MONSTRUM 8.1 (June 2025) | ISSN 2561-5629

Butch Latina Archetype in Science Fiction Horror Films

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Science fiction, as a film genre, has long served as a cinematic medium for envisioning futures, possibilities, and advancements that remain inaccessible in the present world. However, the apparent freedom offered by this genre is often constrained when depicting and imagining marginalized populations' futures (Venditto, 2022). As Daniel Valencia notes, Latino/a/e communities in science fiction films are stereotyped, referenced limitedly, or undergo complete erasure (2009). When science fiction films include Latine[1] characters, it places them in specific contexts, environments, and roles that dictate their participation. Similarly, within the horror genre, characters play distinct roles in shaping the horrors they experience. The disparities between victims become evident as their gender and race/ethnicity dictate the constraints placed upon them, ultimately influencing their interactions, relatability, and chances of survival against monstrous entities (Means Coleman, 2023). The subgenre of science fiction horror explores speculative futures while evoking fear and suspense of the unknown, often illuminating sociocultural anxieties about that potential future. This apparent hybridity of science fiction and horror not only serves as a generic extension but also as a potential unfolding of nuanced experiences, environments, and characters. In particular, this paper identifies and explores the Butch Latina archetype that emerges within this subgenre.

I offer a comparative textual analysis of the science fiction horror films *Aliens* (1986), *Resident Evil* (2002), and *Annihilation* (2018) to examine the sociocultural anxieties around Latinas that are intentionally positioned as a foil to white female protagonists who represent distinct femininity, desirability, and survivability. Despite the films occurring across different periods and industry models, the Butch Latina archetype exists in all three. I argue that the masculinization and/or butchification of Latina characters positions them as expendable characters that serves a specific function in reinforcing not only white woman's desirability and survivability, but also the alignment of whiteness with gender normativity, where femininity is contextualized as

[1] This paper uses "Latine" to refer to Latin American populations, as it is the gender-neutral term preferred by some communities over "Latinx," which is often criticized as a white, elitist imposition. Here, I am speaking to the larger lack of representation of Latine characters in general to science fiction films before specifically narrowing it to Latinas.

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white, heterosexual, and, ultimately, worthy of protection. This archetypal role is not unfamiliar; horror, film/television, and critical cultural studies have long examined how similar tropes imposed on marginalized characters function in comparable ways (Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993; Means Coleman, 2023). However, given the relatively lower representation of Latine characters across horror and science fiction film genres and subgenres within a U.S. Western context (Froio, 2023; Subero, 2016), their distinct portrayals not only stand out but also contribute to a necessary discourse on Latino/a/e/x, Hispanic, and Chicano/a/x visibility, narratives, and purpose.

For clarification, I use the term "Latina" instead of "Chicana" or "Hispanic," to allow for a more intersectional and inclusive analysis that avoids confining fictional characters to their racial or ethnic identities, as well as the identities of the actresses portraying them. For example, while Vasquez in *Aliens* embodies a Chicana style, which is regionally and historically specific to Mexican-American identities, the actress, Jenette Goldstein, has Brazilian ancestry. These asymmetrical identities and representations require broader terminology that acknowledges the spectrum of both fictional and real identities, while still highlighting their marginalized status. Additionally, I utilize the term "butch" to indicate the physical masculinization of the Latina characters' bodies, which contrasts with historical, stereotypical representations and roles of Latinas being hypersexualized, objectified, and desired. While "butch" often colloquially indicates particular lesbian identities or expressions, or refers to women who exhibit masculine traits rooted in their gender performance and sexuality, this paper focuses on how Latina characters' bodies and personalities are butchified to strategically distinguish them from white female protagonists in the films. As Gustavo Subero notes, "the use of the word 'butch' … does not imply a move to territories of same-sex desire; instead, it simply functions as a way to set apart those bodies that are regarded as quintessentially feminine and those that break such stereotypical representations of femininity" (2016, 29). This distinction is especially evident in the depiction of the Butch Latina archetype whose racialized gender nonconformity functions to emphasize the normative femininity of white women. While some of the films' Butch Latina narratives gesture toward same-sex desire, these characters are not readily allowed to fully embody or express their queerness. The films often desexualize them, reinforcing whiteness as both a site of desired heterosexual normativity and idealized femininity.

