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# An Exploration of Dual Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*

Maria D. Ramirez  
*Governors State University*

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An Exploration of Dual Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*

By

Maria D. Ramirez

A.A., South Suburban College, 2011

B.A., Governors State University, 2013

THESIS

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Governors State University  
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## ABSTRACT

Having a dual identity is something that comes across in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. In this novella, the protagonist, Esperanza Cordero, tries to discover, create, and accept the complexity of her dual identity that is influenced by her experiences with poverty, discrimination, classism, and gender expectations. Esperanza wants to overcome the oppression outside her community and the patriarchal society in her community by moving away from Mango Street and becoming a writer. She has to find a way to bridge the gap between both her American and Mexican identity. Through the character of Esperanza, Cisneros tells stories about the marginalized population that are seldom told. She depicts poverty, racism, and gender imposed expectations through the observations Esperanza makes about her community on Mango Street. All these issues affect Esperanza's dual identity because she constantly struggles with both identities by side. The manner that other people perceive her contributes into the way she perceives both her American and Mexican identities.

## Chapter I

### **An Exploration of Dual Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street***

Mexican children and young adults who are born or raised in the United States are faced with two different identities. They struggle to live in two different worlds side by side. These two worlds consist of being both Mexican and American. As a result, this greatly affects the way that their identities are shaped. External factors such as the way people perceive them and the associations that are made about them affects them negatively. They do not know exactly where they fit. On one hand, their parents might be too conservative and they might not understand them. Their parents, along with their cultural expectations confine them to gender expectations. Women are expected to follow the example of Virgin Mary by being pure and taking care of the household while men are expected to be the providers. Male promiscuity is also more acceptable than the promiscuity of a woman. Promiscuous women are seen as “bad” women and therefore unfit to marry. On the other hand, the dominant culture might not completely accept them because although they are raised and/or born here, they are still looked upon as being foreign and outsiders. Having a dual identity conflict affects the way that children and young adults perform in school. Since dual identity is rarely discussed, many people such as educators might not be aware of the conflict. Therefore they do not know how to help their students cope with it. Dual identity has so many complexities that individuals who experience them might sometimes be unaware of it. They are not really sure of the internal conflict that they face everyday living between two different cultures. The experience is hard to put into words.

*Sometimes when I have away basketball games, I come home late at 8:00 p.m.*

*The bus drops me off a block away from home. As soon as I walk into the door,*

*Pa yells at me, “Hija de la Chingada, where have you been?” “I just got back*

*from my game, the bus just dropped me off,” I say. “Nada mas que me salgas con tus chingaderas, you’re going to be put out of my house,” he tells me. I just shake my head and go into my room. I don’t tell him that today I was a starter and that I scored a few of three points that I have been working on all month. If he had only come to my game, maybe he would have been proud of me. He would also know that I’m not doing anything bad. He does not want to come to my games ever since the last time he saw me play three years ago; when I barely got to touch the ball. He thinks that I suck and watching me play is a waste of time. Plus playing sports is no place for a girl anyway. He believes that I should be home learning how to cook; helping my mother with all the household cleaning. “You’re useless and lazy. You’re never going to get marry if you do not know how to cook, no one will want you,” he tells me every time he gets a chance.*

Growing up as a Mexican girl in the United States has been an experience that I was unable to articulate for most of my life. I struggled with things internally and externally. On one hand, I was the daughter of a very traditional father who had double standards between my four brothers and I, while on the other hand I was growing up in a very liberal and dominant culture. I was not allowed to date until I finished high school, whereas my brothers were allow to have girlfriends when they were about twelve years old. Their girlfriends were around the same age as them. I was also discouraged from playing sports. For a long time, my father believed that sports like soccer were not for girls but for boys. When I went behind my father’s back and auditioned for cheerleading and basketball, he was not too happy with me. He showed his disapproval by

not supporting me when I needed money for a uniform. Out of all the hundreds of basketball and soccer games combined together, my father only attended one game. After playing basketball for three years in elementary school, he tried to stop me from playing basketball in middle school because he felt that I was getting out of control since I was coming home late. If I came home an hour later than I was supposed to or went somewhere without his permission, my father would think that I was getting out of hand. He would ground me and remind me that I was not my own boss. Although my father was not a horrible person, his views and traditional way of thinking kept us from developing a good relationship. Out of four sons, I am his only daughter. I am the only one that went to college without his help or permission. I was also the daughter who moved out of his house before even getting married. Even though he does not agree with things I have done, he is proud of me. Education for the women in his family was never an option and finding a good man and getting married was as good as it got for them. He has yet to see all my hard work and all the years I have spent in school pay off, but I am hoping that someday soon he will understand why I spend so much time devoting myself to my writing, to reading, and to being a good student. Someday soon, he will see that school is just not too much work and a waste of time because he thinks my field is impractical.

*Today, I pretended like I was sick, I told Mami that my stomach was hurting but she told me that my stomach is always hurting these days. I finally broke down and told Mami that my teacher is really mean to me but she says that I still have to go to school. Ms. Contreras sends me upstairs to Ms. Brown's class. At first Ms. Brown was really nice to me but when I can't understand her or speak in English, she yells at me. I do not understand what she says but it frightens me. Her voice gets louder and louder. I do not know what to do but to*

*look down. Maybe if I do not look at her she will stop yelling. But when she does not stop and the other children laugh at me, I start to cry. She says something to me that I can slightly understand. I know the words “you” and “stupid.”*

School was very challenging for me. Although I was very smart, I did not have the advantages other children had. I was still learning two languages at the same time. There was no one to help me with homework, I had to figure things out on my own; with the exception of simple arithmetic. After doing so well in my first grade bilingual class, I was transferred into an English-speaking class. The teacher did not have experience in working with ESL (English as a Second Language) students so she showed her frustration towards me by yelling words at me things that I did not understand because I was not proficient in English at the time. Hence I lost my excitement for school and for learning. I would cry every morning before school, begging my parents not to take me. Trying my best to avoid attending school, I even went to the extent of pretending I was sick so that I could stay home. After I did it several times, my parents discovered what I was doing and they made me go to school. When I occasionally saw my first grade bilingual teachers, I told them to take me back to their classroom because I was having a hard time. Their response was that being in that class was the only way I would learn English. My parents did not really say anything about the matter because they trusted that the teachers were doing the right thing. In third grade, I transferred to a different school because my family moved. I comprehended and spoke English better but I was still struggling with reading and writing. My teacher was more understanding of my struggles; she told me to keep working hard because I would eventually get better.

However, the principal of the school prohibited me and other Latina(o) students from speaking Spanish. I felt like a big part of myself was stripped away from me with that particular experience because that was the only way I knew how to communicate. Most of the school staff and teachers were not bilingual. Often times there were words that I was unable to translate into English. The only option I had was to ask one of my Latino(a) peers who spoke both languages fluently. Learning English was difficult because I was unaware that there were major differences between English and Spanish. I thought that both languages had masculine and feminine nouns so that caused even more confusion for me. Children made fun of me because I spoke too fast and with an accent. In fact, teachers felt the need to always state that they could not understand me because of my accent and because I spoke too fast. Even in college, I had teachers that made remarks about accent and my writing. My acting teacher told me that if I wanted to be successful with my acting career, I needed to work hard to lose my accent. Another teacher told me that I needed help with my writing because there were major errors since I was an ESL student. These occurrences made me insecure. I have always feared that when people saw me acting or writing, they would see that English is not my first language and they would somehow correlate that to my character and or intelligence.

I spent most of my life trying to articulate the inexplicable feelings and thoughts about being a Latina in the United States. I thought that there was not a living soul who had experienced what I have been through. Even though I had always loved to read, I had never been exposed to any Latino(a) writers. I had no idea that they even existed. It was not until my freshman year in high school that Ms. Giles helped me to discover the world of Latina writers. The first book that I read was *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* by Julia Alvarez. Although the characters were Dominican, I was still able to relate to them because they shared

similar experiences to mine. Ms. Giles then introduced me to Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, which I disliked the first time I read it. Sandra Cisneros's simplicity made it really easy for me to finish the book in a matter of minutes. I did not take the time to analyze it. I just remember thinking to myself how much I really did not like her book for years. It was not until last semester that I decided to give her work a chance and I read the book again. This time reading the book was magical, I saw so much of myself in the character of Esperanza Cordero. The book had not changed at all; I was the one that had changed. I had much more experience with literature. I was only fifteen the first time I read it. This time around, I was twenty-four.

I was finally able to articulate what my life had been after my Women's Literature professor, Dr. Rashidah Muhammad introduced me to Gloria Anzaldua in a Women's Literature class. Reading "An Open Letter to Women Writers of Color" and *Borderlands/La Frontera* changed my life. Anzaldua finally gave me words to articulate my existence. It was that semester that I understood so much about myself. Ironically this same semester, I experienced much racism. First I was racially attacked by a person, who I thought was a dear friend of mine after I posted the following quote on social media by Gloria Anzaldua that states:

Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty. And Spanish was not taught in grade school. And Spanish was not required in High School. And though now I write my poems in Spanish as well as English I feel the rip-off of my native tongue.

When I first read this quote, I was able to share a little bit of what my experience, thoughts, and emotions had been all my life. I posted this quote in hopes that other Latinas who were on a similar journey as mine would look at it and realize that they are not alone. Instead this person took this quote as a personal insult and he made it his point to let me know that I should move out of the country and go to South America (even though Mexico is North America) because evidently I did not fit into American culture. I was basically an outsider who had no business criticizing American society. My views were different than his for speaking out against the oppression of being both Mexican and a woman. Since this person was a close friend of mine, I wondered if all people who were not of color saw me as an outsider. I was so hurt by what he said that I started to put my guard up because it seemed that regardless of the higher education I was receiving, at the end of the day, I would still be seen as a Mexican girl. I cannot explain the hundreds of times in my college career when I would walk into a classroom the first day of class and think to myself if people were wondering what I was doing there. It always made me insecure about my studies and I always felt the need to show that I was indeed compatible and smart like my peers.

A few days after the incident with my close friend, I opened a bank account and deposited over three-hundred dollars. After waiting more than ten days to receive my debit card, I went to the bank to withdraw money in order to pay for my tuition the next day. When I got there, I filled out the withdrawal form and showed them my state identification. Several minutes later, I was told I could not take my money out since they believed that I had a forfeited social security number. I offered to bring in my social security card but they told me that that would not be good enough. They demanded that I went to go to the social security office to get a letter from them stating that the social security number was indeed mine. I was overwhelmed and frustrated

because I could not believe that they would think of me as someone who would use a fake social security number. I believed that it was easily assumed that my social security card was not mine because Latinos are sometimes stereotyped as being undocumented.

These two experiences further influenced me to research and write my thesis about dual identity in Latino(a) literature. I wanted to explore if the manner in which Latino(a) writers portrayed the dual identity of Latinos(as) in their works is similar to mine. I also had many questions about the complexity of having both Mexican and American identities. I wanted to find the answers to all my questions. It was a process to narrow down the works and authors that I would explore. Ultimately, most of my research was on selected works of Sandra Cisneros. I made my final decision to write about *The House on Mango Street* after standing in line for three hours to meet her. After meeting her, I saw how humble she continues to be. She seemed so similar to me.

Sandra Cisneros grew up in Chicago, not very far from my childhood home. Her father migrated to the United States from Mexico during the epoch of World War II. He was forced to join the armed forces if he did not want to be deported. Cisneros mother was born a United States citizen. Her family immigrated during the Mexican Revolution to work on railroads in Chicago. Cisneros traveled back and forth between Mexico and the United States as a child. In *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros*, Carmen Haydee Rivera explains that, as a child, Cisneros “became painfully aware of her social conditioning and class position, feeling like an outsider visiting relatives in Mexico while at the same time not quite fitting into Anglo American society and culture” (17). As a result, she grew up very isolated with two different identities. Cisneros attended Loyola University in Chicago and majored in English. She then earned a MFA from the University of Iowa in Creative Writing. The common

denominator in both of her degrees was that she was the only Latina enrolled in the English Department at the time.

In the same way as me, Cisneros noticed the lack of Latino(a) writers in the literary canon. She realized that she did not have a privileged life like the people around her. The only writer that she connected with was Emily Dickinson because she was a woman that expressed herself about the patriarchal oppression during her time by writing poetry. However there were still many differences between Dickinson and Cisneros. Dickinson had access to a better education as well as she had a different class position. Most of Cisneros's peers in college were White and middle to upper-class. She noticed that her experiences differed from their lives and college experiences. In "The Bicultural Construction of Self In Cisneros, Álvarez, And Santiago," Ellen C. Mayock quotes Cisneros. Cisneros states, "I knew I was a Mexican woman, but I didn't think it had anything to do with why I felt so much ambivalence in my life, whereas it had everything to do with it! My race, my gender, my class! That's when I decided I would write about something my classmates couldn't write about" (qtd. in Mayock 229). After discovering that her experiences as a Latina were different than her classmates, she decided to write about them. After one of the class discussions in graduate school about Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, she was influenced to write *The House on Mango Street*. Bachelard's work focuses on the way people perceive houses and the impact that it has on dreams, memories, and thoughts. In other words, it explores the concept of a house versus a home. A house is an object that does not have much meaning while a home becomes much more than that. A home is a dwelling place that has emotional attachment. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes:

For our house is our corner of the world... it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty. Authors

of books on ‘the humble home’ often mention this feature of the poetics of space...

Finding little to describe in the humble home, they spend little time there; so they describe it as it actually is, without really experiencing its primitiveness, a primitiveness which belongs to all, rich and poor alike, if they are willing to dream.(4)

Bachelard puts emphasis on the way that interior space influences the way an individual makes a home for itself. In this home, a person is able to find creativity.

Rivera also adds that Cisneros was able to find her creative voice as a storyteller and as a writer when she finally “confronted the metaphor of home space and its relations to the life of a young bilingual, bicultural Mexican American female raised in the poor inner-city of Chicago” (22). While Cisneros’s classmates talked about their white picket fence houses; she noticed the big difference between the spaces she had growing up. Cisneros grew up in “third floor flats.” Her recreation of images was different than the ones her classmates had. Cisneros was further inspired when she worked at the Latino Youth Alternative High School Chicago. She was motivated by the stories she recalled “of the marginalized and scared, of the discriminated poor, of the women living under patriarchal gender codes, of her parents and siblings, of her commutes back and forth between the United States and Mexico of her interplay with languages” (Rivera 23). Cisneros wanted to write stories about the issues that no one ever hears about.

