Jasmine Contile Contile 1

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**The Three Influences**

Instead of accepting how women are treated, Esperanza decides to go against the normal

pattern of her community, and do what is right for herself. Esperanza is the main character in the

book, *The House On Mango Street*, written by Sandra Cisneros who tells the story based off of her own childhood. Esperanza, a young girl who grows up in a community full of poverty, discrimination, and gender inequality, becomes the person she is through the influences of three women, Marin, Alicia, and Sally. Marin and Sally are not good role models. They want a man to “rescue” them so that they can leave oppressive lives on Mango Street. However, Alicia is an amazing role model who goes to college everyday, even though there are many obstacles that stand in her way. Alicia encourages and inspires Esperanza to do good for herself, and not sit at the window of a man’s house, dreaming to get out.

Marin has an influence on Esperanza that sticks with her for a long time. “Marin says that if she stays here next year, she’s going to get a job downtown because that’s where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you away” (Cisneros 26). Marin only wants a job so that she can wear nice clothes and meet a boy that will take her away from Mango Street. Marin is not the best role model for Esperanza because she is not going to work hard to leave Mango Street. She wants a man to take her away and is willing to wait for that chance. Esperanza looks up to Marin because she is pretty and older, but it is made clear that Esperanza wants to get herself out of Mango Street, instead of allowing a man to do so. Another example of this is when

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Esperanza writes, “Marin is already older than us in so many ways, the boys who do pass say stupid things like I am in love with those two apples you call eyes, give them to me why don’t you” (Cisneros 27). Esperanza notices the boys flirting with Marin, and it is obvious to the reader that Marin tries to get their attention by the way she dresses and the way she behaves. Esperanza should not spend so much time with someone who is clearly a negative influence. Marin dresses very maturely for her age and tries to attract boys whenever she can, and that is not a person Esperanza wants to be. While Esperanza values Marin’s ability to capture the attention of the boys, she does not want to throw herself at someone else’s mercy as a way to escape. Marin has a negative influence on Esperanza.

Alicia is the kind of role model Esperanza should look up to because of her positive influences on Esperanza, this can be shown when Esperanza says, “Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees he mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers” (Cisneros 32). Alicia takes two trains and a bus everyday to get to her college, proving her dedication to getting her education and escaping the hard life on Mango Street. Her determination through tough times influences Esperanza to work hard and achieve her goals. However, this is not the only example of Alicia’s perseverance and influence. She stays up all night because of her father who molests her. Alicia tells her father that the mice make her afraid. In reality, the only thing that scares her is her father, and the mice are an excuse to protect her from his abuse. “Close your eyes, and they’ll go away, her father says, or You’re just imagining” (Cisneros 31). Although her father has tried to convince her that there are no mice, out of fear she pretends that there are mice. She is one of the few women that has to deal

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with the fear of fathers, but instead of allowing him to hold her back, she continues to do everything she can to leave Mango Street. Again Alicia represents a positive influence to Esperanza because she shows her she must rely on herself if she truly wants to escape life on Mango Street.

Sally is a negative influence on Esperanza and instead of guiding her, Sally gets Esperanza into trouble. “He never hits me hard. She said her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts. Then at school she’d say she fell. That’s where all the blue places come from. That’s why her skin is always scarred. But who believes her. A girl that big, a girl who comes in with her pretty face all beaten and black can’t be falling off the stairs. He never hits me hard” (Cisneros 92). Sally is abused by her father who hits her when she does something that he thinks is wrong. After her father hits her, he feels sorry for hitting her but still continues to do so. Although Sally and Alicia are similar in regards to being abused by their fathers, Sally does not work hard to get out of Mango Street. Sally follows the norms of the society that she lives in instead of trying to break the pattern in order to do better for herself. “She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot through, though most days he is okay. Except he won’t let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn’t let her look out the window. And he doesn’t like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working” (Cisneros 102). Sally successfully leaves Mango Street but all she gets out of it is another abusive relationship. This influences Esperanza to rely only on herself to escape the oppressions of Mango Street and live a happy life. Sally does not influence Esperanza in a positive way.

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Marin, Alicia, and Sally all influence Esperanza in different ways throughout the novella. Without them she would not be the person she is at the end of the novella. Marin and Sally are examples of people Esperanza does not want to be. They try to escape by finding men to take them from Mango Street. People that read *The House On Mango Street* will learn more about race discrimination, poverty, and gender inequality. People that read the book can gain new perspective or about what it means to depend on oneself to achieve ultimate happiness.

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**Work Cited**

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