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Latina Representation in Films and Television of the Global North

Latinas' identities, bodies, and narratives have been exploited across U.S. Western film and television. As many scholars have noted, Hollywood perpetuates racial scripts, discourses, and oppressive practices that extend beyond the cinematic screen (Dávila, 2012; Guzman and Valdivia, 2004; Taylor-Alexander, 2017). Similar to the depictions of other non-white women, particularly Black women, historical sexualization has constructed Latinas as "exotic," hypersexual, and even dangerous, objectified for the pleasure of white (masculine) audiences (Hill Collins, 2000; Erba, 2017), but through hypersexualization they also became a threat to white women specifically by taking away desirability from them. Therefore, the masculinization of Butch Latina characters, as discussed further below, renders them desexualized to illuminate the historical threat Latinas have had not only among white men but also to white women, whose centrality and desirability rely on Latina's absence and/or ambiguity. Desirability, here, is a key component of distinguishing Latine from white women, where it isn't an aesthetic quality of the characters but a culturally produced metric in these films that reflect intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality. As this paper will show, Butch Latina characters complicate dominant desirability politics through their rejection of femininity, their embodiment of masculinization, and their resistance to heteronormative scripts. Subverting the hypersexualization that the Latina body has often defaulted to, a new cultural threat towards white dominant ideologies and systems is explored in these films. Latina representations in film and television have historically been othered and objectified via hypersexualization, particularly reifying a white male gaze rooted in a dominant, white cultural imaginary. White American imaginations are particularly important to understanding how such frameworks continue to construct and constrain marginalized communities socially and culturally. As Bebout notes, there isn't a singular manifestation of Latinas, but the "white imagination," homogenizes and flattens the diverse identities and experiences within Latine communities (2018). Although Latina characters in film and television have often been reductively portrayed, stereotyped, or neglected, they are rarely imagined outside of their response to the oppressive systems that shape their existence, a dynamic especially highlighted in the horror and science fiction genres.

Latina representation in science fiction and horror genres is often embedded in an "exchange between North American and Latina American 'versions' of horror [which are] that of hybridity" (Brennan, 2019, 172). This

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hybridity that the Latina embodies, I argue, is one of the reasons why the Butch Latina archetype exists where the subgenre of science fiction horror allows a "generic extension," which expands or modifies existing genre conventions to accommodate new archetypes—archetypes that, in this case, might not emerge within rigid frameworks of either horror or science fiction alone. When thinking about Latinas in science fiction and horror films, there is a continuous "search" for such representation, especially given the "one-sided view … that typically does not include the experiences of Chicanxs/Latinxs (or others)" (Lechuga et al. 2018, 241. However, this paper examines how the films' inclusion of Latina representation does not necessarily equate to holistic, positive, or progressive representation but instead further illuminates the sociocultural tensions that this subgenre amplifies. The representation of Latina characters is often shaped by white imagination and therefore the archetype, despite being "allowed" to push boundaries visually, narratively, and historically, still adheres to racial scripts rather than completely subverting them. While the subgenre modifies existing genre conventions, it doesn't necessarily challenge oppressive structures but instead illuminates reinforced racialized and gendered social hierarchies. However, this illumination itself serves a critical function that foregrounds the limitations and tensions within these representations, making visible the very structures they fail to escape, thus offering a space for a critical layered engagement if not outright subversion.

The science fiction horror genre heightens existing sociocultural anxieties often imposed on Latina characters to symbolize themes of otherness and expendability. Despite the Butch Latina being desexualized so as to be unable to utilize stereotypical Latina hypersexuality as a symbolic site of threat towards white men, their existence now indicates them as an "othered" threat towards white women. While white female protagonists in science fiction horror themselves often disrupt traditional gender roles, their survival is still tethered to their ability to conform to heteronormative ideals and remain desirable. This conformity offers them a degree of protection not extended to their non-white counterparts. As such, while the hybridity of the subgenre allows for the Butch Latina's presence, she is still often relegated to supportive and or sacrificial roles. While the perceived progressiveness of Latina representation in science fiction horror may suggest inclusivity, these portrayals often still reflect underlying systems of oppression that impact both white and non-white women. However, by critically examining these dynamics, an opportunity for richer conversations and more nuanced cinematic

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narratives opens around what it means to "represent" Latina characters in these imagined spaces.

The Butch Latina Archetype

Despite the cultural themes that shape the narratives of *Aliens* (1986), *Resident Evil* (2002), and *Annihilation* (2018), the Butch Latina archetype in all three films follows a consistent sequence of characteristics, experiences, and functions that position her as a disruptor of heteronormative and patriarchal narratives. The characterization of the Butch Latina archetype—embodied by Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein) in *Aliens*, Rain (Michelle Rodriguez) in *Resident Evil*, and Anya (Gina Rodriguez) in *Annihilation*—emphasizes their masculinization and butchification, which in turn highlights the perceived threat they pose to the desirability of the white female protagonist. This dynamic positions them as both a bio-threat and a symbol of border transgression, ultimately determining their survivability.

