

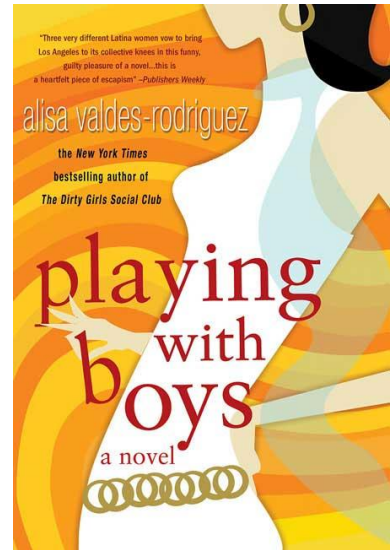
READING GROUP GUIDE

Playing with Boys

By *Alisa Valdés-Rodríguez*

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Playing with Boys* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Playing with Boys*.

About the Book

From the author of *The Dirty Girls Social Club* comes another fast, funny, soulful, and sexy novel about friendship and love amid Latinas.

It's a jungle out there—in Los Angeles, that is, where the tangle of freeways and ingrained insincerity can make a girl feel very alone, no matter how fabulous the weather or how cute the clothes at the South Coast Plaza mall. With very different styles and attitudes, Marcella, Olivia, and Alexis are trying to crack the code in L.A., trying to snare love and success. But first they have to come together—to make their marks and plan the fun they're going to have along the way.

Marcella is a hot, sharp young television actress who's barely able to enjoy the life she's bought for herself and certainly isn't enjoying her body, which is never quite perfect enough. Olivia, whose life revolves around her toddler son, Jack, is tethered to her suburban mommy track so tightly she can *almost* forget the horrible thing that happened to her family when she was a child herself. Alexis is a musicians' manager with a smart mouth, an ample body, and loads of style but barely enough self-esteem to fill a Prada card case. And the boys in their lives? Marcella's had about enough of them throwing themselves at her; Olivia's boy is her son; and Alexis is still searching, not for a boy this time, but for a man.

Playing with Boys is a savvy novel with charm, style, and heart to spare.



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About the Author

Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez is an award-winning print and broadcast journalist and a former staff writer for both the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. *Playing with Boys* is her second novel.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the relationships forged between friends or the characters' family bonds are stronger in this book? Explain how the characters' ties to others affects their behavior.
2. Body image and looks are very important to Marcella and other characters in this book. Discuss how those perceptions change the characters' view of themselves and also whether you think the male characters in the book share those perceptions.
3. Alexis is not a typical heroine—she's Republican and Christian, among other things. Do you think those anomalies make her more or less likable as a character?
4. *Playing with Boys* begins with a satirical portrait of a typical Los Angeles party. In what other scenes did you feel Valdes-Rodriguez sharpened her satirist's pen effectively?
5. Musicians play big roles in *Playing with Boys*. Compare and contrast the styles and fans of Los Chimpances del Norte, Pedro Negrete, and Goyo. Do you think one of them is more successful than the others at being a musical ambassador for their home country?
6. Valdes-Rodriguez makes it clear how much Olivia's childhood has affected her actions and mind as an adult. Which of the other main female characters has brought her childhood into her adulthood?
7. How important is work to the self-regard of Olivia, Marcella, and Alexis? Explain why each character approaches work as she does.
8. Did you feel the city of Los Angeles was a character in this novel? How might the story have differed if it were set in New York City or Chicago?
9. What do you think happens to Caridad after the action in the book is over?
10. If you have read this author's previous novel, *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, do you think Alexis, Marcella, and Olivia are as likely to remain friends as the six characters (Lauren, Sara, Elizabeth, Usnavys, Rebecca, and Amber) in that novel? Why or why not?

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