

Creating a Space of Her Own:

How Esperanza in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* Creates Her Own Space

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1. Introduction

“I am the one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back my chair or picking up the plate” (Cisneros 89). This sentence, spoken by Esperanza, the narrator of the novel, lets the reader know she already understands the gender roles she is supposed to follow and allows the reader to follow her “quiet war” against them (Cisneros 89). Even though she is a young girl living in a community bound by rules that govern her gender, she is already searching for her own space. The unequal roles of men and women in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House of Mango Street* are represented by the characters who fill the pages. Esperanza’s need to create a new space of her own will take her out of the suffocating space of patriarchal constraints bound to leave her in a hopeless situation, like those of her neighbors on Mango Street.

The concept of spatial practices of society will be used to understand how Esperanza defies gender roles and how she defies patriarchal constraints within the society she lives to help create a new space of her own. The space Esperanza is looking for, based on Lefebvre’s theory that social space is created by the society, is one where she can be free of the constraints of gender roles. Lefebvre’s main theoretical concept, “the production of space,” claims every mode of social organization produces an environment that is a consequence of the social relations it possesses and that the relation changes according to the differences in social organization (Lefebvre qtd. in Gottdiener 132-133). The social environment created by the women of Mango Street, who are all from a Mexican/Latina background and live in a poor Chicago neighborhood, is one where Esperanza learns valuable life lessons that show her why her own space is an important thing to create.

Cisneros use of vignettes, as a literary device, convey the life on Mango Street in a way that connects the social space with the relations formed by Esperanza. The vignettes are not long chapters but shorter clips of Esperanza’s experiences. However, what Cisneros creates is a full story of Esperanza’s young life as she grows up in the house on Mango Street and neighborhood that shapes her. Through the experiences of Esperanza on Mango Street, the reader follows her self-discovery of how her gender affects every aspect of her life. This discovery is what helps Esperanza challenge societies gender roles. Esperanza uses her body, as described by Lefebvre, to create a space where she is not just a daughter, wife, or mother, but where she can be free to engage in her own pleasures which include getting an education and becoming a writer. Even as Esperanza’s space, in the novel, is defined by these gender roles, she uses self-determination to defy these roles and create a space of her own.

2. Aim and Approach

The aim of this essay is to use Lefebvre's Marxist critique of social practice to explore how gender roles in *The House on Mango Street* affect Esperanza's life and how she defies these gender roles to create a space of her own. For analysis purposes, there are only secondary sources used to explain Lefebvre's theories because the main text, *The Production of Space*, is a complex work. The information used from these sources breaks down his ideas making them more comprehensible and therefore more useful for analysis. Close reading of the primary source will enable an analysis of the narrative to understand how Esperanza uses the lessons learned on Mango Street to find a space where she is able to live the life she wants; not what others want for her. With the aim in mind, the concept of spatial practice of society will be used to understand why Esperanza must leave Mango Street in order to create a space of her own, but also why she must come back for those left behind (Cisneros 110). Lefebvre's critique is explained through his definitions of the triad of social space, which is perceived, conceived, and lived spaces (Lefebvre qtd. in Gottdiener 131). Using these three ideas of what space is will show how space can be created.

Lefebvre's early break with orthodox Marxism explains why he is concerned with the importance of using the three aspects to show that space is a complex character that enters social relations at all levels (Lefebvre qtd. in Gottdiener 131). In the case of how Cisneros uses the spatial practice of society, Lefebvre's theories of the production of space are used for analysis. More specifically, Lefebvre use of the three aspects of space, that is, spatial practice (perceived), representation of space (conceived) and space representations (lived) are used to define how the body engages in making space in a society (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 6). These concepts will be useful to understand how Esperanza uses her body to create a space of her own, but they will also be useful to examine how the space she creates helps her when challenging gender roles of her society.