The Butch Latina is physically distinct, often with visible muscle definition, shaved head or pulled-back hair, and a blunt, military-like demeanor. Unlike the white female protagonist, she is not positioned as desirable nor does she engage romantically with her male counterparts beyond camaraderie. Because she does not compete with the desirability of the white female protagonist, she faces fewer narrative constraints. The perceived progressiveness of her portrayal lies in this lack of restriction. Notably, the Butch Latina archetype is never cast as an antagonist or villain. Instead, her disruptive qualities serve as a source of personal freedom, allowing her to challenge norms without being relegated to a negative or evil force. This distinction deliberately contrasts between her masculinization and the roles of the white female protagonists. In each film, both white and Latina women exhibit masculine traits but the contrast between "acceptable" masculinization (embodied by the white female protagonists) and "unacceptable" masculinization (embodied by the Butch Latina) becomes a defining narrative tool. While both characters exhibit masculinization in their bodies (being more muscluar or skillfull) and personality (being combativeness, forward), the Butch Latina does not maintain desirability within heterosexual norms. For example, the Butch Latina's masculinization often appears as a disruptive or playful personality, and although both women are disruptive in their own way, the Butch Latina's personality is distinctly developed to set her apart from the white female protagonist. Ripley (*Aliens*), Alice (*Resident Evil*), and Lena

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(*Annihilation*) must develop combat skills, strategy, and resilience to confront biological threats. However, to ensure they remain both powerful and palatable, their characters must retain a degree of conventional desirability.

These distinctions from the Butch Latina are not only physical but relational, highlighting the tension between power and femininity. For instance, while the white female protagonists adopt certain masculine traits—Ripley's short hair or Alice and Lena's combat experience—the Butch Latina's masculinization is more pronounced. The white female protagonists don't readily adhere to traditional gender roles, but they are figures that are both socially and sexually desirable. Each one holds something that distinguishes them from the group, where they have some form of knowledge (Alice knows about unethical experimentations), specialization (Lena is a cellular biologist), or experience (Ripley survived an encounter with a xenomorph) that everyone else doesn't have, knowingly or unknowingly. How the white female protagonists are treated establishes a hierarchical differentiation between them and their group but more readily with the Butch Latinas. For instance, before the Butch Latina appears, other non-white characters are introduced who either emphasize the white female protagonist's importance and vulnerability (as in *Aliens*) or suffer early, dire deaths (as in *Resident Evil*). This narrative structure positions the Butch Latina as seemingly a stronger marginalized figure which shifts the dynamic and reframes the stakes of survival within the film and their representation. This shows a sense of loyalty and camaraderie that the white female protagonist doesn't share and to which she doesn't feel as great a draw. This is where the Butch Latina character differs in personality—while she may not be seen as "unique" or conventionally desirable, she is a source of friendship that positions her as a valuable member of the group dynamic. However, despite her established importance, her survivability drastically changes when the white female protagonist enters the picture. For example, in *Aliens*, it is implied that Vasquez has been a longstanding member of the marine unit, yet their overall survival rate drops after Ripley joins them. Additionally, once Alice joins Rain's group in *Resident Evil,* most of them are killed upon entering Raccoon City, and, significantly, Rain is the first to be bitten by one of the undead. Similarly, in *Annihilation*, while Lena joins a newly formed team preparing to enter the Shimmer, Anya and the other women already have familiarity and trust before her arrival. These examples highlight a common pattern where the entrance of the white female protagonist shifts group dynamics and alters the characters' survivability. This shift underscores one of the core aspects of any horror archetype: their characterization influences their survivability, with the Butch

Latina archetype navigating a particularly complex set of relationships within these science fiction horror films.

The Butch Latina is not only defined by their relationships with their peers but also by witnessing the deaths of their friends firsthand, creating a profound sense of helplessness in their inability to save them. This dynamic creates a significant distinction between the Latina characters and white female protagonists: while both have relationships with their peers, the lack of desirability towards the Butch Latina suggests a diminished investment in their survival within the narrative. This implies that desirability is intrinsically linked to survivability. Though these white female protagonists are distinct from the "final girl" trope in slasher horror films, given that they are not naive, virginal, or unskilled, they do share characteristics based on white, feminine desirability. The "final girl" is a character audiences root for, not just because of her cleverness or strength, but also because there is a desirable investment reflected through the perpetrator's gaze *and* through the audience's anticipation. The absence of desirability reinforces the Butch Latina's expendability and the archetype role they play as a sacrificial figure who bolsters the survivability of the white female lead. This is particularly relevant to the Butch Latina given that each film is encoded with sociocultural anxiety about borders, which is associated with and explored through the Latina characters. They are positioned to not only signify this anxiety but, in some ways, succumb to it as well. In other words, they signify and function as the borders of "otherworldly" terrain and biological threats evident in each film.