*The House on Mango Street* is a novella composed of 47 vignettes that tell of the life surrounding a Mexican-American girl, Esperanza Cordero. She is about thirteen years of age and lives in a prominently Latino(a) neighborhood in Chicago. The whole story is told in first person narration. Esperanza writes about her experiences and the people on Mango Street. She wants a beautiful house like the rest of America but her parents cannot afford the house that she wants. Instead they end up moving to an unkempt house on Mango Street. Esperanza has various

experiences with her teachers and other people that associate her ethnicity to her house and socio-economic status. As a result, she is ashamed of her house and desperately wishes to move off Mango Street; she wants a place where she can build her own identity. At the same time that Esperanza struggles with the negative associations by the dominant culture (White American culture); she also struggles with the gender expectations imposed by her community. Women are expected to be passive and submissive. Since she feels like she does not belong in one culture nor the other, she feels entirely alone. At the end, Esperanza is able to reconcile with both her Mexican and American identities.

In chapter two, I will explore the complexities of being a Latino(a) in the United States. By discussing the implications of a dual identity and how the paradigm of the home impacts a child's education. The effects of classism and how it leads to assimilation. Gender roles and the way it influences young Latina women will be touched upon briefly. For chapter three and four, I will analyze the character of Esperanza Cordero and the way she perceives the world and the people around her. Chapter three will show the shaping of her identity through experiences and external factors in her young adolescent years. It will include the concept of home and its relation to poverty and shame. In the following chapter, I will continue to analyze the dual identity of Esperanza Cordero by the way that she faces oppression outside her community and inside her patriarchal culture. Esperanza's identity is shaped by the way she sees the other women in her community are expected to follow gender roles that reinforce the virgin/whore dichotomy. She does not want to end up like them. Chapter five will be my conclusion in which I will summarize and link previous chapters.

## Chapter II

### Identity Analysis

*The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture (3).*

-Gloria Anzaldua *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Identity is the sense of self and the sense of community and belonging an individual has. Ethnicity, nationality, gender, and even religion construct individual identities. Parents and family members are another strong influence on the development of individual identity. The education received in schools plays a big role in the shaping of identity as well. When people have two different identities created by distinct external factors, there is a clashing of two cultures that creates a dual identity. People that find themselves in this scenario are usually forced to live with their identities side by side, while at the same time not having full ownership of both cultures. This affects a child's education immensely because once they start school, they experience a shock from a culture that is so much different than theirs. Some children might have parents that are more traditional, who are not Americanized. In some cases their parents might not even speak English, meaning that they are unable to get involved with their education. Guadalupe Valdés explains in *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait* that "Hispanic parents are neither committed to nor involved in their children's education...Educators- because they have neither the experience nor the information that might help them make sense of the lives of people different from themselves- feel angry and indignant..." (33). Since teachers do not have experience in dealing with Latino(a) children and young adults, they are unaware of how to help them. Some of them

get really upset with the parents' indifference about their children's education. Therefore, Latino(a) children struggle with school and have a higher failing rate than any other group in the United States. Valdés points out that there many factors that result in the failure Latino(a) children have in school, for example, "family income, family characteristics, and language background" (27). These are some of the main barriers the children faced. One of the biggest obstacles that children with dual identities are confronted with is language. They are unable to communicate with other children and their teachers adequately. At such a young age, Latino(a) children are retained in the same grade and are labeled as being "slow." Many school systems fail to recognize that they are in fact smart but are dealing with two different sets of identities. The treatment and labeling that the children received leads to low self-esteem and isolation. They feel as though they are alone in both cultures because others do not understand.

Having two identities side by side is also makes it harder for children to integrate into American society. They mainly develop one of their identities in school, while they develop their other identity at home with their parents. David T. Abalos explains in *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and The Political* that the Latino(a) "identity is presently being created out of the elements of [their] past with [their] present conditions serving as the catalyst" (51). In other words, a dual identity is constructed by the culture they have always known and by the different culture they are experiencing. A child's dual identity also corresponds to their awareness of their classism. Many Latino(a) children come from impoverished homes. Although they are very young, they know that they do not have the same advantages and opportunities that the rest of America has. Finding themselves in neighborhoods that reflect their socioeconomic status, they come across prejudice and racism. For example, the schools that they attend do not offer the same prospects or programs that schools in richer neighborhoods have. Their ethnicity is also

associated with negative stereotypes and profiling. Experiencing all these negative things that are connected to who they are as Latinos(a) in their childhood makes them to want to assimilate into American society once they are young adults. Abalos emphasizes that people with dual identities make the decision to assimilate because they want to be accepted and have the same benefits as the dominant culture. They believe that in order to succeed, they have to become like the “dominant population, affluent and powerful” (187). He states, “[Their] background was one of painful poverty. So [they] rejected [their] heritage, stripped [themselves] of anything that would hinder [them], which meant reject [their] parents, [their] culture, and ultimately crucial aspects of [their] own selfhood” (187). They try to get away from the perceptions of inferiority that others have of Latinos(as). Latinos(as) in the United States wish to not be associated with the negative connotations people associate with being a Latino. To elaborate, individuals think that Latinos(as) for the most part are uneducated, undocumented, and do not speak English. Having an accent is even looked down upon. In efforts of escaping stereotypes, assimilating into American society is the only choice that some people think they have. However once some assimilate, they are also looked down upon by other Latinos(as) as being sell-outs. Sometimes Latino(as) are offended when other Latinos(as) do not speak Spanish or refuse to speak it. They see it as rejecting a part of their culture and their identity. According to Latino(a) standards, alliance is within their community first.

In the same manner that there is a complexity with having a dual identity, it is far more complex being a woman who has a dual identity. Women are caught between two different worlds; a liberal world and a conservative one. In one world, they are encouraged to seek their independence and sexualities while in the other one they are shamed for those things. It is no surprised that studies have shown that psychological, familiar, cultural and social factors affect

the increase of suicide in young Latinas in the United States out of any other ethnic group. In “Suicide Attempts by Adolescent Latinas: An Exploratory Study of Individual and Family correlates,” Turner, Kaplan, Zayas, and Ross report that “21% of adolescent Latinas attempt suicide with about 11% of their African-American and non-[Latina] white counterparts” (358). Young Latinas find it extremely overwhelming to deal with their dual identities. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa states that there is, “The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The mestiza’s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness” (78). In this restlessness, the Latina woman does not know exactly where she belongs. She does not feel Latina enough nor American enough. Not only do Latinas have to deal with the effects of two different clashing cultures but also have to deal with oppression enforced by the men around them, whether it is by their fathers, husbands, or other male figures in their lives. Many women experience domestic violence and verbal abuse by their husbands and fathers. The moment the men feel that their daughters and wives are doing anything to shame them or are getting out of hand, they seek ways to control them.

The men also have very traditional views about a woman’s place in their home. Latina women are expected to take care of the home and the children, while often times the men are the providers. Women do not have the opportunity to become independent unless they are single mothers. If they are single mothers, then they are looked down upon for having a child out of wedlock. Abalos argues that in Latino(a) families, “a daughter is the jewel of the family , and one cannot be too careful with them...in other words, a daughter carries the honor of the family and by becoming sexual outside of marriage she dishonors the family” (84). Shaming the family is one of the worst things that can happen to a Latino(a) family. Abalos also explains that for

centuries, “Women were devoid of the right to be physically left alone, the right to go away to renew themselves (isolation), denied any independence (autonomy), and ironically, forbidden to rebel in any way (incoherence) lest it cast a shadow on the family image contentment...Latina women were traditionally raised to feel ashamed and worthless if they broke with authority” (Abalos 85). The ones that attempt to or do break authority are excommunicated from the family, while some others are abused. This macho mentality of mistreating women is a result of colonialism. After men witnessed their women raped and their religion, culture, and everything they had relinquished, they felt the need to regain some sense of their manhood by controlling and having power over women. Therefore the way they treat women falls under the virgin/whore dichotomy. In other words, a woman can either be a good one or a bad one. She is a good woman if she marries and bears children, while being chaste and obedient. A good woman follows the example of the Virgen of Guadalupe (Mary). A bad woman is one who never marries but expresses her sexuality. She does not follow any cultural norms and is seen as not being respectable and as a whore.

The way women are perceived and treated in Latino(a) culture greatly affects Latina women, especially young Latinas who have a dual identity. They are faced with two cultures that are constantly contradicting one another. There are some things that are more acceptable in American society which are intolerable in Latino(a) culture. For example, seeking independence by going away to college and seeking an education is looked down upon by their parents and the rest of their community. Sometimes independent moves are perceived as being selfish. While many American parents encourage their daughters to go away to college for the experience and for better employment opportunities, Latino(a) parents see it as a way in which their young Latinas will rebel and bring shame to the family. Even if the daughter does not attend college but

decides to leave her parent's home to seek her independence or to cohabit with a partner before marriage, she is seen as promiscuous and is scolded. However if the roles are reversed and the sons do the same exact thing, they will receive support from the family. Latina women in particular are supposed to stay home and help take care of their parents and the rest of the family. The different expectations in both cultures is a cause for some Latinas to fall into depression or worse commit suicide because it is too much to handle, especially being in environments in which they are neither from here nor from there.

The "herida abierta" that Gloria Anzaldua mentions in the opening statement is a metaphor for the continuous pain from the open wound that Latinos(as) have from living with two different cultures. It never really gets the chance to heal but instead it continues to bleed over and over. This is reflected through their psychological and emotional states. They are constantly living in two worlds side by side, constantly being rejected by both causing immense pain. The struggles and adversities that Latinos(as) face in the United States is not often talked about or even acknowledged. Recognizing that there are problems and struggles that exists within having a dual identity can help to bring awareness into this phenomena so that the "herida abierta" can begin to heal for the future and present generations.

### Chapter III

#### Shaping Identity through Experiences

The shaping of identity is deeply influenced by experiences in childhood and in the young adolescent years. From the beginning of *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros makes it clear that external factors affect the way Esperanza deals with her dual identity. In “Culture As Transition: Becoming a Woman in Bi-ethnic Space,” Maria Szadziuk argues that “Born and educated in the United States, Esperanza is handicapped by her Hispanic background” (111). Szadziuk correlates her “Hispanic” background as if it was a disability. Szadziuk fails to articulate is that her “Hispanic” background is not so much a disability but she does suffer racism, poverty, and prejudice, and alienation due to it. Esperanza explains to readers that the house on Mango Street is not the ideal house that her family wanted but it was all they could afford. Before moving into the house, Esperanza and her family lived in several apartments. Esperanza’s family has an economic necessity, they are constantly moving from apartment to apartment with unlivable conditions. Therefore they had no choice but to move to Mango Street. Esperanza states,

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn’t fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom, next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That’s why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that’s why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other side of town. (4)

Although the family hoped for a nice big white house, the house on Mango Street was all they could really afford. The house is small and everyone in the family has to share rooms. The previous place the family was residing had impoverished living conditions. They did not have

water in their home, a basic need for survival. They also had to share a bathroom with their neighbors and it was inconvenient for them. Esperanza explains to readers that her family is doing everything they can manage in order to survive. Even though she is roughly thirteen years of age, she is well informed of her family's struggle with money. In "A Home in the Heart: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," Nicholas Sloboda suggests that Esperanza's explanation of her family's constant moving and ending up on Mango Street because of their socio-economic status reflects "the limitations of living as members of a minority and the lower class in America. [It also] points to the difficulty in breaking from a life of poverty" (83). Although both of her parents are hardworking people, they do not make enough money to give their children more. Esperanza's life mirrors the cruel reality that working more and harder does not break the cycle of poverty in America. The house that they were able to afford in Mango Street has to suffice for the time being, it is all that Esperanza's parents can offer.

The house on Mango Street is not the house Esperanza wanted but it does have its advantages. "We don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn't a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom," Esperanza remarks (3). Esperanza is grateful for all those things but at the same time her house does not look like the houses on television. Esperanza was always told, either by her parents or by the advertisement on television that the first house her family would own was going to be beautiful. She wanted a house with "stairs inside like the houses on T.V. And [she'd] have a basement and at least three washrooms so when [they] took a bath [they] wouldn't have to tell everyone. [Their] house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence" (Cisneros 4). However the house on Mango Street was nothing like she always imagined it would be, it was actually the opposite. Esperanza disappointedly states:

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Our back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs, and the house had only one washroom, everybody has to share a bedroom- Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. (Cisneros 4)

Esperanza's statement reveals that the house is relatively small for their family. All of them have to stay in one room together. Sloboda draws attention to the use of the word "they." He mentions, "Her use of the indefinite pronouns 'they' refers to those in mass communication and the media that propagate the myth of the 'better life'" (85). In other words, mirroring her awareness of how her family has yet to attain the American Dream. They do not live in a comfortable and beautiful house. To Esperanza and her family, the American Dream continues to be just a myth. Something they might be able to attain if they win the lottery one day.

Esperanza has a hard time making the house on Mango Street her home. If a [house] has the ability to influence thoughts and dreams like Bachelard argues, it is no surprise that Esperanza wants to relocate away from Mango Street. She does not want the associations that come with living in that house. Bachelard states that "A house constitutes a body of images that give humankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). However this is not the case with Esperanza: she does not feel that she has that stability. Thus she wishes to move into a house of her own. She explains in the vignette, "A House of My Own" that she wants "Only a house quiet as snow, a space for [herself] to go, clean as paper before the poem" (Cisneros 108). She does

not want to share it with anyone, she wants everything in it to belong to her. The house of Mango Street encourages her to dream about the day where she will have the house she has always wanted. Observing everything from the doors, to the bricks makes Esperanza want more than what she has because she wants a house to find her individuality as well as her creativity. She cannot do that in a house where all she sees is its poverty, reminding her of how disadvantaged she is. Bachelard also points out that “To live alone; that’s a great dream!... For it is a dream that, in life’s moments of great sadness, is shared by everybody both weak and strong, in revolt against the injustices of men and of fate” (123). Esperanza wants a house that is “not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s” home in order to revolt against the injustices of both poverty and the patriarchal society within her father’s house. It is also important to note that Esperanza is a writer and she finds difficulty writing in her milieu. She finds it hard to find inspiration to write in her environment that is full of hostility and poverty. In “Claiming the Bittersweet Matrix: Alice Walker, Sandra Cisneros, and Adrienne Rich,” Nancy Corson Carter claims that “In afterword for *The House on Mango Street*, the editors...describe it as chronicling ‘The psychological and social development of a writer(Esperanza) who struggles to derive emotional and creative sustenance where material and educational resources are absent’” (199). Esperanza is deprived of a place where she can find creativity and stability.

