

Issue Brief: European American Women/Gender Issues

Key Words

European Americans, women, gender issues, Eastern and Western European immigrants, American culture

Description

There seems to be a disparity in the way distinct groups of European American women experience American culture. This disparity is best expressed in the way Eastern and Western European American women approach gender roles and issues.

Key Points

- We need not necessarily define European American women as “white women.” In fact, the 2010 census defines a “White” person as not only having origins in Europe, but also in the Middle East and North Africa.
- There seems to be a discrepancy in the way European American women of different backgrounds perceive women and gender issues in the US.
- Eastern European American women have been shown to react negatively to the gender-neutral roles of males and females in American culture while Western European American women seem to become better adjusted to them.
- Claims have been made in support of the idea that Western European male and female roles are even more gender neutral than traditional American ones.
- The gap between Western European and American gender equality is closing.

Brief

Upon first consideration, the mention of women and gender issues among European Americans appears to be novel and unexpected. This might be because, when thinking about majority rule and minority rights, we tend to refrain from considering the European American category as a minority group with a particular interest in these conversations. Nonetheless, European American women do have a defined interest in gender equality, to be understood as the quantifiable equality of representation of women and men, and it is interesting to see how their perceptions of these issues vary even among themselves. It is important to note that in this issue brief European American women should not be confused with “White” American women. The US census bureau does not limit the definition of the White category to those persons having origins in any of the original

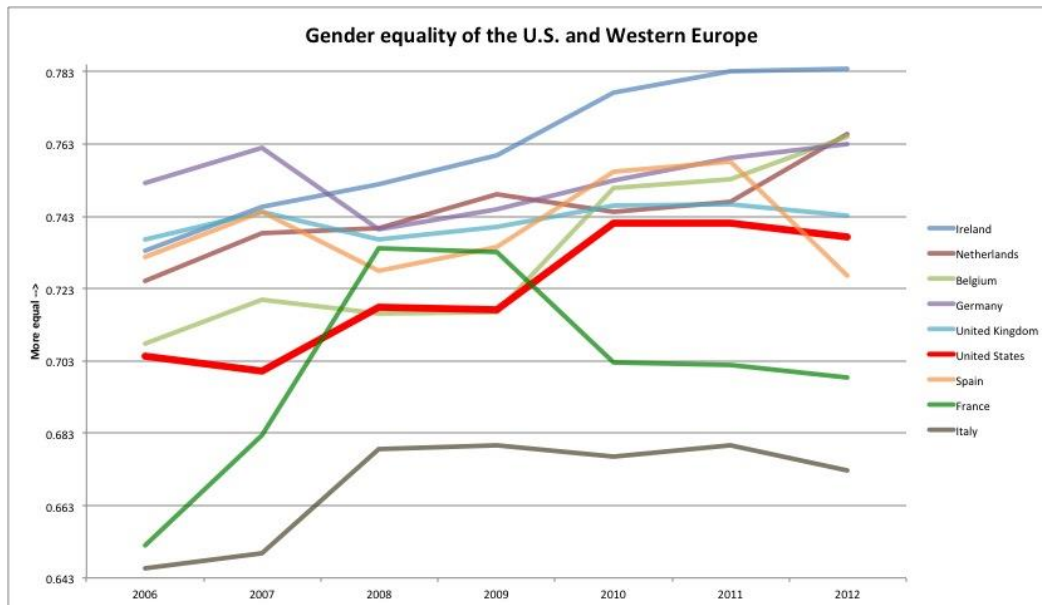
peoples of Europe alone. As such, the European American woman as discussed in this brief should be better understood in terms of the immigrant European woman.



Image from the European Commission:
Gender equality on the rise

When presented with the term “European American,” most people will envision the Western culture that has been historically associated with the United States’ own American culture. Eastern European influences, however, fit into this European American culture just as well and are refreshingly different. Studies have shown that, far from embracing the feminism prevalent in modern day American culture, Eastern European American female immigrants have tended to react negatively toward it. These women interpret feminism in a way that differs from that of their American counterparts. They largely agree with the idea that women should have opportunities equal to those of men especially, for example, when it comes to their careers. However, they value a treatment of the female sex that American women might consider as derogatory or as enforcing of gender roles. Eastern European women embrace the validation of their femininity that these gender roles provide. The fact that their perspectives on this topic vary so much from those of modern American women is important in that it makes it harder for them to become accustomed to

the American culture. Studies have found, for instance, that Eastern European women have a harder time adjusting to their workplaces and that they also have a harder time forming quality relationships with their coworkers.



The Washington Post:
Closing gap in gender equality between the U.S. and Europe

This, however, is not the case for Western European American women who appear to adapt particularly well to American feminism. The value of this distinction to a study of European American women and gender issues lies in its understanding of the difference between what might be considered sub-categories of immigrant groups. Far from surprising, these women's ideals merely seem to reflect the relationship that American and Western European cultures have shared throughout history. Interestingly, Western European countries have been widely considered to be more advanced in their attempts at creating gender equality than their American counterparts. The European Commission, for instance, has explicitly claimed that equality between women and men has been one of the European Union's values since 1957. In spite of this, recent studies show a closing gap in gender equality between the U.S. and Western Europe. For instance, the 2012 World

Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report shows that the U.S. shows significant increases in equality in areas where it was previously far behind. The report measures gender equality based on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

In essence, unlike their Eastern European relatives, Western European American female immigrants have significantly less trouble adapting to the feminism ingrained in American culture. This, in turn, is largely due to the realities of their home countries and as such to the degree of change that each perceives upon immigrating to the United States.

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