

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

Men's Response to Shifting Roles after Peak Oil

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on January 31, 2010 - 10:53am in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

This is a guest post by Sharon Astyk. This is a link to her [blog](#).

One of the things we're talking about right now in our "Finding Your Place" class are issues specific to men and women. The women's issues often seem to focus on material and physical discussions – what can I do about menopause; how do I handle birth control, menstruation and other bodily issues; or about sex and love. When we have these threads about men, they invariably end up focusing on the psychological results that seem particularly acute for many, if not all, men. While all of us have anxieties and many women struggle with these issues, somehow when we get to gender-specific consideration, what comes up for many of the men in the discussion is how difficult it is to deal with shifting roles, and the prevalence of anxiety, depression and over-reliance on drugs and alcohol.

This is a guest post by Sharon Astyk. Another related post by Sharon that may be of interest is [Peak Oil Is Still a Women's Issue and Other Reflections on Sex, Gender and the Long Emergency](#). She also has some posts at this [blog site](#).

One of the things we're talking about right now in our "Finding Your Place" class are issues specific to men and women. The women's issues often seem to focus on material and physical discussions – what can I do about menopause; how do I handle birth control, menstruation and other bodily issues; or about sex and love. When we have these threads about men, they invariably end up focusing on the psychological results that seem particularly acute for many, if not all, men. While all of us have anxieties and many women struggle with these issues, somehow when we get to gender-specific consideration, what comes up for many of the men in the discussion is how difficult it is to deal with shifting roles, and the prevalence of anxiety, depression and over-reliance on drugs and alcohol.

Statistics from cultures undergoing major crises seem to bear out the assumption that often, women adapt better than men to many difficult situations. The decrease in lifespans in the former Soviet Union that accompanied the collapse was in part due to loss of health care, but a lot of it had to do with a rise in the rates of suicide, stress and alcohol abuse. At one point, the division between lifespans for women in Russia and for men was more than a decade. In Studs Terkel's "[Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression](#)" and Jeane Westin's "[Making Do: How Women Survived the 30s](#)", we hear story after story of men who simply couldn't handle the strain of unemployment and dependent family, along with role destruction, and as a result left, or subsided into alcoholism.

Dmitry Orlov made the following observation in [Closing the Collapse Gap](#):

Economic collapse is about the worst possible time for someone to suffer a nervous breakdown, yet this is what often happens. The people who are most at risk psychologically are successful middle-aged men. When their career is suddenly over, their savings are gone, and their property worthless, much of their sense of self-worth is gone as well. They tend to drink themselves to death and commit suicide in disproportionate numbers. Since they tend to be the most experienced and capable people, this is a staggering loss to society.

If the economy, and your place within it, is really important to you, you will be really hurt when it goes away.

This does not mean that every man facing a transition into a poorer, less energy rich world is doomed to crisis. But I think it is important to talk about – because just as I've written many times about the changes that peak oil and climate change and their economic consequences are likely to bring about for women, the ones that come for men are important and real. All men, and all of us who love husbands, fathers, brothers, friends, sons need to be aware of these issues – to be aware of the degree to which watching your world unravel seems to engender different responses. Women who turn to each other, who talk, whose identities may be more complexly built on a mix of personal and professional identities may not grasp how hard this is for the men in our lives to face unemployment and shifts in everything they've known. I think this is an important thing to be able to be open about, for both men and women, and also an important thing to be conscious of.

Have you had this experience, either personally or for someone you cared about? None of us want to see the rates of suicide rising. None of us want to watch the guys in our life struggling. None of us want them to turn to drugs and drink to dull a sense of loss. Of course, many men won't. In many cases, it is the women who struggle with these issues. But overwhelmingly history suggests that the psychological trauma of watching your world transformed often strikes men, particularly men of middle age and above, harder than it does women. How do we soften the blow?



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