

MEXICANADAS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY: CREATIVE PROBLEM
SOLVING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

by

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Rio Grande Valley, to my family, and to all the Chicano community in the U.S. May this project be a record of the amazing people from the RGV and the ways that they have been able to overcome their day-to-day struggles.

Dedicado a mi familia, el tesoro maspreciado de mi vida, mi inspiracion y mi razon de ser. En especial a mis padres, que se han esmerado en enseñarme, como tantos inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos, el valor del trabajo, la tenacidad, y mas importante que todo, el amor.

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Abstract

Everyone has problems in their life but not everyone has equal access to resources—tools, money, time, or knowledge—to properly solve them. As the wealth gap within the U.S. continues to grow, some communities have been forced to find creative solutions to their day-to-day problems because of the resource deficit. The Mexican community in the Rio Grande Valley and Northern Mexico is no exception to this phenomenon, as they practice what they call *Mexicanadas* to get by, the word *Mexicanada* is slang for creative problem-solving with limited resources. This encompasses mainstream solutions to problems like duct tape and zip ties to more complicated and creative solutions like putting materials/pieces together that do not belong. This qualitative project will explore the topic of *Mexicanadas* through photography and in-depth interviews with Valley natives. The goal of this project is to celebrate the Mexican American community of South Texas, to educate outsiders into this “in-group” phenomenon, to inspire the audience to be more resourceful, and rethink the way they view problems.

Introduction

My project is born out of my experiences, experiences that are common in many working-class, immigrant, and minority communities in America's inner cities, borderlands, and Latinx barrios. Since my experiences are the inspiration for this project, it would be helpful for the reader to get to know me a little before delving into the actual topic.

I am a first-generation Chicano/Mexican American from the Rio Grande Valley, commonly known as "The Valley" or "The RGV". Growing up in the borderlands, with Mexican parents, I was raised in both the U.S. and Mexico, where I was able to develop impeccable Spanglish and bicultural identity. It is in my upbringing in the Valley and Reynosa, Mexico that I started noticing *Mexicanadas* being practiced not only by my family but by the general public. *Mexicanada* is modern slang used in the Valley and the northern part of Mexico for creative problem solving with limited resources.

Mexicanadas can range from simple ideas such as putting foil paper on your grill, so it does not get dirty, using an onion cut in half to clean the grill, or more complicated things like using a forklift as a skyjack. The images below are pictures that I have collected over the last few years of *mexicanadas* that I have seen while working construction in the summers and winter breaks.



Photograph 1: Forklift and pallet being used as a "lift"



Photograph 2: Aluminum foil used on grill



Photograph 3: HVAC insulation tube used as knee pads

Mexicanadas are sometimes hard to understand because of their naturally ambiguous nature since there is no hard definition of what a *Mexicanada* is or is not. Therefore, I will do my best to break the pictures down and explain how and why they are examples of *Mexicanadas*. In picture 1 we can see a man standing on a pallet that has been raised by a forklift, he is cleaning the walls with a water pressure gun and prepping the wall for paint. This is a perfect example of Mexicanadas because the painter was faced with a problem and limited resources, not having a lift,¹ and was able to come up with a quick, easy, and risky solution that saved him time and money. Picture 2 is a photo of a steak being cooked on a sheet of aluminum foil on top of the actual grill, this was done to prevent the grease from sticking to the grill or dripping down into the fire and giving the steak a burnt taste. In picture 3 we see an HVAC insulation tube, similar to a pool noodle, being used as makeshift knee pads. I did this when I was working in construction, putting grout on the floor tile and did not have knee pads. This is a *mexicanada* because I was able to reduce the pain on my knees by using the leftover material laying around in the construction site.

One of my earliest memories of a *Mexicanada* is when a loose bolt came off the handlebars of my bicycle, I was around seven years old. I was riding around in my neighborhood, making a turn when suddenly the handlebars came completely off the bike, in that instant I understood that my bike was a goner and that I was sentenced to a gnarly fall. The rough pavement scraped my tender elbows, and as the blood flowed down my arm my first instinct was to get my bike and myself out of the middle off the street. As I walked home with the frame in one hand and the handlebars in the other, I

¹ A lift is equipment used in construction for the purpose of reaching higher heights with a platform. Commonly known as scissor lifts, booms, skyjacks, etc.

was very upset because I did not have a bike anymore. Seeing it be split in two seemed to me at the time as an unsolvable problem but as I mourned my bike out in the yard my uncle came up to me to try and help. He looked at my bloody arms, the bike, and then told me something that I will never forget “*no podemos controlar lo que nos pasa en la vida, lo único que puedes controlar es tu reacción a la situación, haci que sonriele a la vida*”, We cannot control what happens to us in life, the only thing that we can control is our reaction to the situation we are in, so smile at life. He then took a piece of newspaper, damped it with water, and tightly rolled several layers of it to make a small but firm rod of paper. He then inserted that rod of newspaper into the hole where the bolt had once been in while it was still wet, when the newspaper dried my handlebars were once again firmly attached to my bike, making it functional once again. Although this *mexicanada* was only a temporary solution to my problem, that day he gave me much more than my bike back. He gave me a lesson and a new perspective on life, a perspective based on love, creativity, and most importantly resilience.

My thesis project will be an in-depth analysis of *Mexicanadas* in the Rio Grande Valley. The project will use scholarly literature, photography, and in-depth interviews to explore the topic and find all the ways that people in the RGV use *mexicandas* in their day to day lives.

I hope that this project can add to the conversation of *rasquachismo*, a theory developed by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, educate people on the topic, and inspire the audience to be more resourceful—but most importantly to celebrate Chicanismo, the Valley, and the Raza’s resilience.

My thesis project will begin by first explaining Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's idea of *rasquachismo* and connecting it to *mexicanadas*. After that connection is made, I will give some historical context of the Mexican-American/Chicano experience in the U.S. and how that led to both *rasquachismo* and *mexicanadas*. I will also talk a little bit Gloria Anzaldúa's work *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and how her theory on the new *Mestiza* fits within the scope of this project. Lastly, I will talk about *mexicanadas* from a wider perspective using globalization theories and tying it back to Anzaldúa's work but at the same time looking forward into the future into how *mexicanadas* are part of a global tendency.

Mexicanadas & Rasquachismo:

Rasquache was a derogatory term used to describe something/someone from the lower class, that suggested in Ybarra-Frausto's words, vulgarity or bad taste (1989). For example, someone might have said "*mira un carro rasquache*", look a *rasquache* car. This word is comparable to the English words of "Ghetto" or "Ratchet", in their function to describe something/someone from the working class or of poor taste. The term *rasquache* was then reclaimed by the community during the Chicano movement, as a way of showing Chicano pride. The term *rasquache* and its newfound meaning evolved into what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto describes as the "Chicano sensibility" or *rasquachismo*, practiced by many Chicanos across the U.S. (1989). Some examples of this art might be art that is made from recycled material or art that has paradoxical elements. *Rasquache* art, essentially, is creativity, humorous, ingenuous, rebellious, and tacky (Mesa-Bains

1999; Roybal 2013; Ybarra-Frausto 1989). I have attached some examples of *rasquache* art that might be useful in understanding exactly what it is.



