Phallacies behind Assenting Behavior

In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros alludes to multiple readings of windows and the women concealed behind them. Throughout the novel, Cisneros references several women who are imprisoned by men, usually either fathers or husbands. The younger girls of the novel aspire to be the women they watch behind the windows, and they accept their future placement in this role; however, Esperanza, the protagonist of the novel, recognizes the connection and desires to resist the trap set by men. Taking away the independence of a woman and generalizing all women into one category of lust and passivity, patriarchal societies ultimately set the framework in which women are immersed. Cisneros’s text brings light to the normalized infantilizing of women. Although these ideals and limitations are constructed by men, women subconsciously adapt the warped, phallic perspective and subsequently impose the same harsh implications amongst themselves. In “Wrestling with Imperial Patriarchy,” Mukti Barton develops her theory of this role reversal: “This combination I name imperial patriarchy; I find that white feminist theologians often present an analysis that still stems from an imperial/colonial mind-set” (7). Additionally, in *Ways of Seeing* John Berger claims, “This unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women. They do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity” (63). The novel traces Esperanza’s consciousness as she becomes cognizant of this unrighteous manipulation and helps bring awareness to the patriarchal system. She sees the limitations of misogyny and longs for women to recognize and overcome the cycle imprisoning them.

While shoes metaphorically represent growing up for the girls in *The House on Mango Street*, male fetishes of feet eroticism limit the girls’ ability to discover their own sexuality. The
mother in “the family of little feet” casually gives the girls a bag of worn and firmly molded high-heeled shoes. In doing this, she attempts handing the girls their sexuality in a formed mechanism designed by men that impedes women from walking properly. Likewise, this impedance eliminates female independence, further titillating man’s desire to have women fully submissive. When they receive the shoes, the girls are ecstatic because their “feet fit exactly,” like in a princess fairytale; thus the supremacy and rigidity of the patriarchal mold is introduced (Cisneros 40). The “magic” shoes transform the girls immediately from innocent children into elongated, sexual women by stripping away their desire to play jump rope and initiating them into adulthood. Once they step out of the domestic barrier and onto the street, all heads instantly turn towards them; from Mr. Benny’s interrogation, the catcalling boy, the six jealous girls in front of the laundromat, and the bum man, the girls receive far more sexualized attention than they have ever experienced. Michelle Sugiyama articulates this connection: “This power begins to frighten them… this power is ultimately a trap for the women of Mango Street” (2).

Thereafter, the shoes get thrown away, and “no one complains” (Cisneros 42). Even though they rid themselves of the contaminated perspective, it is only a temporary delay of the inevitable system.

The infantilizing of women further manifests in the description of Sire’s girlfriend, Lois. She is strangely incapable of tying her own shoes and “is compared to a baby three times in the same paragraph” (Sugiyama 6). Men subconsciously link certain features of women to a submissive behavior, and Lois’s depiction and incapability epitomize the state of vulnerability that men find attractive. Expounding upon the “infantilized and glamorized,” Sika Dagbovie-Mullins claims, “they are simultaneously loud and silenced, aggressive and abject, commanding and helpless” (2-3). Lois is helpless and reliant on her boyfriend to assist her. The obedience she
embodies is depicted as “she holds his hand, and he stops sometimes to tie her shoes” (Cisneros 73). She holds his hand much like a child would hold a mother’s hand when crossing the street. Instead of the couple holding hands to display affection, she grips onto his hand tightly for guidance into her socially-determined femininity. Her feet evoke the dependence females have become accustomed to as a result of the undermining male continuously overseeing the priorities of women. Again, the reference to feet, particularly dainty feet, shows how the men ultimately control women, while keeping the women blind of the transaction. Male control masquerades as chivalry.

Greatly challenging these stereotypical aesthetics, Esperanza’s feet are in complete opposition to submissive Lois’s. While at her cousin’s baptism party, Esperanza harshly illustrates her brown and white shoes declaring, “My feet scuffed and round… my feet swell big and heavy like plungers... I drag them” (Cisneros 47). Sugiyama cross-references this with Chinese imperialism when making her assertion, “On Mango Street, as in Old China, female beauty is associated with foot size” (3). The imagery of her feet becomes phallic. This disturbing language signals her evolving awareness of the patriarchal mindset and the grim limitations of self-discovery it brings. While everyone else is dancing, Esperanza sits at the table and conceals her shoes. She does not move until her uncle, who is previously proven a liar, uses his authoritative persuasion to convince her, saying, “you are the prettiest girl here” (Cisneros 47). Esperanza reflects, “but I believe him, and yes, we are dancing… only I don’t want to at first” (Cisneros 47). At this young age she does not know why, but she feels trapped underneath that table. Esperanza believes she cannot be both sexually seductive and intellectually dominant. She is forced to choose.
Continuing the application of Chinese history, the female dependence on men directly correlates with the expectations placed on the women in *The House on Mango Street* to be subservient to their fathers and husbands as “footbinding was practiced… for precisely this reason: to make women weak” (Sugiyama 3). The crippling effect evokes female reliance on men. However, “It is not female movement per se but rather female sexuality that the men in the text are trying to control” (Sugiyama 4). Men assemble the epitome of femininity, then bind a compliant personality to those characteristics. A curvy, feminine woman displaying dainty characteristics is far more likely to draw a man’s attention rather than a gallant, rugged woman with sharp exteriors; men correlate the petite delicacy to passivity and dependence, leaving the latter to be independent and strong-willed. Therefore, a male is going to be more inclined to pursue the woman he can persuade and manipulate into something satisfactory for himself.

The men set up an unrealistic, ideal look that all women are expected to embody; then the men set a literal trap to detain the women. In addition to molding the women’s feet to fit the imperial regime, the men also bind the women to the domesticity of household interiors. Throughout the novel, a recurring image of women being imprisoned by men, from father to husband, surfaces. The younger girls aspire to be the women they have watched behind the windows, and they accept their future placement in this role. As Esperanza is enhancing her awareness of this unrighteous manipulation, she reads her name and concludes, “It means sadness, it means waiting” (Cisneros 10). At a very young age she starts to realize her life will revolve around waiting on a man and never delivering herself. She will wait on a man to come rescue her from the house of a different man, alluding to the deceiving fairytale anticipations that adolescent girls adopt. She is named after her great-grandmother, because according to the Chinese calendar, they were both born horse women, defying the expectations of
submissiveness: “which is to be bad luck if you’re born female… because the Chinese, like the
Mexicans, don’t like their women strong” (Cisneros 10). This reference to luck implies that only
males hold empowerment. Faruk Kalay points out, “the women consent to their destiny when
considered from the feminine point of view” (119). Consistently applying the horse analogy,
Esperanza starts linking the arrangement: “My great-grandmother… a wild horse of a woman…
until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off” (Cisneros 11).
Blinding her was the only way to undermine her persistence. After being manipulated, her vision
was the only thing connecting her to the outside world: “She looked out the window her whole
life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow” (Cisneros 11). Furthering her
connections, Esperanza claims, “I have inherited her name, but I don’t want to inherit her place
by the window” (Cisneros 11). As she matures, Esperanza further comprehends the correlation of
assenting women to the constraint men enforce upon them.

As Esperanza gets older, she becomes more and more aware of this male inflicted
restraint. She ponders the life of Rafaela, “who is still young but getting old from leaning out the
window so much” (Cisneros 79). Like Esperanza’s great-grandmother, Rafaela leans on that
same elbow of sadness, waiting on her husband to arrive and yielding to his command.
Continuously tracing the simulacrum, Esperanza thinks, “And then Rafaela… gets locked
indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at”
(Cisneros 79). Her husband convinces her through a restrained comment resembling a
compliment. It is expected for women to conform to the limitations set up for them by the men in
their lives. As Rafaela “dreams her hair is like Rapunzel’s,” she subconsciously associates the
stereotypical aesthetics of beauty with the success of freedom. Pursuing this seductively
dangerous ideology, she tosses down money from her upstairs window and asks Esperanza and
her friends to buy juice for her. Esperanza senses the reference and thinks, “we send it up to her in a paper shopping bag she lets down with clothesline” (Cisneros 80). Advancing the imposed infantilizing, Rafaela’s clothesline acts as an umbilical cord linking her to the unreachable outside world as she is obtaining nourishment through it. There is an interesting role reversal within this dynamic. In keeping the women domesticized, the men adapt a warped sense of maternalization, imprisoning the women inside a metaphorical, patriarchal womb. The men oppressively keep the women locked inside an embryonic space of the home, the window being the only portal within those four walls.

Unfortunately, Rafaela’s husband is not the only one who assigns beauty to such danger. Sally’s father falsely assumes “to be this beautiful is trouble” (Cisneros 81). Esperanza’s mother also proclaims, “to wear black so young is dangerous” (Cisneros 82). The real trouble here is not the beauty itself but the sexual innuendos men prescribe to the beauty. Sally is immensely caught in the masculine web spun by her abusive father. Esperanza sees through the smeared “blue paint [on Sally’s] eyelids” and into the shattered heart Sally tries so hard to conceal (Cisneros 82). Esperanza, in her early hopes of bringing women into the light of the patriarchal mold, begins questioning Sally while subconsciously threading these implications of dangerous beauty into her own life. She asks her, “why do you always have to go straight home after school… Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn’t have to go home?” (Cisneros 82). Esperanza even assertively confronts Sally about her single-minded behavior: “You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can’t come out from” (Cisneros 82). The girls are hesitantly discovering the encumbrance of the metaphorical womb as a preexisting condition that will strive to follow them wherever they go. Sally flees her father’s abusive home only to fall again into the patriarchal mold which allows no room for her to delve into her own desires. After Sally gets married upon
entering the eighth grade, her husband “doesn’t let her look out the window” (Cisneros 102). Stripping away her portal, he does not even allow her to look at the freedom residing in the outside world. Instead, “She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet” persistently trying to make her world straight when she ultimately knows it is anything but seamless (Cisneros 102).

Corresponding to Sugiyama’s assertion of the book elaborating “primarily on the rigid control of women by men,” Cisneros’s novel uses the enforcement of patriarchal hegemony to propose the notion of women’s assent over time developing into women oppressing other women instead of men single-handedly committing the unjust practices (2). After all, the book is dedicated “To the Women” (Cisneros vii). Cisneros acknowledges this unrighteous manipulation and tries to shed light onto the contradiction. While men are enforcing an inferior behavior, the women are consistently assenting without rebuttal. Although men undoubtedly set the trap, women begin voluntarily walking into the setup, luring other women with them. Again, in “Wresting with Imperial Patriarchy,” Mukti Barton more directly defines this paradox in reference to Chinese foot-binding as compared to Victorian corset bondage:

Women’s bodies were sculpted for male sexual gratification. They both started from the middle classes to prove their superiority, but then women from other classes desiring upward mobility followed suit. Mothers imposed this custom on the younger generation thinking that they could not ruin the future of their daughters as acceptable brides. Sexism and classism worked in both these cultural practices. Racism and imperialism added another dimension to the Victorian dress. (23)

Women teaching this objectification makes the women oppressors of themselves, thereby taking away the work from the men. Women have ultimately inverted the roles. Although the foot binding
ensues male dominance, Victorian women condemning the Chinese were doing so hypocritically when taking into account their similar practices. Over generations women have implanted the expectations of beauty into other women. Women have their daughters go to extraneous lengths to ensure that they marry into a prestigious family rather than teaching their daughters to resist from the male cultivated framework and marry a just, moral man.

