Men struggle with porn addiction, some women want to feed it.
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Good news and bad news about one of the greatest evils of the 21st century.

There is good news and bad news about pornography this week. The bad news is that women are clamouring for a fair share of the porn industry; the good news is that men are deserting that pigsty. These are very broad strokes, but the details are equally disturbing and encouraging.

First, the women. It is difficult, goodness knows, to find a new angle on anniversaries like International Women’s Day, but it was startling to find on The Conversation a plea on behalf of female porn directors for fairer access to the market.

The Conversation is an international forum in which academics can popularise their work and is funded by academic institutions. Its articles can be reproduced under a Creative Commons license, and MercatorNet has done so quite often with articles living up to one or other of the qualities advertised in its tagline, “Academic rigour, journalistic flair”.

I suppose that Zahra Zsuzsanna Stardust, the Australian PhD student (and former parliamentary candidate for the Australian Sex Party) who wrote the piece titled “Women in the porn industry need rights and proper pay, not token gestures”, displayed a certain academic rigour in that her research into the dark corners of female porn seems quite extensive. Being involved in the business herself must help.

As for flair, one would have to credit her with a bit of that, too, for passing it off as a plea for social justice rather than the promotion of a degrading subculture that it is.

Readers are supposed to feel indignant for the women directors who were asked by the captains – or rather, pirates – of the online porn industry to share their work free on IWD in return for “mass exposure”. Z Z Stardust’s exposure of the monopolistic features of the industry that nurture such effrontery is a marvel of Marxist analysis. If the subject matter were not so putrid, it would be hilarious.

Life is a struggle in the porn industry. Not only do women and other small producers and their actors have to contend with monopolists above them, but also the cheapskates below them who don’t want to pay. “Performers are urging consumers to ‘pay for your porn’ and ‘vote with your wallet’ as a form of ethical porn consumption.” Their creative efforts are restricted by laws, their labour is stigmatised.
Against the odds, these gutsy individuals are making a bid to “take control of the reins” of production and distribution. So paltry is their income, however, that they may be forced to get a day job as well – just what you would expect in a decadent capitalist economy:

The University of California’s Heather Berg argues this is part of a larger trend under late capitalism: work/life is blurred, performers are encouraged to take on their professional identities 24/7, and workers are expected to perform for love, not for money.

Stardust, one should add, did not have to fund her own research – she got an Australian Postgraduate Award on the taxpayer. If she gets a PhD for it, so much the worse for Australia; so much the worse for women.

And now for the good news.

We have two men to thank for this, a black American footballer-turned-actor and New Zealand athlete, both living in the US.

It is a couple of years since Terry Crews, the Muhammad Ali of men’s aftershave ads, went public about kicking his “addiction to pornography”, but last month he posted videos on Facebook confirming that he was still “clean”.

Crews nearly wrecked his marriage and the happiness of his five children with the habit. He had hidden it for years and only mastered it by going to rehab – after an ultimatum from his wife, Rebecca King Crews. In the first video, viewed 3 million times in the first couple of weeks it was up, he says:

"Some people say, 'Hey, man ... you can't really be addicted to pornography.' But I'm gonna tell you something: If day turns into night and you are still watching, you probably have got a problem. And that was me."

"It changes the way you think about people. People become objects. People become body parts; they become things to be used rather than people to be loved."

In the videos he talks about how the internet allowed the habit to take hold and grow, and how “telling someone” breaks that power. He says to women (are you listening, Stardust?) who suspect something:

"Women, you need to be fearless. You need to confront your man about this problem. You cannot accept any pornography in your life."

And he describes porn as "an intimacy killer."

"Every time I watched it, I was walled off. It was like another brick that came between me and my wife. And the truth is, everything you need for intimacy is in your (partner)."

This month it was the turn of New Zealander Nick Wills to fess up about his obsession with porn. Wills, 32, the father of a 2-year-old son and a runner headed for the Rio Olympics, tells a story very similar to Terry Crews’ and used the same social media outlet, Facebook, to talk publicly about it.

Like Crews, Wills credits his wife of eight years, Sierra, for his turnaround. Both couples are Christian and their faith seems to have increased the shame of admitting the habit, but also made it possible. Making their struggle public as well has provided an extra motive to change and – in terms of positive feedback from thousands of people – a huge amount of extra support.

Both talk about being “addicted” to pornography, a term that is now used widely in this context. Like other additions it remains a temptation; after being “porn-free” for two-and-a-half years, Wills still has to struggle with images that come back unbidden.
It began for him, he says, when he was a lonely teenager and "was exposed" to magazines and videos that it seemed to give him “some form of intimacy that I severely lacked." He came to see that it was not about intimacy at all, but an “unnatural” and “temporary Solution” that left him feeling “empty and lonelier than before”, and objectified and hurt women, especially his wife.

This should really alarm us since access to porn has increased uncontrollably since Wills was a teen, and has become so ubiquitous that few teenage boys are untouched by it. Wills and Crews give us a clue to both prevention and cure: talk about it, don’t let it fester, don’t let shame stop you.

These two men have done society a huge service in coming out so publicly about a curse that has the potential to blight the individual consciences, marriages and family life of a generation – and more. How distressingly ironic that a bunch of female sex radicals, aided by the academic establishment, are claiming that making porn is a creative art and an honest job for women.