

# Different cultures between saudi arabia and united states

Countries, United States



Seeing as that I am a Saudi Arabian descent and living in the United States, I have been exposed to many misunderstandings, stereotypes, and invalid generalizations about my culture. There have been many instances in which I encountered stereotypes, mostly presented to the American public through various media types, which have limited Americans from realizing or seeking to comprehend more about my culture and heritage.

As Thomas Sowell points out “ one of the obstacles to understanding what behavioral characteristics follow each group around the world is the widespread use of the term “ stereotypes” to dismiss whatever observations or evidence may be cited as to distinguishing features of particular group behavior patterns. ” (Sowell, 11).

From my perspective, three beliefs that most 21st Century Americans have in regards to Saudis which are stereotypical are: 1) our women are submissive and have no voice or rights in our society, 2) Saudis are either fanatics or support terrorist activity in the name of religion, and 3) lastly each family in Saudi has its own oil well and therefore no other businesses are required. There are specifically two Saudi laws which Americans have heard about via the media which have formed American opinion about Saudi Arabia's attitude towards women.

The first law enforces that women must cover their hair and body with a black veil and garb. Another Saudi law which has been granted much media attention is that Saudi women are not allowed to drive. These laws are looked upon by Americans as boding poorly for Saudi women. Because this conduct is in such sharp contrast with the United States' attitude towards

women and their more revealing attire, the media has hyped upon how these Saudi laws are examples of how Saudi women are submissive because they have neither stood upon for their rights, such as drive or dress as they desire, nor sought to have a voice in society.

What we see instead is a strong familial structure with nepotism occurring in society (Lewis, 68-69) While it is true that such laws have led to women having no public role in their society because they are seemingly “protected” by their Saudi men, it is unfair to conclude that Saudi women have no rights or voice in society. Saudi women do indeed have rights such as being guaranteed certain shares in inheritance, are allowed to own property, are permitted to choose or refuse potential husbands, and are considered equal to men in the eyes of God (<http://www.saudinf.com/main/h61.htm>).

Furthermore, many Saudi women come to the United States to better educate themselves and return to Saudi to seek employment as nurses, doctors, professionals, and teachers. Upon returning to Saudi they have a hand in better educating or helping the next generation of women seek out their own respective goals. Hence, while it is a valid generalization that Saudi does not promote a public scope or ideology for its women, it does instead enable women to better improve upon themselves and expect protection for Saudi men that women might not have in the states.

Lastly, a large number of Saudi women have accepted the scope of their responsibilities as a maternal figure in their families and feel that they are submissive to their religion and rearing their children appropriately

(<http://www.saudinf.com/main/h62.htm>). While in the United States, we are seeing that women are being forced to work and provide for their family units without choice, face a higher possibility of divorce, see that rape and sexual harassment statistics have increased, instances of teen pregnancies have rose, and lastly cases of broken homes have increased.

From my experience, women's liberation and freedom is coming at a high cost to society's families and while the belief that women are submissive and lack a voice in Saudi might be true from some perspectives, it is obvious that in the United States this stereotype might actually be occurring due to jealousy perhaps on the part of women who do not have the luxury of selecting if they decide to seek employment or remain at home to raise their children (<http://www.wrmea.com/archives/may-june01/0105035.html>).

Another emphatic belief that Americans seem to have about Saudis is that we are either fanatics, villains, or that we support terrorist activity in the name of religion. Obviously Saudi Arabia which houses the Kaaba, the cube figure which is the most sacred site in Islam, represents our religion and is the direction to which the 5 daily prayers are made. For Americans, the media has publicized how Saudi is the birthplace of fanatic behavior and dramatizes the pilgrimage made to the site as well as how Saudi men dress in the distinct head piece and robe.

After September 11th, Americans became overwhelmed with even more media publicity about how the attackers were of Saudi descent and how Saudi wealth has indirectly added in efforts to attack Westerners, and other such activities. Prior to 9/11, Saudi was simply the land of oil and most

Americans could not even find it on the globe! In our modern day world, the news, publications, and movies all instilled within Americans the belief that Saudis were temperamental, geared towards violence, and oil rich businessmen.

In fact, comic often portrayed us as villains and school textbooks have been found to associate Islam with violence and intolerance. (<http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=283>). Due to its rich status, Saudi did not have strong external relationships which could overcome their stereotypes until recently. This belief is not a valid generalization by any means! It is far from the truth as Saudis have sought to limit the ultra conservative factions within their country because besides tarnishing its reputation in the world it also causes commotion and upheaval in Saudi Arabia as well.

For Saudi, it is of utmost importance in its abroad relations to keep allies and businesses purchasing its oil and it can not afford to alienate its friends. As Saudi is the predominate supplier and largest producer of oil to countries abroad, Americans have the misconception that each Saudi family must contain their own personal oil well in their own backyard. This is a laughable belief, but it is not the first time I have experienced Americans believing it to be a valid one. In fact, the country produces an average of 10.2 million bbl/d of total oil, comprising crude oil, and natural gas liquids.

The belief that Saudi has individual oil wells in each individual property is preposterous. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the significance of acknowledging that Saudi Arabia is seeking to better improve its external relationships with other countries and improve its global image.

The leadership in Saudi has sought to control its ultra conservative factions which have impaired its ability to ensure peace and tranquility both within its borders as well as with out. Generally, the media has created an atmosphere of fear and ignorance about other cultures.

This psychological manipulation of Americans has lead to further stereotypes which harm cultural diversity and understanding. Many communities have created outreach programs between different cultures in an effort to achieve better communication, understanding, tolerance, and acceptance. These efforts have enabled Americans to began to open the lines of communication and acquire a grasp that our differences are key to learning how to respect other cultures and not fall to misconceptions about other groups of people.