Photograph 4: Handbag made out of bottle caps.

*Miskell, Brad. Accessed Oct. 25, 21
<https://pin.it/4XQigWq>*

Photograph 5: Sculpture of the Virgen Mary with sunglasses.

*Raya, Marcos. "Mexican Rasquache". UIMA
Twitter. Accessed Oct. 25, 21
<https://twitter.com/uimart/status/885603389727543296>*





Photograph 6: We can see a yellow house with a lot of easter and Tweety bird decorations.

Fisch, John. 2014. *Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City*. Accessed Oct. 25, 21
<https://creativetimereports.org/2014/09/15/spatial-justice-rasquachification-race-and-the-city/>

Photograph 4 is an example of *rasquache* art because it is using recycled materials, the bottle caps, to make the piece. Other than that, this purse is also probably not the most functional one, which makes it a little rebellious and humorous that an object that is supposed to carry around things cannot do that. Photograph 5 is considered *rasquache* because it is a statue of the virgin Mary with sunglasses on, this of course is very rebellious because it is controversial, especially for catholic believers. Photograph 6 is *rasquache* because it completely disregards house decoration norms and puts things, stuffed animals, that would not usually be used to decorate a home as decoration. It is purposefully deviant and tacky which makes it fall under *rasquachismo*. These three photos above are not *Mexicanadas* and lean more into the artistic camp of *Rasquachismo*. They were done with the intent of sending a message or serving aesthetic purposes and

not solving a problem or being practical. Of course, a lot of *Rasquachismo* and *Mexicanadas* overlap but to me, the intentionality is the main distinction between the two.

Ybarra-Frausto argues that *lo rasquache* manifests itself through art and the Chicano's attitude on a day-to-day basis. In *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility* he says

In an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit, and movidas. Movidas are the coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope. Rasquachismo is a compendium of all the movidas deployed in immediate, day-to-day living.

Resilience and resourcefulness spring from making do with what is at hand (*hacer rendir las cosas*). This use of available resources engender hybridization, juxtaposition, and integration. Rasquachismo is a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluence, preferring communion over purity. (Gonzalez and Ybarra Frausto 2019:86)

Movidas are the solutions that Chicanos use to solve their day-to-day problems, these *movidas* are born out of necessity and involve ingenuity. The most important thing he says is that the compilation of these *movidas* are what make up *rasquachismo*, giving them importance in the perspective. The word *Mexicanadas* is the contemporary slang used to describe what Ybarra-Frausto describes as *movidas*. Like I said previously I grew up around these *movidas/mexicanadas* my entire life, I was familiar with the word *mexicanada/s* at a very young age. It was a casual word that was used in my home, mechanic shops, construction sites, parties, and anywhere else where a creative solution

was given to a problem. The word *mexicanada* was used in both Mexico, particularly the city of Reynosa, and in all the Valley.

Ybarra-Frausto does a great job in explaining just how these *movidas* have become an integral part of the culture. *Mexicanadas* are a reaction to the lived realities of the community, they are born out of necessity to survive. But even though the individual might not be struggling to physically sustain, there might be other internal/cultural struggles for survival which is why this perspective is embraced with love by the community. For the Chicano *rasquachismo* is much more than art or a way of saving money; it is their way of life, a deeply felt identity. This is why we might see *mexicanadas/movidas* by all social classes, even those in the high class who might have enough money to properly fix the problem like paying a mechanic or a plumber. They do not try and *mexicanada* their way through their problems because they are stingy or because they are broke but because they have been socialized by their families and communities to solve the problems themselves. Chicanos who do *mexicanadas* are a product of Mexican and American culture, history, and shared struggles that have conditioned their social behavior to be that of resilience and creativity. *Lo rasquache* perfectly encompasses *Mexicanadas* through *movidas* and offers it an ideological home in academia in which to live.

Literature Review

Historical Context

Humans have always adapted themselves, their behavior, and their environment to survive. *Mexicanadas* are the way that the Mexican immigrant community has adapted their very human instinct of surviving in contemporary times. But we can see early examples of this adaptation in the region from pre-colonial times with the very ingenious ways that Mesoamerican civilization built their temples, art, and clay pottery. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma points out that clay pottery allowed these civilizations to create practical tools like containers to carry around water and food, but most importantly pottery gave them a creative means in which to express their self-identity (2008). Like many other cultures, the Mexican people were able to transform their survival instinct into something beautiful through Clay artifacts. I believe it is this same creativity that their descendants will later express through *Mexicanadas*.

The history of Mexico gives us many other examples of the way that its people have had to adapt for survival. One of the most controversial figures of this has to be Malintzin, most commonly known as *La Malinche*, who was the translator for Hernán Cortés in his conquest of Mexico. Her position in Mexican culture is understandably complicated, some considering her a traitor, a victim, or the first example of Mexican feminism. Academics cannot seem to agree on many things regarding *La Malinche*, like the significance of her role in the conquest of the Aztecs, her intentions, or even what her name really is (Godoyol 2012). What is important to point out about her are two things, primarily, that she sets a hybridization precedent. She mixes the Indigenous blood with the Spaniard one, to make the Mexican race, a race based on hybridization. Secondly, she

was able to control two powerful men Cortés and Moctezuma, changing the course of history. This manipulation from both sides, in my eyes is a powerful foreshadowing for the manipulation that was to come from her decedents through their *mexicanadas*.

Malintzin is a great example of the adaptation that can come from oppression and limitation. She was sold into slavery by her family and later given away by her owner, with no say in the matter, as a gift to Cortés (Pratt 1993). History shows us that she was able to adapt in these horrible situations to learn Mayan and Spanish languages during her captivity. I see her life and struggles in a similar light to what the Mexican community is now experiencing in the U.S. Even though literal slavery is no longer part of the story, the community has been able to adapt to the difficult positions they were placed in with their *mexicanadas*.

To understand *Mexicanadas* and the reason Mexican culture was able to harvest/foster the growth of such a phenomenon we need to understand the social context of the Mexican state and its people. Like many other countries to come out of colonialism Mexican society was heavily influenced by the exploitation they suffered at the hands of Spain. Mexico was a colony from the 16th century up until the early 19th century when the oppressed people of Mexico raised arms for independence. Even though they were now independent, the 286 years they spent under colonialism left behind an exploitative economic system and a highly stratified society (Bernal 2009). The wealthy *Hacendados*², among other elite political figures, controlled the lower class, comprised mostly indigenous and mestizo people, that lacked the proper resources and luxuries that the higher class had. This scarcity experienced by the lower class is important for the

² Hacendado is a Spanish word used to describe someone of high rank in colonial Mexico, usually a property owner or descendent of a property owner.

development of *mexicanadas* because it creates a social dynamic in which people with little economic means are forced to live next to people that do not have that problem.

