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## **WOMEN'S PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN SANDRA CISNEROS' THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of women's personality is an important and relevant topic, particularly in the context of patriarchal cultures that continue to influence the lives of many women. This study examines the family and social factors that contribute to the development of women's personalities. Employing a narrative qualitative methodology, the primary data is drawn from the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, with additional insights obtained through library research. The study is framed through the feminist-psychology theory proposed by Karen Horney, which emphasizes that women's personalities are closely tied to their social and cultural environments. The findings reveal two key factors that shape women's personality development: family influences, which are impacted by parental support and financial difficulties, and social influences, which primarily stem from peers and the surrounding neighborhood.

*Keywords: personality development, feminist-psychology, family influences, social influences*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The position of women is often misunderstood. Halizah and Faralita (2023, p. 20) argue that many people still fail to comprehend the true role of women, viewing their duties solely as reproductive and domestic in nature. This perception reduces women's responsibilities to the home, where they are expected to bear children and care for them. Furthermore, women are often seen as weak, limited, overly emotional, and illogical, which leads to the belief that they are unsuitable for public-sector roles. Even when women do work in the public sphere, build careers, and compete with men, their actions are frequently seen as a violation of their supposed nature.

Patriarchal culture places women in a subordinate position relative to men. According to Halizah and Faralita (2023, p. 21), patriarchal systems elevate men as rulers and view women as second-class citizens who must submit to male authority. Such gender-based discrimination often results in

exploitative treatment, preventing women from fully participating in public life. This patriarchal framework is not confined to the domestic sphere but permeates society at large, influencing the culture of both family life and national governance.

Patriarchy clearly demonstrates how different facets of gender inequality are interconnected. A patriarchal social structure is one in which men collectively hold power over women. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and behaviors in which men oppress, dominate, and exploit women, alongside the belief that men are dominant and women are subservient. Women are perceived as second-class citizens, constrained and placed in subordinate positions within a patriarchal society that prioritizes men as the primary authority figures and leaders. Omara (2004) argues that this occurs because patriarchal culture subordinates women, viewing them as inferior to men. This oppression results in gender inequity.



Historically, patriarchal culture has dominated various aspects of social, political, and economic life, significantly shaping the development of women's personalities, especially in traditional societies that still uphold unequal gender values. The patriarchal system places men at the center of power and control, while women are often relegated to subordinate roles dictated by norms that limit their freedom and potential. This has a profound impact on the formation of women's identities and personalities, where from an early age, they are shaped to fulfill expectations that restrict their roles to the domestic sphere, such as being obedient wives or responsible mothers. Meanwhile, opportunities to develop in the public sphere are often hindered by structural limitations. Over time, patriarchal culture not only shapes how women view themselves but also influences their mindset, attitudes, and behaviors, often marked by insecurity, dependency, and limited opportunities to explore their full potential as individuals. Additionally, patriarchal culture can foster submissive and passive behavior in women as a coping mechanism in a society that does not support independence and gender equality. Nowadays, gender equality remains a goal to be achieved within society, as women continue to be seen as far behind men. Kaulin (2019, pp. 1-3) asserts that gender equality must be present in every corner of society, ensuring that there is no room for discrimination, especially against women. However, true equality is still distant, largely due to ongoing discrimination and violence against women.

All humans are inherently endowed with the same potential to develop into remarkable individuals; however, not all are afforded the same opportunities to nurture the talents within them. Like a tree planted in a small pot, it cannot grow as large as a tree planted in an expansive field. Similarly, women often find their opportunities for growth and development constrained. For

example, in the Mexican community, women are still seen as members of the family who must be protected and nurtured, a perception rooted in the struggle of men to assert their self-esteem within the community. However, some figures, writers, and artists have refused to remain passive and have fought for the freedom and rights they deserve in various aspects of life. One such figure is Sandra Cisneros, who expresses her thoughts and advocacy through her works.

Sandra Cisneros, a highly influential Mexican-American novelist, is the focus of this study. Alexander (cited in [womenhistory.org](http://womenhistory.org), 2020) describes her as a writer born on December 20, 1954, in Chicago. Her father, Alfredo Cisneros de Moral, was a Mexican immigrant who moved to the United States as a young man and later pursued a career as an upholsterer. Her mother, Elvira Cordero Anguiano, of Mexican-American descent, served as Cisneros' sole female role model. Cisneros is the third child and only daughter among seven siblings.

Cisneros has authored numerous works that are widely recognized and have received significant acclaim and awards. Alexander (cited in [womenhistory.org](http://womenhistory.org), 2020) notes that her works have been translated into twenty-five languages. Some of her notable works include *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), *El arroyo de la Llorona y otros cuentos* (1991), which won the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction in 1991, the Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Lannan Foundation Literary Award. It was also selected as a notable book of the year by *The New York Times* and *The American Library Journal*, and was nominated as the best fiction book of 1991 by *The Los Angeles Times*. *Loose Woman* (1994) won the Mountains & Plains Booksellers Association's 1995 Regional Book Award in the poetry category, while *Caramelo* (2002) received the Napoli Prize and was shortlisted for the Dublin IMPAC



International Literary Award. It was also nominated for the Orange Prize (now known as the Women's Fiction Prize) in England. *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (2015), a collection of essays, won the 2016 PEN Center USA Literary Award in Creative Nonfiction (Cisneros, 2023). *The House on Mango Street* (1984) won the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1985 and is considered required reading in elementary schools, high schools, and colleges in the United States. As of September 22, 2016, she was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Barack Obama. The book has sold over six million copies, been translated into more than twenty languages, and is a staple in middle schools, high schools, and universities across the nation.

Considering the facts mentioned above, this novel will serve as the focus of the study to explore women's personality development. Women are often associated with the proletariat or the oppressed class, where their rights are severely limited. According to Djajanegara (2000, p. 3), women in capitalist society are considered an oppressed class, lacking economic value because their domestic work is often undervalued and not seen as comparable to men's paid labor. This view may stem from patriarchal systems and historical forms of slavery.

The definition of personality proposed by Hurlock (1898) originates from the Latin word *persona*, meaning 'mask.' Personality is crucial for every human being, as it influences how a person's behavior and actions can be judged as good or bad (Mawaddah, 2023, p. 13). Each individual has a unique personality. Personality is an essential aspect for humans to express their existence in the world, particularly in fulfilling their roles as social creatures, both internally (socially for themselves) and externally (socially for others).

Among the various definitions of "personality" (cited in Hurlock, 1898, p. 462),

perhaps the most comprehensive is that of Allport, who defines personality as the dynamic organization within an individual of psychophysical systems that determine their unique adjustments to the environment. The term "dynamic" highlights the changing nature of personality, emphasizing that changes can occur in the quality of a person's behavior. "Organization" suggests that personality is not simply a collection of isolated traits, one added to another, but that these traits are interrelated. This interrelationship evolves, with some traits becoming more dominant and others less so, influenced by changes in the individual and their environment. The psychophysical systems include habits, attitudes, values, beliefs, emotional states, sentiments, and motives, which are psychological in nature but have a physical foundation in the child's neural, glandular, and general bodily states. These systems are not the result of heredity, although they are grounded in hereditary foundations; they are developed through learning as a consequence of the child's various experiences. The psychophysical systems serve as motivating forces that determine how a child will adjust to their environment. Since each child has different learning experiences, the adjustments they make are "unique," meaning that no two children, even identical twins, will react in exactly the same way. Additionally, as psychophysical systems are learned, the traditional belief that personality traits are inherited is refuted.

The patriarchal system confines women, serving as the foundation for the emergence of the feminist movement. Women are oppressed, misunderstood, and overlooked by the dominant patriarchal traditions. This system promotes men as the holders of authority in society, while women are consistently marginalized from social, political, and even economic spheres. As Johnson (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 172) asserts, oppression is a system of social



inequality through which one group is positioned to dominate and benefit from the exploitation and subordination of another.

In an article titled *Feminisms in Motion: Pushing the “Wild Zone” Thesis into the Fourth Dimension*, Kanthac (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 172) explains that the implications for feminist literary critics, and cultural analysts in general, have been profound. Citing Lorraine Code, Kanthac notes that feminism has made it clear that issues of women’s oppression cannot be isolated from other issues of differential positioning within and in relation to various social orders. According to Tong, women have always been marginalized under the dominance of patriarchal culture, placed in subordinate positions through labels that position them as inferior to men. This situation has led to various forms of domination in both public and private spheres. As a result, women have developed a sense of mutual care and solidarity, which led to the birth of the feminist movement. Feminism is a response to male domination, originating from the assumption that women are second-rate beings who can be treated according to men’s will. Therefore, feminism is considered a movement to end such domination.

Jones and Michelle (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 173) argue that feminist studies focus on analyzing women’s experiences of gender subordination, uncovering the roots of women’s oppression, examining how gender inequality is perpetuated, and offering solutions to gender inequality. Traditional values are identified as the source of women’s inferiority and restricted roles, which strip away their rights and freedoms, leaving them dependent on men. In society, women often rely on fathers, brothers, or husbands, particularly in terms of financial and intellectual dependence. In the social realm, women do not enjoy the same rights because traditional culture confines them to domestic roles as housewives, wives, or mothers,

leaving them excluded from education and professional opportunities. As a result, the inequality of rights between men and women has spurred women to fight for equal rights, particularly in the economic, social, and educational spheres.

Therefore, O’Connel (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 173) states that Horney effectively demonstrates how cultural factors encourage women to depend on men for love, wealth, care, and protection. This dependence emphasizes the ideology that a woman’s life is given meaning through others: her husband, children, and family. Cultural factors exert a powerful influence on women because they often propagate ideologies about the “nature” of women. Women are viewed as naturally weak, emotional, dependent, and limited in their ability to think autonomously. These ideologies not only align women with their subordinate roles but also help instill the belief that this is the fulfillment women desire or the ideal they should strive for.

In addition, Bruce (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 173) states that religious and ideological aspects also contribute to the teachings and dogmas that lead to the hegemonization of women by the power of men. Religious propositions, which argue that women inherit original or derivative sin, perpetuate the idea that women are responsible for mankind’s exile in the world today. Ideology plays a significant role in the circle of social stratification, with gender stratification representing a form of oppression, particularly of women. By labeling men as the bourgeoisie and women as the proletariat, this dichotomy increasingly reinforces the role of women as having no economic value. Women are confined to domestic roles, restricted to taking care of household matters.

This study uses Hurlock’s concept of the factors that can influence the development of a woman’s personality. According to Hurlock (1898, pp. 220-225), the determinants of an





individual's personality are shaped by early social experiences. These early social experiences have a significant impact on the type of adult a child will become, as social and antisocial behavioral patterns are formed during the formative childhood years. A child who has predominantly positive experiences is more likely to seek out similar interactions and develop social skills. Conversely, an excessive number of unpleasant encounters can result in negative attitudes toward social interactions and people in general, promoting antisocial or unsociable behavior. Unhappy social experiences are detrimental at any age, but they are especially harmful during the early years of life because this is the critical time for the formation of basic social attitudes—attitudes toward people in general, specific individuals or social groups, and social life as an experience. The behavioral patterns established at this time can be modified later, but as time passes, they become increasingly difficult to change. Early social experiences can occur with family members or people outside the home. As a general rule, experiences within the home are more important during the preschool years, while experiences with outsiders become more influential once the child enters school. Each year, as the desire for status within the group grows, attitudes and behaviors are increasingly influenced by pressures from group members.

The social experiences are divided into family influences and social influences (Hurlock 1898). Family influences refer to the immediate environment of the home and the direct interactions within the family unit, which shape a person's values, behaviors, and identity. On the other hand, social influences encompass interactions outside the family, including friendships, peer relationships, and societal norms, all of which play a critical role in individual development.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Women's Personality Development**

Since ancient times, there has been a view that women are the source of men's misfortune. Synnott (cited in Nurhayati 2018, p. 15) states that in both the ancient and medieval European worlds, women were considered less worthy of moral behavior. A woman's emotions were thought to drive her toward evil, and men were required to supervise every aspect of women's behavior, ensuring that women obeyed them. Augustine reminded his congregation that "through a woman the first sin came, the sin that brought death to us all."

Women have historically been viewed as dependent and inferior beings, lacking full autonomy and equal rights in various civilizations. Nurhayati (2018, pp. 15-16) states that in many civilizations, women have never been fully independent or autonomous human beings. They have not been considered individuals with equal rights and obligations to fulfill social, economic, political, and even spiritual duties. It was as if women were not allowed to own the world. In women's bodies, all the great potential of humanity is stored, just like that of men. Women possess a brain and conscience with intelligence and sensitivity that are relatively equal to men's. Women's physical strength is also not weaker than men's. Evidence in education, science, economics, professions, culture, the spiritual world, and human civilization reveals this reality. However, the full potential of women's humanity has often been submerged, forgotten, or overshadowed by the male-dominated social history. This is what is commonly referred to as patriarchal civilization. Patriarchy is an ideology that grants men the legitimacy of superiority, controlling and defining social, economic, cultural, and political structures from a male perspective. The world is shaped by male thought and within a male-dominated system. This ideology has been present since early human civilization, has been perpetuated over time, and pervades all aspects of life. In this



situation, women are viewed as inferior beings, second-class citizens, regulated and controlled, and, in many cases, exploited and discriminated against simply because of their female bodies.

In examining the existence of women, scholars continue to investigate how much physiological and biological factors contribute to gender differences in feminine and masculine personalities. Nurhayati (2018, pp. 25-35) states that, according to contemporary experts who have conducted research on female psychology, it is clear that differences in the personalities of women and men are influenced more by expectations and socialization from parents than by physiological factors. Due to their physical appearance, women are often portrayed as imperfect (second-class) and unimportant (subordinate) beings, leading to their marginalization, exploitation, and relegation to domestic roles, such as managing the kitchen, the household, and other domestic responsibilities. Even in managing domestic affairs, women do not possess full sovereignty, as they are often controlled by men within patriarchal cultural conditions. Consequently, they frequently face physical, sexual, economic violence, and harassment.

