

August 2023

**Review of Leon-Boys, Diana. *Elena, Princesa of the Periphery: Disney's Flexible Latina Girl*. Rutgers University Press. 2023. 182 pp. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN# 978-1978830172**

Bryce Henson  
*Texas A&M University*, BHENSON@TAMU.EDU

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy>

---

## Recommended Citation

Henson, Bryce (2023) "Review of Leon-Boys, Diana. *Elena, Princesa of the Periphery: Disney's Flexible Latina Girl*. Rutgers University Press. 2023. 182 pp. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN# 978-1978830172," *Feminist Pedagogy*. Vol. 3: Iss. 5, Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy/vol3/iss5/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@CalPoly. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Feminist Pedagogy* by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CalPoly. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@calpoly.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@calpoly.edu).

Leon-Boys, D. (2023). *Elena, princesa of the periphery: Disney's flexible latina girl*. Rutgers University Press. 182 pp. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN# 978-1978830172

In *Elena, Princesa of the Periphery: Disney's Flexible Latina Girl*, Diana Leon-Boys provides a book-length examination of Princess Elena of Avalor, which Disney purports to be its first Latina princess character. More than just identifying Latina girls as an oft-ignored demographic of study, the book explores the immense pedagogical investment in producing, representing, mediating, and performing Latina girlhood in a transnational context between the United States and Latin America. With great nuance, Leon-Boys utilizes flexibility as an analytic to comprehend the labor Latina girls are symbolically and socially called upon to enact. Throughout the book, Leon-Boys explicates how Latina girls are simultaneously a desirable demographic market, animate post-racial and post-feminist beliefs in the United States, and are placed under hegemonic forces that fortify local, national, and transnational hierarchies. Against the background of neoliberal multiculturalism, this mediascape, as the author shows, is contradictory. Luckily, *Elena, Princesa of the Periphery* aids its readers in navigating this complex terrain of mediated Latina girlhood.

A notable strength of the book is how it is both sophisticated and accessible. Engaging the arenas of discourse and representation, Leon-Boys draws on, applies, and even extends the “circuit of culture” (du Gay et al., 1997) approach to her analysis of Elena of Avalor and the broader social, cultural, economic, and political forces surrounding this figure. In the introduction chapter, she deftly bridges feminist studies, Latina/o/x studies, media studies, cultural studies, and youth studies in a manner that **pushes each individual field forward** by accounting for gaps in scholarship. For example, in Latina feminist media studies, there are only a few book chapters and articles about Latina girls, but no books to date. Similarly, youth cultural studies focuses predominantly on boys, ignoring how girls navigate age, race, gender, class, and nationality. In this interdisciplinary bricolage, Leon-Boys zeros in on the importance of the mediascape and pedagogies surrounding Latina girlhood.

After the strong introduction, each body chapter investigates the flexible labor Latina girls are ideologically hailed by Disney to perform in this era. Drawing on an impressive methodological toolkit, the book agilely moves from contextualization to production to representation to reception and performance. The first chapter is a necessary contextualization of Disney as a transnational media conglomerate with exceptional influence in the U.S., around the globe, and increasingly with U.S. Latinx and Latin American audiences. Chapter two wields a formidable political economy approach to explicate the means of production, industry, audience, and ownership (i.e., the forces that go into forging a media text). This folds over seamlessly into the following chapter, “Animated Latina Girlhood and the Continuum of Flexibility.” There, Leon-Boys utilizes textual analysis to locate and deconstruct the meanings of gendered Latinidad in Elena of Avalor, from the television show to streaming short shows on Disney+ to Disney’s smartphone app. A strength of this chapter is Leon-Boys’ “continuum of flexibility” model that engages “different levels of engagement with actual cultural myths, stories, locations, symbols, cuisines, and narratives” (p. 65). The continuum provides a much-needed conceptual tool to analyze how representations fall into existing stereotypes, homogenize vastly different swaths of people, or disrupt a hegemonic narrative surrounding a group. The final chapter is an innovative ethnographic case study of Elena at both of Disney’s theme parks in the United States. In a chaotic environment that is anything but quotidian, the author keenly demonstrates how

audiences mobilize their interpretations of Elena on-screen with how they interact with the Elena character at the theme parks. In this chapter, it is especially notable how Latinidad is operationalized differently in California versus Florida based on factors such as local U.S. Latinx populations, Latin American tourists, and even state politics.

As part of a larger trend in academic publishing, the book is somewhat short page wise. Perhaps the author is a victim of her own success, writing a superb and succinct book that leaves the reader desiring much much more. Yet, one cannot help but wonder how an audience reception study of Latina girls with the television show might benefit this book. Another aspect that leaves the reader wanting more is that the author continually makes the insightful critique that Disney conflates U.S. Latinx and Latin American communities as one and the same, which elides social, political, and historical heterogeneities. In fact, Disney uses that ambiguity to their advantage, using Latin American tropes to draw U.S. Latinx audiences. Yet, the author never provides her reader a definition of each category or how the two communities are different from one another. Nonetheless, this book is feminist cultural studies at its finest, a much valuable contribution to a variety of fields: feminist studies, Latina/o/x studies, media & cultural studies, and youth studies. The book is relevant for a variety of readers from upper-level undergraduate courses to graduate courses and doctoral seminars.

#### Reference

du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Madsen, A. K., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (2013). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman* (2nd Edition). SAGE Publications.