

Interviewee: Fatima Khan

Female, Age: 18

Birthplace: Bellevue, WA (Pakistani-American)

Occupation: Student

1. What do you feel are important things U.S. students should know about Pakistan?

F.K.: I think there are many cultural differences that students should know about, like clothing and food. I also think that it's important for U.S. students to know the nation's history, because Pakistan has a really big history.

2. Do you feel that there are any misconceptions or misunderstandings about Pakistan in the U.S.? If so, what are they?

F.K.: I think there are many misconceptions about Islam, which is the main religion of Pakistan. Islam as I know it and practice it is a peaceful religion and many of its messages or ideas seem to be misinterpreted and misused by certain groups. Also, just recently in the London bombings there were misconceptions that Pakistanis were the core group behind it and we couldn't believe it. That was pretty shocking. The majority of people in Pakistan, the boys and girls, are not raised to do violent things like that.

3. How do you feel that education in Pakistan is similar to and/or different from education in the U.S.?

F.K.: I've gone to school in both the U.S. and Pakistan, and I can say that it's very different. In Pakistan there are two levels, A Levels and O Levels. A Level is though 11th grade and to college. O Levels is to the 12th grade only. Pakistan only has primary and secondary schools, not middle schools or junior highs. Another difference is that every school has its own uniform system to show that everyone is equal. But over here you can wear whatever you want or show whatever you want, which can be quite revealing. That's why there are so many school rules here. The workload in Pakistan is very tedious and very difficult compared to here, where some students often slack off until the 11th grade. For example, I was looking at my cousin's books in Pakistan and he's only a seventh grader there. But I realized that I did those things in 8th or even 9th grade here. It's more difficult there and there's more pressure because there is more competition. For example, in Pakistan an individual's final exam placement and results are published in the newspaper! So your rank on final exams is very important. Here there are often a lot of smaller tests or other things that can influence your grade, but not in Pakistan because the final exam counts for everything there.

4. How is daily life in Pakistan similar to and/or different from daily life in the U.S.?

F.K.: Probably the most obvious difference is the clothing. People wear the Shalwar Qamiz, which is worn by men and women. This is like a long shirt worn over baggy pants. It's very loose and light. The younger generation is a bit more into jeans and Westernized culture, but most of Pakistan wears the traditional Shalwar Qamiz. In cuisine there are many spices and herbs that are used to make things more spicy or flavorful.

5. What are some expectations for men and women in Pakistan? What are the standard gender roles or norms?

F.K.: I just want to say that in the West I think there is a misperception that all women are suppressed and it's nothing like that. Everyone has shares of things and rights. Also, remember that Pakistan has had an elected national female leader, Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto. Many Western nations have not had that!

6. Some Americans say that typical or "classic" American elements are apple pie, automobiles, and baseball. Do you feel that there are similar elements that typify Pakistan?

F.K.: Definitely cricket because that is a game that every one of all ages is interested in. When it's Pakistan against India it's just the best because the games are so important. It's almost a national event and it's a national pride. Pakistan's national sport is actually field hockey, but I think cricket is way more popular.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about Pakistan?

F.K.: I think that the weddings are very important. These are the highlights of my trips when I go there. The weddings last an entire week, not just a day. The male and female have different parties and events all week long. There is the Mehndi, where the bride and groom's hands get decorated with henna; the Shadi and Valima, or reception. There is also the Nikah where an Imam (an Islamic priest) reads the ceremony and completes the proper paperwork. The weddings are very colorful, with red, green, and yellow. Plus everyone gets to go the feast. The wedding ceremony is paid for by the girl's family and the guy's family pays for the reception. The weddings there tend to be very big as well and involve large numbers of family members and friends.