The presence and existence of the Butch Latina, both literally and figuratively, embody anxieties surrounding alien bio-threats and border transgressions, reflecting the broader American discourse on Latine immigrants. Each Butch Latina's introduction is not only memorable and distinctive but also strategically placed right before the crew, along with the white female protagonist, transitions into an unknown and alien territory. For example, Vasquez is introduced doing pull-ups as Ripley and the crew awaken from hypersleep just before their descent to LV-426 to confront the xenomorphs. Similarly, Rain breaks through a window with her first on-screen words, "Blow me," immediately preceding the team's descent into Raccoon City to unknowingly face the undead. Anya, though given a softer introduction, is the first to approach Lena, seemingly hitting on her just before they enter the Shimmer, which biologically alters their DNA. As Orquidea Morales notes in their analysis and construction of "border horror" there is an element of conflating the female body with geography where the border itself becomes feminized, "the devious and dangerous border … influences the

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disposability and pain that female bodies—here, especially, the bodies of women of color–endure" (2018, xi). The personification of these border anxieties underlines how the Butch Latinas serve as specific symbols of tension and transition into perceived alien or threatening spaces. This also echoes a well-known point in Gloria Anzaldúa's work that, regarding the border between the United States and Mexico, is "una herida abierta," or an open wound, to which the Butch Latina archetypes in all three films endure great emotional and physical pain from the boarders they cross (1987, 25). It begs the question: Does the "border" exist in the future? Though the physical border of the United State and South American countries might not exist readily in these films, that doesn't stop them from creating their own.

Aliens (1986): Birth of the Butch Latina, "Hey Vasquez, have you ever been mistaken for a man?"

Vasquez is the progenitor for the Butch Latina archetype in science fiction horror. While white female protagonists have a long-standing presence in both genres, it is through characters like Vasquez that new forms of representation emerge. Yet she exists alongside established racialized stereotypes that other non-white characters are subjected to, reminding us that Vasquez's uniqueness is still constrained. For example, a Black nurse is in charge of Ripley's physical and psychological health, and familiar with her night terrors that reawaken the horrors Ripley experienced on *Nostromo.* However, it is Vasquez, portrayed as a powerful, assertive, and tough character, who truly sets the tone for an emerging non-white archetype in science fiction horror. To make Vasquez not just another non-white supportive character but a viable one, sociocultural commentary, despite this film being set hundreds of years in the future, was utilized to assist the audience in understanding the significance of what Vasquez's character represents.

During the 1980s, particularly in the United States, Chicana feminism was at the forefront of challenging dominant white patriarchal societies and Vasquez's Butch Latina archetype adheres to fashion and style that were embraced by women who were not afraid to be both tough and feminine in their own ways. Vasquez's attire reflects the militaristic and working-class dynamics of her character's milieu. It also reflects Chicana fashion and broader cultural moments during the 1980s. Chicana fashion and style were symbolic in terms of resistance, rebellion, and rejection of traditional gender norms which Vasquez signifies in her style: an altered t-shirt to show her muscular

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physique, a red bandana on her head, dark eyeliner, and additions to her uniform/weapons such as the phrase "el riesgo siempre ojo" (always be aware of the risk). What is particularly interesting about Vasquez's masculinization is that it is both progressive and regressive. It reflects the Chicana feminism efforts to dismantle machismo within the community, yet this same style also culturally and sexually "others" her (Garcia, 1997). Though Vasquez adheres to masculine, militaristic machismo, and there is an intentional desexualization of Vasquez, making her not desirable for the white male gaze implicit in the film's form, her loyalty to her comrades and the sense of emotional care she has towards them illuminate gendered, feminine aspects of her that still signal her hybridity.

Desirability is conveyed through how Ripley's body and vulnerability are framed in comparison to her peers. When she is first discovered, she is in a sleep-like state reminiscent of Snow White, evoking an aura of fragility and allure. This connection between sleep, vulnerability, and desirability is a recurring motif throughout the films, but it is particularly evident in *Aliens*. Despite Ripley's less traditional feminine appearance, this framing emphasizes her connection to her femininity in contrast to her woman counterparts. For instance, when the new Marine crew is shown in their stasis pods, their bodies are positioned neutrally, with arms at their sides. In contrast, Ripley's posture is distinct—her arms rest above her head, and she moves slightly in her sleep, subtly drawing attention to the feminine aspects of her body. Even her clothing reinforces this distinction: while the female Marines wear t-shirts and shorts, Ripley is dressed in a tank top and underwear that exposes her hips. This not only differentiates her from the group dynamic she is entering, but also how she is allowed to embody femininity in ways her female peers are not. This contrast becomes even more apparent with the introduction of Vasquez. While Vasquez also exposes her arms and has clear alterations to her shirt, the focus is on her muscular physique, emphasizing strength rather than sexuality, which is evident in being introduced to Vasquez in the midst of doing pull-ups. Vasquez's initial curiosity about Ripley underscores their differing portrayals of femininity and desirability. When Vasquez sees Ripley, she asks, "Who's Snow White?" Another female Marine replies that Ripley is a consultant who once saw an alien. Vasquez then turns to her closest comrade, Drake, and says, "Que Bonita!" marking Ripley as a point of intrigue while subtly highlighting the distinction in how their bodies and roles are perceived. Additionally, this can allude to Vasquez's non-heterosexual interests as she is not only more masculine-presenting, but any closeness that she has with a man is through camaraderie rather than sexual interest. This is cemented when

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Hudson, a male Marine, asks Vasquez, "Have you ever been mistaken for a man?" With military humor, Vasquez retorts, "No, have you?" This exchange highlights the differing forms of acceptability these two archetypes experience among their peers and within the narrative. For Vasquez, camaraderie, not sexual interest, is a key marker of acceptance between the two women.

Vasquez, as noted before, symbolically represents border anxiety. Right before they intend to descend to the colony, where the xenomorphs have wreaked havoc, Ripley is giving the Marines a debriefing of the situation. Though Ripley is trying to share information she has experienced firsthand with the group, Vasquez interrupts when Ripley starts to become emotionally overwhelmed by describing the xenomorphs' vicious nature. Vasquez retorts about the xenomorphs, "I only need to know one thing, where they are," causing laughter amongst her group. To which Hutch comments, "Somebody said 'alien.' She thought they said 'illegal alien' and signed up." Here, despite being set hundreds of years into the future, feelings about Latine immigrants have not changed. Border anxiety is even visually relevant in *Aliens,* what countries in science fiction films is an important reference, and as the camera pans across Earth the only two countries shown clearly are the United States and Mexico. Vasquez's presence evokes themes of borders, invasions, and threats—paralleling the dangers posed by the xenomorphs themselves.

The determination of survivability between the two women rests on their being able to conform to social norms, which indicates a form of investment in the individuals who are more likely to have a future in the society to which they hope to return after such bio-threats are eliminated. For instance, Ripley is set up to have a nurturing quality that is rooted in family, given that she is mourning the loss of her daughter and is views the colony in terms of "families." But as they enter the colony, now overtaken by xenomorphs, Ripley's family values become ever more prominent when they encounter Newt, a young girl who is the sole survivor. They form a mother-daughter type of bond, which is prevalent throughout the rest of the film. As they learn that the xenomorphs have a colony formation that binds them to a "mother" of their own, the final battle boils down to mother (Ripley) vs. mother (xenomorph). Even as Ripley becomes more masculinized, which is necessary to defeat the xenomorph "mother," there are visual elements that differentiate Ripley from Vasquez. Hicks teaches Ripley how to shoot one of the Marine's guns while engaging in flirtatious banter. Also, though Vasquez is shown with a seemingly larger gun than her Marine peers, showing greater strength compared to the group, Ripley can operate a similar

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gun while holding Newt, indicating a nurturing aspect that Vasquez apparently cannot obtain.

Figure 1. Vasquez and Ripley holding guns.

This character development is strategic since, despite the fact that all the white female protagonists have distorted relationships or family dynamics as we will come to see, they still appear to adhere to a nuclear family dynamic that provides a level of sympathy and investment in these characters that the Butch Latinas don't attract or in which they are not allowed to participate. Although Vasquez shows care and moments of emotion, these are tied more to her comrades and ultimately end in devastation. While Ripley is obtaining a "new" daughter and love interest (Hicks), and simultaneously showing strength in the ability to defeat the xenomorphic mother, Vasquez's strength diminishes. This becomes clearer at the climax, where Vasquez is holding the door against a group of xenomorphs who are trying to get at the group. Seemingly left behind by Ripley and Hicks, who are chasing after Newt. Vasquez becomes injured and in her final moments is held by her Lieutenant as they together trigger a bomb that kills a group of xenomorphs and themselves. As we see throughout these films, all of the Butch Latinas have to *endure* graphic, violent, and drawn-out deaths that aim to secure some form of survival and hierarchy for the white female protagonist. By the end of the film, Ripley, Hicks, and Newt are all in their pods, forming a pseudo-family. Despite

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Vasquez's demise, she remains a memorable figure of this film and among audiences. However, it would take more than a decade before her archetype becomes embedded and begins to clearly shape representations of Latinas in science fiction horror.

Resident Evil (2002): Clearer Masculinization, "I think when I get out of here, I'm going to get laid."