Living in this specific neighborhood caused others to look down upon Esperanza. Esperanza’s neighborhood reflects the family’s socio-economic status. Upon moving into the house on Mango Street, Esperanza becomes friends with Cathy Queen of Cats who is a White young girl on Mango Street. According to Cathy Queen of Cats, she is a descendant of the queen of France. Esperanza is really happy when Cathy Queen of Cats agrees to be her friend for a few

days until Cathy tells her the reason why her family is moving away. Cathy tells Esperanza that her family is relocating because “the neighborhood is getting bad” (Cisneros 13). Cathy feels superior to everyone else on Mango Street and thus she chooses to make this statement even though her insult towards the people on Mango Street is also applicable to Esperanza, since her family just moved there. The neighborhood is getting bad because people of color like Esperanza are moving in. “They’ll just have to move a little farther north from Mango Street, a little farther every time people like us keep moving in,” Esperanza states (Cisneros 13). Sloboda remarks that “Cathy’s comment reminds Esperanza of the transient nature of life in her type of neighborhood. It also verifies for her that other families do not want to live near to or be associated with her class and people” (86). Cathy’s statement makes Esperanza more aware of the social stratification of her community. With Cathy’s character, Cisneros gives readers an insight of how some people outside the Latino(a) culture stereotype it. After Cathy leaves Mango Street, Meme Ortiz moves into her house. Through him, Esperanza is able to give a description of Cathy’s house, “Inside the floors slant. Some rooms uphill. Some down. And there are no closets... Around the back is a yard, mostly dirty, and a greasy bunch of boards that used to be a garage” (Cisneros 21-22). The depiction given points out that the house was not maintained and that Cathy like the rest of Esperanza’s community lives in poverty. Although Cathy shares their poverty, she still feels superior to them for the simple fact that she is a White young girl who allegedly is a descendant of royalty. Cathy only becomes her friend because she thinks she can manipulate her. Although that changes when Esperanza becomes friends with Rachel and Lucy. Cathy tells her, “Don’t talk to them, Can’t you see they smell like a broom” (Cisneros 14). Esperanza observes that “their clothes are crooked and old,” but she still likes them. Cathy tries her best to tug her arm so that Esperanza does not speak to them but Esperanza prefers Rachel

and Lucy. Esperanza's observation of their clothes reflect that Lucy and Rachel are also impoverished. Their clothes like the houses on Mango Street mirror the poverty of the neighborhood. Their economic plight is closely linked to their cultural identity

Esperanza is embarrassed of her neighborhood because it is not as "nice" as other areas, even though she feels safe in it. When one of the nuns from her school is passing by her house while she is outside playing, Esperanza becomes more aware of her surroundings. Esperanza recalls that the "The Laundromat downstairs had been boarded up because it had been robbed two days before ..." (Cisneros 5). The nun asks her where she lives and when she points to her house, the nun makes her feel worthless when she says, "you live *there*?" Esperanza writes, "The way she said it made me feel like nothing. There. I lived *There*. I nodded" (Cisneros 5). For a religious figure to make her feel like she was worth nothing, she had to use a tone that belittled her. Living "*there*" is not the place Esperanza hoped to move to but nonetheless it is her home. Szadziuk comments that "As a [young adolescent], Esperanza becomes painfully aware of the relationship between dwelling and social status, an awareness that initially stems from shocked reaction of one of the nuns upon seeing the girl's house on Loomis Street. (Szadziuk 112). The way others depict the space she lives in as a "bad neighborhood" or as "ugly" greatly affects her. After the occurrence with the nun, Esperanza develops a sense of shame for where she lives. She is not happy with living on the house in Mango Street. Maria Elena De Valdes writes about this shame in "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." She writes that, "A house is a reflection, an extension a personified world that is indistinguishable from the occupant. ...She knows the person she is does not belong to the hostile ugly world she lives in" (Valdes 12). Esperanza does not want to be associated with the "ugliness" of her neighborhood and so she wishes she live somewhere nicer. Julian Olivares also comments on the aspect of

shame in “Entering *The House on Mango Street*.” “The House on Mango Street is an extension of Esperanza’s Cordero’s identity. While not as dilapidated as her previous house on Loomis Street, for her, its poor state is a sign of her poverty and shame,” Olivares notes (214). Shame and poverty go hand in hand with one another. Esperanza’s mother tells her in “A Smart Cookie” that she could have been someone in life. However she quit school because she was ashamed of how poor she was. “I didn’t have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains,” Esperanza’s mother tells her (Cisneros 91). Her mother also confesses to her that “Shame is a bad thing...It keeps you down” (Cisneros 91). Valdes believes that this is a closed circle of poverty because if people like Esperanza’s mother are “poor because [they] are outsider[s] without education; [they] try to get an education, but [they] can’t the contrastive evidence of poverty and ‘[i]t keeps [them] down’ (58). For people like Esperanza and her community, it is so hard to break from the cycle of poverty. Even if they try, it is hard to break because the odds are against them. For example, they are not given the same opportunities that children from the other side of town are given.

Esperanza like her mother is ashamed of her poverty, she is ashamed of her house. In another occasion, Esperanza wants to eat with the other students at school during lunch time. However, the Superior nun at her school tells her that she does not need to stay since her house is only a couple of blocks away. Esperanza states, “And then she made me stand up on a box of books and point. That one? she said, pointing to a row of ugly three-flats, the ones even the raggedy men are ashamed to go into” (Cisneros 45). In trying to prove the point that she does not need to stay for lunch, she ends up belittling Esperanza in the same way that the other nun demeaned her in front of her house. Esperanza then says, “Yes, I nodded even though I knew that wasn’t my house and started to cry. I always cry when nuns yell at me, even if they’re not yelling” (Cisneros 45). She nods and accepts that she lives in the house that “raggedy men are

ashamed to go into” because the nun imposes that raggedness upon her. Ellen McCracken draws attention to this issue in “Sandra Cisneros’s *The House of Mango Street: Community-Oriented Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence*,” she announces that “The Sister Superior is revealing her own prejudices; in effect, she is telling the child, ‘All you Mexicans must live in such buildings’”(116). She correlates that to her Mexican identity because the nun thinks there is where Mexican people like Esperanza live.

Sloboda asserts that with this occurrence, “Cisneros not only highlights the carelessness with which entire communities are negatively typified, but she exposes an irony, as Esperanza is repeatedly treated insensitively by someone who is supposed to be aware of the plight of the lower class and oppressed” (87). In other words, nuns are supposed to be caring and compassionate of the less fortunate, yet they are prejudiced. They looked down upon impoverished children. Even though the encounters Esperanza has with the nuns that are her teachers are not positive ones, they still contribute to shaping her identity. Teachers are influential figures in the lives of young adolescents. Teachers have the power to influence students and their words and actions affect them greatly. In Esperanza’s case, her teachers impacted her in a negative way because of the way that they shamed her. This shaming also contributes to shaping her identity. Faruk Kalay writes in “The Women figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*” that “The elaboration of others starts with shame. Owing to Esperanza’s young age, it is a normal feeling for a child who lives in hard conditions because of poverty...The feeling of shame of oneself turns into the concealment of identity” (121). In other words, Esperanza does not feel inferior for being a Mexican girl of a lower socioeconomic status, until her teachers make her feel that way. Only then, she feels

ashamed of that part of her identity because of the negative connotations that people associate with her heritage.

In the chapter, “Those Who Don’t,” Esperanza reflects on the way that people from other non-Latino(a) neighborhoods perceive her community. She writes, “Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake” (Cisneros 28). The “they” refers to “Whites” who end up in Esperanza’s neighborhood on accident. Mayock points out that this vignette “immediately sets up a contrast between *los otros* [The others] and *nosotros* [Us]” (227). Hence distinguishing her community the same way that the dominant culture differentiates themselves from communities of color. These neighborhoods are separated from one another through invisible borders. The unseen borders are used to keep people of color away from the wealthier communities. Anzaldúa states,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (3).

In other words, places have good or bad energy depending on previous events. In the case of Esperanza and her community, they feel the “emotional residue” upon entering neighborhoods where they are unwanted. They undoubtedly feel like they are passing over boundaries they should not be crossing. Individuals from Esperanza’s community fear going into other neighborhoods by accident because of the racism they believe that they will encounter. Esperanza writes, “But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight” (Cisneros 28).

They are frightened that they might be racially profiled. Hence accused of burglary and/or assault. It is very easy for people of color to be profiled because those are associations that other people make about them. The way people of color are constantly portrayed through the media only brings negative stereotypes to them. In “Esperanza Develops in Spite of Two Oppressive Cultures,” Gale Joyce Bellas voices that in this vignette, “Esperanza addresses this prejudice by explaining what transpires when people of different economic classes leave their own neighborhoods (82). There are consequences for transgressing boundaries. Anzaldua notes:

Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tensions grip the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger. (3-4)

When an individual is not part of the larger society then he/she has no business being in spaces where he/she does not belong. . If found in places where the person is unwelcome, he/she can be punished by death itself. Thus it is no shock that Latinos(as) face hostility due to the “racial and class boundaries that exist within American society” (Bellas 84). Ethnic people with a low socioeconomic status do not have the privilege to enter such communities.

Mary Prat Brady comments in “The Contrapuntal Geographies of *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*” that “Location is integral to the construction of identity and community” (122). Since Mango Street a part of a Latino(a) neighborhood in a part of town that is not very wealthy, it has many stereotypes. Individuals that live there are perceived as criminals. Esperanza mentions that outsiders who get lost in her neighborhood upheld the stereotype that the people in her community are delinquents. They think that they will be robbed and even assaulted. In the vignette entitled, “Louie, His Cousin and His Other Cousin,”

Esperanza tells an account of a young man who one day drives a yellow Cadillac to Mango Street. Esperanza states that this is not an average car because “the windows didn’t roll up like ordinary cars. Instead there was a button that did it for you automatically” (Cisneros 24). After showing everyone the car and giving them a ride in it, the police comes and in attempt to run away from them; he ends up crashing the car to a lamppost. The police arrests him and he is never seen again. Many critics have argued that in this vignette, the young man runs away from the police because he stole the car. Cisneros never states that he stole it, just mentions that he came into Mango Street with the car one day. For many, it is rather easy to argue that the car is stolen because they believe that someone from that neighborhood could never have a car like that unless they forcefully took it from someone else. No one ever looks at the possibility that perhaps the car was borrowed and that the person who was driving ran away from the police because he panicked. He knew that they would never believe that he had borrowed the car or maybe even purchased it because people from Mango Street cannot have nice things without being criminals.

Esperanza believes that people have a negative portrayal of her community because many people are never exposed to it. Outsiders do not concentrate on the sense of community that exists in her neighborhood; instead they focus on all the negativity that surrounds it. She expresses by stating, “All brown and around, we are safe” (Cisneros 28). As long as her community is together, they all feel safe. Esperanza knows everyone in her neighborhood, including the individuals that outsiders would most likely be frightened of. Esperanza explains, “We aren’t afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby’s Brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that’s Rosa’s Eddie V., and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he’s Fat Boy, though he’s not fat anymore nor a boy” Cisneros 28). Although

they might look intimidating to others, Esperanza knows that they are harmless. To explain the division between the communities, Valdes uses a metaphor to link the way weaving works to them. She suggests that “The colour of the warp is different in each community, the woof keeps them next to each other, but their ignorance and fear keeps them separate” (Valdes 60). In other words, the only thing that keeps these communities apart from each other is their prejudice and racism. As a result Esperanza feels alienated. Felicia J. Cruz explains in “On the ‘Simplicity’ of Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*” that “Norton identifies ‘the trauma of exclusion’ experienced during childhood as an especially poignant ‘specific paradigm of structurally significant experience,’ since youth ‘is the location of personality formation... [It is the] most crucial significant portion of a person’s life’” (qtd. In Cruz 923). All of Esperanza’s continuous dramatic experiences as well as the perception of others imposed upon her are contributing factors that shape her identity.

In the vignette titled, “Bums in the Attic,” she states, “People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those who live too much on earth. They don’t look down at all except to be content to live on hills. They have nothing to do with last week’s garbage or fear of rats” (Cisneros 86-87). In this vignette, she compares the struggles of her community to those of wealthier communities. Things that people in the wealthier communities take for granted, she has to worry about. This vignette also portrays how conscious Esperanza is of the disadvantages of living in her neighborhood. Especially in that area of Chicago where there are rat plagues and an abundance of garbage. There is a racial and wealth gap between her neighborhood and the houses on the hill. The houses on the hill have better municipal services that take care of the garbage and the rat plagues. Those people do not have to be concerned. Esperanza’s community on the other hand, does not have the same resources and those things become environmental

hazards because of the health risks such as contamination and disease that rats and garbage cause to humans. Sloboda argues that “Cisneros further confirms how the difference in living conditions between the slum areas, with its run-down houses, and mainstream America, with its picket fences, leads to divisiveness” (86). In other words, the living conditions between the slum areas and picket fences are divided not only by class but also by race. Whites live in the areas that have the picket fence around their houses while minorities such as Latinos(as) live in “run-down houses.” The racial wealth gap between different communities is evident. Children living in a White neighborhood have better schools as well as resources. The White neighborhoods are not associated with having inadequate schools and high crime rates.

Bellas also remarks, “Her image is a product of the types of houses she sees on Television: white houses with big yards that exist in suburban America...her image is derived from her desire to live comfortably” (81). Esperanza continuously sees the American Dream through advertisement and on trips she embarks with her family to see the houses where her father works. She wants a nice suburban house with a beautiful garden just like the houses where her father works. Esperanza also tells readers in this vignette, “I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. We go on Sundays, Papa’s day off. I used to go. I don’t anymore” (Cisneros 86). Her frustration keeps growing as she keeps wishing for something that is unattainable for her. She hopes that she will be able to live in a beautiful house. Quintana affirms that “On an ideological level, [she] dreams the American dream; [but] on a material level, like all her community she remains systematically excluded from it” (qtd. in Cruz 920). Esperanza wants the American Dream but at the same time it is almost unfeasible because of her socio-economic status, as well as her ethnicity. When her father asks her why she no longer wants to go with the rest of the family to look at the nice houses, she does not want to dishearten

him by telling him the truth. Esperanza does not want to tell him that she has had enough of wishing and looking at houses that her family will never be able to afford. Her father assumes that she does not want to accompany her family because she is getting too old. Her sister, Nenny, believes that she does not go because she is conceited. She states, "I don't tell them I am ashamed- all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can't have" (Cisneros 86). Through Esperanza's lenses, when she sees her family and herself desiring the houses on the hill, all she can see is the way that people perceived them as poor and homeless.

"The house on mango street can be seen as an 'ethnic sign' that can be easily close off the future for the young protagonist... If she accepts it as her lot in life, then she is conforming to the dominant culture's definition of who she is," Rivera emphasizes (33). In other words, if Esperanza decides to stay in her neighborhood, she will never have the chance to break the cycle of poverty. She will do exactly what is expected of her by the dominant culture. In his chapter, "A Theory of Transformation," Abalos asserts "[The] self-identity [of] Latina women and Latino men is badly bruised by an inability to make it in this society. [Their] self-image is distorted by the view that the dominant culture has on [them]" (27). Esperanza's image of her Mexican identity is burdened by the views imposed upon her. For example, when she talks about her name it is evident that she wishes to change it because of the cultural undertone of her name. In the vignette, "My Name," Esperanza states, "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color" (Cisneros 10). Although her name means hope, which is something beautiful and positive she dislikes her name, because of some negative Spanish terms associated with it. She continues to say, "It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs

like sobbing” (Cisneros 10). Esperanza associates her name with the Spanish language and her culture. Since she lives in Chicago, her name does not easily assimilate into American society. Esperanza is even teased at school because of her name. She states, “At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth” (Cisneros 11). The sound is not as soft as it is in Spanish and saying it is not even tolerable. Esperanza contends that others find her name painful to pronounce. She is caught in a world where her parents have given her a Spanish name that reflects her cultural identity. She lives in an American society where her name and culture are not so acceptable. The name itself creates a Mexican identity that she wants to escape from. Rivera affirms “Her desire to adopt a new name in an attempt to change her own destiny and move away from the constraints inherent in the Spanish meaning of Esperanza” (32). To elaborate, Esperanza never gets the things she wants. She hoped for a beautiful house but instead her family only had the funds for the house on Mango Street. The house on Mango Street was intended to be a temporary house but Esperanza explains that although it was supposed to be “For the time being” she knows “how those things go” (Cisneros 5). Her Spanish name Esperanza translates into hope in English. Hope is expecting and trusting that something will happen. Thus she associates her name Esperanza (hope) with waiting. She does not understand that waiting is like hope. Hope is waiting for something positive in the future. It does not have a positive connotation for her.

When meeting Rachel and Lucy and they ask for her name, Esperanza thinks to herself, “I wish my name was Cassandra or Alexis or Maritza- anything but Esperanza. Rivera notes that “Esperanza’s desire to baptize herself under a new name reveals how she rejects cultural imposition...” (32). It also does not help that she inherited the name of her grandmother, who was entrapped by Esperanza’s grandfather for most of her lifetime. Therefore, the sentiment of

the name becomes tarnished because of its association to her grandmother. Rivera also adds, “Esperanza searches for an identity outside of confining patterns domination that only offer her ‘sadness’ and ‘waiting’.” (32). As a result of this sadness, waiting, and her dual identity, Esperanza falls into a state of solitude. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Mexican critic and writer, Octavio Paz reflects on the solitude that people who have two different cultures experience. Paz notes, “It is impossible to equate these two attitudes: when you sense that you are alone, it does not mean that you feel inferior, but rather that you feel you are different... We are truly different. And we are truly alone” (19). Feeling inferior might just be an illusion but the core of the problem is knowing that a person is truly alone and no one can relate to his/her otherness. This solitude however makes Esperanza able to empathize with other people in her neighborhood, who are also experiencing solitude or are seen as outsiders.

“Esperanza feels the difficulties of belonging to two worlds, which she does not wholly feel a part. Throughout her narrative, she shares this sentiment of not belonging with others in her neighborhood who she clearly sees do not belong either,” Bellas notes (85). She is easily able to relate to the people in her community that are label as “outsiders.” In the vignette, “No Speak English,” she talks about an immigrant woman in her neighborhood, Mamacita. Mamacita has just arrived to the United States. Esperanza like Mamacita feels like she does not completely belong. They both feel isolated, lonely and misunderstood. Esperanza informs readers that her husband “saved his money to bring her here. He saved and saved because she was alone and with the baby boy in that country. He worked two jobs. He came home late and he left early. Every day” (Cisneros 76). Her husband worked really hard to bring her to the United States so that Mamacita and her son could have a better life and opportunities. She never leaves her house, “She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick

songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull” (Cisneros 77). Mamacita finds a sort of comfort in listening to the Spanish songs. In order to try and help her feel at home, her husband paints the walls in their house pink, the same color of her “home in a photograph.” Sloboda emphasizes that “This poignant image illustrates that a home space, as a physical and psychological site of a familiarity and comfort, plays a vital role in the (re)settling of the subject on both an individual and communal level” (85). Although her husband tries his best to help her feel at home by painting the walls the same color as her house in her native country, it is still not the same. Physiologically Mamacita’s new house does not have the warm feeling of a home. She feels alone. Mamacita does not speak English, in fact she refuses to learn. Hence when she hears her infant repeat the same words of a Pepsi commercial, it “break[s] her heart forever” (Cisneros 78). According to Esperanza, Mamacita reacts by saying, “No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears. No, no, no, as if she can’t believe her ears,” (Cisneros 78). Her child’s acknowledgement of another language is seen as a way into accepting the new American identity. “Mamacita tries to preserve her sense of identity in her new country by speaking only in her mother tongue and not in English, ‘the language that sounds like tin’,” Sloboda comments (85). Mamacita continuously asks her husband when she will be going back home and after a while, he is frustrated with her and tells her, “We are home. This is home. Here I am and here I stay. Speak English. Speak English Christ” (Cisneros 78). Esperanza then adds that Mamacita, “who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road to that country ” (Cisneros 78). Her husband shatters her hopes of returning to her country when he tells her that they are home and therefore she should assimilate into American society by speaking English. Mamacita feels like he is

trying to take her identity from her by telling her to speak English. Esperanza believes Mamacita's inability to speak English prevents her from going anywhere. Since she does not speak the dominant language, she will not be able to blend into the society and therefore will be label an outsider. Sloboda states, "By watching how Mamacita struggles to adapt to her new homeland, Esperanza begins to appreciate the immigrant woman's feeling (and knowledge) that she does not belong" (85). Although Esperanza is a second generation American, it is not so hard to correlate to Mamacita's sense of not belonging, since she does fully belong herself.

Esperanza sympathizes with a young man that Marin meets at a dance. He worked in a restaurant until he died in a hit-and-run. Marin was the last person to see him alive. His name was Geraldo. Neither Esperanza nor Marin knew his last name. Since Geraldo did not have an identification card with him, no one could verify his last name or his address. Esperanza then explains that no one attended to him at the hospital. He would have been alive if "maybe if he hadn't lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come..." (Cisneros 66). The only person that cared about him that night was Marin. Marin did not really know him; he was just someone she met at a dance. Geraldo was treated as if he was a "nobody." He experienced discrimination because he was an undocumented immigrant. Esperanza reveals that Geraldo was "Just another *brazier* who didn't speak English just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed" (Cisneros 66). The derogatory words that Esperanza uses are only a reflection of the way that society perceives undocumented immigrants. Esperanza's description of Geraldo's persona as ashamed is similar to the way that she feels; she does not belong and does not have a home. Although society sees Geraldo as a "nobody," Esperanza sees him as an individual. In "Silent Speech: Narration, Gender, and Intersubjectivity in Two Young Adult Novels," Fiona Hartley-Kroger states, "Esperanza has a moment of reflection for Geraldo, perhaps because he

left his hometown as she longs to do. Their common goal of escape forges a connection, a kind of sympathy; it is close to the kind of intersubjectivity that Esperanza's spectatorship affords other female characters" (285). Esperanza is able to connect with Geraldo because poverty forces both of them to leave their home in hopes of pursuing the American Dream. Geraldo is maltreated in a similar way that the rest of the women on Mango Street are oppressed by both cultures.

Geraldo's home is far away in another country and since he does not speak English, it is almost impossible for him to assimilate into American society. American society is hostile and prejudice towards him because he is an outsider. Esperanza continues:

What does it matter? They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The only ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo- he went north... we never heard from him again. (Cisneros 66)

With this statement, Esperanza draws attention to the countless immigrants who die and are forgotten. Harryette Mullen states in, "'A Silence Between Us Like a Language': The Untranslatability of Experience in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*," that [Geraldo's] story represents "the silenced and marginalized that's includes children, homosexuals, and working class and immigrant Chicanos and Mexicanos, whose stories have been untold or untranslated" (11). No one really cares about them, besides their families and perhaps a few people in their communities. They work hard and live in impoverished conditions. They come to the United States in hopes of pursuing the American Dream. Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger writes in *Battlegrounds and Crossroads: Social and Imaginary Space in Writings by Chicanas* that

Geraldo “represents a new socially dislocated underclass in the Global American city: the [undocumented] immigrant filling lower wage jobs resulting from the informalization of labor processes...” (181). Since immigrants like Geraldo are escaping poverty in their countries, they will take strenuous jobs in the United States for very little pay. “He is only seen at night; he is publicly invisible; there is no place for him in a city that does not acknowledge his existence,” Oliver-Rotger adds (181). Geraldo is basically non-existent in this country and after his death, he falls into oblivion like countless of undocumented immigrants in this country that have perished. No one in this country cares about them. No one remembers them, except for their families and friends that they left behind in their countries.

Esperanza is not only able to empathize with Geraldo because of his solitude but also because Geraldo reminds Esperanza of her father. In the vignette, “Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark,” Esperanza discloses her father’s morning routine every day before he goes to work. She says, “My Papa, his thick hands and thick shoes, who wakes up tired in the dark, who combs his hair with water, drinks his coffee, and is gone before we wake...” (Cisneros 57). This statement reveals that her father like Geraldo has a manual labor job that does not pay much. He has to wake up every morning before the sun is even up. Although her father works really hard, her family is unable to have the house that they dreamed of because of the disparities of wealth in the country. McCracken observes:

For the migrant worker who had moved continuously because of job exigencies and who, like many others in the Chicano community, has been deprived of an adequate place to live because of the inequities of income distribution in U.S. society, the desire for a house is not a sign of individualistic acquisitiveness but rather represents the satisfaction of a basic human need. (115)

In search of a house of their own, Geraldo like Esperanza's father emigrated from their native country to provide for their families. Life for them in the United States is not so easy because of all the obstacles they faced along the way. In "No Speak English," Esperanza also informs readers that when her father arrived in the United States, he was unable to communicate adequately. Therefore "he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hamandeggs. That was the only word he knew." (Cisneros 77). Through her father's experience, Esperanza grasps how life is hard for an immigrant that does not speak English. Since her father was unable to communicate efficiently, he had to eat the same thing three times a day for three straight months. While her father's English prevented him from eating anything other than ham and eggs, Geraldo's inability to communicate causes for him to be ignored and unacknowledged.

Esperanza makes it clear that she has yet to find a place that feels like home. In the vignette, entitled "Alicia and I Talking on Edna's Steps," Esperanza describes a conversation between her and her neighborhood friend Alicia. Alicia is a young woman, who is her role model because she is a college student. "I like Alicia because once she gave me a little leather purse with the word GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back there. But today she is listening to my sadness because I don't have a house," Esperanza informs (Cisneros 106). Guadalajara is a city in Mexico, where Alicia is from. Esperanza knows that unlike herself, Alicia has a place that she can call home. Esperanza conveys this in a conversation with Alicia:

You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of.

No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia,

and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph...only one I dream of. (Cisneros 106-107).

The shame imposed upon Esperanza by other individuals prevents her from taking pride in her house on Mango Street. Esperanza wants a beautiful house that looks nothing like the houses on Mango Street. Rivera writes, "Esperanza wants to escape from the confines of Mango Street and yearns for a house of her own, this does not mean that she totally rejects her culture or embraces the 'American Dream...What Esperanza longs for is a 'different' house in which to nurture her individuality, freedom, identity and voice. (35) Esperanza wants to separate herself from the negative associations, oppression, poverty, and the imposed prejudice that influences her Mexican identity. Although she desperately wants to leave Mango Street, people from her community tell her that she must return to Mango Street. Alicia tells Esperanza, "like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too" (Cisneros 107). Despite not liking the association with Mango Street, Alicia explains to Esperanza that she must come back to make it better because no one else will. During Rachel and Lucy's younger sister's funeral, three Mexican sisters "came in with the wind that blows in August, thin as a spider web and barely noticed. Three who did not seem related to anything but the moon" tell her that she will go very far in life (Cisneros 103-104). Valdes suggest that, "It is significant that they are from Mexico and appear to be related only to the Moon. In pre-Hispanic, the lunar goddesses, such as Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal, were the intermediaries for all women" (64). These three women in the same way as the lunar goddesses are Esperanza's intermediaries. They are there to remind Esperanza of who she is. The three sisters ask her to make a wish. Even though Esperanza does not reveal to readers her request; it is very easy to guess that she wished to move out of Mango Street. After making the wish, one of the women calls her outside and tells her "When you leave

you must remember always to come back for the others. A Circle understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (Cisneros 105). She knows her wish but thinks that it is important for her to know that she must come to terms with this part of her dual identity. In his article, Sloboda maintains that this statement "draws attention to Esperanza's increasing awareness of a bond between her individual identity and her home space" (92). After hearing this, Esperanza feels ashamed forever wishing to go far away from Mango Street. Valdes also explains, "The problem is that she belongs to the house on Mango Street and to deny it would be at the expense of herself, of her identity. She belongs to a world that is not hers; it is an opposition that will not be resolved in a synthesis or a compromise" (66). There is a complexity to both of her identities. It is at this point that Esperanza accepts that she is indeed Mango Street but can be not Mango Street at the same time. She refuses to be a victim of oppression within and outside her community.

## Chapter IV

### You are Either a Virgin or a Whore

*A Mexican American Female who has minority status in her own land and even though she in, in part, indigenous to the Americas and a member of one of the largest (minority) ethnic groups in the United States. She is a woman whose life is too often characterized by poverty, racism, and sexism not only in the dominant culture but also within her own culture. [Latinas] are also not characterized as members of a conquering and conquered culture rooted in the Spanish language...These women are... often lumped together with other U.S Latinas (Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American) as if there were no diversity among [them]. These women are also U.S citizens with full legal rights and responsibilities for whom there is unofficial discrimination.*

-Irene Isabel Blea (qtd. in Rivera 1)

Esperanza Cordero continues to struggle with both of her dual identities because she is oppressed in both of them. The dominant culture subjugates her because she is Mexican, while her own culture oppresses her because she is a young American woman. The expectations of her differ in both cultures; her Mexican culture is a lot more conservative than her American one. The virgin/whore dichotomy is heavily imposed upon her and the rest of the women in her community. This becomes problematic because Esperanza does not want to be a housewife, she wants to be a writer. In order to achieve her goal, she must get away from Mango Street and a place of her own. In “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” Leslie Petty states that Cisneros once said, “Females, like the snow, are not seen in Latino culture as unique individuals but are labeled as either ‘good’ women or ‘bad’ women, as ‘clean’ or ‘dirty,’ as ‘virgins’ or ‘malinches’ ” (119). There is no in between, women can only be one or the other. Living in poverty is also something women who

followed the virgin example must accept instead of being ambitious and wanting a better life for themselves. This is a derivation from Mexico's history. In the pre-Columbian era, women deities were worshipped. One of them was Coatlicue and Coatlicue was the fertility and Earth Goddess. Gloria Anzaldua affirms that Coatalopeauh was the mother of the celestial deities as well as she was, Tonantzin, which literally translates into "Our Holy Mother" in the Nahuatl tongue (27). However the Aztecs were a male-dominated society and they gave all female deities "monstrous attributes "and substituted male deities in their place. "They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects," (Anzaldua 27). One aspect of the split was condemned as dark and sinister, while the other aspect, Tonantzin, was seen as the righteous one. For many years, Tonantzin was venerated on the Tepeyec hill until the Spaniard Christian missionaries arrived and they burned it down. When the native people of Mexico were exploited and conquered, their identities and religions were relinquished. Their religious practices and deities were proclaimed evil and sinful. It was later said that the Virgin of Guadalupe (who is equated to Mary) appeared to an indigenous man, Juan Diego, five times. She asked for a shrine to be built in her honor. Even though her name changed, the native people of Mexico continued to worship her as Tonantzin. The Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated in Mexico far more than the Christian God Himself. The Virgin of Guadalupe is a symbol of Mexican identity and as Paz mentions, she is the "consolation of the poor, the shield of the weak, the help of the oppressed... she is the mother of the orphans" (76). Most of the reason why Mexicans revere her is because she is an "Indian" Virgin. She is one of the few traditions that has survived from colonialism and thus the Mexican people can identify with her. Her main characteristic is passivity which means that she just accepts everything that happens to her

without retaliating. She is submissive to the will of God. Hence she is used as a role model for womanhood. Mexican women are encouraged to follow her example.

The other part of the dual image that Cisneros depicts in the novella is Malinche, who is also referred to as “La Chingada” (the violated one) by Paz in his chapter, “Sons of La Malinche.” Paz notes that, “Dona Marina [Malinche] becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated, or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgotten La Malinche for her betrayal” (86). According to the legend, Malinche is the equivalent of “Eve” in Mexico. Some legends see her as being a traitor because she helped the Spanish Conquistador, Hernan Cortes to conquer Mexico by translating for him. Other legends depict her as Cortes’s mistress; a woman who is sexual and hence a whore. In her essay, Petty remarks that, “Malinche’s betrayal and violation threaten the Mexican concept of the male, she either openly challenges his authority or is not saved by his protection. This dual threat makes her the symbol of the female sexuality that is both denigrated and controlled in Mexican society” (122). With these two archetypes, Mexican women are constantly reminded that they can only be “good” women or “bad” women. One who has remained chaste and a virgin, or one who has lost it. Cisneros portrays women who follow this dichotomy are oppressed and thus the only way to escape the oppression is by rejecting the passivity that is attributed to both archetypes and by finding their individuality. This quest is more complex for Mexican women who live in the United States. As Anzaldua states, “The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures” (79). In *The House of Mango Street*, Esperanza has to juggle both of her identities constantly. On one hand, she is a young woman who wants to pursue the

American Dream like everyone else in America. While on the other hand, she is a young Mexican woman who is expected to follow conventional gender standards of her Mexican culture.

In the vignette entitled, “Boys and Girls,” Esperanza makes the distinction between her brothers and herself. She states, “The boys and the girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours” (Cisneros 8). Early in the book, Esperanza makes it clear that her sister, Nenny, and her live in a different worlds than their brothers. When they are home, their brothers looked down upon them. They always have something negative to say to them but when they are in public, both girls become invisible to them. The boys see their association with the girls in public as a negative one. Acknowledging Esperanza and Nenny in public will mean that they are their equals, hence they will have to treat them as such. With this vignette, Cisneros portrays how young boys at an early age are shown to be superior to the girls. If it is not to insult them then the girls just become non-existent to the boys. In another vignette, “Darius and the Clouds,” shows that young boys are not only conditioned to be misogynistic but also tough. If they show any tenderness, they like the girls will also be label negatively. In this particular vignette, Darius and Esperanza are naming the clouds. Esperanza is surprised when Darius says something wise. She notes,

Darius, who doesn't like school, who is sometimes stupid and mostly a fool, said something wise today, though most days he says nothing. Darius, who chases girls with firecrackers or a stick that touched a rat and thinks he's tough, today pointed up because the world was full of clouds, the kind like pillow. (Cisneros 33)

Darius acts in that manner because those are the gender expectations for him. He is always supposed to act tough, with “machismo”. In *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales*,

*Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans*, Rafaela G. Castro defines “machismo” as a stereotypic image of a Latino man who is extraordinarily aggressive, stresses dominance over his family... and places strong emphasis on masculine rigidity” (147). Castro also adds that many young men try to emulate this characteristics at an early stage in their lives (148). This “machismo” continues to be a part of their behavior and treatment towards women as adults.

In a conversation between Rachel and Lucy in “And Some More,” both girls see that they can only be good or bad by the way that they describe the different types of snow. Lucy explains, “There ain’t thirty different kinds of snow. There are two kinds. The clean kind and the dirty kind, clean and dirty. Only Two” (Cisneros 35). There cannot be an in-between, it has to be one or the other. The way that Lucy sees snow as dirty or clean is reflective of the way that the women in her society can be as pure and clean as the snow or impure like the dirty contaminated environmental elements. At such a young age, the girls have an understanding of what is expected of them in their culture. One of the worst things that a family can experience is to have a daughter or any other woman in the family who is a “mala mujer” (a bad woman). A woman is a bad one, if she shows any signs of aggressive behavior. If she wishes to be respected and admired, then she must reject her individuality and refuse to be herself. She must obey the authority of her father or husband and put her “selfish” needs and ambitions aside. In other words, any desire for an education or to have a better life is a looked down upon. A woman is supposed to submit herself to the authoritative male figure in her life.

For so long women have feared to be labeled as whores so they try their best to be virgin-like. They uphold an image of purity and are under the authority of a man. They do not have sex and if they do, they are married and they do not speak about enjoying it. In fact, most women are

condition to think that sex is something to be ashamed of and is only for pro-creating purposes. Latina women are also expected to have a super spiritual strength like that of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Mary). This spiritual strength helps them to endure any pain and suffering, as well as it helps them to tolerate the abuse from their husbands or fathers. Esperanza reflects on the gender imposed virgin/whore dichotomy when she observes her friend Marin, who is a few years older than her. Marin wants to find a husband to take care of her. Esperanza explains that in her conversations with her, Marin articulates that she is waiting for a man to marry her so that she can get out the poor neighborhood and move into a big house somewhere else. Instead of changing her life herself, Marin, “Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life” (Cisneros 27). Marin’s wish to marry someone to take care of her is an effect of the virgin/whore dichotomy that she has learned from the other women in her community. She also has a boyfriend in Puerto Rico that sends her letters. Marin confesses to Esperanza that they plan to marry. However if she has to wait until the next year to marry him, she will keep her options open and marry someone else. Marin is also looking for a husband because her aunt does not allowed her to go anywhere. She is only permitted to go outside the front of her house when her aunt is there to watch her. Marin is to be supervised at all times because the rest of her family lives in Puerto Rico and they have to watch her to make sure that she does not do anything that can possibly shame the family. It does not matter how cold it is outside, Marin goes outside everyday with her radio. “What matters, Marin says, is for the boys to see us and for us to see them,” Esperanza expresses (Cisneros 27). By sitting outside every night, Marin hopes that a man will notice how pretty she is in hopes that he will want to marry her.

Marin seems threatening because “she wears dark nylons all the time and lots of makeup...” (Cisneros 23). She has the appearance of a “bad girl.” Marin does not get the

opportunity to go out much, since she lives in Mango Street and she only babysits her brother's children. Hence she wants to get a job downtown because she believes "that's where the best jobs are, since [she would] always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can [possibly] meet someone in the subway who might marry [her] and take [her] to live in a big house far away" (Cisneros 26). Marin plans to use her beauty in order to obtain a higher socio-economic status so that she can live comfortably. Although Petty argues that like Malinche, Marin will be seen as a traitor for turning her back to her family and culture because "she is leaving her neighborhood and her duty as babysitter to where the 'better jobs' are, in the more Anglo-oriented downtown area," it has more to do with the fact that she has gender expectations to fulfill and her family fears that she will use the power of her sexuality to get what she wants (126). She will not be seen as a traitor as Petty argues but instead as a "mala mujer" (bad woman). Paz notes that the attributes of what individuals consider a bad woman consist of having an aggressive behavior, instead of a passive one (39). Marin's behavior is considered aggressive because of the way she carries herself. Although she has a boyfriend in Puerto Rico, she is still looking for someone else in the United States to marry her to give her economic security. She wants to get out of poverty. In the end, it all has to do with control more so than anything else. Elizabeth Coonrod Martinez observes in "Crossing Gender Borders: Sexual Relations and Chicana Artistic Identity" that the women in *The House of Mango Street*, "do not get to choose their spouses and if they do pick a boyfriend, and get pregnant, they are considered bad girls. They do not get a choice before or after marriage" (131). Thus the fact that Marin is attempting to use the power of her sexuality to seduce a man to marry her automatically makes her a "mala mujer" (bad woman) because she is attempting to use her free will.

In the same way as Marin, Esperanza starts to see how powerful the sexuality of a woman is. This takes place in the vignette, "The Family of Little Feet." A lady from the family of little feet gives Esperanza and her friends, Rachel and Lucy a bag of three pair of used high heel shoes. When Esperanza puts on the high heels, she is shocked at how different her legs look. Esperanza says, "But the truth is it is scary to look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see attached a long leg" (Cisneros 40). It was like all the sudden, Esperanza was aware of a new power she had. It was something new to her. Esperanza also notes that the three girls decide to walk in heels around the block and when they go to the corner store, the men cannot stop staring at them. She tells readers, "We must be Christmas" (Cisneros 40). The girls were sexualized by the men the moment they put the heels on, they were like a gift to them. Some of the men at the corner grocery store questioned the why they were wearing the shoes. Another man threatens to call the cops if they do not take them off because he says that they are too dangerous for them to wear (Cisneros 41). The man does not tell them why the shoes are dangerous, he just demonstrates his disgust towards the girls wearing them. This particular men is repulsed with the girls' behavior because they are not showing passivity by walking around Mango Street with their high heel shoes. They are exercising their individuality and that is unacceptable in a patriarchal world. The high-heels make the girls' legs more sexually appealing, which gives them a sort of sexual power. Michelle Scalise Sugiyama deeply analyses the reasons why Cisneros uses heels and feet to show male manipulation of the female sexuality in "Of Woman Bondage: The Eroticism of Feet in *The House on Mango Street*." Sugiyama goes to the extent of correlating heels to foot binding in China because of their similarities in their erotic appeal. According to Sugiyama's research, women who had their feet bound were not able to walk anywhere and therefore had to be transported everywhere. Women with bound feet always had a

chaperone with them and it made it almost impossible for them to escape. Therefore, their feet impeded them from going places alone and from gaining an independence. The women who did not have bound feet were seen as immodest. Hence women were encouraged to bind their feet if they did not want to be perceived in that manner. Men perceived bound feet as beautiful, hence women who wanted to be perceived in this manner had their feet bound.

It is no surprise that Esperanza makes a correlation between the Chinese and Mexican men when she talks about her grandmother. She was once a wild woman but she completely changed after she got kidnapped by her grandfather. She mentions, “She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse, which is supposed to be bad luck if you’re born female- but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don’t like their women strong” (Cisneros 11). Esperanza observes that men in both the Chinese and Mexican cultures try their best to control the women in their societies. They want them to be passive. Any signs of aggressive behavior constitutes them as unruly women. Sugiyama divides the need to control the sexuality of women into two categories. She writes:

- (1). Those that seek to blockade female sexuality, and (2) those that seek to bombard it. In other words the male quest to control female sexuality is rooted either in fear (that the woman will lose her chastity and thereby shame the family) or desire (to possess the woman sexually), depending on the man’s relationship to the woman in question. (16)

Regardless of a man’s relationship to a woman, most men find the sexuality of a woman threatening and they go in a quest to attempt and control them completely so that they can keep them from engaging in sexual activities. The intentions however vary depending if the man is related to the woman or if the man wants to objectify her sexually. Paz further states, “In a world made in man’s image, woman is only a reflection of masculine will and desire. When passive,

she becomes a goddess, a beloved one, a being who embodies the ancient, stable elements of the universe: the earth, motherhood, virginity (35-36). When a woman is passive, she is perceived to be a goddess because she obeys her patriarchal society. Men want a woman who is obedient and submissive like Virgin Mary, who submitted herself to the will of God. In like manner, men want women that will submit to their will. When a woman is the opposite, she becomes a devil.

At the same time that Esperanza and her friends are discovering the power to seduce men at such an early age, they are also slightly learning that their sexuality can be used in the exact opposite. They can be sexually attacked and taken advantage of. Esperanza and her friends start to grasp this when the “Bumman” in front of the laundromat asks Esperanza’s friend, Rachel, for a kiss in exchange for a dollar once he sees her wearing heels. He is sexually aroused when he sees them. Rachel thinks about taking the dollar and is tempted to kiss him. “We are tired of being beautiful, Lucy hides the shoes...under a powerful bushel basket on the back porch, until one Tuesday her mother, who is very clean, throws them away. But no one complains,” Esperanza states (Cisneros 42). After this experience Esperanza, Rachel, and Lucy are overwhelmed with all the attention they generated from older men when they wore the heels. Wissman affirms that the “girl’s joy in their emerging sexuality and its intoxicating effects on themselves and the men around them becomes quickly and quite dramatically undercut by the day’s events” (22). In a way, their world is shattered and wearing high heels is not as magical as in the fairytale, “Cinderella.” Sugiyama makes a comparison between the young women of Mango Street and Cinderella. She states, “Like Cinderella, their suitability as wives is symbolically determined by their shoes and feet...they use their sexuality to acquire a husband who they think will take them far, far away where they will live happily ever after” (Sugiyama 19). For this reason, Cisneros mentions Cinderella specifically in this chapter once the girls put

on the high heel shoes, they say, “Hurray! Today we are Cinderella because our feet fit exactly...” (Cisneros 40). Although this vignette starts off like the Cinderella fairytale because their feet perfectly fits the high heels, it does not end the same way. “Rather than transporting the heroines to a festive ball filled with prospective mates, these shoes instead transport them to streets filled with desirous and lecherous men,” Wissman asserts (22). The girls’ myth of beauty is destroyed in this chapter. They learned that they can bring attention to themselves at the same time that they can bring unwanted attention from older men. Esperanza correlates feet to her sexuality.

In the “Chanclas” vignette, which translates into sandals, Esperanza attends a baptism at the Precious Blood Church basement. Her mother buys her new clothes but she forgets to buy her shoes. Esperanza has to wear her brown saddle shoes, which she is very ashamed of. Once at the baptism, a boy who keeps looking at her asks her to dance but because she is ashamed of her shoes, she rejects him. So instead she pays attention to the metal folding chairs around her that have a stamped printed, “Precious Blood.” Her uncle then asks her to dance with him and she accepts and everyone is proud of their dancing. After dancing Esperanza notices that, “All night the boy who is a man watches [her] dance” (Cisneros 48). Although Esperanza is only wearing old brown saddle shoes that she uses for school, she still gets the attention of a “boy who is a man.” In reality, he continues to look at her because he wants her sexually. The name of the church and the mentioning of it printed in the chairs several times is symbolic of Esperanza’s virginity and the reason why the “boy who is a man” observes her all night long, although she is not wearing high heels that would of have accentuated her hips and legs. Esperanza becomes a sexual desire for the “boy who is a man.”

At about only thirteen years of age, Esperanza continues to see the way that she is sexualized by men when she gets her first job at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers. There is an older man that is very friendly to her. Since it is her first day of work and she does not know anyone, she is happy when he tells her that she can have lunch with him from now on. That makes her feel better, since she will not feel so lonely when she is eating. He then asks her for a birthday kiss, since according to him it is his birthday. Feeling pressured by him and since she is naïve, Esperanza innocently asserts, “I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn’t let go (Cisneros 55). He takes advantage of her and shows her his real intentions. By kissing her forcefully, he shows to her that a man can take anything by force, even if a woman refuses. As Esperanza is getting older, she starts to notice the changes in her body. In the vignette entitled, “Hips,” Esperanza, Rachel, Lucy and her sister, Nenny discuss hips while jumping rope. They say that having hips is a sign that a young girl is becoming a woman. Esperanza says, “One day you wake up and they are there. Ready and waiting like a new Buick with the keys in the ignition. Ready to take you where?” (Cisneros 49). In this statement, Esperanza uses a simile to compare her transforming body with hips to a car. Having hips signifies that she is going to experience new things. Esperanza and her friends explain why hips are good to have. According to them, hips are good for: holding a baby when cooking, for dancing, and bearing children. They also mentioned that hips turn a girl into a woman and that they serve to differentiate girls from boys. Rachel, Lucy, and Esperanza are a few years older than Nenny. While jumping rope, the girls make chants about hips while Nenny just chants about songs that the girls believe to be childish. They get annoyed with her because she does not fully comprehend when they are talking about the importance of having hips. Ultimately, their society has taught them that having

hips is a good thing because they will be able to fulfill their social responsibilities by marrying and bearing children.

Since Esperanza comes from a very conservative home, she does not express her feelings about her sexuality, except to readers. In the chapter "Sire," Esperanza confesses to readers that a young man, Sire, always stares at her when she walks by him. She is bit intimidated by the way he looks at her. Esperanza seems to have a crush on Sire but her parents tell her to stay away from him because "he is a punk" (Cisneros 73). Sire has a girlfriend, who according to Esperanza, "doesn't know how to tie her shoes," whereas Esperanza does (Cisneros 73). She perceives her as incompetent and starts to see that that is the reason why Sire is with her. Esperanza thinks that if Sire's girlfriend was a smart girl, then he probably will not be with her. Sire would not be with her because men do not like smart women because they are harder to manipulate and control. Sire also has his girlfriend run to the store for him, instead of going with her or going for himself. At night, Esperanza always observes them together when they drink beer and go for long walks. Esperanza wonders where Sire takes her and imagines that she is Sire's girlfriend. Esperanza pictures:

Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas. I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt. Not this way, every evening talking to the trees, leaning out my window, imagining what I can't see. A boy held me once so hard, I swear, I felt the grip and weight of his arms, but it was a dream. Sire how did you hold her? Was it? Like this? And when you kissed her? Like this? (Cisneros 73)

In her day-dreams, Esperanza is in control of the situation. Only in her dreams is she able to explore the possibilities of her sexuality because she cannot tell anyone how she wonders about

Sire sexually. She is well aware that her parents and the people in her community are very conservative. Young women who think about enjoying their sexual lives have a bad reputation and are labeled as “whores.”

Esperanza's mother tells her that Sire's girlfriend is one of “those girls...that go into alleys” (Cisneros 73). Esperanza's mother indicates that the kind of girl that goes into alleys is the type of girl who is a whore. In other words, Sire's girlfriend is sexually active, therefore she is damaged goods. Esperanza has a hard time in trying to balance her dual identity because of the virgin/whore archetypes imposed on her. Esperanza feels lonely and out of place. She feels like she does not belong on Mango Street because no one understands her. She believes that the only things that understand her are the four skinny trees she hears from her room. Esperanza finds comfort in their strength. She says, “They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here” (Cisneros 74). These are the same trees that she talks to every night while she daydreams about being Sire's girlfriend. Valdes suggests that this, “Image evokes a powerful statement about belonging and not belonging to the place where they [the trees] happen to have grown” (62). They are the only trees on Mango Street where there is nothing but concrete. In these trees, Esperanza finds comfort in their endurance and strength.

Esperanza explains that she was named after her grandmother, who once was very strong and “a wild horse of a woman” that refused to marry until one day Esperanza's grandfather, “threw a sack over her head and carried her off...as she was a fancy chandelier” (Cisneros 11). Through the eyes of the young Esperanza, readers can see how she correlates her grandmother to a “fancy chandelier” so that one can see how the grandfather viewed her as a mere object that he could just take. Her grandmother is compared to a stationary object who lacks a sense of self.

Esperanza continues to say that her grandmother, "...never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things that she wanted to be" (Cisneros 11). Instead of leaving him, she stayed with him and spent the rest of her life feeling sorry for herself, trapped looking out the window. After her kidnapping, Esperanza's grandmother developed a passive behavior. In "Remembering Always to come Back: The Child's Wished-For Escape and the Adult's Self-Empowered Return in Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*," Reuben Sanchez contends that "Although she has inherited her grandmother's name, Esperanza will not 'inherit her place by the window'" (235). She does not want to fall into the same vicious cycle. Growing up in an American society, she sees that receiving an education is the only way to not inherit her grandmother's place by the window. Rivera adds that "with the story of Esperanza's naming, Cisneros points to one of the emblematic cultural traits related to the women in the Mexican American community: the encoded lesson of female submissiveness often passed down from generation to the next" (31). Esperanza decides that she will not inherit the same fate as her grandmother. She will not remain passive, she will take action for her future.

However, she sees that the men in her culture oppressed the women by impeding them from having opportunities to better themselves and from becoming independent. She tells readers how her friend, Alicia, is hindered by her father. He forcefully imposes the "virgin" role on her. After her mother dies, her father makes her the woman of the household. She has to wake up every morning to make tortillas. When she tells her father that she sees mice when she stays up studying, her father tells her that she imagines them. He demeans her by asserting, "And anyway, a woman's place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears

early just in time to rise...” (Cisneros 31). The tortilla star that is reference in this vignette is actually Venus, the morning star. It appears right as the sun is about to come out. Olivares provides details about the symbolism Cisneros portrays by using the “Tortilla star.” He comments:

To Alicia Venus, the morning star, does not mean wishing upon or waiting for a star to fall down--as it does for [others], nor romance nor the freedom of the outside world; instead, it means having to get up early, a rolling pin and tortillas. Here we do not see the tortilla as a symbol of cultural identity but as a symbol of a subjugating ideology, of sexual domination, of the imposition of a role that the young woman must assume. Here Venus--and the implication of sex and marriage as escape--is deromanticized, is eclipsed by a cultural reality that points to the drudgery of the inside. (Olivares 92)

Without getting married, Alicia must take care of her household because that is what is expected of her in the Mexican culture. Szadziuk argues that “a woman’s transition from one culture to another may not only be expected to affect the way she conceives her gender role but may also interfere with gender identification” (120). Alicia transitions between cultures. In one culture, she has to wake up early to make Tortillas and to take care of the household, while on the other hand she has to stay up late at night studying so that she can get an education. Education is the only way for her as both a woman and minority to get out of poverty and away from the gender role her father has imposed upon her. Gender expectations across cultures might overlap but not exactly coincide with one another (Szadziuk 120). In other words, what is expected of her as a young woman in the dominant culture is not the same as what it is expected of her Latino(a) culture. Her father discourages her from pursuing a higher education. Alicia mourns because she wishes there was an older sibling that would take the responsibility that has fallen upon her.

Alicia is also a first-generation college student. She works hard to attend school; she even takes two trains and a bus to commute.

Regardless of how hard she works, her father and the rest of her Latino(a) community do not support the fact that she attends college. Instead of admiring her for all her hard work and dedication, individuals like Cathy criticized her. In another chapter, “Cathy Queen of Cats,” Cathy states, “Alicia is stuck-up ever since she went to college. She used to like me but now she doesn’t” (Cisneros 12). Her ambition and motivation to become successful is seen as arrogance. Although Cathy knows that Alicia is really busy taking care of her household and attending school, she finds ways to judge her. Cathy does not empathize with the fact that Alicia barely gets any sleep, since she is up late studying and up early making tortillas. Anzaldua clearly articulates that people in the Latino(a) community perceived education as a way of rebelling. In the chapter, “Movimientos de rebeldia y las culturas que traicionan,” she remarks, “If you get above yourself, you’re an envidiosa [envious]. If you don’t behave like everyone else, la gente [everyday people] will say that you think you’re better than others, que te crees grande [You think you’re all that]. With ambition (condemned in the Mexican culture and valued in the Anglo) comes envy” (18). There is not really a way of getting an education without being criticized. Although it is praised in one culture, it is judged in the other one. Since Cathy is not part of Alicia’s community, she does not see Alicia’s education as a rebellion. Cathy is rather jealous of Alicia for going to school and trying to succeed.

Alicia’s father on the other hand does see her education as rebellious. He knows that with education comes power and independence. He is afraid of losing that power over her, hence he feels the need to stay in control by waking her up early after she was up all night studying. Her father believes that he cannot take over the household roles that were the responsibility of

Alicia's deceased mother because he is a man. He firmly believes that that is a woman's job. Since Alicia is the oldest woman in his household, he forces her to take the role of her mother. He also believes that she is defying him when she tells him that she sees mice, he sees it as a way of attempting to get out of doing her daily duties. Szadziuk comments and states that Alicia "is considered deficient in her compliance with the culture's unwritten rules; a woman's sole duty is to prepare food, and staying up all night and going out during the day is suspicious. The social patterns here do not provide for a woman's education" (117). Women rarely get encouraged or the opportunity to an education; they are expected to take care of the men and/or their children.

Since the women in Esperanza's neighborhood are seen as property, they are physically abused the minute the men feel that they are doing something to shame the family. Esperanza articulates this when she tells readers about her friend Sally. Esperanza mentions that everyone thinks Sally is beautiful and her father thinks that being that beautiful is nothing but trouble. In "Writing Will Keep You Free': Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*," Kelly Wissman links beauty "to male control of female bodies and breeds of violence to maintain control" (22). Beauty needs to be regulated because another man can come and take a woman because she is beautiful. The boys at school spread rumors about her and the girls are jealous of her so she does not have any friends. In an earlier vignette, "Sally" Esperanza asks her, "Why do you always have to go straight home after school? You become a different Sally. You pull your skirt straight, you rub the blue paint off your eyelids. You don't laugh, Sally. You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can't come out from" (Cisneros 82). Esperanza notices how much she has changed and how she is locked in her house all the time. Mayock believes that Sally "fears the constant sexual abuse imposed by her father" (226). Moreover, Mayock argues that Sally is not only physically abused but also sexually

violated by her own father. Although her father is worried about someone else violating her, he is the one that hurts her the most. Brady mentions that, “The majority of violent crimes against women occur in homes and are committed by acquaintances” (135). Sally does not even have to go outside to be violated by someone; she is abused by someone in her own household. Both Sally and Alicia do not have to wait to get marry to be forced into gender roles. Their homes become the place that they find themselves entrapped.

In a later vignette, “What Sally Said,” Esperanza further tells readers that Sally is terrified of her father. When Sally comes to school with bruises, she lies and says that she fell off the stairs. Esperanza remarks that her father hit her like she was an animal. On one occasion Sally leaves her house and resides in Esperanza’s house for a few days in order to avoid her father. After a few nights, her father who had been crying apologizes to her and asks her to come home. Sally forgives him and returns home with him. Her father is nice to her until he sees her conversing with a boy and he hits her again. Esperanza affirms, “Until the way Sally tells it. He just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and belt” (Cisneros 93). Sally’s father tells her, “You’re not my daughter, you’re not my daughter.” (Cisneros 93). Her father hits her because he is afraid she will run off like his sisters who brought his family shame. Petty explicates her father’s attitude towards her with the following passage:

Sally’s attractiveness is the source of much unhappiness. Because her looks are perceived as a sign of promiscuity, she is stigmatized in her school; the boys tell stories about her in the coatroom, and she has very few female friends. More damaging, though, is the reaction of her father who ‘says to be this beautiful is trouble’ ...Sally’s sexuality is doubly threatening to her father’s masculinity. Not only could she betray him by being

promiscuous, but her beauty might also entice a man to violate her, which would threaten the father's role as a protector. (127)

This passage is further reaffirmed when in attempt to escape from her father, she marries a marshmallow salesman before she is even in eighth grade. Esperanza remarks that Sally is happy, "except sometimes her husband gets angry and once broke the door..." (Cisneros 101). Sally's husband is just as abusive as her father. Her husband is however, a lot more possessive of her. This is evident in the following passage that states, "Except he won't let her talk on the phone. And he doesn't look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the things they own..." (Cisneros 102). Sally marries because she thinks she is going to have more freedom. However that is not the case, she finds herself confined again and in worse scenario. Her father at least allowed her to visit Esperanza.

Sally is imprisoned in her husband's house. She is bored and losing her sanity. There is not much that she can do but to observe absolutely everything in her house. She pays careful attention to all the details on the walls, "how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake" (Cisneros 102). She is a hostage of her own home. Kalay better explains it by writing, "The home depicted here is again a kind of prison which isolates women from their own society. For example, the women characters who regard the marriage as a sanctuary confront with a worse 'house' segregating them from their family and friends and forcing them to work like slaves" (122). Her isolation from the rest of the world is unhealthy for her, especially in a crucial time in which she is developing physically, emotionally, and socially. Esperanza's observes that Sally is forcefully pushed to follow the virgin/whore dichotomy by being obedient to the men in her life. She was under the authority of both her

father and her husband. Since Sally married so young, she never got the opportunity to become independent. Every time she was about to rebel against the patriarchal society, she was severely punished. Sally like many other women on Mango Street is treated like an object. Paz brings attention to this concept and writes:

Woman is an object sometimes precarious, sometimes harmful, but always different. By converting her into an object and by subjecting her to the deformations which interests, his vanity, his anguish and his very love dictate, man changes her into an instrument, a means of obtaining understanding and pleasure, a way of achieving survival. (Paz 197)

By taming and keeping her from becoming her true self, men are able to control her and keep her from disobeying.

