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# The Jobless Gender Gap

*Unemployment for men is growing at a much faster pace than for women.*

By [DAVID PAUL KUHN](#)

Last month the unemployment rate climbed above 10% for the first time in more than a quarter century. Less noticed is that male workers crossed this same threshold six months earlier. Since the U.S. became the world's dominant economic power, no downturn has fallen more disproportionately on one gender.

The unemployment rate for men, 11.4%, based on seasonally adjusted data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, outpaces the rate for women, 8.8%. We now have the largest jobless gender gap since tracking became possible in 1948. The gap reached its previous peak, 2.5 points, in 1967 and 1978. Today's gap has exceeded that for three months. It's endured at two points or above for an unprecedented length, eight months and counting.

As of the end of October, the U.S. had lost 7.3 million jobs in this Great Recession. Men account for 5.3 million of that loss. The shift is so dramatic that women now constitute 49.9% of the work force and will soon outnumber men.

So some have come to call this downturn the "he-cession." And yet, for all its unprecedented scope and nature, the limited attention and passive response it has received are remarkable. Imagine the outcry if women amounted to roughly three in four lost jobs in this recession.

What has happened to men is fundamentally a product of the times. This recession made America's already declining manufacturing sector decline more rapidly. About half of all job losses have been in manufacturing and construction, overwhelmingly male sectors.

Government policy has also exacerbated this trend. The stimulus dollars were disproportionately directed away from those who lost the most jobs. The Obama administration estimated early this year that more than four in 10 stimulus jobs were going to women, about twice women's estimated job losses. There was no major new infrastructure spending, as during the New Deal, in part because women's groups such as the Nation Organization for Women and the Feminist Majority lobbied hard against the president's proposed "shovel ready" stimulus program.

The jobless gender gap could exacerbate Democrats historic problems with male voters. The importance of that tension is captured best with independents. Democrats regained the majority by winning back the middle. Earlier this month, however, independents sided with Republicans by a 2-to-1 ratio in gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey. Women make up the majority of voters. However, men constitute roughly 55% of independents, according to Gallup poll data.

It is among the oldest of political lessons that infrastructure spending can also build votes. The political impact of the stimulus has been blunted because the emphasis was on securing the social safety net by spending in areas such as health care and education, where more women work.

Good politics could have also been good policy. China implemented a more New Deal-like stimulus focused on infrastructure, and that's clearly been a factor in China's more rapid recovery. The building of roads or railways has an economic multiplier effect that Medicaid assistance to states and food stamps do not.

The solution is not a male version of the Labor Department's Women's Bureau. Men don't need to start viewing themselves as victims. But the stimulus or new jobs bills could be adjusted to address the wave of male unemployment by expanding public works spending. It would make for more effective policy and be fairer. As the feminist movement taught us, what happens to one gender happens to us all.

**Mr. Kuhn is chief political correspondent at RealClearPolitics.com.**

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