From childhood, girls are controlled by their fathers, brothers, uncles, or guardians. As they grow into adulthood, they are controlled by their husbands, and if they have a career, they are controlled by their employers and patriarchal work regulations. Women often endure the mistreatment imposed by men or the patriarchal system, seeing it as normal and commonplace. As a result, women have little choice but to remain in the home. Neither the private nor the public spheres provide a safe or comfortable space for women. As a consequence, many women remain confined to their households, regardless of their circumstances. This phenomenon, where women endure such painful fates, is often considered an image of “masochism,” which

Freud describes as the ability of women to endure pain and suffering. Because masochism is associated with women, it reflects the affirmation of male dominance and hegemony over women. This biased imagery has led to stereotypical gender roles between women and men, which have become institutionalized and ingrained within the culture, often going unchallenged or uncriticized. The psychological image of women is not something inherited and unchangeable; rather, it is influenced by a variety of factors, including biological tendencies, motives, abilities, societal expectations, learning outcomes, conditioning, struggles, and situational pressures.

Personality, which encompasses characteristics and behaviors, is defined by the American Psychological Association (apa.org) as the enduring traits and behaviors that shape a person’s unique adaptation to life. This includes key traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns. Various theories explain the structure and development of personality in different ways, but all agree that personality plays a critical role in determining behavior.

Personality is defined as the dynamic organization of psychological systems within an individual, which determines their characteristic behaviors and thoughts. According to Hurlock (cited in Dhewi, 2021, p. 10), personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of these psychological systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought. This statement means that personality can reflect a person’s habits, thought patterns, and behavior. On the other hand, Hurlock states that development refers to a progressive series of changes that occur in an orderly, predictable pattern as a result of experience. In this context, development is often linked to the maturation of the nervous system. She believed that the sequence of development is the same for all humans, though individuals may progress at different



rates. This variation can help construct unique personality patterns from one person to another.

Everyone has specific patterns in their personality. According to Hurlock (1974), there are two main patterns in personality: characteristics and self-concept. A trait is a specific attitude or quality that is evident in the way people address their problems, behave, and respond to others in public. On the other hand, a person's self-concept refers to how they perceive themselves. This relates to the notion that a person must possess a certain type of personality. When someone is asked to define themselves, they will often express their ideas and opinions about who they are as individuals. This is an example of how self-concept is demonstrated. These concepts focus on both what a person is and how they view themselves.

People strive to change their personalities because they often struggle to feel content with who they are. Pikunas (cited in Dhewi, 2021, p. 11) states that people attempt to change their personalities because they are aware that it is difficult for individuals to feel content with their own identity. Hurlock claims that it is the individuals' surroundings—such as their parents and instructors—who, through comments on their personalities, make them aware of the need to develop their character. Individuals recognize that change does not necessarily lead to improvement. Change may occur either for better or worse. However, when the change is for the better, personality modification and development can be viewed as the same process. When a person's potential develops and manifests as new attributes, skills, traits, and related characteristics, change can take place.

## **2.2 Theory and Method**

This research employs a narrative qualitative method. Cresswell (2007) states that narrative is a type of qualitative research in which researchers describe the lives of

characters, collect and tell stories about individual lives, and write narratives about distinctive experiences (p. 36, 54). Using this method, data are collected through a compilation of stories from the novel *The House on Mango Street*. According to Arikunto (2006), the data source in research refers to the subject from which the data is obtained. In this study, the data source is the novel *The House on Mango Street*, treated as the primary source. Secondary sources are obtained from various books and other relevant materials from the internet, such as online journals and the author's official website. The tertiary sources include online dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary and Wiktionary, The Free Dictionary.

Several steps are involved in this study. First, the novel is read extensively to understand its events and issues. Then, the data are collected in the form of dialogues and narration, with significant events being highlighted. Third, tertiary data are gathered from various books and online sources. After the data are collected, they are analyzed and interpreted through feminist psychology, particularly focusing on the character's personality development.

This study applies the feminist-psychology theory of Karen Horney (cited in Feist et al., 2013, p. 168). Karen Horney, a neo-Freudian and a pioneer in female psychology, is known for her emphasis on cultural and social influences. Horney notes that feminine psychology is an area of psychological study that addresses the political, economic, and social challenges women persistently confront. This perspective can be seen as a counteraction to male-dominated theories, such as Sigmund Freud's ideas on female sexuality.

Horney (cited in Feist et al., 2013, pp. 170-171) asserts that culture, particularly early childhood experiences, plays a crucial role in shaping human personality, whether neurotic or healthy. While Horney agreed with Freud



that early childhood traumas are important, she differed by emphasizing that social forces, rather than biological factors, are paramount in personality development. Western society contributes to this vicious cycle in several ways. First, people in this society are imbued with cultural teachings related to kinship and humility. However, these teachings are often at odds with another prevailing attitude, namely, aggressiveness and the drive to win or be superior. Second, society's demands for success and achievement are nearly endless, so that even when people achieve their material ambitions, additional goals are continuously placed before them. Third, Western society tells people that they are free and can accomplish anything through hard work and perseverance. In reality, however, the freedom of most people is greatly restricted by genetics, social position, and the competitiveness of others. These contradictions, all stemming from cultural influences rather than biological ones, create intrapsychic conflicts that threaten the psychological health of normal individuals and pose nearly insurmountable obstacles for neurotics.

Horney believes that neurotic conflict can originate from almost any developmental stage, but childhood is the age at which the vast majority of problems arise. A variety of traumatic events, such as sexual abuse, beatings, open rejection, or pervasive neglect, may leave lasting impressions on a child's future development. She insisted that these debilitating experiences can almost invariably be traced back to a lack of genuine warmth and affection. Horney's own lack of love from her father and her close relationship with her mother likely had a powerful effect on both her personal development and her theoretical ideas. Horney hypothesizes that a difficult childhood is primarily responsible for neurotic needs. These needs become powerful because they are the child's only means of gaining feelings of safety. Nevertheless, no single early experience is responsible for later

personality. Horney cautioned that "the sum total of childhood experiences brings about a certain character structure, or rather, starts its development." In other words, the totality of early relationships molds personality development. "Later attitudes to others, then, are not repetitions of infantile ones but emanate from the character structure, the basis of which is laid in childhood." While later experiences can have an important effect, especially in normal individuals, childhood experiences are primarily responsible for personality development. People who rigidly repeat patterns of behavior do so because they interpret new experiences in a manner consistent with those established patterns.

Horney, as cited in Feist (cited in Nugroho et al., 2023, p. 175), concludes three basic attitudes, referred to as neurotic tendencies, in dealing with basic conflicts:

#### 1. Moving Towards People

Approaching other people is one of the primary ways human beings overcome conflicts that arise from relationships with others. This attitude represents self-protection in response to an inability to protect oneself. Horney describes this as a neurotic need to shield oneself from feelings of helplessness. The yielding personality type is characterized by a strong and persistent need for affection and acceptance, including the desire to be loved, sought after, needed, and protected.

#### 2. Against People

This is the process of confronting others, which refers to aggressive actions that tend to view other people as unfriendly. Rather than approaching others in a submissive or dependent manner, aggressive neurotics prefer to fight others by appearing strong and cruel. The actions of aggressive individuals often involve a tendency to fight against others, including the need for power, exploiting others, gaining respect and prestige, being admired, and achieving goals. Aggressive people are more inclined to play to win, often





at the expense of others or their opponents.

### 3. Moving Away from People

This is an action taken to overcome conflict by distancing oneself from others. This strategy expresses the need for solitude, freedom, and independence. Therefore, the behavior of individuals who adopt this tendency is characterized by avoiding problems by becoming more narcissistic or preoccupied with their personal ego, thus withdrawing from social life.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the theories related to the main character of *The House on Mango Street* are discussed using the feminist-psychology theory proposed by Karen Horney. Horney explains that culture, especially early childhood experiences, plays a leading role in shaping human personality, whether neurotic or healthy. She presents three basic attitudes, known as neurotic tendencies, in dealing with basic conflicts: moving towards people, against people, and moving away from other people.

Esperanza, the main character of *The House on Mango Street*, is portrayed as resilient, introspective, and fiercely independent. Despite the difficulties she faces, she remains determined to create a better future for herself. As a young Latina girl grappling with the complexities of growing up in a lower-income neighborhood in Chicago, Esperanza's journey is marked by her efforts to navigate her identity, desires, and dreams amidst the pressure of social and cultural conditions, including poverty, patriarchy, and cultural expectations.

She feels the weight of being different from her white peers, and the stigmas and stereotypes placed on her ethnicity and socioeconomic status make her feel ashamed and restricted. Esperanza longs to escape her circumstances and dreams of a home that is truly her own, away from the confinement and

oppression she feels in her current environment.

As she grows up, Esperanza faces numerous challenges and struggles. She encounters sexism, misogyny, and abuse from the men in her community, which shapes her understanding of power, respect, and control. Additionally, she is burdened by the societal expectations placed on her as a woman, which often conflict with her desire for independence and self-expression. Esperanza also forms meaningful connections with other women in her community, which provide her with a sense of solidarity and support.

Esperanza's character embodies the internal conflicts and external pressures that many marginalized individuals face as they strive for self-actualization and agency. Her experiences and struggles paint a poignant picture of the challenges of adolescence and womanhood, while her resilience and determination serve as an inspiration to others in similar situations. Ultimately, Esperanza's journey is a testament to the enduring spirit and resilience of those who strive for personal autonomy and fulfillment despite the obstacles they face. She experiences the process of personality development through her understanding of the negative factors influencing her growth, especially the patriarchal system and poverty.

### 3.1 Family Influences

Cisneros creates Esperanza to portray women who undergo personality development, overcoming negative factors such as patriarchy, in order to achieve a better future. Patriarchal culture in Esperanza's family reinforces the expectation that women should be submissive, compliant, and sacrifice their personal ambitions for the sake of the family. This cultural pressure shapes how women in Esperanza's family perceive themselves.

In Esperanza's household, there is a clear division between the roles of men and women.



Her father is the primary breadwinner, working long hours to support the family, but remains emotionally distant and less involved in daily family life. This reinforces the idea that men's primary responsibility is to provide financially, while women, like Esperanza's mother, are expected to focus on domestic duties. Esperanza's mother, despite being intelligent and capable, is confined to the home, fulfilling the role of caretaker. She regrets not having pursued an education, but due to her gender and societal expectations, her opportunities were limited, reflecting the gender-based restrictions common in patriarchal families. The emphasis on these traditional roles creates a rigid structure where women's primary value is tied to their ability to manage the household and care for their children, while men are distanced from these domestic responsibilities.

Horney (cited in Feist, 2013, p. 171) emphasizes that the development of a woman's personality is influenced by early social relationships, particularly within the family, as well as broader cultural factors. She argues that negative childhood experiences can lead to basic feelings of anxiety, which, in turn, affect how individuals interact with the world. Horney outlines three ways people respond to this anxiety: moving towards people (seeking affection and approval), moving against people (seeking control and dominance), and moving away from other people (seeking independence and separateness). In *The House on Mango Street*, these dynamics are reflected in Esperanza's interactions with her family.

Esperanza's family lives in poverty, and economic hardships shape her underlying insecurity and anxieties. Horney argues that poor social conditions, such as poverty, engender feelings of powerlessness in children, which affect their coping strategies. The poverty makes her dream of a better life, but it also causes her deep discomfort and shame. She expresses her frustration with her

family's living situation in the following narration:

There, I said, pointing up to the third floor. You live there? There. I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. There. I lived there. I nodded. (3)

Her shame over her family's house reveals how much their socioeconomic status affects her sense of self-worth. This reflects Horney's idea (172) that when children experience feelings of inadequacy due to external conditions, such as poverty, they develop a desire to escape those conditions. For Esperanza, this feeling of "nothingness" becomes a driving force behind her ambition for a better future.

The first family factor that influences Esperanza's personality development is her mother. In this novel, her mother plays a significant role in shaping Esperanza's character. This influence is evident both through her dissatisfaction with her own life and the encouragement she gives Esperanza, which impacts her personality development. Her mother is wise yet regretful. She is intelligent and capable, but she is confined by the limitations of their life on Mango Street. Her mother's unfulfilled potential is revealed when she expresses disappointment over her life choices. The novel narrates:

I could've been somebody, you know? my mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a TV. I was a smart cookie then. (84)

This quotation highlights the significant role of parental influence in shaping a child's perception of their own potential. Esperanza understands her mother's frustration and



regret, which becomes a driving force in her determination to escape Mango Street. She does not want to be trapped like her mother, burdened by traditional gender roles in her family and community. To be independent, Esperanza moves away from the people she knows. She adopts the coping strategy of “moving away from other people” as proposed by Horney (cited in Feist et al. 2013, 172). Esperanza seeks to create a future that is different from her mother's life.

Horney also emphasizes that parents play a crucial role in shaping a child's "self." Early interactions between parents and children significantly influence how children develop their self-concept, both their actual self and idealized self. If parents provide unconditional love, security, and emotional support, children are more likely to develop a strong and healthy real self.

In addition, her mother strongly encourages Esperanza to continue her education so that she can have better opportunities than she did. Horney (cited in Feist et al. 2013, 172) states that social and cultural pressures can make a child feel the need to avoid the fate of their parents. In this case, her mother's encouragement for her daughter to focus on education reflects an understanding that intellectual and economic independence can help Esperanza escape the limitations experienced by women in their family. The novel narrates:

Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard. That Madame Butterfly was a fool. She stirs the oatmeal. Look at my comadres. She means Izaura whose husband left and Yolanda whose husband is dead. Got to take care all your own, she says shaking her head. (84)

Her mother warns her daughter not to depend on men, as is the case for many women in their community. Through this encouragement to study and not to rely on others, her mother directs Esperanza to take

control of her own future, in line with the pattern of moving away from people in Horney's theory. Esperanza wants to be intellectually and economically independent, which she sees as a way to avoid the life of dependency that many women in her community often experience.

It is evident that Esperanza's mother has a major influence on her personality development. Her mother's dissatisfaction with her own life and strong desire for education motivates Esperanza to avoid the same fate. Through the strategy of moving away from people, Esperanza aspires to be independent and escape the limitations that restrict women in her family. The social and gender roles pressures faced by her mother also trigger Esperanza to challenge the cultural norms that limit women, which leads to the strategy of moving against people.

