold eyelid.”

Growing up, a lot of Korean American girls had surgery to turn what we called a “single eyelid”—which comes from having an epicanthal fold—into one with a double fold. (With a “double” eyelid, the fold is visible when the eye is open; with a single one it isn’t.) I had mine done when I was 14.

It took my eyes all summer to heal. When I went back to school, I heard that the Korean boys approved. It felt good. Now I’m conflicted. When I look at Plum, my one-year-old daughter, I can’t imagine wanting to “fix” anything on her. Her sparkly, single-fold eyes are so pretty, like little onyx sesame seeds. They remind me of the puffy little eyes I had as a baby. I grieve for them now because I can finally see their beauty.



television news, in entertainment or in law firms; although in law now you can push the envelope a little bit. With each generation, that envelope gets pushed, but we haven’t yet gotten to a place, in corporate America at least, where [how you wear your hair] can be simply a style choice.

REESE: I’d like us to consider how we see things. When it comes to race, we’re looking from the past. When people see me with my natural hair, they don’t see Dr. Venus Opal Reese who has four degrees, they see an historical idea of what natural hair means. And that’s what it meant in the 1970s and 1960s; it equaled black nationalism and was linked to the Black Panther Party. It was considered militant. That doesn’t mean it’s true now, but that’s how it’s linked.



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That’s something I think most of the women in my study [for her book *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*] wouldn’t know. How could they? It’s not talked about; we’re scared to death of racial controversy. In my study I found that whether you are racist is about how aware you are of the concerns that people of other races have. So we need to stop wondering, “Am I racist? Oh, God, no, I couldn’t be!” and ask how aware we are.

CHIDEYA: And African Americans have to admit, pressure to look a certain way comes from our community, too. I was at a black journalists convention and I had my hair blown out. People looked at me like I was a sellout.



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