This philosophy of women passing down oppressive roles to succeeding generations is easily linked to the mother passing down the bag of shoes to Esperanza and her friends, as previously mentioned. Judith Fetterley pursues, “Intellectually male, sexually female, one is in effect no one, nowhere, immascualted” (xxii). Through Fetterley’s vision of immasculcation, she reveals the source of the conformed phallic behavior. When the girls begin playing dress up with the shoes, they are ultimately setting up the roles for which they will fulfill in the near future. Women teach their daughters how to objectify themselves; women pass down the roles as quickly as the men develop the framework. Just as the mother passes down her placement in the system of bondage, Rachel also “teaches [them] how to walk down to the corner so that the shoes talk back… with every step” (Cisneros 40). Men set up the aesthetic ideals, but women are so subservient that they unconsciously begin teaching other females how to perform exceptionally in the eyes of a male. Subsequently, and indeed ironically, the females encumbered into the system of falsities adopt this “male design” as a pedagogy (Fetterley xii).

Esperanza first consciously experiences the confinement herself when she desires to eat lunch in the canteen like a majority of her peers. Ironically, her first conscious encounter of male inflicted prejudice is acted out through a woman. Esperanza is called to the seat of judgment in Sister Superior’s office: “My turn came and I stood in front of the big desk with holy pictures under the glass while the Sister Superior read my letter” (Cisneros 45). Her description of the
event reflects much upon the idea of Judgment Day—a day all people will go before God to receive His verdict of their decisions made while on earth. The preservation of the holy pictures under the glass in her office signals her supremacy, deeming her perspective as right and being of God’s. The placement of the pictures beneath the glass mimics Sister Superior’s placement under God’s reign, framing her within the construction of a patriarchal, religious regime. Therefore, her judgment of Esperanza must directly correlate with God’s judgment of her, and if God Himself does not have mercy upon her, who will? After disapprovingly reading the letter from Esperanza’s mother, Sister Superior tries her hardest to keep Esperanza from staying at the school: “You don’t live far… I bet I can see your house from my window” (Cisneros 45).

Carelessly pointing to a house that is not even Esperanza’s, Sister Superior judges the house from afar, looking again through the manmade window, through the male lens, and ultimately asserting Esperanza unworthy compared to the normalized vision of material success. Barton elaborates: “The imperial/colonial Christian patriarchy taught us to look down on our neighbors” (10). Sister Superior is so far immersed into the system that she loses sight of her proposed placement of assistance and condemns Esperanza through the male lens herself. Although the control is being administered by a woman, Sister Superior’s perspective is warped to comport to that of a man’s. She enacts the male gaze.

Not only are the women responsible for teaching the construct, women also assent and adapt to the paralyzing framework of the metaphorical womb. These impediments are embedded into the minds of children, male and female. In the very beginning of the novel, Esperanza semi-consciously witnesses the implantation: “The boys and girls live in separate worlds… boys in their universe and we in ours… My brothers… They’ve got plenty to say… inside the house. But outside they can’t be seen talking to girls” (Cisneros 8). Likewise, throughout Esperanza’s
budding resistance to this conformity, she realizes she is alone in her desire to break-away from the system. Sally is being raped by Tito, an older boy from their neighborhood, in the garden outside, where the men recharge their unfailing dominance. Esperanza, severely unnerved by the encounter, soon realizes she is the only one who sees the event as treacherous. She is frantically relaying the account and, “his mother was ironing shirts… not looking up from her ironing… And kept on ironing” (Cisneros 97). Tito’s mom keeps driving out the uprising faults of the system with the only way she knows how: through a domestic chore. His mom desperately fails at ironing out the wrinkles society has paradoxically placed upon itself, and Esperanza is left feeling helpless.

