

The Interpretation of Sandra Cisneros' Novel *The House on Mango Street*

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Introduction

Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* is an illustration of the problems faced by Latina women in a culture laden with racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Society as depicted in the book is being dominated by men, while the Latina women are treated without equality, akin to second-rate beings. Women are, however, generally praised for their physical features. The ultimate objective of the novel is to portray the challenges and problematic issues in the everyday life of Latina females, while showing the sense of duty one feels to care for the community and loved ones. As such, Cisneros best portrays the effect of community through stigmatization, the events of Esperanza's life, and the feelings that develop into a sense of community and obligation for duty.

Stigmatization

Cisneros portrays women as the objects of the counterparts in their relationships. This objectifying takes place for the women as daughters, employers, girlfriends, or even friends. The females are raised to think that their physical appearance is the most important thing in their life. The book also shows how women are obligated to be faithful to their spouses while the male counterparts have the complete control of all aspects of the relationships. The main character, Esperanza, is shown differently from the rest of the women characters: while she was brought up to be happy with the same role as the rest of the women, she is not happy with such a role. Esperanza realizes that she wants to break out of the bondage with her mental abilities and other skills.

The level of concern for physical appearance exhibited in the novel by the Latina women can be regarded as extreme. The women think that if they are not especially sexually appealing, they will not gain the attention from males required for

life. Since the role of a woman is to be taken in, supported, and controlled by a man, they feel they need to make themselves attractive enough to be ready for this role. All the women in the community are raised to believe they need men for support. Esperanza seeks to become independent from the role placed upon her by the community, and, furthermore, she dreams of a society where the men are the ones that are controlled. Esperanza also hopes to reach out to the community in order to teach them how to break free of its bonds. While stigmatization is one area Esperanza uses to show the effects of the community, the other powerful tool the heroine uses is the perspective into her personal life as she develops and forms bonds.

Life Events and Bonding

Cisneros portrays Esperanza's maturation both physically and mentally. The story outlines such occurrences as the development of her social life, puberty, her first feelings for someone of the opposite gender, and her interest in writing. Esperanza's writing allows her to express herself while providing solace, and sense of freedom, it is evident from her words: "Leap and somersault like an apostrophe and comma" (Cisneros, 1983, p. 71). The stories she writes give a better depiction of the neighborhood while showing many courses of action she may take by herself. Shortly after moving into the new home, Esperanza makes two Latina friends that live nearby. All the girls are reaching puberty and are already finding themselves sexual targets from various members of the community in some cases. Esperanza begins puberty officially when she shows an interest in males watching her dance. Following the death of two close family members, Esperanza soon becomes more observant to the women in her neighborhood. One of her friends, Sally, becomes more sexually active and makes Esperanza feel uncomfortable. More discouraging

experiences follow while Esperanza is soon compelled to leave Mango Street and find her own place to live. Esperanza describes the house in the following way: "The house I belong to but do not belong to" (Cisneros, 1983, p. 110).

Sense of Community

After some time Esperanza becomes fully ready to leave Mango Street. Once she realizes that she is ready in this sense, she almost immediately understands that she can never fully and truly leave, while it is her role to help those close to her. If she does leave, she feels she will return to help those who need her or were the part of her life. By the end of the year, Esperanza has developed emotionally and physically. Her maturity is evident in everything she does. Her writing continues to reflect how there are benefits to leaving as well as how she feels about the areas in her life. Ultimately for her, the writing is both an emotional escape and a sort of reflective measure on the physical escape that she may take.

Conclusion

Community is a powerful element, and Cisneros portrays this with her writing talents through many aspects of community. Though the novel only depicted a single year in the main characters life, it was able to show the power and value of community, the bonding that takes place from experience, and the desire to give back for the positive experiences of life.

Reference

Cisneros, S. (1983). *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage.