

Objectification and shame in the house on mango street



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What he did. Where he touched me. I didnt want it, Sally.

The way he said it, the way itr's supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies.. says Esperanza, the narrator in *The House On Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. Esperanza and other girls on Mango Street struggle with growing up and being objectified by men. The neighborhood they live in puts the girls into unsafe situations with other people around. Throughout the novel, Esperanza and other young girls lose their innocence due to the comments and actions of men. Girls are told to adjust themselves, and they become accustomed to this expectation by the end of the book. In the novel, one theme is that growing up a woman can be shameful and objectifying. It is evident when a bum harrases Rachel, when sher's abused in the workplace, and when young girls choose to wear heels.

While on the street, Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel are shamed for their choice in shoes. In "The Family of Little Feet" while they are wearing blue, yellow, and red heels, Mr. Benny at the corner store makes rude comments towards them. He asks them where they got the shoes, and continues to critique them, "Your mother know you got shoes like that? Who give you those? Nobody. Them are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that. Take them shoes off before I call the cops" (Cisneros 41).

This commentary could be interpreted as him trying to help the girls, but by his choice of words I think that there is more to it than that. He doesnt speak in a kind way, take them shoes off before I call the cops. Threatening to call the police because of a girlr's shoes is completely ridiculous, and teaches them that they have to adjust for what men want, or there will be serious consequences. Saying all of these things in a public place is embarrassing for

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anyone. It leaves the girls feeling ashamed and small, like Rachel is left feeling after the drunk bum speaks to her.

When Rachel walks down the street, she is objectified and harassed. In *The Family with Little Feet*, Esperanza, Rachel, and other girls choose to wear heels into town, and they run into a drunk bum. Rachel continues to speak with him despite all the other girls telling her not to, and then the bum offers her money, "If I give you a dollar will you kiss me? How about a dollar. I give you a dollar, and he looks in his pocket for money (Cisneros 42). When the bum man speaks to Rachel like that, it definitely belittles her and takes away some of her freedom in the moment. The man objectifies her by offering to trade her for money. He thinks that it is an acceptable proposition, and that he can buy girls. We buy things, not people, and trying to buy her is treating her like an object. This is an example of objectification in the novel, along with when Esperanza begins her new job at Pan Photo Finishers.

When Esperanza began to work at her new job, she was abused. In *The First Job* Esperanza is harassed and sexually abused by an old man at her new workplace. She's working at Pan Photo Finishers, and doesn't know anyone there. She spends most of the day alone working, and when she goes to the coatroom to eat, a man comes in. He starts talking to her, and says they can be friends. She finds him comforting because she didn't know anyone else at her job. He tells her it's his birthday, and asks for a kiss, "...he said it was his birthday and would I please give him a birthday kiss. I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn't let go (Cisneros 55). This is abusive because he kissed her without her
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consent, and didn't let go. In the text, she never verbally consented to what was given to her, and she is also underage. The man didn't wait for her consent, and that takes away her voice. Not waiting for consent is an example of objectification, because he is treating her like something he can just grab and move around how he wants. He treats her like this, rather than someone with a voice or an important opinion. The harassment causes Esperanza shame, similar to how the girls felt when they wore their heels.

Esperanza and other girls face harassment frequently throughout *The House on Mango St*, such as when the drunk bum talks to Rachel, when she's employed, and when Esperanza and her friends wear heels for the first time. In the novel, Esperanza and other girls end up in situations where men belittle them, and attempt to use or harass them. Instead of allowing men to objectify Esperanza, or feeling ashamed of who she is, she fights the gender roles that have been set out for her, and tries her hardest to follow her own path and learn from the situations she's been in.