Though still having the same action-packed themes and aesthetic, *Resident Evil* (2002) complicates sci-fi horror not only through bio-experimentation on the undead but also because it was based on a video game series popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Several cultural changes influenced the development, release, and reaction of this film. For instance, this film was released in early 2002, months after the September 11 attacks, an event that sparked widespread public debate about national identity, trust in government and authorities, and heightened anxieties toward citizens who did not fit the racial, ethnic, or religious norms of white Christian American culture. *Resident Evil* was created and released around a time that could have seen it fuel these types of anxieties. The extension of the Butch Latina differs from, yet complements Vasquez's legacy as the establisher of this archetype. Rain, the Butch Latina archetype in *Resident Evil,* is played by Michelle Rodriguez, who got her first acting role in the independent film *Girlfight* (2000). This performance granted her several awards and recognitions, which shortly after landed her a lead in *Fast and the Furious* (2001). These films position Rodriguez in feminized yet edgy roles, and with her acting skills and personal history—she served in the U.S. Army—she was seemingly a real-life Vasquez. *Resident Evil* profits from Rodriguez's personal and professional image while (un)intentionally extending this to a Vasquez-style. Recurring cinematic themes and archetypal characteristics continue to exist in this film with some adaptations that unveil further complexity within Latina representation and the anxieties and threats they pose towards white femininity, especially around masculinity and butchification.

The film focuses on Alice, the white female protagonist, who suffers from amnesia and finds herself thrown into chaos when she is thrown in with a group of commandos to investigate a deadly t-Virus outbreak in an underground research facility. They soon discover that the virus has reanimated the dead into vicious, primal, and highly contagious creatures.

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Though Alice doesn't face any alien life forms in this film, a different biological threat lurks, aiming to infest the into which group she is dragged. Each biological threat in the films revolves around some form of contamination—whether from xenomorphs implanting human hosts with chest-bursting offspring, the t-Virus turning victims into cannibalistic undead, or the Shimmer mutating the DNA of anything it touches. This concept of infestation carries broader cultural implications, particularly when considering how Latine communities have historically been framed as invasive threats in media and right-wing propaganda. When considering Latinas in particular, they are often depicted as a threat to white femininity, mirroring how these films frame biological threats as destabilizing forces. The anxiety surrounding Latina women "stealing" from white women, threatening their future desirability, sustainability, and biological lineage, manifests not only in the monstrous entities they confront but also in the ways these films hypermasculinize them.

Like Ripley but contrasting with Rain, Alice's desirability is established through a mix of allure and vulnerability even before she is introduced. There are several other women, outside of Alice and Rain, who are killed off or have drawn-out deaths. For instance, the minute a racially ambiguous woman's head is cut off in the beginning sequence, Alice's eyes open, introducing her naked in a shower and awakening from the slumber that precedes the amnesia she experiences throughout the film. As she goes through her drawers trying to find clothes to put on, she finds that one of them is filled with guns, she gasps, pulling away from them in shock. This moment, though we find out she is highly skilled in combat, unveils a sensitivity to the masculine objects with which Rain has no problem interacting.

There are interesting moments of white women's masculinization that remain at arm's length, even as these women ultimately embrace the military and tactical skill set necessary to confront the biological entities. Ripley asserts that she is not a soldier, yet she defeated the Xenomorph Queen. When Alice is addressed with "I want your report, soldier," she responds, "I don't know what you are talking about," and Lena adheres to her scientist more than her U.S. soldier identity. This hesitation or delayed embrace allows these white female protagonists to emphasize aspects of their more feminized personalities, avoiding immediate association with masculine traits. In contrast, Butch Latina archetypes readily embrace their soldier-like characteristics, making it hard for them to separate their femininity from their masculine behaviors. This disruption between femininity and masculinity amongst the Butch Latinas is not easily separated but matters because it highlights how

these gender expressions is racialized. Despite both the Butch Latina and the white female protagonist having some form of masculinity attached to their femininity, the clear masculinization of the Butch Latina's body and personality positions them in a hierarchical difference in desirability and survival. Side by side, Rain and Alice are physically different, despite both being highly skilled. Rain is covered completely in tactical gear, while Alice is in a revealing red dress. Their visual contrast reflects a deeper, distorted hierarchy of gendered and racialized value.

