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Humanities-1/2
3 Nov. 2014

Women Surrounding Esperanza

Most people would suffocate under immovable constraints like gender inequality, racial discrimination, and poverty. Esperanza has to fight these constraints every day and comes out victorious. Esperanza is the main character in The House on Mango Street written by Sandra Cisneros. She is held back by many constraints that accompany the life and community she was born into, but is still trying to seek a way to escape and never come back. However, she would not have been able to escape if it were not for the many women who influence her along the way. If Alicia, Sally, and her mother were not there to make Esperanza realize that she can only depend on herself to escape, she would be stuck on Mango Street forever.

Alicia has many positive influences on Esperanza. For example, the reader can tell that Esperanza looks up to Alicia when she says, “Alicia who inherited her mama’s rolling pins and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus because she doesn’t want to spend her whole life in a factory” (Cisneros 31-32). Esperanza, like Alicia, wants to get out of Mango Street. It is obviously very difficult for Alicia to escape by herself, yet she still is going to college every day even though it is an extremely difficult feat. Alicia is not relying on anyone to help her; she is doing it by herself. Alicia’s independence influences Esperanza to follow a similar path. Not only does Alicia influence Esperanza with her independence, she influences her with her strength. For instance, readers can clearly see Alicia’s positive influence when Esperanza says, “Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And

fathers” (Cisneros 32). Even though Alicia is sexually harassed by her father, she still takes the initiative to go to college. Instead of settling for an oppressed life, she has the strength and the willpower to take control of her life. Because of Alicia’s determination and drive, Esperanza admires her. Alicia is influencing her to take control of her life and to not relinquish her independence.

Sally influences Esperanza in many ways. When the reader first meets Sally, they learn how her father physically abuses her when Esperanza says, “He never hits me hard, she said her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts. Then at school she’d say she fell. That’s where all the blue places come from” (Cisneros 92). Sally’s father abuses her because he is scared that she will abandon him. Sally is scared of him, yet she still has her own kind of power at school. She wears make-up, flirts with boys, and does not hand over her power at school. This is one reason Esperanza admires Sally. Sally is influencing Esperanza to be confident in herself. Still, Sally is not free. She is still trapped and abused by her father. Consequently, she wants to escape but her way of escaping influences Esperanza to not follow in her footsteps. Esperanza’s disagreement with Sally’s plan is shown when she says, “Sally says she likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he is okay” (Cisneros 101). Sally gets married in order to escape from Mango Street. However, instead of escaping and having her own power, the power over her life only transfers from one man to another. Sally’s mistake teaches Esperanza that she should never rely on a man to help her escape. The only person she can rely on is herself. Esperanza is influenced by Sally in many ways, both positively and negatively.

Esperanza's mother is a smart woman whose mistakes influence Esperanza to not follow in her footsteps. Her mother's frustration with the life she is trapped in is evident to the reader when Cisneros writes, "I could've been somebody you know? My mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V. But she doesn't know which subway train to take downtown" (Cisneros 90). Esperanza's mother has many abilities that most people do not. She can speak multiple languages, fix a T.V, and sing, but she is still stuck on Mango Street. Esperanza's mother is a perfect example of who Esperanza will become if she does not escape. Esperanza's mother influences Esperanza to follow a different path by showing Esperanza who she will become if she does not. Esperanza's mother is not only influencing Esperanza with her current situation, she is influencing Esperanza with her past. Her mother's feelings for her past mistakes are clearly shown to the reader when she says, "Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains. Yup, she says disgusted, stirring again. I was a smart cookie then" (Cisneros 91). Esperanza's mother talks about how she was smart in high school, but she quit school because she was embarrassed of her poverty. Now she is ashamed that she was embarrassed enough to quit school and chose to not get the education she deserves. Esperanza's mother is influencing her to not make the same mistake that she did and follow through with her education.

Esperanza's mother, Alicia and Sally have all impacted Esperanza in different ways to make her realize that the only person she can rely on to escape is herself. If her mother had not shared her story, if Sally had not make her mistakes, and if Alicia never showed Esperanza what strength is then Esperanza may have never gathered the independence needed in order to get out

of Mango Street. These three women influence Esperanza to become the woman she needs to be in order to escape. Even in today's world, there are many young girls who are trapped in a world where men are the controllers. Esperanza's story tells young women everywhere that they do not have to give up their independence in order to find a better life.

Work Cited

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House On Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.