

ABSTRACT  
LATINA REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH

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This quantitative content analysis investigates the representation of Latina girls and women in children's books across two distinct publishing periods. Drawing on foundational scholarship in gender and racial representation in children's literature and informed by the emergence of multiracial feminism in the 1990s, the study examines a total of forty books, using the book as the unit of analysis (20 published in 1995 and 20 in 2025). A comprehensive 60-item coding instrument was used to generate descriptive statistics, conduct inferential testing, and support comparative qualitative analysis across four domains: structural representation, gendered behaviors, occupational roles, and dialogue-based agency.

Findings strongly support longstanding claims within Latino children's literature scholarship that Latina girls were largely invisible in the 1990s. In the 1995 sample, Latina representation was entirely absent across all six structural indicators: there were no Latina adult women, no Latina girls, no Latina protagonists, no titles identifying Latina characters, and no Latina authors, illustrators, or visual depictions. This absence extended into all other domains, as Latina characters did not appear in any coded behaviors, occupations, or dialogue exchanges. This complete erasure reflects a broader pattern of intersectional invisibility, particularly striking given that the decade coincided with increased scholarly attention to multiracial feminist critique. The findings reveal a clear gap between critical discourse and actual publishing practices.

By contrast, the 2025 sample demonstrates notable increases in representation across all domains. Latina females appeared as central and supporting characters, protagonists, authors, and illustrators. They were depicted engaging in a wider range of behaviors, occupying varied settings, and expressing agency through dialogue. Despite these gains, occupational portrayals remained somewhat constrained by traditional gender norms, particularly in the types of roles assigned to adult Latina characters and in the distribution of leadership and rescue actions.

Overall, the comparison between 1995 and 2025 highlights both meaningful progress and persistent structural limitations. While representation has improved, it continues to be shaped by enduring cultural assumptions. This study provides rare empirical evidence documenting both historical exclusion and contemporary shifts, emphasizing the need for continued efforts to ensure authentic, complex, and empowering portrayals of Latina girls in children's literature.