Esperanza also talks about Rafaela who is also obliged to follow the virgin/whore dichotomy. Her husband keeps her indoors and prohibits her from going outside. He is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at. Once again, beauty is seen as threatening to the men in Esperanza's community. Beauty brings negative consequences to the women who have it. The more beautiful the woman is, the more the more possessive men are of her. Men fear that their beauty will cause for other men to take them away or provoke them into sexual activities. Esperanza notes that, "Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow and dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's. On the corner there is music from the bar, and Rafaela wishes she could go there and dance before she gets old" (Cisneros 79). Like Rapunzel, Rafaela is imprisoned and isolated from the rest of the world. She follows the role of the obedient wife and although she lives in a place where women are given a little more liberty, she finds herself trapped in her house. She is not able to go anywhere without her husband. Thus she asks Esperanza and her friends to go to the store to get her Papaya juice on Tuesdays since that is the

night that her husband comes home late from playing Dominoes. The double standard in Rafaela's marriage is evident because he can come home as late as he wants to, whereas she is not even allowed to go to the store to buy herself juice.

Esperanza's identities clashed with one another because she sees the manner in which Rafaela and the other women in her community are continuously oppressed. On one side she is ambitious and wants to get off Mango Street, while on the other hand, she wants to make her parents proud. She deals with both of her identities by rejecting the traditional patriarchal rules and gender roles. Esperanza decides that she will start to act like a man. She will rebel in subtle ways. Esperanza declares:

I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. In the movies there is always one with red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all the way. Her power is her own. She will not give it away. I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am the one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. (Cisneros 88-89).

By refusing to pick up after herself in the manner some men do, Esperanza challenges her patriarchal culture by breaking the limitations that follow her and the women in her community. She does not want to be "tamed" like the other women. Esperanza does not want the same fate for herself. She will use her beauty as power to control men. Esperanza will not be defined by gender expectations. Szadziuk explains that Esperanza will "meander between the aggressive 'masculine' behavior and the 'beautiful and cruel' self-image because she refuses to be victimized" (121). She will utilize her beauty as a tool to fight her patriarchal society.

Towards the end of the novella, Esperanza tells readers that in an outing with Sally in the chapter “Red Clowns,” she is sexually assaulted at a carnival by a group of young White men. She experiences once again that men will take something by force even if she does not comply. Esperanza always imagined that her first sexual encounter was going to be as beautiful as she hoped. She conveys to Sally, “It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it... The way they said it, the way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks...” (Cisneros 99). Her first sexual experience was not magical like the fairytales and novels said it would be. Esperanza’s whole idea about sex is shattered with this experience. She cries, “The one grabbed me by my arm, he wouldn’t let me go. He said I love you, Spanish girl... I couldn’t make them go away. I couldn’t do anything but cry” (Cisneros 100). She feels hopeless and powerless because she could not do anything about it. In “ ‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” Kelly Wissman asserts that this is a horrific experience for Esperanza, “filled as it is with a sexual assault, a racial slur, and abandonment by a girlfriend she trusted...” (26). She feels betrayed by Sally because she left with an older guy while she was at the carnival waiting for her. Esperanza believes that it would have not happened if Sally had been by her side to protect her. Not only is Esperanza a victim of a sexual attack but also of racism. As she is getting assaulted the boys taunted her by continuously saying, “I love you Spanish girl” (Cisneros 100). This is actually the racial slur that Wissman is referring to in the previous statement. They taunt her because they associate sexual promiscuity with her because she is Mexican girl. Although they did not know her actual heritage, they just associated her with an over-sexed easy-lay stereotype. Latinas are usually stereotyped as being hypersexual, “spicy,” and promiscuous. Therefore Latina women are often times expected to be sexually available and when they are not, they are raped, like in

the case of Esperanza. As a young Latina woman, Esperanza battles with the racialized sexual message she receives when she is attacked. She struggles with her identity because she is seen as property and as inferior. Although Esperanza is traumatized about her awful experience, she blames other women, including Sally for not warning her about the possibilities of a sexual attack. Esperanza believes that women have a social responsibility to help one another.

Esperanza feels responsible for Sally when they are both in a junk yard before she gets married. Since her father hits her when she is not doing anything to shame him, she decides to experiment with the young men on Mango Street. In the vignette, "The Monkey Garden," Esperanza talks about the way that Tito and his friends stole Sally's keys and refused to give them back until Sally gave them a kiss. Sally agreed to kiss them although Esperanza was worried that they would take advantage of her. She states, "I don't know why, but something inside me wanted to throw a stick. Something wanted to say no when I watched Sally going into the garden with Tito's buddies all grinning. It was just a kiss, that's all. A kiss for each one. So what, she said" (Cisneros 96-97). Fearing for her friend, Esperanza, "ran up three flights of stairs to Tito's apartment. Esperanza finds Tito's mother and tells her, "Your son and his friends stole Sally's keys and now they won't give them back unless she kisses them and right now they're making her kiss them" (Cisneros 97). Tito's mother tells her "Those kids. What do you want me to do, call the cops?" (Cisneros 97). Esperanza did not get the response she was expecting from her. Tito's mother acts like it is Sally's fault. Brady states that:

From an early age women are taught to worry about sex crimes; as a result they develop a set of unspoken rules about dress, behavior, lifestyle, sexuality, and female loyalty and passivity in relationships and construct a series of boundaries in the physical and social worlds which [women] must not cross if they wish to remain safe" (137).

Sally has cross those boundaries. Tito's mother thinks that Sally is accountable if anything happens to her. She should have not been there to begin with.

Esperanza knows that the only way that the women in her community will free themselves of all the oppression is by helping and caring about one another. It is something that they owed to each other; since they are constantly oppressed in both the dominant culture and in their patriarchal community. In order to escape the virgin/whore dichotomy, Esperanza must leave Mango Street. Bellas writes:

Esperanza wishes not to be objectified by her culture or oppressed by the dominant culture. Esperanza suffers a feeling of alienation from her own culture and the consequences of replanting herself as a new entity. She is blazing a trail for a new Chicano woman as she attempts to overcome the sexism, diminishing opportunities and value on education within her own community, and racism present in the dominant American culture. (Bellas 86)

Esperanza tries her best to bridge a gap between both of her identities to overcome cultural barriers in both cultures. Esperanza must attend school and attain her own house so that she can write. She then will be able to empower herself and help the other women that are left behind in her community. Times have changed and young Mexican women finally have the opportunity to become someone besides a wife. Anzaldua indicates, "For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons (17). Mexican women like Esperanza in contemporary times have the opportunity to attend school and gain independence. They no longer have to inherit their grandmother's and mother's virgin/whore dichotomy. The older

generations did not have a choice, therefore the options were very limited. For many women, marriage was the best thing that could ever happen to them. The fourth option Anzaldua offers does however come with the prize of being seen as selfish. In other words, women who choose an education and career path do it in exchange for not marrying or having children. There is however an exception to this. For the most part, women that attend college, choose to wait to have children and/or to get married. This is of course perceived as being selfish. Esperanza wants to leave Mango Street so that she does not have people from her community discouraging her from attending school. She needs to get away from these implications so that she does not have to face all the negativity surrounding young women who choose an education. Esperanza does not want the same obstacles that her friend Alicia is faced with throughout her college career.

Esperanza will bridge both of her identities by developing the new consciousness that Anzaldua talks about in the chapter, "La conciencia de la mestiza." Anzaldua affirms:

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode- nothing thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something. (79)

Esperanza will have to accept both her Mexican and Americans identities. She will have to understand that there is nothing defective about being a Mexican young woman. In order to deal with her dual identity, Esperanza will turn all the negativity and oppression she has seen and or experienced inside and outside her community into something positive. She will write about it,

she will tell the stories of the women that may never leave Mango Street. These women will not go unnoticed, they will be remembered. By developing this new consciousness, Esperanza will be strong, she will not break, she will be powerful, and she will overcome passivity with her writing. Esperanza chooses to become a writer to empower herself. Writing will be powerful for Esperanza because “writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths, of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies [their] survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared,” Gloria Anzaldua writes in “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers” (171). The act of writing will help Esperanza to heal her pain as well as it will help her to expose the issues that plagued her community. Esperanza states “I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free” (Cisneros 110). Towards the end, Esperanza reconciles with her Mexican and American identities. Through her writing, she is able to accept both of her identities. The book ends with “They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out” (Cisneros 110). With this statement, it is evident that Esperanza will return to fulfill her social responsibility and help the rest of the women. Esperanza will be a pioneer in her community so that the vicious cycle of oppression can be broken. Therefore women with dual identities can make something great out of all of their negative experiences.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

As I have thoroughly explored, Sandra Cisneros portrays dual identity of the Mexican-American young woman, Esperanza Cordero in *The House on Mango Street*. Esperanza wishes to leave Mango Street to realize her dream of having a beautiful home far away from her neighborhood. Esperanza's life is full of poverty. Esperanza and her family had to constantly move from place to place. Before moving into Mango Street, her family did not have running water and they had to share a bathroom with several other families. Upon relocating to Mango Street, Esperanza is happy that she finally has a home that belongs to her family. Granting it is not the house she had always wanted, she is glad that they no longer have to deal with landlords. Esperanza wants a beautiful house because of the tarnished experiences she has with the nuns at her school, as well as with other people outside of her community. They associate her ethnicity with the poverty that surrounds her. All the negative experiences, as well as the way that society perceives her community, inspires Esperanza to pursue the American Dream. She wants a home of her own that is nice and comfortable. As a result of the associations people make between poverty and her Mexican identity, Esperanza develops a sense of shame and a deeper awareness of the social wealth gap in the country. Moreover, she also feels out of place and lonely. No one understand her. Hence, she empathizes with other people in her community that are seen and are labeled as outsiders. Through this, Cisneros draws attention to the problems and difficulty of the new immigrant, who has a hard time assimilating into American society.

Esperanza not only struggles with being both Mexican and American but also with being a young woman in her Mexican culture. Most of the women around her are oppressed in their patriarchal society. She desperately does not want to end up like them. With all the stories about

the oppression of the women, Cisneros depicts the virgin/whore dichotomy that is heavily imposed upon Latina women. Esperanza sees the cycle of a life entrapped in a house and oppressed by a father or a husband. In order to avoid falling victim like these women, Cisneros stresses the importance of breaking away from the virgin/whore dichotomy by rejecting passivity. In the end, Esperanza understands that she must accept all the positive and negative things that have occurred to her and create something great from them. Esperanza decides to become a writer. She will write stories about the women and the rest of her community. Esperanza also resolves to come back to Mango Street to help all the women who are unable to leave and make a better life for themselves.

By understanding dual identity better, educators might be able to have a better understanding of their students and the conflict that they struggle with internally and externally. Educators might be able to help children who have a dual identity by not stripping them of their Mexican identity and working with them on accepting both dualities at the same time. In having more of an understanding, educators might find a new approach to teaching children with dual identities. Therefore these children will get the assistance that they need and they will not be label as “slow.” Perhaps educators might be able to help their students by encouraging them in the times when their families do not understand their goals and ambitions for an education, like in the case of Alicia who sees mice. The effects that can possibly come from awareness of this topic are important for generations to come. It might even have the influence of decreasing the rate of young Latina woman who fall into depression or commit suicide because they feel isolated and misunderstood. If the young women feel like they cannot confide in their parents because they will not comprehend them, at least they might think about trusting their teachers. They might develop a relationship with them. Although some educators might not fully

understand what they are going through, listening and encouraging might go a long way. In addition, multilingual and multicultural curriculums should be a major focus of American educational institutions.

If at an early stage, I would have had people in my life to tell me that I was not alone and that with time, I would be able to juggle both of my identities by side; I would have not felt so hopeless for most of my young adult life. As I reflect back to that time when I was in high school, I see how educators such as Ms. Giles and Coach Gonzalez changed my life. They both helped me get through the hardest time of my life pushing me to attend college because they both saw potential in me. When I met Coach G my freshman year of high school, I was shocked that she was a Latina who attended college. Most of the women that I knew in my community never even had the opportunity for a college career, they just got married I was stunned when both teachers told me to start thinking about college and the possible career fields that I wanted to explore. Before then, going to college was just an idea. It was for people that had supportive parents with a high socio-economic status. I never thought that it was something that could actually happened to me because I lacked the resources. I had no idea about how to even complete a college application. I did, however, have two educators who changed my life and that told me that with time things would fall into place.

By starting the conversation of dual identity, through literature such as *The House on Mango Street*, people can see that all people who immigrate from all over the world and live in the United States also have one. It is not just a Latino(a) issue but a universal one. People always associate negative things to a certain group of people upon their arrival to a new country. It does not necessarily have to be in the United States. All various groups of religious and ethnic groups of people are faced with having different identities and sometimes they are not sure of how to

deal with them side by side. Noticing that a duality of identity is far more common can make people more understanding of one another and can assist them to realize that they are not alone in their solitude. Individuals have far more in common than they would like to think. Prejudice and ignorance keeps them away from understanding and helping each other. This world would be a much better place if individuals will take the time to notice that their experiences are not too different than the person that does not speak or look like them. They are only misconceptions that shape our portrayal of others because we live in a global community.

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Abalos, David T. *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 2007. Print.

Abalos gives critical data and research about Latinos(as) in the United States and the contemporary issues they encountered. He touches on politics, anthropology, psychology, family, identity, theology, and politics of Latinos and their families.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza/ La Frontera*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987. Print.

This book is a great starting point to understanding Latino(a) dual identity. Anzaldua goes deep and writes about indigenous religions, colonialism, and the history of the Southwestern United States. She reflects on the meaning to live on both sides of the border and how Mexican-Americans struggle with identity. Anzaldua also touches on feminism and the roots of machismo in Latino culture. This is really a thought provoking book that helps to better understand why or how many traditions in Latino culture came to be.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color, 1983. 165-74. Print.

This is a great collection of essays by feminist writers such as Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, and many more writers. Many of the writers touch on what it is to be both a writer and a woman of color. They share their experiences as feminist and their encounters with racism and prejudice.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon, 1958. Print.

This is great book that explores the concept of space and the way it influences emotions, dreams, and thoughts. Bachelard analyses the reasons why so many poets write about their childhood homes. He researches the psychology behind it.