Interestingly, the writing style of Cisneros could be viewed as a continuation of Virginia Woolf's claim that women writers need a space of their own to contribute to the cannon of women's literature (Doyle 9). Cisneros not only creates her own space but develops Esperanza's space in the novel. In the novel, Cisneros uses domestic space to reflect on how the community reinforces race, class and gender hierarchies imposed by the Latino patriarch on Mango Street (Doyle 5). In "More Room of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," Doyle explains how there is a difference in the questions of gender because Cisneros perspective is that of a Chicana one and not a white perspective (6). However, while

Doyle's argument is convincing it does not specifically address the social production of space. This is because her focus is on how Woolf wanted women to become a bigger part of the literary cannon by not writing about women in relation to men, but the relationships that could happen between women (Doyle 12). This essay will use Woolf's ideas of to understand why Esperanza should be able to become the creative person she wants to be when she has her own space to produce her writings.

The use of vignettes in the novel by Cisneros help the reader to understand the environment in which Esperanza must learn how to create her own space. In an article by Hartley-Kroger, she examines how each vignette features a different view of Mango Street life (276). Hatley-Kroger connects the gender roles of the women in the neighborhood to the positions the women allow themselves to be put into (280). Through these connections she answers what kinds of identity are possible for Esperanza. In a study done by Kray, et. al., they explain how and why gender roles are facing resistance when it comes to changing them (98). This study shows that whether gender is viewed as historically derived or biological, atypical behavior is seen as wrong and this reinforces the status quo (Kray, et.al 99). Also, an article by Burcar will be used to examine how gender roles are seen using attire, in this case, high heeled shoes. In this interesting study, Burcar compares the use of shoes to how society sees women. This comparison shows how the restriction of feet is equivalent to the restriction of women's movement in society (Burcar 354). These articles bring to life the experiences expressed in the vignettes. They will help understand how Esperanza makes the choices she does throughout the novel.

To understand how making a space of her own can be difficult in her situation, Esperanza's experience with patriarchal constraint is used to show how male dominance affects her life. First to define what a patriarchal constraint is, an article by Jonasdottir will be used. In this article it explains what it means to live a life in the patriarchal system of male dominance. Jonasdottir presents how feminist theory has evolved over time while coexisting with the theory of patriarchy (160). Jonasdottir's article also references reasons why women are not powerless, they just lack authority (168). This article will help understand Esperanza's choices in the novel when it comes to dealing with the patriarchal environment in which she lives.

The space Esperanza wants to create for herself cannot be fulfilled while she is living within a system of patriarchal constraints. The second article that will be used to explain how patriarchal constraints effect Esperanza is one by Duan. In this article she explores the awakening of Esperanza's self-consciousness and her resistance of patriarchy under the guidance of the theories about self-conscious and patriarchy (Duan 263). In a direct connection

to the novel, she explores Esperanza's awareness of racial differences and feminism. Also, she examines how the father in most of the vignettes is the women's direct oppressor and how women of the neighborhood are regarded as men's accessories (Duan 264-265). Duan presents a theory of how Esperanza can get rid of the oppression of the patriarchy, thus using this article will show how Esperanza breaks from the gender roles to create a new space for herself.

One limitation to this essay is that a discussion of language is not addressed. The language used by Esperanza and those of her neighborhood are direct and selectively tagged as defined by Genette (Barry 238). The way speech is represented throughout the novel brings the reader closer to the events which may bring a better understanding of Esperanza's goal to creating her own space. However, there is more emphasis on how and why Esperanza creates her own space through defying gender roles and spatial practices of society.

3. Previous Research

The primary source used for analysis is the 25th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros. This edition published in 2009 has an introduction written by Cisneros in the same year. In the introduction titled, "A House of My Own," Cisneros recounts her life as she was drafting the novel. She explains how she produced the ideas that shape Esperanza's life by using her own life for inspiration (Introduction xi-xxvii). The novel received high praise when it was published, bringing Cisneros' tale of a young girl into the hearts of students using the novel in primary and higher education (Duan 266).