The same dynamic repeats itself in the mid 19th century when Mexico loses the Mexican-American war and is forced to give the U.S. over a third of its land. Even though the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which declared the end of the Mexican-American war, guaranteed the Mexican citizens living in the territory that the U.S. was about to annex, all the privileges and rights as the White race, this did not bear fruit in reality (Anzaldúa 2012). Mexican citizens became second-class citizens overnight and were suddenly foreigners in their own land. As white opportunists started to come into the new territory Mexican citizens started to be dispossessed of their land, which they were legal owners of. With no land and no social capital on which to dispute these injustices, the Mexican people were once again forced into the lower class of the new society they were part of. This again created the same dynamic that had existed in colonial Mexico where we have two highly segregated communities living in the same society. The oppression experienced by the Mexican people and their limited economic means creates an environment that once again lends itself for *Mexicanadas*.

The oppression that the community faced at that time was not only financial but affected them through all social institutions, including the government. One of the most notorious examples of the abuse of power was that of the Texas Rangers, a law enforcement group that was infamous for their massacres and abuse of authority in South Texas. They were known to be frequent liars and did not follow or respect due process, excusing their behavior by saying they were in a state of war with bandits (Warnock, Warnock, and Henley 2004). The shared discrimination experienced by the community

created an in-group/out-group feeling among the community with its ideas and way of life. As time passed American law started to change and there were significant improvements in the quality of life of Mexican Americans and the Mexican community in the U.S. But even though things have improved discrimination and second-class citizenship still exist. Redlining and discriminatory practices prevented the community from accumulating wealth, Latinos have some of the lowest incomes from all races and ethnicities, the community was hit hard by the war against drugs as it was stripped from valuable social capital. Mass incarceration shunned community members into lengthy sentences, excluding them from voting, getting an education, and generally, being productive members of society, exacerbating the instability in Latinx neighborhoods. In fact, in recent years from 2000 to 2013 the number of Hispanics in prison has increased by more than 50% (Kilgore 2015). In modern society all aspects of social life are increasingly intertwined with each other, and Latinos have been put in a difficult social position that has reinforced the shared sensibility that has been building since the start of colonization and continues through mass incarceration.

It is this shared sensibility and sentiment of oppression that is transformed into acts of resistance that will eventually lead to the Chicano movement of the 1960s. It is this movement that cemented the Chicano name and identity embracing the community's history and shared struggle. An important time in Mexican American history as it was the first time that a collective movement mobilized the community to fight for workers' rights, land, educational reform, and basic civil rights (Carillo). The Chicano movement was an interesting time in which the community flourished and outpowered itself with pride. It is this cultural enrichment of the 60s that would lead the Mexican American

community to embrace and engage in *Mexicanadas*. Like many things to come out from this era, *Mexicanadas* are a combination of American and Mexican values that reflected the community's newfound identity, an identity that valued hybridization. The story of *Mexicanadas* and how they came about is really the story of the Mexican-Community, whose adversity forced them to think outside the box and find their own solutions.

The Mestiza Consciousness

The Valley was and continues to be, a synergy of both American and Mexican cultures that creates a uniquely bicultural environment. It is this environment that can be found in many other communities along the southern border of the U.S. where the Mexican community is present. It is in these transnational spaces that we find a unique environment different from that found further north in the U.S. or further south in Mexico. This environment is not separated by the border as much as it is united by it, much like mestizos were in colonial times, not separated but united by both European and Indigenous blood. This mélange of cultures and the resulting identity is what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the “mestiza” consciousness. A consciousness that finds power in inclusivity that is a result of “racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross-pollination” (Anzaldúa 2012:77). The mestiza consciousness is shared by all those who like Anzaldúa are torn in between two cultures, bringing within them tolerance for ambiguity. It is this tolerance for ambiguity that makes them capable of adapting to the environment around them and holding otherwise rigid concepts open for interpretation and subjectivity. How could they not think of concepts and the physical world as flexible when their very own identity is based on deep contradictions within.

It is the mestiza consciousness, that has allowed the Valley and other places like it to create bicultural phenomena like Tejano music, bajo sextos (a six-string guitar used in Tejano/norteño music), Spanglish, mural art, lowriders, trokitas (Spanglish word, comes from English word *truck* and is used to describe a pick-up truck that is lowered like a low-rider), and most importantly *mexicanadas* and rasquachismo. It comes to no surprise that people along the border, who embrace diversity and subjectivity within themselves might tinker with objects around them. *Mexicanadas* are a mirror into the community's feelings about themselves and the world around them. They reflect the people's own mestizaje and subjective view of a cruel world that is in constant need of manipulation.

Mexicanadas on a Global Perspective

Francisco A. Lomelí describes the borderlands as a glimpse into the future, a future in which all people are of mixed races and ethnicities (2012). Where the mestiza consciousness reigns, and harmful ideologies of pure/superior race are a thing of the past. His idea of the future is that of one human race that finds power in its mixture of blood, very similar to what we see now in contemporary border regions. This future described by Lomelí is what many scholars imagine will eventually happen when globalization reaches its final stages of composition.

Pieterse in his book describes globalization as the increased interaction between people, a historical process that has undoubtedly increased since 1990 with the expansion of the internet (Yeganeh 2012). Although globalization has happened and continues to unravel itself in modern times, it has not come to an end, some theorists like Pieterse have their own ideas on how it will end. One of the possible endings is that of the hybridization perspective, where distinct cultures come together to create a global

mélange (Yeganeh 2012). This is the same idea that Loemli brought up when he described the borderlands as a land of the future in which different races and ideas mixed to make a unique one. It is also the same idea that Anzaldúa talks about with the *mestiza* consciousness, the new consciousness that border dwellers have as a result of their transcultural experience. Hybridization is something that has already been happening in the border region and because of it, as I have previously explained with the *Mestiza* consciousness, the people who have experienced it think of their world very differently than someone who has not. It is this constant mixture of cultures, blood, and ideas that help Border citizens tolerate ambiguity and creatively think of their world around them. It could be theorized that *mexicanadas* and other creative problem-solving practices around the world have only been increased through globalization, as hybridization changes perspectives of global citizens. Another way in which I see the hybridization increasing Mexicanadas around the world is through the internet and the sharing of *life hacks* and memes displaying the humoristic side of solving problems in uncommon ways.

Even though globalization and its economic benefits have been increasing at an exponential rate in the last years, with the rise of the internet, this success is not shared equally. Third world countries, commonly known as the global South among globalization scholars, have been staying behind in the progress (Yeganeh 2012). Globalization has made the wide wealth gap even wider than before as wealthy countries take advantage of global trade and exploit the global south for its abundant resources. Even though the United States is one of the countries that has greatly benefited from globalization, not all its regions have shared the prosperity. One of them has been the RGV, which has one of the lowest income rates in the entire nation (Ura 2016). As the

wealth gap continues to be exacerbated by globalization, places like the RGV find themselves even further than they already were to their fellow Americans. The difference in income makes the Valley the perfect place to practice *Mexicanadas*. This is because as people start to experience an increased feeling of resource scarcity, they begin to think more creatively about the things they have at hand (Mehta and Zhu 2016). Globalization has fostered a perfect environment for *Mexicanadas* as people in the Valley experience an increased feeling of resource scarcity, as they see that the widening wealth gap within the U.S. increases. *Mexicanadas*, therefore, act as a vehicle bridging the gap between the lower class and the increasingly global high class.

Research Methods

This is a qualitative research project that uses in-depth interviews and photography as its primary research methods. To recruit interviewees, I made flyers and posted them on social media, I reached out to my local network in the Valley, and through snowball sampling I was able to interview 29 people. I used the snowball method for a few reasons, first because of how taboo it is to talk about money within the culture, and secondly, because of the time constraint. Since *Mexicanadas* are closely tied to income and resource availability, it made it difficult to find subjects who would be willing to have an open discussion about it with a stranger. The unwillingness of people to talk about money made snowball sampling ideal for the project because it gave me insider access to the networks of people without having to spend too much time establishing rapport. Having someone in the community vouch for me, made the interviewees a little more comfortable knowing that I was a person who could be trusted.

Throughout the data collection state, I also attempted to interview random people around the RGV. What I did for this was that I drove around the main business streets of the Valley and into the neighborhoods around these major streets. Whenever I would see something interesting in a house, business, or in construction sites I would stop, explain the project, and ask for an interview. Even though a lot of people were friendly and showed support for the project only a few granted me formal interviews. Not only was there a certain level of mistrust of higher education institutions but they would also lose money if they stopped their work to talk to me. Those who did agree to the interview still showed a certain level of discomfort, especially when signing the waiver, but I tried to alleviate that by blending with them as much as possible. I would frequently code-switch my language from English to Spanglish, to proper Spanish, depending on how I gaged the person's body language and general engagement.

All interviews were done in person at the subjects, home, workplace, or at a neutral place where they felt most comfortable. I had prepared a series of nine questions, with each one having several follow up questions. To comfortably get through the nine questions it would take me around 30 to 60 minutes. To remember the conversations, I recorded all of the interaction with a portable recorder and wrote notes on a notepad for each question. Paying special attention to the subject's word choice, facial expressions, and emotional response like laughter. After the interview I would take photographs of the *mexicanadas* that they had talked to me about, because the objective of this project is to not only expose this interesting topic but also celebrate the community. I made it a point to take the subject's portrait next to their *mexicanada*, usually as they talked to me about, trying to capture the essence of the moment. Rarely did I ask them to pose in a specific

way, the interview subjects were given complete autonomy over their body posture, hand signs, and or facial expression. It was my hope that this liberty of expressions would allow the individuals to convey their feelings and attitudes towards their *Mexicanadas* in the way they decided to pose with them.

This is a table of all of the people that I interviewed. With their individual genders, age, whether they grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, and their occupation at the time of the interview.

	Interviewee	Gender	Age	Grow up in the RGV	Occupation
1	Angeles Silva	F	50	No	Housekeeper
2	Luis Hernandez	M	48	Yes	Handyman/Mechanic
3	Sara Hernandez	F	44	No	Housekeeper
4	Consuelo Silva	F	70	No	Housekeeper/Retired
5	Arturo Sandoval	M	40	Yes	Carpenter
6	Ignacio Hernandez	M	72	No	Framer/Carpenter
7	Daniel Gutierrez	M	52	Yes	Superintendent
8	David Dominguez	M	19	No	Student
9	Maria Olivo Ramirez	F	73	No	Housekeeper/Retired
10	Jose Ramirez	M	72	No	Carpenter
11	George Selvera	M	58	No	Bussiness Owner
12	Hugo Hernandez	M	35	No	Body Shop Worker
13	Francisco Casique	M	45	No	Body Shop Worker
14	Jose S. Silva Sr	M	47	No	Electrician/Business Owenr
15	Rita Tristan	F	79	No	Housekeeper/Retired
16	Robert Flores	M	48	Yes	Bussiness Owner
17	Jesus Palos	M	48	No	Maintenance/Electrician
18	Jose Felix Ibarra	M	55	No	Maintnace/Welder
19	Raymundo Almendanez	M	60	Yes	Retired Veteran
20	Jesus Oyervides	M	56	No	Maintenance/Electrician
21	Benjamin Peña	M	42	Yes	Educator
22	Belinda Rosa	F	53	Yes	Educator
23	Raul Ortiz	M	46	No	Cook/Business owner
24	Angel Martinez	M	44	Yes	Educator
25	Cesar Castro	M	40	No	Educator
26	Elias Guerrero	M	52	No	Business Owner
27	Tomas Ruiz	M	69	No	Laborer
28	Mariano Salazar	M	40	No	Bussiness Owner
29	Jorge Selvera Jr.	M	32	Yes	Maintenance/Entrepreneur

Analysis

One of the questions I asked in the interviews was in what type of environments the subject frequented *Mexicanadas*. To no surprise most responded by saying at home and/or at work, regardless of age or occupation. Considering that the two places that any individual might spend the most time in, except for students, is at home and at work it comes to no surprise that these are the two most common answers. The most logical way to organize the analysis section was by the subject's occupation, in the hope that this key distinguisher between people might give us some insights on the way that a person's day to day life could determine the type, frequency, and perspective on *Mexicanadas*.

Women's Perspective

When I started this project, my intention was not to focus on males but as the interviews unraveled themselves, I noticed that the overwhelming majority of them were men. I think that this arose for two important reasons, primarily, was that this was not a random sample of the RGV populations since I used snowball sampling. That means that I was referenced from one interviewee to the other, this as explained in the method section was the most appropriate sampling method because of the topic's sensitivity, since it is closely tied to money or an individual's frugal habits. The second reason as to why most of the subjects were men was the genderization of fields such as construction, where there are few to no women. These environments were the ones I was going after, which made it hard getting women's perspective if they are not there.

Out of the 29 people I interviewed, 6 (20.7%) of them were women, this section is dedicated to them and their experiences with *Mexicanadas*. I grouped them together

because they were a significantly smaller group and all their occupations overlapped, for the exception of one. 5 out of the 6 women I talked to were homemakers and one of them was an educator. Their ages ranged from 44 to 79 years old and none of them had grown up in the RGV but had lived most of their adult lives there.

