

The Biggest Culture Shock: Americans in Movies vs. Real Life

I've often wondered about something. Why is it that on TV and in movies, Americans are so open, friendly, happy, wild, free, exciting, social, carefree, spontaneous, and expressive? They look so easy to meet and befriend. And they gladly invite you into their circles, take you out for fun, and introduce you to their friends. TV characters act so emotional, passionate, and full of life and feeling. And American women are portrayed as open, loose, flirtatious, and easy to pick up and have a steamy affair with. Thus people in other countries assume that this is how Americans really are.

But in real life, Americans are very closed, cliquish and paranoid of others. They don't talk to strangers unless it's business-related, they don't know their neighbors, and they aren't social outside their clique. So how can they be "so open" as people in Asia think? Americans establish their friends and cliques early on in life, and do not like to meet new people. People are in their own bubble and disconnected from others. They are distant and basically ignore you and expect you to mind your own business while they mind theirs. There is an "ice barrier" between strangers (hence the term "breaking the ice"). The social vibe feels very cliquish, paranoid and uptight, not relaxed at all. And women in America in reality are very closed, private, cliquish, and do not like to connect with others. They are not open, curious or engaging at all, but unapproachable and paranoid. They have a cold wall or force field around them. And they view flirtation as creepy, taboo and violating, sometimes to the point of harassment too.

In real everyday life, Americans are stressed and tired, always in a rush to get through their daily routine, and uninterested in human connection. But if you are not like that too, then you stick out like a sore thumb!

Thus there is an ENORMOUS difference between the media image of Americans and reality. Why is there such a HUGE difference that no one talks about?! It's so bizarre, like the Twilight Zone!

What's interesting to note is that Asian immigrants living in America do not consider Americans to be open, wild, free and exciting like on TV (as Asians in Asia do). Instead, they say that Americans are "fake and selfish", and that they only care about themselves and are not your real friends. This speaks volumes, and I can only wonder why the media in Asia have not debunked the false image and misconceptions that Asians have about America long ago. Why would they want their people to continue having false illusions about America? It's very strange.

My friend and cultural advisor, a former US immigrant who speaks 10 languages and has lived in 9 countries long term, making him an expert in cultural analyses, made the same observation in my forum when he described the biggest culture shock that immigrants face in America:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=8855>

"I think generally, the biggest culture shock that people experience in the US is not between their country and the US but between what they thought the US would be and what it actually is. Books and movies about America make the place appear very free and exciting and happening and the people are so interesting and emotional. There is sex and fun and romance going on. When they arrive, the place looks very conservative and the people appear robotic and quiet. Sex is subdued and hard to come by. The people are not open at all, they look closed and mistrustful. Everybody is just working and looking tired and apathetic. Talking to strangers is taboo. There are thousands of little rules and laws and social mores that seem as dogmatic and strict as those in a Muslim society. And every time you are at risk of breaking yet another law and facing very dire consequences. That is the biggest culture shock of all."

Now that is perhaps the most accurate summary of America ever written. It is all so blatantly obvious, yet no one talks about it. It's like an "Emperor's New Clothes" syndrome. To talk about this would make you look like a loser, so no one dares to, because you are supposed to be "positive" about everything and ignore the reality of such things. Either that, or people don't see it due to cognitive dissonance from their social programming.

You see, there is also an unspoken social rule that everywhere you go, you MUST say that people are friendly and great, or you say nothing at all. You are NOT allowed to say that people are unfriendly or unsociable. That is a taboo and No-No, no matter how true or justified. Thus truth is censored, and political correctness and positivity are placed above truth and honesty. This is very weird to me, since I place truth and honesty above political correctness and positivity. Is there something wrong with me, or everyone else? In America, there definitely is a HUGE GAP between hype and reality. No doubt about it. What's wrong with pointing out the truth? Since when did truth become a taboo?

For more taboo truths, or to discuss these observations, visit my website and forum at www.HappierAbroad.com.