The previous research of Lefebvre, Soja, and Butler are important to consider when trying to understand the how gender and space correlate to each other in Sandra Cisneros' novel. First, Lefebvre was a French Marxist philosopher whose most comprehensive approach to space was defined in his 1974 book, *The Production of Space* (Butler 37). While Lefebvre's studies are not strictly made for analysing literature, according to Simonsen, his theories about how the body is an intrinsic part of social practice can be used for this type of analysis (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 2). This is essential to help understand Esperanza's role in making a space for herself in the novel. Lefebvre explains that there is a double illusion in the abstract of space that pervades contemporary life, and for this he uses the terms 'illusion of transparency' and 'illusion of opacity' (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 3). With the illusion of transparency, space appears luminous, is easily understandable, and imposes no contrast to action. This illusion constructs an identity between social space and mental space (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 3). Within the vignettes of the novel, the reader "sees" Esperanza's thoughts about the way her life compares to that of others on Mango Street and how she wants her space to be different than

theirs. With the illusion of opacity, a natural simplicity and solidarity imparts on physical space. This illusion deals with a common-sense view of space being more real than the subject and their understanding of the world (Simonsen 3). This aspect of the theory relates to the “home,” here another word for space Esperanza is searching for in the novel.

As compared to earlier theorist, Lefebvre’s ideas move the body into an actual space not a metaphorical one (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 1). The dimensions of work and social practice, bodily creativity and poetry, Eros, sexuality, and desire are all connected to Lefebvre’s ideals of the body (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 4). Lefebvre uses the theory of a triad of social space to show how the body is involved in the constitution of the dimensions of social space (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 6). He introduces spatial practice, representation of space and spaces of representations (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 6-7). Spatial practice encompasses what is considered a perceived space; one that embodies the interrelationship between institutional practices and daily experiences and routines. Representation of space is considered a conceived space; conceptualizing and discursively constructed by professionals through systems and verbal signs. Finally, the space of representation is conceived as the lived space; the space of inhabitants and users along with artist and writers in which they seek to create through appropriation of the environment (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 7-8).

Soja’s research expanded the theories brought by Lefebvre by explaining the concept of “thirthing-as-Othering” (Wrede 12). Soja uses all dialectics and remaps cultural spaces, voicing alterity, and advocating multiplicity therefore challenging the spatial binaries and recognizing the radical potential that lies in difference (Wrede 12). In his 1996 book, *Thirdspace*, Soja describes that there are new opportunities to break down the choices that are oppressive and exploitative, especially to oppressed women (Wrede 12). As a Mexican- American Esperanza is already portrayed as the “other” of society. Soja’s ideals give her a chance to understand that she can create a new space for herself.

A quote by Judith Butler saying, “[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts,” gives evidence to the reasoning that one is not born with a gender, but it is created by society (Butler qtd. in Wrede 10). This quote denotes how concerns of time and space, particularly the relationship of time and space to the physical performance of gender, converge in contemporary gender studies (Wrede 10). Butler delves into the idea that if gender is a social construct, who determines which gender roles go to whom (11). In Esperanza’s case, throughout the novel she is faced with what being a woman means by the interactions with her

neighbors. She sees that the relationship between gender and movement in society is used as a form of control or limitation of women's mobility, therefore she is determined to break these roles for herself (Wrede 11).

The following analysis section will define what space means to Esperanza by using the vignettes written by Cisneros. In analysing the vignettes, how Esperanza defies the gender roles that her society endorses will be shown. Lefebvre believes that the transformation of social relations means a transformation of socio-spatial relations, a production of a new, liberating space (Lefebvre qtd. Gottidiener 133). Therefore, first there will be a deeper look into what space means and how Cisneros' use of vignettes in the novel helps the reader understand why Esperanza's search for her own space is necessary.

4. Analysis

4.1 Home and Space

4.1.1 Lefebvre and Esperanza's space

In his research, Lefebvre had the intention to link physical and mental spaces with the social characteristics of space by understanding how space is produced through human agency (Lefebvre qtd. in Butler 39). When using these aspects, he established a conceptual triad that expresses the complex interaction of these levels of spatial relations (Lefebvre qtd. in Butler 40). The three levels are that of spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. (Lefebvre qtd. in Butler 40). The interactions of Esperanza in her social space on Mango Street can be used to understand why Esperanza is trying to create her own space in the novel. Lefebvre also states that social space is a social product, therefore space can serve as a tool of action, as a tool of control, as a tool of dominance and of power (Lefebvre 26). Esperanza must learn how to use these tools to her advantage when creating her own space.

