

the massive and growing human need.

If we are to find a system that works for all of us and life on Earth, we will have to create a social and economic system that is not based upon growth and competition.

I believe our only chance to survive the mess we're making is to place cooperation above competition — "together we stand, divided we fall," "love one another," "share," "respect all life," "take care of one another" and all that good, lovey-dovey stuff.

Our time's quickly running out. Competition's leading to not only the demise of many other species, but to our own as well.

Patrick Bronson
Eugene



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The Crackdown

Police action just adds to fear and mistrust

The Eugene Police Department announced recently that it was cracking down on prostitution arranged online. Of course, we are told, it's not about punishing people who find few other opportunities to survive when prostitution is the best available option. It's really about the drug use, unreported assaults, unreported robberies and pimps. Yet a crackdown like this is only going to make these problems worse.



Sex workers are less likely to report assaults, rapes and thefts when they fear arrest. Many of the other public concerns around sex work, such as violence, drugs and other crimes, are in fact a result of the criminalization of sex work. A police crackdown will only push people further underground, where recourse against exploitation is harder to access.

We've seen the result of an environment of police antagonism of sex workers. In 2003, Gary Ridgeway confessed to strangling 90 women to death, stating, "I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught." For years there were people who knew he was responsible for the killings, but because of their own involvement in or relationship to sex work, they either did not come forward or were not believed. As can often happen when police crackdown on sex workers, many were as afraid of the police as they were afraid of Ridgeway.

Online listings of erotic services had become a relatively safer option for those engaged in sex work. The Internet has helped individuals effectively compete with pimps and agencies and have more options to work for themselves rather than a potentially exploitative "manager." For those with access to a computer, this alternative avoids some of the risks and dangers associated with street-based sex work.

It's not clear how EPD expects this crackdown to improve anything. Eugene police Detective Rick Lowe is quoted in the *R-G* (12/13) saying, "People involved in this sort of thing should be real cautious ... We want to let them know that if they aren't careful, they could find a police officer answering their ad, or ordering up a police officer for themselves." The increased threat of arrest won't get too many people to leave the business — especially if they don't have any other options — but it will make them become more cautious and less likely to trust police.

Sting operations on craigslist.com and other online listings will make such places less viable options for independent sex workers. The police say they wish to protect sex workers from those who would exploit them. Yet the more police position themselves as a threat to sex workers, the more sex workers will decide to turn to various managers who can offer them protection from the police.

Fear of police is not just about arrest. Sex workers are often targets of violence because the shaming and stigma associated with sex work makes violence less likely to be reported. The unfortunate reality is that the people who take advantage of that include people who are police officers. According to *INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence*, a 2002 study found that "24 percent of street-based sex workers who had been raped identified a police officer as the rapist." Police hold a lot of power over people, especially those involved in a criminalized line of work. In Eugene, we know that well. That was essentially the issue with officers Lara and Magaña.

Every year on Dec. 17, gatherings are held around the world to participate in the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. This year the Sex Worker Outreach Project organized a march on Washington, D.C., to demand rights for all sex workers.

Some cities are considering decriminalization acts that would bar police from investigating or arresting people solely based on engaging in sex work. The intent is to create an environment where sex workers can report crimes without fear. It may take some time before such policies are enacted. In the meantime, however, perhaps we can get a law enforcement strategy that prioritizes the welfare of those involved in sex work, rather than one which creates an environment of fear and mistrust of police.

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Tobi Hill-Meyer is a Eugene writer and activist in LGBTQ politics.