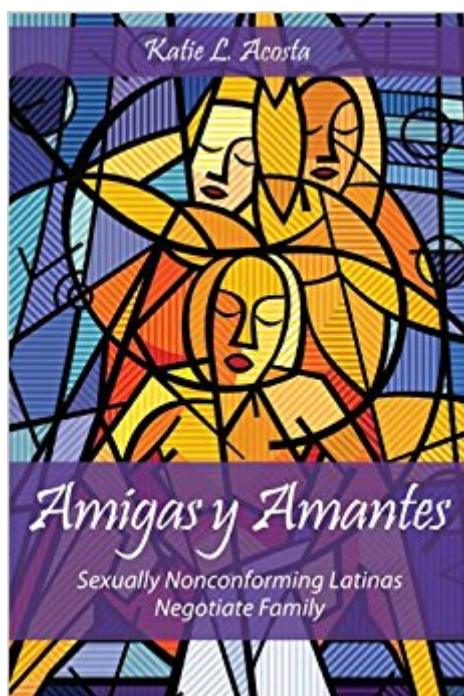


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# Amigas Y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family (Families In Focus)



## Synopsis

*Amigas y Amantes* (Friends and Lovers) explores the experiences of sexually nonconforming Latinas in the creation and maintenance of families. It is based on forty-two in-depth ethnographic interviews with women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer (LBQ). Additionally, it draws from fourteen months of participant observation at LBQ Latina events that Katie L. Acosta conducted in 2007 and 2008 in a major northeast city. With this data, Acosta examines how LBQ Latinas manage loving relationships with the families who raised them, and with their partners, their children, and their friends. Acosta investigates how sexually nonconforming Latinas negotiate cultural expectations, combat compulsory heterosexuality, and reconcile tensions with their families. She offers a new way of thinking about the emotion work involved in everyday lives, which highlights the informal, sometimes invisible, labor required in preserving family ties. Acosta contends that the work LBQ Latinas take on to preserve connections with biological families, lovers, and children results in a unique way of doing family. Paying particular attention to the negotiations that LBQ Latinas undertake in an effort to maintain familial order, *Amigas y Amantes* explores how they understand femininity, how they negotiate their religious faiths, how they face the unique challenges of being in interracial/interethnic relationships, and how they raise their children while integrating their families of origin.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Amigas y Amantes makes a significant contribution to understanding the lives of 'sexually nonconforming' Latina women. Acosta compellingly reveals the life experiences of these women, the challenges they face, and the way they handle these challenges." (Anita Garey author of *Weaving Work and Motherhood* 2013-02-20)"Amigas y Amantes" offers a thought-provoking sociological lesson about gender conformity and femininity and the fascinating ways these may shape a Latina mother's concern about the nonconforming sex life of her daughter." (Gloria González-López author of *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives* 2013-05-08)"Acosta explores the experience of Latinas who do not conform to traditional gender or cultural roles by identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or queer. A well-written, deeply engaging sociological work that discusses and promotes thought on gender conformity and femininity within the Latina culture. All academic libraries with sociology or women's studies programs absolutely must own this book. Essential." (Choice 2014-05-01)"Amigas y Amantes offers a richly nuanced portrait of LBQ Latinas' family lives. Acosta skillfully foregrounds the voices of her respondents to make visible the tensions and contradictions entailed in their efforts to bring together their families of origin and choice, and, also important, to create spaces for the existence of the families they envision for themselves." (American Journal of Sociology)

KATIE L. ACOSTA is an assistant professor of sociology at Georgia State University.

Even though this is an academic book it is written in an easy to read fashion. It was a very informative book about an important topic that very few have researched. I appreciate that the author included the original Spanish versions of the transcript excerpts as well as their English translations.