Spatial practices can be used to understand Esperanza's everyday life. Cisneros creates a world on Mango Street that shapes Esperanza's life experiences. Her routine is changed by her family's moving from apartment to apartment (Cisneros 3-4). However, once she is established in her new home on Mango Street, her routine stabilizes. She is a student in this new neighborhood, she makes new friends and meets the inhabitants of Mango Street. This space is considered a perceived space because it relies on a common-sense understanding of space (Simonsen 6). This space arises out of a process of empirical reality not a product of intellectual reflection (Butler 40). The combination of environment and Esperanza's

experiences in this environment help spatial practices retain a cohesion and continuity and facilitate communication and social exchange (Butler 40).

In the representation of space, the abstract form of space is defined by the signs and codes given to a society (Simonsen 7). In other words, this space is formed from what outsiders to the society believe. These beliefs effect the environment in which Esperanza lives. Simonsen writes, “[t]hese are forms of knowledge of space in society, the ideological content and claims of truth of theories, and the conceptual imaginations of space linked to production relations” (6). In the vignettes “Cathy Queen of Cats,” and “Those who Don’t,” both stories describe what others think of the neighborhood in which Esperanza lives. They use the signs and codes of society to show that the environment has become bad when brown skin people move in (Cisneros 13, 28). This level of space helps the reader understand why Esperanza wants to image a new space for herself. This new space would not be one of what people think she should be because she is a girl, a Mexican American, or from a poor neighborhood.

Lastly, Lefebvre’s definition of the representational space is one that is associated with the social and bodily functions of lived experience (Lefebvre qtd. in Butler 41). This space includes a terrain of struggle on the way to realizing oneself as a total person and brings out an alternative imagination of space (Simonsen 7). This space introduces the body as a participant in the space itself. Lefebvre’s research claims that the embodied lives experience comes from the energies of the body, from the creative activity and from the level of affection (Lefebvre qtd. in Simonsen 7). Esperanza uses her body throughout her narrative to express who she is becoming. In the vignettes “Hips” and “Sire” Esperanza comes to an understanding of how her body works for her and how it works in her society. In “Hips,” Esperanza’s maturing body is moving toward adulthood with the addition of this new body part. There is a realization between her and her friends that hips are natural but useful in being a woman (Cisneros 50). In “Sire,” Esperanza realizes that because of these newfound hips, the boys of the neighborhood notice her. This attention leads Esperanza to believe she has control over what she wants to use her body for. Cisneros writes,

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. (73)

Esperanza is experiencing new life lessons that will lead her to achieve her goal of creating a new space of herself. According to Lefebvre, she will need to combine her mental, physical, and social self to create this space.

4.1.1.1 Cisneros' use of vignettes

The vignettes are an important part of the exploration of Esperanza's search for her own space. The vignettes also link together the three aspects of Lefebvre's theory for the production of space. Sandra Cisneros' use of vignettes helps the reader understand Esperanza's motives in wanting to find a space of her own. By telling of the life of Esperanza in such a way, this collection of small stories is a creative way to bring the reader along on a coming-of-age story. The basic narrative mode is diegesis (Barry 232), that is, with Esperanza as the narrator. Esperanza talks about the events on Mango Street in an essential and linking manner (Barry 232). Cisneros says, "I wanted to write a collection which could be read at any random points without having any knowledge of what came before or after. Or, that could be read in a series to tell one big story. I wanted stories like poems, compact and lyrical and ending with a reverberation." (Cisneros qtd. in Doyle 12). Within the vignettes, Esperanza's internal focalization brings her own thoughts and feelings to light. This shows the importance of the vignettes because as a reader, one can understand why Esperanza needs to create her own space. Cisneros also uses a circle technique with the first and last vignette to show the path Esperanza's journey takes and this shows the reverberation Cisneros was looking for in her writing (Doyle 11). An example of this is in the very last vignette when Esperanza lets the reader know she likes to tell stories and will tell you "a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (Cisneros 109).