The second significant role in Esperanza's personality development is her father. He is a hardworking man who strives to provide for his family. Although he is not a talkative or emotionally present figure, his dedication to his family significantly influences how Esperanza understands the responsibilities and limitations faced by immigrant families. Her father works all day and is rarely seen at home except in the mornings or evenings, which demonstrates the pressures faced by working-class parents.

One of the important moments in the novel is when Esperanza sees another side of her father that she had not seen before, namely when her father cries upon receiving the news that his own father (Esperanza's grandfather) has died. The novel narrates:

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, today is sitting on my bed. And I think if my own Papa died what would I do. I hold my



Papa in my arms. I hold and hold  
and hold him (52).

This quotation shows how Esperanza, even as a child, begins to understand the emotional and physical burdens her father endures. Her father, who is usually seen as a strong and emotionless figure, now reveals his vulnerability. This experience shapes Esperanza's empathy and deepens her awareness of the great responsibility her father bears as the breadwinner. However, behind this empathy, Esperanza also realizes that she does not want to live with the same limitations as her father. While he represents hard work and constant sacrifice, for Esperanza, this is also a reflection of a life full of restrictions, lacking the freedom to dream bigger.

This experience prompts Esperanza to adopt a strategy of "moving away from others," where she strives to break away from traditional roles that she views as limiting.

The third role is Esperanza's grandmother (Great-grandmother). Esperanza's grandmother is a very important figure, though her influence is more symbolic. Esperanza is named after her grandmother, and her grandmother's story is one of the most significant influences on how Esperanza views the role of women in society and in her family. Her grandmother was a strong woman who was eventually forced into marriage and led a life of regret, trapped inside the house like a bird in a cage.

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 she wanted to be. Esperanza.  
I have inherited her name, but I  
don't want to inherit her place by  
the window (6).

In this quotation, Esperanza realizes how her grandmother was trapped in the traditional restrictions of a woman's role. Her

grandmother's story reinforces Esperanza's basic anxiety about what her fate might be if she does not break free from prevailing social and cultural expectations. Her grandmother serves as a negative role model, driving Esperanza to adopt the strategy of "moving away from others," seeking a way out of the restrictive roles imposed on women. Esperanza's grandmother represents a generation of women whose lives were constrained by forced marriages and rigid domestic roles. For Esperanza, this is a warning: if she is not careful, she could inherit the same fate. This drives Esperanza to reject traditional roles and strive to create a freer life—one where she can control her own destiny, rather than being trapped in a stifling patriarchal structure.

### **3.2 Social Influences**

In this novel, Esperanza's personality is shaped not only by her family but also by her environment, including her neighbors, peers, and the cultural context of her community. It can be analyzed how the external forces of Esperanza's environment—poverty, gender roles, and community dynamics—shape her sense of identity and her pursuit of independence. Horney's theory emphasizes how social and cultural factors, particularly those experienced in childhood, play a pivotal role in personality development.

The first external factor influencing the development of Esperanza's personality is her friend, Sally. Esperanza's environment is marked by traditional gender roles and the objectification of women, which shapes her understanding of womanhood. She witnesses how the women in her community are often trapped in oppressive situations, forced into domestic roles, or subjected to male domination. Esperanza observes the fate of women like her friend Sally, who marries at a young age to escape her abusive father, only to find herself trapped in another oppressive relationship. It narrates:





Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready, but married just the same. She met a marshmallow salesman at a school bazaar, and she married him in another state where it's legal to get married before eighth grade. She has her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates. She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape (94).

Sally's choices might reflect Horney's concept of "moving toward people" as a coping strategy, where an individual seeks approval and affection, often at the expense of their own needs and well-being. Sally's experiences influence Esperanza to critically evaluate her own path and desires. Sally's situation reveals the limited options available to women in Esperanza's environment. Rather than gaining freedom, Sally's marriage becomes another form of confinement. Esperanza's observations of women's struggles cause her to develop a strong desire to avoid the same fate. She resists conforming to traditional gender roles, choosing instead to pursue her own path, even if it means breaking away from societal norms. Horney asserts that cultural and social factors play a significant role in shaping personality, particularly in the development of women's identities. Societal expectations, traditions, and cultural pressures heavily influence how individuals, especially women, perceive themselves and navigate their lives. Esperanza's rejection of these roles is clear when she says:

I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate (83).

Here, Esperanza symbolically rejects the passive, subservient role expected of women. By moving away from traditional expectations, she asserts her desire for control over her own life, embodying Horney's

concept of "moving away from others" to pursue independence.

The second figure is Esperanza's aunt, Aunt Lupe, who plays a positive role in Esperanza's life through her words. Aunt Lupe, who is terminally ill and bedridden, encourages Esperanza to write as a way to escape her stifling reality. Although Esperanza feels guilty for taunting her aunt, Aunt Lupe's advice continues to guide Esperanza in pursuing her dreams and freedom through writing. Aunt Lupe says: *You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn't know what she meant* (56).

