



Economics Group

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Employment: Beyond the Sound Bites—Reading the Signals IV

Sex, race and ethnicity are always touchy subjects. However, good policy making demands we look at the reality of the differences in the employment experience if we wish to make progress on jobs.

The Mancession, the Mancovery and Industry Mix

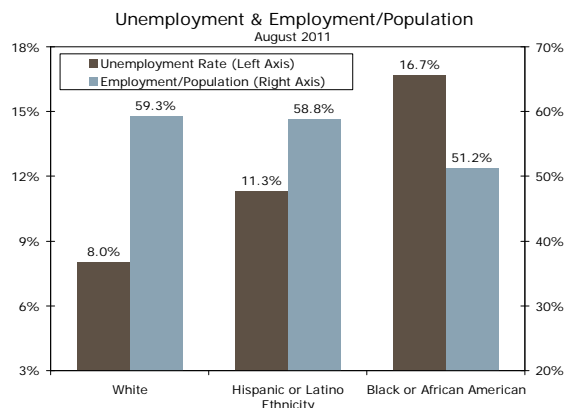
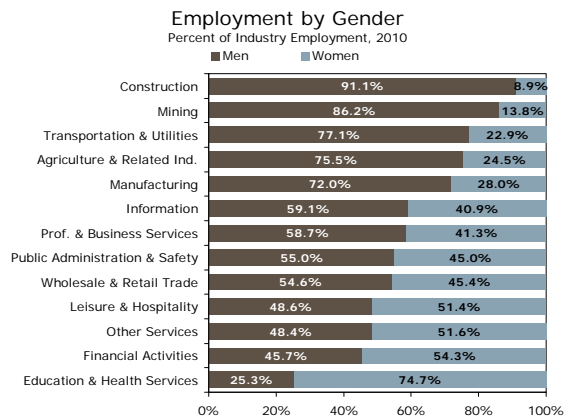
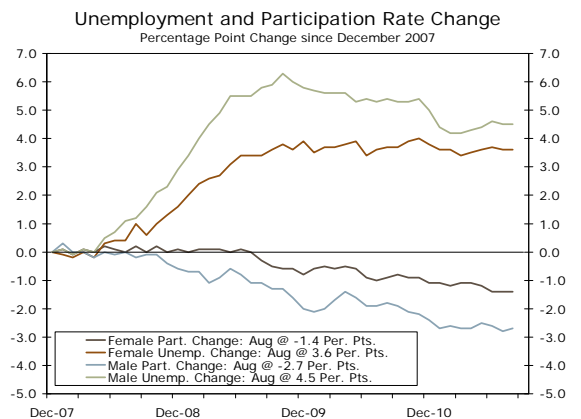
As noted in our earlier pieces, the labor market woes brought on by the recession and painfully slow recovery have not been shared evenly across groups. Unemployment since the start of the recession has risen disproportionately for men, so much so that the recession has been dubbed by many as a “mancession.” Decomposing the headline unemployment rate of 9.1 percent, joblessness stood at 8.5 percent for women compared to 9.6 percent for men in August. Unemployment has risen markedly since the recession began for both sexes, but more steeply for males (top chart). This has come at a time when male participation in the labor force has fallen sharply, accelerating the long-term decline since the mid-1950s.

What accounts for the variation in unemployment between men and women since the recession? The performance of different industries during the downturn and the share of men and women working in those industries play an important role. Predominately male industries such as construction and manufacturing were some of the hardest hit sectors during the recession. Conversely, the education and health services industry—where women are more heavily represented—has added jobs throughout the recession and recovery with employment up 8.0 percent since Dec. 2007.

While the 1.1 percentage point gap between male and female unemployment is wide, it has actually narrowed over the course of the recovery from a peak of 2.7 percentage points. Thus far, the recovery has been stronger in male-dominated industries such as manufacturing and professional and business services, which has helped bring down the male unemployment rate. At the same time, state and local government finances have become increasingly strained, leading to cuts in administration and public education—positions that are more likely to be filled by women. Still, women are faring better. As discussed in our second issue, education has been a key factor in workers’ unemployment experiences, and women are increasingly more likely to hold a college degree than men.

Where Race and Ethnicity Matter

Stark differences are also visible when looking at race and ethnicity. Black joblessness, at 16.7 percent, stands more than 7 percentage points above its prerecession rate and is more than double the unemployment rate for white workers (8.0 percent). Furthermore, unemployment for black teenagers is staggeringly high at 47 percent, making it difficult for this group to gain valuable work experience early in their working years. Unemployment among Hispanics, at 11.3 percent, falls in between the rate for whites and blacks. However, due to a higher participation rate, Hispanics and whites have roughly equal rates of employment relative to their populations at 59 percent. Black employment-to-population is notably lower at 51 percent.



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