One of the most interesting things about my conversations with the women was that 3 out of the 6 got emotional when talking about *Mexicanadas*. When I would ask them to explain what a *Mexicanada* was, most of them would give me a general explanation and then turn to personal examples. Talking about *Mexicanadas* would make them reminisce on their past and the struggles they endured. They would get teary eyed, and their voices started to slightly shake, they would tell me that those were the things they had to do to survive. I think that most of them would get emotional because they would think of their family. Especially their parents who did everything they could to give them a comfortable life, even if they had to use some *Mexicanada* here and there. Even though men got serious when talking about their past too none of them showed any real emotion, I believe that this has to do with the norms in Mexican culture. It is more acceptable for women to show emotions, happiness, or sadness, and it is a cardinal sin for men to cry, especially in front of a stranger. The serious moments I had with women were often broken by laughter that would arise with narratives of ingenious *Mexicanadas* that saved the day. Not only did the rigging help them solve a problem they had in the past, but it also helped them cope with sad memories through humor.

Through my conversations with women, I was able to see that *Mexicanadas* are deeply tied to *familismo*, the cultural value of family within Mexican households. For most of these women their *mexicanadas* were done to help around the house, to nurture

their families. Their examples ranged from making clothing for their kids, by measuring with their hands, to using unconventional tools and tricks in the kitchen. Although, *familismo* was the most common value reflected in our conversations, it was not the only one. I was also able to see *marianismo* and the value placed in having a clean and presentable home. *Marianismo*, comes from the Catholic church's teaching of the Virgin Mary, a woman who sacrificed her free will for God's plan, the self-sacrifice that Mexican women try to embody for their family. For these women, most of them homemakers, their home is a symbolic part of their lives that reflects not only their personalities but their family's honor. The homes I was invited to were impeccable and it was easy to see that they took great pride in them. Everything was in order until they started showing me their *Mexicanadas*, which were often hidden behind closed doors or behind cabinets. They unsurprisingly stood out once I was made aware of them, but I would have otherwise not paid attention to them.

I believe that the fact that they were hidden from sight says a lot about the way women think and feel about *mexicanadas*. We can see the differentiations that Amalia Mesa-Basin makes between *rasquachismo* and *domesticana* which she says is the women's version of *rasquache* art, in *mexicanadas*. The women were indifferent to them, thankful for the problem they solved but not necessarily proud of them. They wanted to keep them in their home but did not want them to be visible to guests. An ironic dynamic that *mexicanadas* might be so prevalent in such an orderly environment or that they might be a necessary component in maintaining order at home. Like Ybarra-Frausto describes in his essay, *mexicanadas* are the day-to-day *movidas* that allow normal life to continue in harmony.

Something distinctive that women did was that they not only used *Mexicanadas* to solve problems, but they also used them as creative outlets for self-expression. In my conversation with Belinda Rosa, whose family have lived in the Valley for generations, I noticed that Mexicanadas had been in the Valley for a very long time. She told about all the ways that people used to live, through the stories of her grandparents. Picking up the left-over cotton that would be left behind by the machines or accidentally dropped in transportation, reusing the paper bags from grocery stores to cover textbooks, making clothing out of flour sacks, and even making house decorations from fishing line and beads.



Photograph 7: My ama, mom, shows me her most recent Mexicanada.



Photograph 8: Lucas, a great dane, learned how to open up the gate. His mom now ensures he does not escape with her Mexicanada, a collar wrapped around the pillar preventing it from opening even if it's unlocked.



Photographs 9: Broken shelves in the fridge were quickly fixed by some duct tape, that keeps them functional.



Photograph 10: It is common for people in the Valley to reuse food containers, in this picture we see a butter container being reused to store foods such as salsa



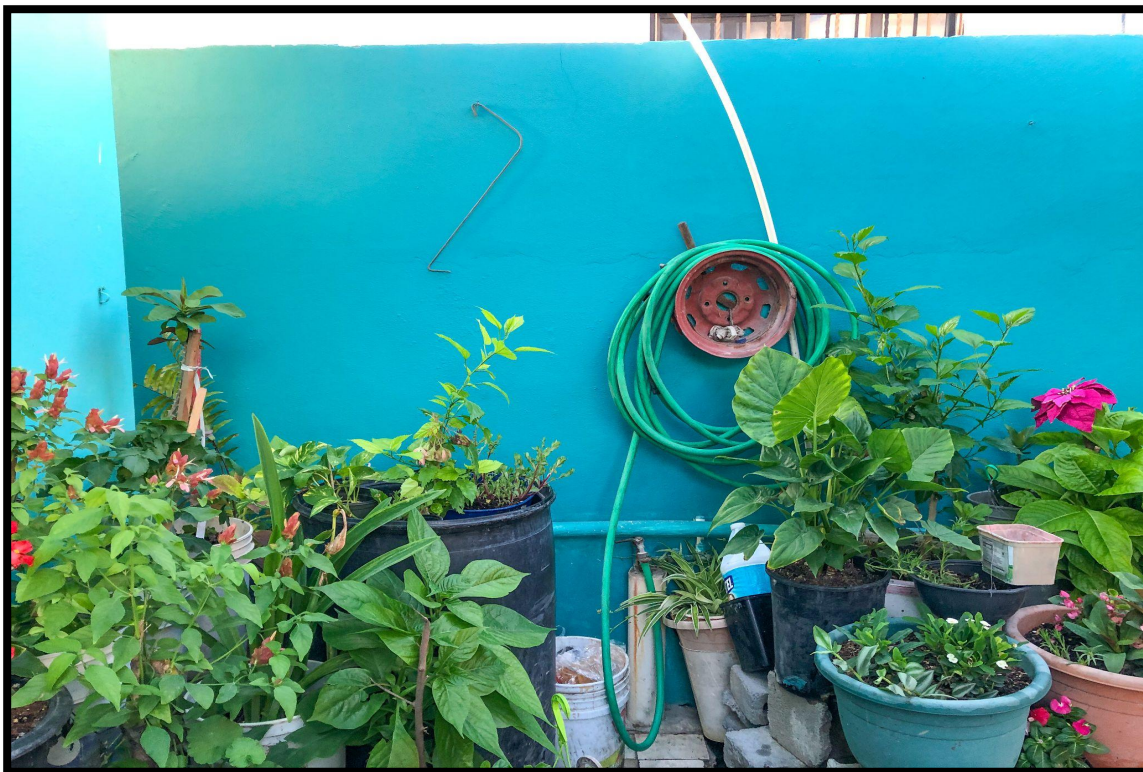
Photograph 11: Doña Olivia, shows me how she makes clothing, without using any rulers or tape measures. Measuring things with her hand, using manos enteras y dedos- whole hand (pictured above) and fingers.

Photograph 12: Common in Mexico and in the RGV is the practice of limpieas or barridas-cleansings, it is believed that rubbing the egg (or specific plants like mint) will absorb ojo-bad energy.



Photograph 13: Swing made out of recycled tire, hanging from metal pipe wedged between two trees.





Photograph 14: Old rim painted and hung on the wall, acting as a hose hanger.