Cisneros uses her own experiences to develop the life of Esperanza (Ganz 23). Cisneros was born into a family with six sons and when her father claimed to have seven sons, she would remind him that she was not a boy (Ganz 21). Her mother had other ideas for her daughter's future, as she herself was one who missed experiences due to her own limitations in life (Ganz 22). This led Cisneros to be the benefactor of her mother's love of reading and knowledge; Cisneros received all the opportunities denied to her mother (Ganz 23). When at college, Cisneros realized she could write from a perspective that was unlike anyone she knew. This relates back to the ideals of Woolf, who wanted women to have a space of their own to become better writers and to contribute more to literature (Doyle 9). Cisneros uses her space to create something new because she understood the importance of writing a novel with a unique perspective, different than others that could influence future women writers. This novel represented the voices of not only her own family culture but the mixture of cultures in which she grew up (Ganz 25). Each vignette Cisneros write shows a different aspect of Mango Street

and the life experiences of Esperanza. The stories in each of these vignettes come together to set the stage for Esperanza's journey to finding her own space.

4.2 Women and Space

The narration by Esperanza in the novel gives the reader a focalized experience in her journey to find her own space. As one who is a part of every vignette, as either a direct participant or spectator, Esperanza can show the available positions allowed to the women around her (Hartley-Kroeger 280-281). As her interpretations and understanding of these women's lives grow, so does her understanding of who she wants to be and what space she wants to have in her own life. In the vignette "My name," Esperanza explains that she inherited her name from her great-grandmother (Cisneros 10). However, Esperanza does not want to inherit her great-grandmother's place by the window, where she looked out to see all the life experiences that she would never achieve for herself (Cisneros 11). This is one space where Esperanza knows she will never be satisfied to fill, that is, one where she has no control over what experiences she can have in life.

In the vignette "Four Skinny Trees," Esperanza's motivation to find a new space can be understood by the way she understands the importance of the trees on her street. She says, "[t]heir strength is secret," suggesting that if they can have a secret strength then so can she (Cisneros 74). Esperanza looks to the trees for support when she needs to be reminded that she can make it no matter what the obstacle.

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be. (Cisneros 75).

In this passage from the vignette, Esperanza expresses her views that are clearly different from other women on Mango Street. She is not invested in the idea that because she is a woman, she will get strength from a husband or father, but that she can have a strength all her own. This idea goes against the long-held belief that a woman must have a man to be complete (Martine 60).

Another aspect of Esperanza's realization of what she can do to be in a different space than other women is in the vignette titled "The Family of Little Feet." In this vignette, Esperanza and her friends are given a bag of used high heeled shoes (Cisneros 40). The group of girls think that these shoes are just a fun thing to experience but as they move through the neighborhood, the shoes start to represent something else. The experience of becoming a woman in the eyes of the men on Mango Street shows how one pair of shoes can lead the

exploitation of the girls (Burcar 355). An interaction with a bum on the street shows the girls that their beauty can be changed by something so little. Burcar suggests that the wearing of high heeled shoes not only binds the feet, but also restricts the space women take in society and helps reinforce gender roles given to women, who need to be feminine (356). By the end of the vignette, Esperanza and her friends throw away the shoes because they are not ready to be so grown. Esperanza says, “[w]e are tired of being beautiful,” and with this she learns another lesson of what it is to be a woman (Cisneros 42). She understands the space of an exploited woman is one she cannot fill either.

4.3 Patriarchal Constraints and Space

The women of Mango Street show Esperanza that if she wants to create another type of space, one not based on her gender alone, she will need to break down the patriarchal constraints used against women on this street to do so. Their experiences are examples of a life ruled by men. The experiences she has with them show her that the social space filled by these women is not one she wants to share. The challenge, for Esperanza, is how to make a new space of her own after learning from the lessons only these women can share.

From a gender perspective, society is male dominated in all areas, but it does not have to mean women have no influence, just a lack of authority, according to Jonasdottir (159). In her research, Jonasdottir defines patriarchal constraint in terms of male dominance in the present time, father dominance prevailing from the past or even as a social dominance of men over women (170). In the vignette “Alice Who Sees Mice,” the reader finds a young woman who has inherited the role of mother. Her mother died and she is now responsible for her father and siblings. She is afraid of the mice in her apartment, to which her father says do not exist (Cisneros 31-32). This example of father dominated patriarchy shows how the father is in total control over his daughter. In this vignette, he expects his daughter to fulfil her role of mother even though she is still a child. Alice in this case has no way to change her situation, as her father is the authority figure. However, Esperanza lets the reader know that Alice also has started to study at university and hopes to make it out of the apartment full of mice (Cisneros 32). Even though Alice is stuck in a life ruled by her father, she shows Esperanza there is a way to change your space.