Rain embodies the butch and masculinized traits that Vasquez introduced, particularly through her unwavering loyalty to her commando unit and her close bond with J.D., which parallels Vasquez's connection with Drake. Their playful and comedic banter highlights their camaraderie, but as with Vasquez, this bond is severed when Rain is forced to witness her partner's brutal death. This demonstrates the emotional expression and space that the Butch Latina is allowed to have, arguably a feminized quality of the Butch Latina, but it is reserved for a friendship that ends in pain. Rain's butchification is also demonstrated through her dialogue—with lines such as "I think when I get out of here, I'm going to get laid" and "Blow me"—which does not explicitly define her sexuality but instead reflects a masculine assertiveness that contrasts with the more passive, socially acceptable expressions of desire typically afforded to white female protagonists. Across these films, the white female protagonists have their survival and narrative investment intertwined with their desirability and adherence to conventional social norms—whether it be Ripley assuming a maternal role, Alice's symbolic connection to her pseudo-husband, or Lena's attempt to reconcile her infidelity. Even as these women challenge traditional roles, they ultimately retain a level of conformity that allows them protection. In contrast, the Butch Latina archetype, despite also deviating from traditional femininity, is denied the same narrative leniency, reinforcing their expendability in service of the white female protagonist's survival. Compared to all examples of the Butch Latina archetypes, Rain makes it closer to the end of the film. Nevertheless, what all of them eventually succumb to the bio-threat with which the film symbolically associates them. Rain has been continuously bitten and infected by the contagious undead. Her strength is evident even in the pain she consistently endures. Despite the loyalty she has to the group, the resilience she shows against the bio-threat, and her tactical skills, which grant her greater odds of survival, her death is no less than gruesome and drawn out. Though on the train to get them out of Raccoon City and given the antidote, Rain turns into one of the undead and is killed by Alice. The drawn-out nature of

Rain's death serves as a symbolic function to emphasize her physical endurance while also turning her racialized body into a spectacle. This reinforces her not only as memorable but expendable, underscoring the consequences of not adhering to normative expectations.

Alice and Rain's relationship, compared to equivalents in *Aliens* and *Annihilation*, grows warmer, showing care for the well-being of the other. However, as noted later in the *Resident Evil* series, Rain "returns" but in clone form, so as to test how Rain's DNA handles the t-Virus. Not only is Rain's identity and body reduced to experimentation by the white corporate power of Umbrella, she is divided into two types, a "Bad Rain" who is villainized against Alice, and a "Good Rain" who helped Alice escape from the facility. These roles reinforce reductive stereotypes that Latina characters have historically participated in, either being evil or sacrificial. *Resident Evil* illuminates a significant tension that existed between white women and women of color, where feminist movements often did not reflect the complex realities faced by women of color. As a result, white women could become agents of the very systems of oppression they claimed to resist. Alice's role exemplifies this dynamic: although she occupies the position of a strong female protagonist, her survival comes at the expense of Rain, whose body is a site of infection and violence. But it is in *Annihilation* that such tension is stirred to the point that mutual anxiety emerges between the Butch Latina and the white female protagonist.

Annihilation (2018): Sacrificial Always, "Thanks for the fucking backup Lena!"

While *Annihilation* (2018) presents itself as more progressive due to its all-female cast and broader science fictional representation of women, it arguably reinforces regressive tropes—not only via the Butch Latina archetype but more broadly through what it has Latina representation endure. *Annihilation* is a science fiction horror film that is based on the novel by Jeff VanderMeer. It follows a group of scientists who enter an environment that has been contaminated by alien biological agents they call the Shimmer, which are biologically mutating plants and animals. This film faced controversy over studio concerns that the film was "too intellectual," with proposed changes that included making Lena, the white female protagonist, a more sympathetic character. However, creative clashes over these revisions ultimately led to a limited theatrical release, with the film transitioning to Netflix for streaming.

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Although the decision was applauded, given that it didn't "dumb down" the narrative for audiences, the wish for Lena to be more sympathetic speaks to the legacy of white women in films needing to be represented as softer and more desirable. Nevertheless, *Annihilation* doesn't detour from the tensions that continue to exist between the Butch Latina archetype and the white female protagonist.

Anya exhibits masculine traits both in personality and physicality. As the Butch Latina archetype in *Annihilation*, she is distinguished by her shaved head, bulkier frame, frequent cursing, and signature white tank top. Notably, Anya is the first to integrate Lena into the group on a more personal level. Yet as in the other films, the arrival of the white female protagonist marks the turning point that seals the fates of the other team members. Unlike Vasquez and Rain, Anya's femininity is more explicitly "restored" or accepted—she is portrayed as having non-heterosexual attraction, showing motherly care toward Josie, one of her comrades, and expressing emotional vulnerability, for example through fear. A subtle nod to Vasquez occurs when Anya admires a large gun, yet, unlike Vasquez who insists on wielding the heavy weaponry to match or surpass her male comrades, Anya's strength is depicted as softer and more humanizing. This is shown through moments such as struggling to hold the alligator's mouth open, managing the emotional well-being of her peers Sheppard and Josie, and later choosing not to carry the large gun, deeming it too heavy despite recognizing its utility. This contrast alludes to how Anya's characterization, while evoking Vasquez, shifts toward a less militaristic portrayal, reinforcing the distinct but still evident limitations imposed on the Butch Latina archetype. Nevertheless Anya , like Vasquez and Rain, embodies loyalty and camaraderie, but this ultimately leads to her downfall. She struggles deeply with the death of her comrade Sheppard, mirroring Vasquez's loss of Drake and Rain's loss of J.D. Each of these women desperately tries to save their fallen ally and stop the biological threat but fails. These moments only serve to heighten the racial/ethnic tensions between the Butch Latina archetype and white female protagonist.