Bellas, Gale Joyce. "Esperanza Develops in Spite of Two Oppressive Cultures." *Patriarchy in Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*. Durst Johnson, Claudia. Ed. Detroit: Greenhaven, 2010. 78-86. Print.

In this essay, Bellas asserts that Esperanza is part of both the dominant and non-dominant culture. Hence Esperanza attempts to create her own identity by balancing her existence between the two cultures that are both oppressive. In one culture she is discriminated for her ethnicity as well as her social class, while in the other culture she is oppressed with gender stereotypes.

Brady, Mary Pat. "The Contrapuntal Geographies Of *Woman Hollering Creek And Other Stories*." *American Literature* 71.1 (1999): 117. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 Apr 2015.

Brady draws a close study to the way space and geography are used in the collection of short stories in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. She critiques the correlation between spatial relations and violence. Brady argues how it affects the way women are perceived and treated.

Brunk, Beth L. "En Otras Voces: Multiple Voices in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation The House on Mango Street*. Bloom, Harold. Ed. New York: Infobase Pub, 2010. 141-155. Print.

In this essay, Brunk points out the many voices that exist in *The House on Mango Street*. For example, a mature and a young voice, a speaking and a writing voice, to name a few.

These different voices are important in making the story a success in telling the life surrounding Esperanza and her neighborhood.

Carter, Nancy Corson. "Claiming The Bittersweet Matrix: Alice Walker, Sandra Cisneros, And Adrienne Rich." *Critique* 35.4 (1994): 195. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 Apr 2015.

In this journal, Carter writes about three works, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and *Your Native Land, Your Life* by Adrienne Rich. The author focuses on the themes of oppression of the patriarchal society, discrimination, and the roles of women as nurturers.

Castro, Rafaela. *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print. This is a great informative source of Mexican Folklore and religious practices. Castro offers an insight of the importance that these stories and practices are conserve and passed on from generation to generation to educate them. At end of the book, Castro also provides two in-depth bibliographies that are excellent to continue to research.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage books, 1984. Print.

This is Cisneros's first published work. It is a novella composed of 44 vignettes that tell the life surrounding a Mexican-American girl, Esperanza. She is about age of 12 or 13 and lives in a prominently Latino neighborhood in Chicago. The whole story is told in first person narrator. Esperanza writes about her experiences on Mango Street.

Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.

This is Cisneros collection of 22 short stories. The stories are divided into three different sections, "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn," "One Holy Night," and, "There Was

A Man, There Was a Woman.” Each section deals with a certain theme like coming of age, women oppression, poverty, and migration from Mexico to the United States.

Cruz, Felicia J. “On the ‘Simplicity’ of Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 47.4 (2001): 910-946. Project MUSE. Web. 15 Mar 2015.

Cruz discusses how the “simplicity” of *The House on Mango Street* made the book accessible for many people to read and understand. The novella is straightforward and allows reader to share Esperanza’s stories as they read the book. However each experience of the reader will differ since many overlooked themes such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Cutter Martha J. "Malinche’s Legacy: Translation, Betrayal, and Interlingualism in Chicano/a Literature." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 66.1 (2010): 1-33. Project MUSE. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.

In this article, Cutter analyzes the manner that the historical figure, Malinche, is used in Chicano literature. Cutter points out her multilingualism is important to the way her legacy is now depicted in literature. The author describes Malinche as a symbol of a troubled identity.

Frever, Trinna S.. ""Oh! You Beautiful Doll!": Icon, Image, and Culture in Works by Alvarez, Cisneros, and Morrison." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 28.1 (2009): 121-139. Project MUSE. Web. 2 Apr. 2015.

Frever offers a study on the way that Julia Alvarez, Toni Morrison, and Sandra Cisneros use dolls in their works to symbolize social messages about gender and culture in America. The author uses textual evidence from the works of Alvarez, Morrison, and

Cisneros to demonstrate the way each author uses the dolls to criticize racism, consumerism, and gender stereotypes in the United States.

Ganz, Robin. "Sandra Cisneros: Border Crossings And Beyond." *Melus* 19.1 (1994): 19. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 Mar 2015.

This article offers a brief description about the life of Sandra Cisneros. Her life as a child in Chicago and as a college student. Ganz mentions that Cisneros's life impacted her works. This author also discusses Cisneros's writing process and some criticism that she has received.

Hartley-Kroeger, Fiona. "Silent Speech: Narration, Gender And Intersubjectivity In Two Young Adult Novels." *Children's Literature In Education* 42.4 (2011): 276-288. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 Mar 2015.

Kroeger discusses narration, gender, and the power of silence in *The House on Mango Street* and in *The Chocolate War*. Although these novels are not similar to one another, the author makes a point about their feminist and narratological perspectives.

Kalay, Faruk. "The Women Figures And The Notion Of 'Home' In Sandra Cisneros' *The House On Mango Street*." *Journal Of Graduate School Of Social Sciences* 17.1 (2013): 117-126. Academic Search Complete. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.

Kalay shows how the notion of "home" is depicted in *The House on Mango Street*. "Home" is correlated to the treatment of the women in an oppressive patriarchal society. This scholarly article is useful in understanding the way that Cisneros uses "home" to symbolize a prison for the women that live there.

Matchie, Thomas. "Literary Continuity In Sandra Cisneros's *The House On Mango Street*." *Midwest Quarterly* 37.1 (1995): 67-79. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 Mar 2015.

In this journal, Matchie argues how many books such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, *Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros are just a literary continuity from other books. Matchie correlates *The House on Mango Street* to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

Mayock, Ellen C. "The Bicultural Construction Of Self In Cisneros, Álvarez, And Santiago."

*Bilingual Review* 23.3 (1998): 223-229. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 Mar 2015.

Mayock's article provides an examination in the works of Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros, and Esmeralda Santiago. She argues how the protagonists in their works are affected by two different cultures in trying to construct their own identity.

McCracken, Ellen. "Sandra Cisneros's *The House of Mango Street*: Community-Oriented

Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence." *Patriarchy in Sandra*

*Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*. Durst Johnson, Claudia. Ed. Detroit:

Greenhaven, 2010. 114-121. Print.

McCracken examines the reasons why the literary establishment is skeptical about giving *The House on Mango Street* a place in the literary canon. The author argues that it is because the writer is a Latina who writes about social issues that are still prevalent in American culture. McCracken also adds that the novella might not gain a place in the literary canon because it is primarily focus on the Latino(a) community and because it is accessible for anyone to read.

Mermann-Jozwiak, Elisabeth. "Gritos Desde La Frontera: Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, And

Postmodernism." *Melus* 25.2 (2000): 101. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 Apr

2015.

This article discusses the concept of postmodernism in Mexican-American literature.

The author uses the novel, *So Far From God* by Ana Castillo and the short story “Little Miracles, Kept Promises,” from the *Woman Hollering Creek* collection by Sandra Cisneros.

Mullen, Harryette. "A Silence Between Us Like A Language ': The Untranslatability Of Experience In Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*." *Melus* 21.2 (1996): 3-20. Academic Search Complete. Web. 28 Apr. 2015. Project Muse. Web. 28 Mar. 2015. Mullen argues that Cisneros uses the Spanish language in the collection of the short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* to portray how Latino(a) culture is untranslatable in a dominant culture in the United States. Hence Cisneros uses “insider” language codes, including those that come from indigenous languages that is accessible within a discourse of educated Latinos(as) that have deeply researched and analyzed their indigenous roots.

Olivares, Julian. “Entering the *House in Mango Street*.” *Patriarchy in Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*. Durst Johnson, Claudia. Ed. Detroit: Greenhaven, 2010. 87-94. Print.

Olivares discusses that Esperanza discovers her identity by writing and getting an education. It is not until she realizes the importance of these two things that she understands her social responsibility and freedom from the oppression that binds the rest of her community.

Oliver-Rotger, Maria Antònia. *Battlegrounds and Crossroads: Social and Imaginary Space in Writings by Chicanas*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003. Print.

Oliver-Rotger explores the works of many Latina writers such as Helena Viramontes, Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga, Pat Mora, and Ana Castillo. This book is divided into three sections. In one of the sections, the author focuses on their biographies, while in the other two sections, she focuses on their theoretical framework.

Paz, Octavio. *Alternating Current*. New York: Arcade Pub., 1990. Print.

In this book, Paz writes about culture, aesthetics, drugs, and atheism. Paz also focuses on the human experience, language, and Mexican culture. This book offers a poetic and honest perspective on some of the issues that Mexico still struggles with.

Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. New York: Grove, 1985. Print.

This book is a great starting point for individuals that want to learn about the complexity of Mexican identity and culture. Paz writes about Mexico's "hidden mask" that many Mexicans wear in order to survive and the wounds that still exist from colonialism.

Petty, Leslie. "The 'Dual'-ing Images Of La Malinche And La Virgen De Guadalupe In Cisneros's *The House On Mango Street*." *Melus* 25.2 (2000): 119. Academic Search Complete. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.

Petty gives an excellent examination of the way powerful figures as the Virgen de Guadalupe and Malinche are depicted in *The House on Mango Street*. She writes about the archetype dualities of these figures that exist in many of the characters throughout the novella and how Cisneros rejects these roles in writing about them.

Rivera, Carmen Haydée. *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009. Print.

This book analyzes most of Sandra Cisneros's works. It points out how art, history, and Cisneros's personal life are reflective throughout her writing. Rivera also touches on

social issues that are still prevalent in American culture when it comes to writers who are both women and of Color.

Romo, Leticia I. "Sandra Cisneros' "Barbie-Q": A Subversive Or Hegemonic Popular Text?." *Studies In Latin American Popular Culture* 24. 1 (2005): 127-137. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 May 2015.

This article works in the assumption that Cisneros's short story 'Barbie-Q' depicts hegemonic ideals through the classic icon, Barbie. Higher social classes are able to afford it while the low-socio economic class is left behind wishing they had it. The author believes that Cisneros uses Barbie as a symbol to show the disparities between social classes in America.

Sánchez, Reuben. "Remembering Always to Come Back: The Child's Wished-For Escape and the Adult's Self-Empowered Return in Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*." *Children's Literature* 23.1 (1995): 221-241. Project MUSE. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.

Sanchez writes about the reasons Esperanza from *The House on Mango Street* has to desperately want to move out of Mango Street and her reasoning for wanting to come back to help the other women and children that are left behind. Esperanza wants to empower herself through writing and education. Thus knowing that in order to these things, she must leave Mango Street.

Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. "Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminisms." *Cultural Studies* 13.2 (1999): 251-262. Academic Search Complete. Web. 18 May 2015.

Saldivar-Hull examines feminism in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. She focuses on the romanticized notion of the American Dream for many women before they cross the Mexican border to the United States. She also focuses on the differences

between living in a first world and a third world countries as a Mexican-American woman.

Sloboda, Nicholas. "A Home in the Heart: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*."

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation *The House on Mango Street*. Bloom, Harold. Ed. New York: Infobase Pub, 2010. 81-95. Print.

Sloboda argues that Esperanza develops a self-resilience understanding of herself in the novella. Therefore she is able to break away from hegemony that confines her. In doing this, Esperanza is able to transform her future.

Sugg, Katherine. "The Ultimate Rebellion: Chicana Narratives of Sexuality and Community."

*Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 3.2 (2003): 139-170. Project MUSE. Web. 23 Feb. 2015.

Sugg's article deals with the way Latinas have rebelled through literature by using Malinche as a powerful symbolic figure. The author suggests that many Latina writers have turned this iconic figure that has always been perceived as a traitor and evil into something far different than that. Instead Latina writers use her as a feminist symbol.

Sugiyama, Michelle Scalise. "Of Woman Bondage: The Eroticism of Feet In *The House On Mango Street*." *Midwest Quarterly* 41.1 (1999): 9. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 May 2015.

This journal studies the obsession of feet in *House on Mango Street*. Sugiyama argues that feet are correlated to the girls' sexuality throughout the novella. According to the author, feet are powerful symbols of both sexuality and oppression. The author makes an interesting connections between the story of Cinderella and Cisneros's characters.

Szadziuk, Maria. "Culture As Transition: Becoming a Woman in Bi-ethnic Space." *Bloom's*

*Modern Critical Interpretation The House on Mango Street*. Bloom, Harold. Ed. New York: Infobase Pub, 2010. 107-126. Print.

In this scholarship, Szadziuk explores the concept of culture and classism in *The House on Mango Street*, *When I was Puerto Rican*, and *Loving in the War Years* by Latina writers. She focuses on the multicultural identity and the way it contributes to transforming the human psyche.

Thomson, Jeff. "What Is Called Heaven: Identity In Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*." *Studies In Short Fiction* 31.3 (1994): 415. Academic Search Complete. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

This article provides an insight about identity in the lives of the women in *Woman Hollering Creek*. Thomson touches on many feminine stereotypes as well as the absence of men in the works of Cisneros. This article is also helpful in analyzing self-realization when breaking out of the bonds of silence by discovering power when speaking.

Turner, Sandra G., et al. "Suicide Attempts By Adolescent Latinas: An Exploratory Study Of Individual And Family Correlates." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 19.5 (2002): 357-374. Academic Search Complete. Web. 22 June 2015.

In this scholarship, the authors explored suicide in young Latinas. They discussed how social, cultural, and psychological factors contribute into making the decision of committing suicide. The authors use empirical and theoretical literature in their research.

Valdés, Guadalupe. *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait*. New York: Teachers College, 1996. Print.

This is a great book that analyzes the lives of ten families who have just arrived to the United States. Valdes analyses the paradigms of the families, the problems their children

encounter in schools and the ways the families have in order to survive in a new world. Extensive questions are made about the way that the American school system handles children who are learning English. Valdes also mentions how the teachers' lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of their students' culture causes their students to fail.

Valdes, Maria Elena De. "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 23.1 (1992): 55-72. Print.

This essay offers a critical analysis on identity in *The House on Mango Street*. The author primarily focuses in the character of Esperanza and the way that she searches for her identity through the narrative. Valdes argues that as Esperanza matures, she develops her identity.

Wissman, Kelly. "'Writing Will Keep You Free': Allusions To And Recreations Of The Fairy Tale Heroine In The House On Mango Street." *Children's Literature In Education* 38.1 (2007): 17-34. Academic Search Complete. Web. 26 Mar. 2015.

Wissman explores the way that Cisneros uses fairy tales in *The House on Mango Street* in order to display how problematic they are when women looked upon them as examples of an ideal life. The author suggests that Esperanza's character might inspire hope to the generations of young readers.

Xiumei, Xu, and Gong Qinyan. "Translatability Vs Untranslatability: A Relevance-Theoretic View." *Babel* 58.4 (2012): 408-422. Academic Search Complete. Web. 19 Mar 2015.

This essay offers an analysis of language. The authors state that there are two levels of untranslatability. Thus when some things are translated into another language, they might not translate or they lose their meaning.