Esperanza’s ability to break free from the patriarchal constraints of the men of Mango Street is another way in which she will be able to create a space for herself. In Duan’s area of research, he defines patriarchy as it relates to the male being the center of power in all relationships (264). It was American writer Kate Millet who offered this definition back in the

sixties and was first to say that all women suffering comes from the patriarchy (Duan 264). In the vignette, "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays," Cisneros writes about a wife who is denied a life because her husband thinks she is too pretty to stay with him (79). Rafaela must live her life through a window and clothesline that hangs out of it. She is struck in a home where she has no control over her own actions, all because of her husband's own insecurities. Her husband is the authority over her, and she is kept inside while he is still able to do whatever he wants (Cisneros 79). Esperanza's interactions with Rafael show her what a husband is capable of. This leads to Esperanza's growing ability to see how men control women simply because they are women and to an understanding, she cannot fill that space.

Another example of patriarchal constraint, with the male as the center, which is witnessed by Esperanza, is in the vignette "Sally." In this vignette, we meet a girl from the neighborhood that Esperanza wants to be like. She describes how Sally has perfect shoes and knows how to apply make-up and how she is a dreamer (Cisneros 81-83). However, we learn later in the novel that Sally is routinely beaten by her father. Cisneros writes, "He never hits me hard..." (92). This is another example of the patriarchal constraint that the women on Mango Street must endure. Not only Sally, but also her mother is complacent in the abuse by her father. Sally explains that "her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts. Then at school she'd say she fell..." (Cisneros 92). Both women allow the father to get away with this because he is the man of the family. Sally explains his behavior by saying it is to save her from the humility of being a girl and the shame a girl can bring to the family, like his sisters did to her father's family (Cisneros 92). Even later in the novel, Sally finds love and escapes her father's abusive home, only to be controlled by her husband, who does not let her leave the house (Cisneros 102). However, Sally's experiences give Esperanza another look at the patriarchal system and gives her inspiration to find escape from it (Duan 266). Esperanza knows that she cannot let a man, a father or husband, control her in the same way as Sally is controlled. Esperanza understands that any male dominance over her would stop her from ever finding a space of her own.

4.4 Identity and Space

Gender identity is an either/or proposition, and maleness itself has freedoms of behavior that Esperanza covets but cannot access on Mango Street (Hartley-Kroeger 285). Determined "not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain," Esperanza defies the gender roles she sees in her neighborhood to create her own space (Cisneros 88). Throughout the novel, Esperanza uses her experiences with the roles of gender

to find her identity. By the end of the novel, she knows that she wants a new space that will fit her needs, not the needs of others. According to Kray, et al., when it comes to gender equality, there is always a push for a women to gain success by taking a more male role (98). However, as much as Esperanza sees and understands the roles of men, she is not trying to fill the space of one. She comes to the realization that it is she who will be the one to create a new space for herself. She will not let the choices of others derail her from her ambitions, which include becoming a writer and leaving Mango Street.

The identity Esperanza seeks throughout the novel is expressed in her goal to defy the gender roles her neighborhood endorses. The lives of men inhabitants of Mango Street are represented by the female domestic life, in which life is prison-like in existence (Martin 60). Within this life, the men who are supposed to be the support system and keep the women safe are usually the ones who cause the most harm (Martin 60). In the vignette “No Speak English,” Mamacita is a women brought to the United States by her husband but is confined to her apartment (Cisneros 76). The neighbors believe it is because she is too fat, but Esperanza knows it is a combination of not speaking English and homesickness that keeps her there (Cisneros 77). Mamacita’s husband becomes angry when she says she wants to go home because he believes that this is their home now and gives her no choice in the matter (Cisneros 78). Mamacita must adhere to the ruling of her husband because she is trapped by his intentions to make a new home in America. As a result, Esperanza’s belief that she will not commit to the same gender roles as other women on her street is confirmed.