Photograph 15: Mrs. Rosa, music educator, shows me her Mexicanada, rubber bands holding the reed to the mouthpiece, used in competitions when ligature on woodwind instruments fails.

Mechanics and Auto Body Work

One of the most common environments in which *Mexicanadas* are practiced are Mechanic shops, especially small ones working from unofficial settings like a garage or a driveway. The lack of proper tools and equipment lends itself almost perfectly for *Mexicanadas*. There is a whole economic sector on both sides of the border that rely on *Mexicanadas* to thrive. It is not uncommon for people to buy used or damaged cars in auctions across the U.S., transporting them to the border, selling them for parts or fixing them with *Mexicanadas* and then reselling them. This is especially common in Mexico where a lot of people do not have the money to buy a new car, so they buy them used and fix them up into a working condition. Little mechanic shops or handy men who do this job, do it for a fraction of the cost it would take a dealership or an accredited mechanic shop to do it. Of course, you might see a few rubber bands here and there, some colorful parts that do not match the rest of the motor but nonetheless they will get it going. This group of interviewees was composed of three individuals, 10% of total sample, who worked as mechanics and in auto body shops. Their ages range from 35 to 48 years old at the time of the interview. Interestingly none of them were born in the RGV but had been in the area for a large part of their adult lives.

In interviewing mechanics and people who have experienced these kinds of repair shops, I realized that they see the world differently than a typical person does. When you spend enough time in environments of limitation your perspective changes. For these three men, the world is less rigidly divided, and they are open to alternative ways of doing things. They are stuck between two worlds, the professional one with the proper solutions but are also fluent in the informal ways in which to get the job done. It is the

way they do everything, from looking for and identifying the issue, to solving it. One of my favorite stories from my best friend's family is when his car broke down and his grandfather, an amateur mechanic by professional standards but an expert *barrio* mechanic, helped him fix it. As they popped the hood open and turn the engine on, to hear the problem, his grandpa says "pasame el tubo del piso" – pass me the tube on the floor, it was a piece of a black flexible air intake tube that most cars have. My friend dumbfounded as he could not think of any reasons of why he might need a plastic tube to fix the problem, got it and handed it to him. His grandfather got one end and pressed it against his ear, with his other hand he got the other end and pressed it against different parts of the motor, listening carefully for any discrepancy. He was literally using a plastic pipe as a stethoscope to listen to the problematic engine, eventually he was able to identify the problem and fix it. My friend's story shows us something very important from the topic, even though *Mexicanadas* are described as creative solutions, they are more than solutions. *Mexicanadas* are a way of life for people in the border, it is a mental state based on possibility and hope. They are the way in which people from the RGV do everything, from finding a problem to fixing it.

In my conversations with this group of people, I did not get a lot of emotional reactions other than laughter. Something that was very apparent when talking to them was how proud they were of their *Mexicanadas*, when talking about them they would start smiling and progressively get even more excited as they posed with their inventions or tried explaining something they had done. This was very interesting because just like *rasquachismo*, the art, *mexicanadas* are commonly underappreciated and shunned by society. With no regard for social opinion, these workers have reclaimed a deviant

practice and made it a part of their cultural identity. Similarly, to the way the Chicano community reclaimed the word *rasquache* and the art itself, after it was ridiculed as ghetto and from the lower class. For these workers, *mexicanadas* are not something they are ashamed of, they view them as a necessary part of life that only clever workers like themselves can get away with.

For them *mexicanadas* were a symbol of intelligence and savviness that only a few could master. As they listed all the *mexicanadas* they knew for cars, it felt as if they were showing off to me by proving they knew a lot. It was very noticeable that in the border culture, knowing tricks for solving things carries a lot of social status. The more you know the more respect you get from your peers; I think this has something to do with Mexican cultures value of the elderly. The elders are well respected in the community and are, in theory, the wisest of the group because of their experiences. Knowing *mexicanadas* gave these workers a sense of social status because it showed they had been around for some time.

Another thing that I noticed from those conversations was that for two of them, they had a lot of trouble remembering the things that they had done. It might have been that they were put on the spot and were not ready to talk but during my conversations with them they really struggled to come up with some examples of *Mexicanadas*. It was clear that they were familiar with the concept, but they just could not remember things they had done. The absence of memory again supports the idea that Mexicanadas in the RGV are very normalized, to the extent that they do not even stand out to people anymore. Whereas someone who is not from there might notice odd things that people do such as reusing containers for food or cracking an egg into a radiator to fix a leak, for

people in the Valley these things are the norm. In the words of Hugo Hernandez, an autobody shop worker, “*En Mexico la unica manera de hacer las cosas es incorrectamente*”- In Mexico the only way of doing things is *incorrectly*.

Some of the Mexicanadas that the mechanics mentioned were ingenious, from the most basic ones like finding wholes in tires with a tub of water. By placing the tire in the water and carefully watching wear the bubble come out from. To cleaning a dirty car battery with some mineral water and a brush, taking off the corrosion in the terminals. One that shocked me had to do with a differential³, when the differentials get old, they start to make noises, to fix this some people put raw ground beef in it and close it up. As the car/pick-up gets used it starts to grind up the meat, releasing its oils and fats on to the gears making the differential stop squeaking. Something interesting in the autobody shop that I noticed that the workers did not realize they were doing, was the wide use of painter’s tape. They would fold it in half and make a loop to open doors without the door handle or fold it into a rope that was used to keep trunk doors from opening completely, allowing them to work on a specific spot. Because a lot of the *mexicanadas* the mechanics told me had to be done in a specific moment I could not photograph them, but I did capture some of the *mexicanadas* they had laying around in their shops.

³ A differential is the part of the vehicle that transmits the power from the engine to the wheels. It looks like a big ball joint at the end of a long stick, easily visible in the rear end of pick-up trucks as it is right between the rear tires over the axis.



Photograph 16: Luis H., handy man & mechanic, and his son JD pose for the camera



Photograph 17: Luis's Mexicanada is a blacksmith's anvil, used to bend metals over it. This one is made from an old train track, fence post, and an old wheel hub.



Photograph 18: Luis proud to pose with his Mexicanada with hammer in hand



Photograph 19: JD is happy to show the camera his dads homemade sprinkler system

*Photograph 20:
Hugo shows me
how the tape holds
the trunk open at
an angle so he can
work on it
comfortably*



Photograph 21: Workshop speaker/radio has a mexicanada for an antenna



Photograph 22: Mixing and pouring paint into spray gun using coffee cups





Photograph 23: Workshop table filled with coffee cups used to pour paint into spray gun



Photograph 24: The spring-loaded hose reel in the wall stopped locking when it was fully extended, the hose would go right back in, to solve this the workers in the autobody shop tighten an adjustable wrench that keeps it from going back in



Photograph 25: Painter's tape is folded and then used to hook the trigger in car door, you then pull on the tape to open it when the handle is taken off



Photograph 26: Juan demonstrates how to open the door with the painter's tape

Construction and Maintenance

In this section I have grouped all the people who worked in the construction sector in one way or the other, like maintenance workers or people doing remodeling projects. This interview group is, unsurprisingly, made up off only men. I contacted most of them by going through my father's contacts, he has been working as an electrician in the RGV for over 20 years. There was nine people in this section that I interviewed, making up 31% of the total interview subjects, unsurprising considering their willingness to talk about them on the job. Their ages ranged from 32 to 72 years old, and they worked in various positions such as electricians, carpenters, superintendents, contractors, and general laborers. Six out of the 9 people in this group grew up in the RGV, with many of the non-Valley natives being foreign born.