Again, just the same as great-grandmother Esperanza has a bag thrown over her head, the only way to tear down a persistent woman is through her eyesight. By literally diminishing her vision of a prosperous future, a woman will be forced to become a lump of clay, easily manipulated by the male potter. Esperanza’s Aunt Guadalupe greatly opposes the dependent and fragile archetype women are expected to embody. This connection is easily denoted from Sugiyama’s reference that “A crippled woman is easier to control than a woman with healthy limbs” (3). As a woman of astounding vigor, she is clearly marked, ideologically “diseased” and taken out of the system upon defying it. “Hard to imagine her legs once strong, the bones hard and parting water… not bent and wrinkled like a baby, not drowning under the sticky yellow light” (Cisneros 59). Refusing encumbrance into the system of falsities, Aunt Lupe is disease stricken, infantilized by a force far outside of her reign. Keeping the power of the male perspective within her control ultimately left her with a doomed fate. Her resistance was detected and annihilated, rendering her physically handicapped and entirely dependent upon someone else. Consequently, she is one of the strongest influences on Esperanza, encouraging her to form
a resistance in her writing: “keep writing… it will set you free, and [Esperanza] said yes, but at that time [she] didn’t know what [Aunt Lupe] meant” (Cisneros 61). Though Esperanza does not yet realize the value of this advice, her Aunt foretells of the great patriarchal conflicts that lie ahead.

From the beginning of the novel, Esperanza is relayed as a resisting character: “… me, my hair is lazy. It ever obeys barrettes or bands” (Cisneros 6). As she grows older she steadily becomes aware of her differences from the other women surrounding her in that she sees the male inflicted rigidity for what it is – a corrupted role reversal initiated by imperial design and instilled into the minds of women. Assuming much of the coercion derives from the men of her community, Esperanza reaches out to various women for help only to realize that they are equally devious. The problem with this binary is that the women are unconscious of the juxtaposition. As most of the women adopt pedagogical practices of oppression, Esperanza conversely aspires to teach other women to be aware of the system in hopes of refuting it and bringing about social change. She ultimately decides to resist and help the other women, bringing them into awareness; although, the step out of conformity is one they will have to consciously make on their own. As Esperanza tries to subvert, Barton also emphasizes that the system is not corrupting only one race, one class, one religion – we are all doing it to ourselves: “When we are united in this struggle, we shall better be able to support one another in our work towards ending sexism in all its manifestations in each and every culture” (25). In leaving her house on Mango Street and adopting pedagogical practices of resistance through her writing, Esperanza envisions a house she will utilize in pushing all women over the brink of liberation.
Works Cited


Phallacy book. Read 49 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Phallacy looks closely at some of nature's more remarkable examples of pen...Â Emphasizing our human capacities for impulse control, Phallacy ultimately challenges the message that the penis makes the man and the man can't control himself. With instructive illustrations of unusual genitalia and tales of animal mating rituals Phallacy shows where humans fit on the continuum from fun to fatal phalli and why the human penis is an implement for intimacy, not intimidation. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. Adolescents who indicated harming themselves reported significantly increased antisocial behavior, emotional distress, anger problems, health risk behaviors, and decreased self-esteem. Results provide support for the coping or affect regulation model of self-harm. Findings suggest that self-harm is associated with maladjustment, suicide, and other health behaviors indicative of risk for negative developmental trajectories. Discover the world's research. 20+ million members. Names: Willingham, Emily Jane, 1968â€“ author. Title: Phallacy: life lessons from the animal penis / Emily Willingham. Description: New York: Avery, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index. Identifiers: LCCN 2020007572 (print) | LCCN 2020007573 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593087176 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593087183 (ebook). The altered behavior could expose the crayfish, also known as crawdads in Louisiana where they are a staple in local cuisine, to increased risk of predators, which include eels and turtles as well as mammals and birds. It might also impact the entire aquatic ecosystem as crayfish eat algae and other organic matter that impact the recycling of nutrients - but this effect would likely come later and requires further study to confirm, the team wrote.Â It would be amusing if it triggered crayfish to go on random mass-killing binges. But there would still be.. "No relation to human behavior". sibeaudry Â• 2021-06-17T01:21:26Z.