In the context of Horney's theory, Aunt Lupe serves as a figure who helps Esperanza develop a "real self"—one that is able to transcend the limitations imposed by her social environment. This urge to write helps Esperanza overcome the basic anxiety she feels about living in a restrictive environment. Aunt Lupe inspires Esperanza to move away from the passive life that many women around her live and to use her creativity as a means of achieving freedom.

The third role is Alicia, a young woman in college who is trying to improve her life through education. Esperanza's neighborhood is filled with a mix of people, each influencing her in different ways. She interacts with characters like Alicia, who is determined to escape through education. These characters serve as models for different coping mechanisms within their shared environment. Alicia, in particular, is an inspiration to Esperanza. She is one of the few characters who actively pursues education as a way to break free from the constraints of Mango Street. It narrates:

Alicia, who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want



to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin (26).

Alicia can be seen as embodying “moving away from people,” where she distances herself from traditional expectations to pursue her personal goals, particularly through education. Alicia’s determination to continue her studies despite the responsibilities forced upon her at home aligns with Horney’s concept of striving for self-sufficiency. She refuses to let cultural and familial demands limit her aspirations, choosing education as a path to empowerment and escape from the limitations of her circumstances.

Alicia's character also reflects Horney's theory of cultural impact on women, where many women internalize traditional roles. However, Alicia challenges these norms by rejecting the idea that a woman's primary role is confined to domestic responsibilities. Her struggle with taking care of her family while pursuing her education shows how difficult it can be to break free from such expectations, but she persists. This persistence provides Esperanza with a different model of what a woman can be, shaping her views on her own future.

The fourth figure is Marin, a young woman living with her family on Mango Street, who dreams of moving to the United States in search of a better life. Marin is another character who influences Esperanza's views. Unlike Alicia, who struggles through education, Marin hopes to escape the Mango Street neighborhood by marrying a rich man, as Horney states that cultural impacts play a significant role in the development of a woman's personality. Marin spends her time putting on makeup and dreaming of a better life, but her chosen path is passive, waiting to be “saved” by a man. This is shown in the following passage: *Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a*

*car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life* (22).

Marin exemplifies the traditional view that the way out for women is through marriage, not through self-employment. Esperanza is influenced by Marin's dreams but ultimately rejects them, seeing this dependence as a form of entrapment, not freedom. In the context of Horney's theory, Marin is an example of the “movement toward others” attitude, in which she seeks protection and security through romantic relationships. Although Marin provides a lesson about the desire to escape poverty, Esperanza chooses not to depend on others.

The fifth figure is Rafaela, another woman in Esperanza's circle who is trapped in an oppressive domestic life. Her husband locks her in the house for fear she might “run away,” and she can only dream of freedom. Rafaela asks the children to buy her juice from outside because she is unable to go out on her own. Her story illustrates the physical and emotional limitations that many women face on Mango Street. It narrates: *Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow and dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's* (76).

Rafaela is an example of what Esperanza fears: a woman who has no control over her life and can only dream of freedom without actually being able to attain it. In Horney’s context, Rafaela represents those who feel trapped by social and cultural conditions, and because of her lack of control over her life, she experiences anxiety and alienation. Esperanza sees this as a fate to be avoided, and that is why she is determined not to live like Rafaela or other women who are confined by the constraints of gender and marriage.

The sixth figure is the three sisters. They are the three mysterious women Esperanza meets at the end of the novel, who offer important advice for her future. They represent the collective wisdom of the community, advising Esperanza not to forget her roots even



after she has made it off Mango Street. They tell her that even though Esperanza wants to run away, she must return to help those who are still left behind. They say:

When you leave, you must remember 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 (97).

This advice challenges Esperanza's desire to "get away from other people" altogether. The three sisters remind Esperanza that her identity will always be tied to her native environment, and that part of personal growth is understanding and accepting that while moving forward, she cannot escape her past. This connection to Mango Street, even as she aspires to leave, represents a core part of her identity and the responsibility she feels toward her community.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In *The House on Mango Street*, through the lens of feminist psychology using Karen Horney's theory and focusing on Esperanza, the novel demonstrates how a patriarchal environment, combined with poverty (family financial difficulties), shapes a woman's identity and personality. The analysis reveals that both family and social influences play significant roles in the development of a woman's personality, guiding her toward self-discovery and independence. Family relationships, especially those with parents, are crucial in shaping women's personalities. In addition to family dynamics, social factors such as peers and the neighborhood also influence women's development.

This study further finds that these women choose to overcome these negative influences by "moving away from others," particularly through education. They seek to create a better future for themselves through education, and,

ultimately, their aim is to return and help those left behind on Mango Street. Their journeys reflect broader struggles faced by women who strive to assert their identities and gain control over their lives, despite the constraints imposed by both poverty and a patriarchal culture.

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