Esperanza must remember that her identity is a combined Mexican and American one. This is also a representation of the “othering” talked about in Soja’s research. Even though Esperanza is seen as a Mexican, she is still a part of a larger American society. While she may show fear of losing her place if she rejects her community on Mango Street, she understands that the hierarchies and values of this street are not ones that she can adhere to when creating a new space for herself (Martin 62). Soja’s claims that the challenges to spatial practices will help women, like Esperanza, to show that there is potential in what is seen as different (Wrede 12). When Esperanza talks about visiting her Aunt Lupe in the vignette “Born Bad,” she tells of a place where she can express herself freely through her writing (Cisneros 60). Her creativity offers her a means to defy the borders of her society and what they believe her role as a girl should be (Martin 62). However, if Esperanza wants to fully commit to her writing, she will effectively reject the community which represents her ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic home (Martin 62). In a sense, this means she will have to lean toward the more American side

of her identity. Esperanza must learn that the differences in the two cultures she represents can be mixed while her search for a space of her own is developing.

4.5 Defying Gender Roles to Create Her Space

A final aspect to consider in Esperanza's journey to finding her own space by defying the gender roles of her society is to understand that spaces are in fact, gendered (Wrede 13). In the quote used to begin this essay, Esperanza already knows the difference between a woman's and man's space. She knows that to leave the table in such a way is not considered what a woman should do, however, she does it anyway. She uses the interactions with all her community to see the differences between men and women also. "From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (Massey 179; Qtd. in Wrede 12). Esperanza must use this information to become the woman she wants to be when she is able to leave Mango Street for good.

As mentioned in Previous Research, Judith Butler highlights the idea that gender is a social construct. She suggests that if gender is a constructed by culture, then it is fixed and not movable (Butler 10). Also, what determines a person to be one gender, or another is set by laws of society (Butler 11). A boundary for analysis is created which in turn creates limits on what actions are considered male or female (Butler 12). In the case of Esperanza, she sees what laws govern the women in her neighborhood and understands that these laws are not ones she can follow. However, these laws do affect what she understands her role to be. Esperanza can be defined as an incremental theorist in this case, as she tends to adopt goals oriented toward leaning and growth (Kray, et al. 100). Esperanza, through the vignettes, is seen as less strongly identified with her gender in-group, the women of Mango Street. Also, because she does not feel the need to prove her gender, she does not follow the laws laid down in her society (Kray, et al. 100).

Esperanza's interactions with the women on Mango Street show her that equality is something that is not going to happen for her, so she shifts her intentions to be someone different. As Soja explains, gendered identity is ever shifting to a difference model from one of equality (Wrede 13). In the vignette "A House of My Own," she explains what she is looking for in her own home.

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty petunias. My books and

my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem (Cisneros 108).

This difference between her and the other women of Mango Street provides Esperanza with the knowledge she will create a space for herself. She is determined to use all her experiences in order to fulfil this need. She understands that looking for an equal space will not be enough, she needs a space different from everyone else.

5. Conclusion

The vignettes written by Cisneros about Esperanza's life on Mango Street give the reader a full understanding of the importance for Esperanza to find her own space. The spatial practice of society has an influence on all her choices. She strives to find a space where she is not constrained by what society tells her she must be, but a space where she can define herself. By defying the gender roles of her environment, she is on her way to reaching that goal.

When using the previous research and articles aimed at analysing the novel, why and how Esperanza achieves her goal to create a new space of her own is defined. By understanding space defined by Lefebvre, Esperanza used her physical, mental, and social space in order to understand why a new space is needed. Cisneros' use of vignettes to tell the story of Esperanza help the reader to see why there is a need to defy gender roles in the first place. Examples of interactions with the women in her community show Esperanza that she will not follow their experiences in letting a husband or father make their choices. This also includes the patriarchal constraints put on the women by those husbands and fathers that restrict their movements in society. Through the vignettes, Esperanza's identity is connected to her gender because it shows a clear connection to what others expect her to be as a woman in society. She understands because she is a woman there are roles she is supposed to adhere to, for example mother or wife. However, Esperanza defies these roles to become the woman she wants to be. She will leave Mango Street behind for her own space.

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