Just like the mechanics, construction workers in the RGV are well known for their *mexicanadas*. The low supervision of construction projects and the natural messiness that a construction project has, lend themselves for this kind of behavior. Not only that but considering the heavy workload and repetitive nature of some tasks makes workers think outside the box in trying to come up with easier ways in which to solve problems. Even though ease might be the motivation for some *mexicanadas*, it is not the sole reason why construction workers do them. For example, sometimes they feel rushed, for different reasons like material not coming in on time or waiting for another worker to finish his work before you can start your own, *mexicanadas* offer a faster alternative. Another common reason for *mexicanadas* is that customers do not always want to pay for the material that the contractor/electrician/plumber/etc. needs. This forces the trades men or contractors to find cost effective alternatives, whether this is good or bad, is up to

individual discretion. What is known is that *mexicanadas* help people solve problems regardless of what they might be.

This group had so many stories to tell me about their *mexicanadas* that I would not have enough time to do justice to each of them. What stood out immediately about their stories, other than the large quantity of *mexicanadas* each of them had, was that unlike all other groups they were more hesitant to say they were proud of *mexicanadas*. Even though they were all proud of some *mexicanada* that they had done at some point in their career, they were skeptical in completely agreeing that they are proud that the community does them. This shocked me because most people in other groups would respond with a “Very Proud!” when I asked if they were proud or ashamed that their community practiced *mexicanadas*. In comparison, the construction workers would pause to think for a minute and give me a hesitant yes. After digging around with follow up questions they would explain that *mexicanadas* could be used for good or bad. They are good in the way that they allow you to save time and money, but they could be very bad if someone was using them out of laziness and not necessity. They each shared stories of people they had seen use them to cut corners, in places where it is was not safe or wise to do so.

Something I learned from interacting with people in construction, through this project and my own personal work experience, is that *mexicandas* just like humor were a job requirement. They were a non-negotiable and in the words of Superintended Daniel Gutierrez, “you have to learn [*mexicanadas*]” if you want to be successful in the industry. As I asked these workers to sit down for a second and reflect on their lives and the way they have used *mexicanadas* they told me a few things that I think perfectly capture the

essence of the Mexican American experience. To these workers the *mexicanada* is a constant reminder of the beauty, pain, and irony of what it means to be a Mexican. They were born out of necessity and have been used masterfully by the community, even when they are no longer needed for survival. For the typical immigrant *mexicanadas* allow them to escape their reality and join a limitless one. To my father, just like many others, “Las mexicanadas me an enseñado a sonreir le a la vida”, Mexicanadas have taught me to laugh at life. They give autonomy back to the worker who has the power, even in the most stressful situations.

In Mexico there is a common saying, *la esperanza es lo último que muere*, hope is the last to die. I believe that mexicanadas are the literal manifestation of that saying as many of these workers expressed a sense of hope in the community and the future when talking about *mexicanadas*. A hope that all their problems would one day be a thing of the past and that the big issues that the country faces could be solved with a little creative thinking.



Photograph 27: Arturo Sandoval, puts up ceiling grid in the McAllen Medical Center remodelling project.



Photograph 28: Arturo shows the camera his tools.



Photograph 29: Ignacio Hernandez shows the camera his rivet tools.



Photograph 30: Ignacio putting up more ceiling grid on top of scaffold.



Photograph 31: Ignacio, 72 years old, poses for the camera.



Photograph 32: Ignacio tells me he once made a mexicanada for his drill, an extension drill bit of 36+ inches.



Photograph 33: Daniel Gutiérrez, Superintendent, says mexicanadas are more popular at home, because at work you must follow code.



Photograph 34: Jose Ramirez, known as "El Tio Lolo" shows me how he stores his screwdrivers for easy access.

Photograph 35:
Many construction
workers in the
RGV recycle
containers for
storage



Photograph 36: Tio Lolo
shows me his mexicanada, a
second level in his work van.
That he uses to store
sensitive material like
sheetrock wall. Allows him to
protect it and carry even
more things above it.



Photograph 37: To open the back door he has to pull the ring from the door on the side, the ring is attached to a chain on the back door that engages the trigger.

Photograph 38: When he started carpentry work, he wanted a leather pouch, but they were expensive. He made his own hammer holster from a piece of PVC pipe and used it with the apron that he got for free at hardware stores when you bought a box o nails.





Photograph 39: Tio Lolo poses for the camera after a day of working.



Photograph 40: This mexicanada helps Tio Lolo level heavy gates so that he can install them with ease.

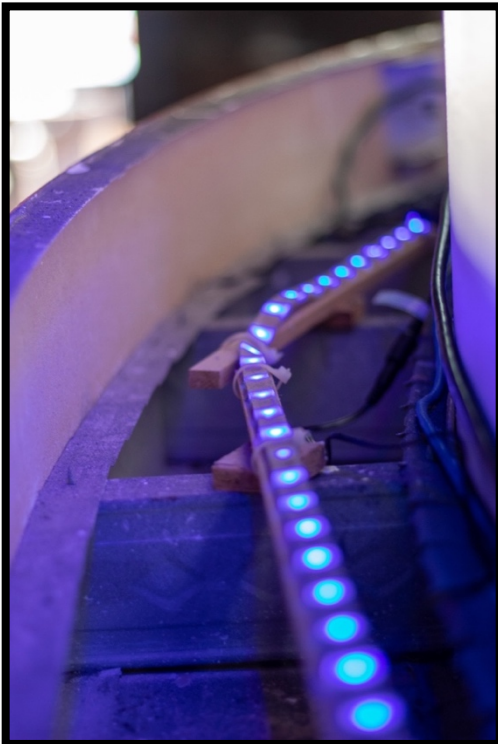


Photograph 41: My dad changing a light for his friends, got onto the roof with the ladder and then I passed it up to him so he can reach. Alternatively, we would have to transport a bigger ladder or rent a skyjack.



Photograph 42: The light pole is being held up by an empty electrical box. Its sole purpose is to support the pole.

Photograph 43: For as long as I can remember my dad has had this dolly, or diablito in Valley slang. It is a mexicanada because the 10 nuts welded to its frame allow it to act as a wire rack, used when wiring a house/building.