In this book, the academic interviews Latina lesbians and bisexual women, whom she calls sexually nonconforming, about the tensions or cohesiveness between their lovers and their biological relatives. I wonder if people may benefit by reading this alongside Dr. Mignon Moore's study on Black lesbian families. Maybe an undergraduate could write a paper comparing the two. Still, I must admit that I preferred Moore's book. A lot of academic books have drab covers. I think perhaps authors don't want to look like they are promoting the surface over the depth. I really think that could hurt any writer's book sales. Thus, I love that Dr. Acosta goes in a different direction and uses an amazing, eye-catching cover. The beautiful cover will surely catch more readers, but some may not be used to academic language and end up biting more than they can chew. The alliteration of the

title may be catchy. However, I wonder if this book should have been called "Amantes y Parientes" instead. That would state the two spheres analyzed here more boldly. Yes, some of the women here are mothers. However, the book says more about "how does your birth family respond to your girlfriend" more than it does "how does your birth family deal with your partner and the kid you had through AI." I can imagine lesbians who wish to start families wishing to hear more about that here. Too often, studies and fictional accounts about gay men and lesbians of color act like the group has two choices: get with a white partner or a same-race partner. Regardless of sexual orientation, not enough exists about people of color that get with other people of color. For example, Rachel Moran's book "Interracial Intimacies" barely touches that type of couple, quickly stating that the grand, grand, grand majority of interracial couples consist of a white partner and a non-white partner. But hey! Remember the Blatina couple in the film "Go Fish"? They exist. I really applaud Dr. Acosta for discussing Latina-Black couples here and not just Latina-white ones. However, her findings are depressing and they counter what I would hypothesize. This book has a whoooooooooole chapter in which it is stated that one way Latina lesbians can sidestep homophobia is by dressing and acting in a femme manner. She writes that some family members suggest that they would rather have a feminine, lesbian relative than a masculine, heterosexual, female one. That argument reminds me of what several studies of male homosexuality in Latin American have stated: only a feminine man or bottom would be considered gay down there. A Dominican male once told me that the epithet "m\*ric\*n" refers to gender-nonconformity more than it does to homosexuality. However, other scholars have noted, "No one knows what goes on between four walls." That is meant to suggest masculine gay dudes may be hiding their bottom activities by their gender-typicality. Uh-oh, I may be digressing. Here's the point, the author said only about three of her interviewees were non-feminine. I just cannot believe that the grand, grand, grand majority of Latina lesbians are femme. Dr. Mignon Moore never suggests that there are barely any butch, Black lesbians. Why render Latina butches invisible? Frida Kahlo sometimes appeared in suits. Two famous Latina lesbian writers, Moraga and Anzaldua, were not femme women in my eyes. It may be class-related, as Dr. Moore argues. And I do get the sense the women in this study skewed toward money. I just don't buy that every Latina lesbian is girly. That's just not true. I think a ton of readers could leave with that impression and they'd be wrong. I know seeeeeeveral Latinos who have told me that they think a Latina butch would be treated better than a queeny, Latino gay guy by the larger Latino community. I've met a decent number of Latina lesbians and I would neeeeeever tell anyone, "They tend to be femme." This book has the potential to really upset Latina butches. Did you all see Skip Gates' "Black in Latin America"? In that series, he said Haitians tend to be proud of their African

ancestry, but Dominicans do a lot to dance around it. There is a well-cited book called "Hopeful Girls, Troubled Boys" in which a Dr. Nancy Lopez is not afraid to speak about Dominicans in the same breath as Haitians and Black Americans. I think Dr. Lopez speaks openly about being a Black woman. In this text, this author just calls herself "dark-skinned." I googled her and she is clearly of African descent. She refers to one of her interviewees as Afro-Dominican, but I didn't see one place where she used that term to describe herself. The author recounts that a Latina of European ancestry said, "I'm Latina and white" and an American of European ancestry responded, "So!? You're JUST Latina." I would like to tell the author that many in the United States would deem her more African than she lets on to. As a person proud of his African heritage, it just irked me to no end the way the author never once admits to her African roots. The book is small in page length, but it still took quite a while to read. There was just something difficult about it. I just think the style is going to turn off some readers. Don't get me wrong: I do think tenure boards punish professors who write plainly. There were just enough things that I felt could have been stated in a paragraph, rather than over several pages.

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