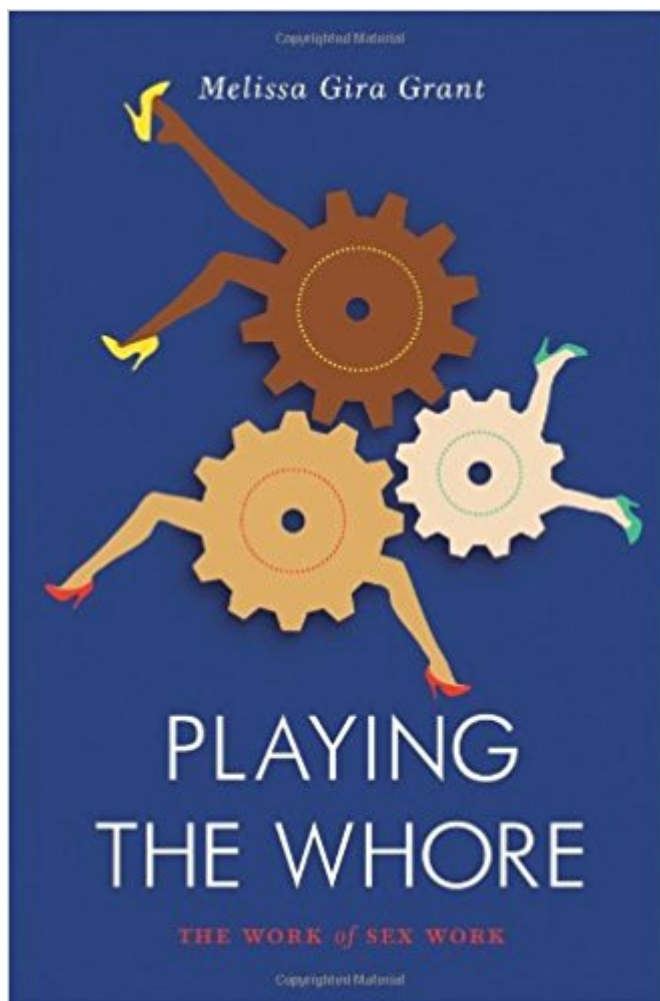


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# Playing The Whore: The Work Of Sex Work



## Synopsis

Recent years have seen a panic over “online red-light” districts, which supposedly seduce vulnerable young women into a life of degradation, and New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof’s live tweeting of a Cambodian brothel raid. But rarely do these fearful, salacious dispatches come from sex workers themselves, and rarely do they deviate from the position that sex workers must be rescued from their condition, and the industry simply abolished – a position common among feminists and conservatives alike. In *Playing the Whore*, journalist Melissa Gira Grant turns these pieties on their head, arguing for an overhaul in the way we think about sex work. Based on ten years of writing and reporting on the sex trade, and grounded in her experience as an organizer, advocate, and former sex worker, *Playing the Whore* dismantles pervasive myths about sex work, criticizes both conditions within the sex industry and its criminalization, and argues that separating sex work from the “legitimate” economy only harms those who perform sexual labor. In *Playing the Whore*, sex workers’ demands, too long relegated to the margins, take center stage: sex work is work, and sex workers’ rights are human rights.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Collectively as a society we've got a whole bunch of tangled, warped intuitions and policies towards

the exchange of money for sex. Melissa Gira Grant does a remarkable job of rigorously teasing these apart and righteously scrapping those she finds wanting. Her work has been hugely influential in how I think about sex work and outright changed my mind on a number of points. She's a must read.

—Chris Hayes, *All In With Chris Hayes* "An important contribution to debates around sex and work, and deserves to be read by anyone who wants to get beyond tired and damaging understandings of both."

—Nina Power, author of *One Dimensional Woman* "Thoroughly researched, eminently readable...Keeping the focus on ideas instead of autobiography has an impressively unsettling effect, as we're forced to acknowledge the writer's boundaries, and our own voyeurism."

—*Village Voice* "Gira Grant is one of the most interesting policy thinkers in the country when it comes to sex work, and this short book introduces and outlines her thinking on the matter."