Despite being recruited into a team of highly educated specialists, Anya's expertise is limited to her role as a paramedic—essentially a first responder. Each woman has some form of doctoral expertise: Lena is a cellular biologist, Ventress is a psychologist, Sheppard is a geomorphologist, and Josie is a physicist, but Anya is not granted the title of "doctor" in her field. *Annihilation* shifts the basis of class hierarchies from physical strength to intelligence and academic achievement. Anya's role as a paramedic implicitly marks her as occupying a lower socio-economic and intellectual status

compared to her peers. In some ways, even her expertise as a paramedic and strength is undermined given that Lena has combat experience, being in the U.S. Army with her husband, and then becoming a cellular biologist. Knowledge and its attainability play a significant role in differentiating white female protagonists from Butch Latina characters throughout all three films. Moments arise where characters demand transparency and knowledge about the alien bio-threats they seek to conquer or survive. For instance, Rain already has some insight into the mission's purpose after the facility is shut down. However, Alice comes to remember how the facility was shut down in the first place because of an attempt to steal the bioweapon. The white female protagonists are consistently portrayed as holding or uncovering crucial hidden knowledge, which is either intentionally (Lena withholding information about her husband being a part of the last group to enter the Shimmer) or unintentionally (Alice not being able to access her memories and her status as successfully transformed by the t-Virus) withheld from the Butch Latina characters.

This division of knowledge reflects broader sociocultural tensions and historical practices of exclusion, where women of color are often denied access to critical information or left out of decision-making processes, even in spaces ostensibly focused on women being in solidarity with one another. The lack of transparency or sharing of knowledge reinforces hierarchical dynamics, where white women are positioned as gatekeepers of understanding and agency, leaving the Butch Latina characters in subordinate roles. Among the three films, Ripley stands out as actively trying to dismantle hierarchies of knowledge exclusion. From the beginning, she repeatedly warns the corporation and the Marines about the xenomorphs. Unfortunately, Vasquez interrupts her during one such moment with a comedic retort, highlighting the lingering divisions between the two women and the fractured sense of group camaraderie. Nevertheless, a closer examination of all three films reveals a recurring moment of confrontation between the Butch Latina archetype and the white female protagonist, occurring just before they descend further into terror. After Sheppard is taken Anya's sarcastic retort, "Thanks for the fucking backup, Lena," underscores the underlying tension between these two archetypes. Ripley steps forward, staring Vasquez down as she pointedly states, "I hope you're right. I really do." Similarly, when the group travels on a train to the underground facility, Alice watches Rain struggle to open a door, prompting Rain to challenge her gaze with a direct, "You got a problem?" These moments highlight the friction between the two archetypes, reinforcing

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the Butch Latina's positioning as both a formidable force and a perceived challenge to the white female protagonist's authority.

Figure 3. Alice and Rain's confrontation in *Resident Evil* (2002).

Figure 4. Lena and Anya's confrontation in *Annihilation* (2018).

While *Annihilation* (2018) offers a seemingly progressive portrayal of this archetype—depicting Anya as emotionally expressive, caring, and even vulnerable—this nuance does not shield her from the same violent fate imposed on her Butch Latina predecessors. Her death is not only physical but psychological, as she is haunted and ultimately consumed by Sheppard's cry for help, then grotesquely echoed by the mutated bear. Just as Vasquez and Rain are unable to save their closest comrades, Anya is not only powerless to protect Sheppard but is tormented by the very embodiment of her failure when she becomes infected by the Shimmer.

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Conclusion

These three films—*Aliens* (1986), *Resident Evil* (2002), and *Annihilation* (2018)—outline how the Butch Latina archetype was constructed, sharpened, and extended over time. The portrayal of the Butch Latina archetype in these films reflects evolving dynamics of race and gender in the science fiction horror genre. The consistent marginalization of Latina characters through their masculinization and butchification speaks to deeper cultural anxieties surrounding the intersection of race and gender, particularly about white female desirability and survivability in dominant narratives. These portrayals reinforce the racialized gender hierarchy between Latina and white characters, offering both insight and critique into how films not only entertain audiences but shape societal perceptions of desirability, power, and survival.

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- 2025 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.