—Mike Konczal, *Washington Post* "An informative and extremely worthwhile addition to the existing body of literature on sex work."

—Stoya, adult performer and Vice columnist "Learn, listen, take heart • this is the real deal."

—Susie Bright, sex and culture critic, and founder of *On Our Backs* "Well-researched and provocative | A vital text on an incendiary topic."

—Lily Burana, author of *I Love a Man in Uniform* and *Strip City* "Gira Grant weaves her way through sanctimony and hypocrisy with wit, eloquence, insight, and a dose of necessary outrage."

—Laura Kipnis, author of *How to Become a Scandal* "Makes precisely clear that a culture that polices, silences and marginalizes women who sell sex is a culture that cares nothing about women. Period."

—Janet Mock, author of *Redefining Realness* "As self-appointed saviors like Nicolas Kristof command mainstream media attention for their crusade on behalf of trafficked women, Melissa Gira Grant provides a sharp and powerful counternarrative, a layered, justice-minded critique of such interventions as well as a much needed skewering of carceral feminism."

—An important, illuminating and engaging read.

—Liliana Segura, Senior Editor, *The Intercept* (First Look Media)

Melissa Gira Grant is a writer and freelance journalist whose work has appeared in *Glamour*, the *Guardian*, *the Nation*, *Wired*, and the *Atlantic*. She is also a Contributing Editor to *Jacobin*. Her website is [melissagiragrants.com](http://melissagiragrants.com).

"Playing the Whore" offers readers a unique examination of the space which various forms of sex

work occupy in the socio-political cultural realm of North America, specifically the USA (but also on a global scale). This book helps us to understand sex workers as human beings like everyone else, rather than objects of disinterested scrutiny, abstract worship, or scornful pity. Anyone who wants to analyse the divisive debates around the various options for addressing the wider social issues raised by sex work should have this book. Listening to sex workers themselves is the critical starting point for gaining a true appreciation for their concerns, their perspectives, and their lives.

I don't remember reading a more consciousness-raising book before this one. Grant potently lays out the hypocrisy of anti-sex work folks and just how terrible the "Rescue Industry" is. It's appalling, as are the hypocrisies of the anti-sex work reformers when it comes to their complicity in the police brutality and sexual assault sex workers face as a result of criminalization and stigmatization. Be prepared to have any previous assumptions, perceptions, or prejudices you may have about sex work and sex workers powerfully challenged. It takes a lot of courage to advocate for the rights of sex workers, particularly in a country like America, where our handling of human sexuality is ridiculous and slut-shaming can be a powerful deterrent. Much thanks to Guardian columnist Margaret Corvid for referring me to this book.

Strong and passionate, and in my opinion, accurate argument on how women working as sex workers are mistreated by societal institutions that are made to protect them and everybody else. After the third or fourth chapter, the arguments get repetitive causing it to become a boring read. This is unfortunate because I think the arguments and topics are vital, but the delivery takes away from that.

This book was concise and well-done, and provides an important perspective that is all too often ignored in mainstream media. One of my favorite quotes from the book: "Sex workers should not be expected to defend the existence of sex work in order to have the right to do it free from harm."

Before recording opinions or worse, making laws, about something you've never done, it's worth reading and listening to what actual sex workers have to say. This book is a great discussion of the pornographic nature of the "rescue" industry and how it causes actual harm to those it purports to help.

One of the best books on sex work, views, lobbies, history and movements and politics of it. I am

usually hesitant to read books on this subject since usually the books on area of sex work are fantasy tale of good and evil with erotic dressing. After reading the review of the book on Boston Review, I started reading the book. It is a very good read and educates the reader very well.

This book is a phenomenal overview of the current state of sex workers' rights and the conundrum they're faced with when trying to tell their own stories while still trying to accrue basic rights. It's an engaging, informative read for anyone interested in the politics of sex work, police brutality, and civil rights.

An interesting book that I highlighted a lot in. It's about how police and many feminists, especially anti-prostitution activists, have no clue about sex work and cause more harm than good. What made it more than just a text book is its clear insider knowledge by the author.

Grade: B+

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