Photograph 44: Hidden light strip has to face up to be as bright as possible, to do this my dad zip tied them to small pieces of left over wood, acting as an anchor.



Photograph 45: Jesus Palos, tired of buying air fresheners for the restroom made his own mexicanada. Bought a small bottle of floor cleaner and made a pin hole in the bottom of it. He places the bottle in the water tank of his toilet. Whenever he flushes it a small squirt of the cleaner is released, making the water smell good.



Photograph 46: Instead of bending down to pick up nails and screws, Jesus Oyervides "Jesse" fishes for them with his mexicanada.



Photograph 47: Jesse made these benches from pallet wood he recycled.



Photograph 48: Jesse made this rack to hold wood from old electrical pipe he did not need.

Photograph 49: When Jesse's elderly mother was going to visit him, he wanted to make her as comfortable as possible. He used left over wood to raise a normal toilet up. Reducing the distance she had to squat down, making it easier for her to use this.



Photograph 50: Jesse also made a handrail on the stairs of his home for his mother, using PVC pipe.





Photograph 51: Tomas Ruiz, Don Tomas, uses his bike to transport tubing.



Photograph 52: Don Tomas poses for the camera with his bike.



Photograph 53: The sign protects the washer from the rain and dust. The pallet in the bottom protects the base of the washer from collecting rust when it floods.



Photograph 54: Don Tomas shows me one of the most iconic mexicanadas, a bag filled with water hanging outside, most of the times with a coin inside. It is believed that this mexicanada keeps flies away, because of the way it reflects the light hitting it.



Photograph 55: Don Tomas shows me his water key, that can be used to open or close the water supply of streets/neighborhoods.



Photograph 56: Dolly has plastic water bottle cut in half zip tied to it, this is used to hold welding rods or other miscellaneous tools.

Photograph 57: Jorge Selvera, is doing the final touches on his biggest mexicanada yet. A ramp used to unload an 18-wheeler, made from recycled plywood and old scaffolds.





Photograph 58: It took four people about 3 hours to unload all the cargo using the ramp.



Photograph 59: The ramp was made the morning it was needed, as Jorge thought of how he would unload all the merchandise he noticed the old scaffolds in his yard and began to build it.

Photograph 60: The wood was held down to the frame of the ramp using what Jorge calls "Mexican zip ties", pieces of wire.



Photograph 61: Jorge poses with his invention.



Mexicanadas in Business

In the Valley *mexicanadas* reach into every corner of society, even though they are more prevalent in lower class communities they are still present in some unthinkable places like in businesses. Especially small business owners or mom and pop shops that do not have the corporate backing to fix all the problems that may arise. This group was made up of five people, 17% of total sample, who in way or the other use *mexicanadas* in their businesses. Their ages range from 40 to 58 years old, and only one of them had been raised in the RGV, for the rest of them they have spent a considerable portion of their adult lives in the Valley. The five of them were independent business owners who operated small to medium size enterprises like scrapping, a laundry mat, carwash, landscaping, selling street corn and a staple of any Hispanic neighborhood a *paletero*, ice cream man.

An interesting aspect of *mexicanadas* that came up in my conversations with several businesspeople was the risk attached in doing a *mexicanada*. They would say something along the lines that risk is a natural part of any business undertaking and that with the risk comes reward. I feel as if in their eyes they thought of *mexicanadas* in the same way they did of a business. You must be flexible for your business to survive, when a problem arises you must adapt, after which you can enjoy relative stability until a change in the environment once again forces you to adapt. Which is the way that they would talk about *mexicanadas*, they understood that the world was constantly changing and that the *mexicanadas* was not a permanent solution but something that could allow you to continue with your day-to-day life. George Selvera, business owner and entrepreneur, said that in his experience Mexican people have an aptitude for risk taking.

That statement was engraved in me since I heard it and although I think it is a little of an overgeneralization, I do believe that he had a point.

People that lack resources and are surrounded by others in similar financial circumstances, will be more inclined to overlook/accept the risks associated with unconventional solutions because there is no other option. There will always be a risk involved when using a *mexicanada*, depending on what you are doing. Even though there might be an absolute risk, the community is so used to *mexicanadas* that the risk becomes relative to everything they have already done, which might make them seem prone to risk taking. I do not think that just because a person is Mexican, they might be more willing to take risks, but I do believe that living in a cutthroat environment like Mexico or the RGV a person will be socialized into accepting risk as a part of daily life.

Another interesting outlier from talking to people in business was, unsurprisingly, that they were very conscious about money and being wasteful. To them *mexicanadas* were another way in which they could run their business without having to incur unnecessary expenses. For Robert Flores, proprietor of a scrapping business, his business is based around buying and reselling anything that might be thrown out, cleaning, it, refurbishing and finding a customer who might want it. He explains that for him it all about “not being wasteful” and that he inherited this business model from his father, who thought him the ins and out of the industry. For Raul, a cook, *paletero*, and a catering business owner, *mexicanadas* are an integral part of both businesses. He explained to me that he started his catering business when he found someone giving away a flat top griddle because the propane gas was no longer fueling the burners. Without thinking he took it in and started working on it, attaching parts from scrap BBQ pits he found on it

until eventually he got it to work. He got what would have costed him \$800+ for less than \$50 and was then able to make more money off it by cooking for events. For his ice cream selling he transports his cart in his minivan, using a *mexicanada* to load it, traveling to the areas where it is easier to sell.

For Mariano Salazar an *elotero*⁴, adaptation has been key for the survival of his business. He has been selling corn for approximately 15 years, he first started by selling from a food truck which was not too successful, so he switched to a permanent location on a business plaza which had similar results. In a desperate attempt to find another location he started selling his corn out of a grocery cart he found in an ally in front of a jewelry store in McAllen. He quickly found that selling it more casually in the open air without any signs or buildings made him sell more corn. Even though he has moved across the street of where he used to sell it, he is now selling it from the trunk of his car, still having the same success. He tells me that his *mexicanada*, selling from the trunk of his car, works because when people buy corn they want to feel as if they are getting the most authentic snack they can. Mariano does this by emulating the experience of buying street corn in Mexico, usually at the side of a street out in the open. He tells me “*a la gente le gusta sentir como si estan comprando su elote en Mexico*”, people want to feel like they are buying their corn in Mexico.

Like many of the other groups, it was hard to get pictures of the stories some of them told me since they were in the past, nevertheless they still had some *mexicanadas* around them when I interviewed them. These are the photographs I took take from this group.

⁴ English Translation: Street corn seller, street corn is a common Mexican snack, it is usually white corn on the cobb or in a cup with mayo, yellow cheese, fresh Mexican cheese, lime, and sour cream.



Photograph 62: Mariano, has a strong clientele, which includes all kinds of people.



Photograph 63: Mariano making an "elote en vaso", which consists of white corn, butter, cream, fresh cheese, mayo, lime, and a chili paste.



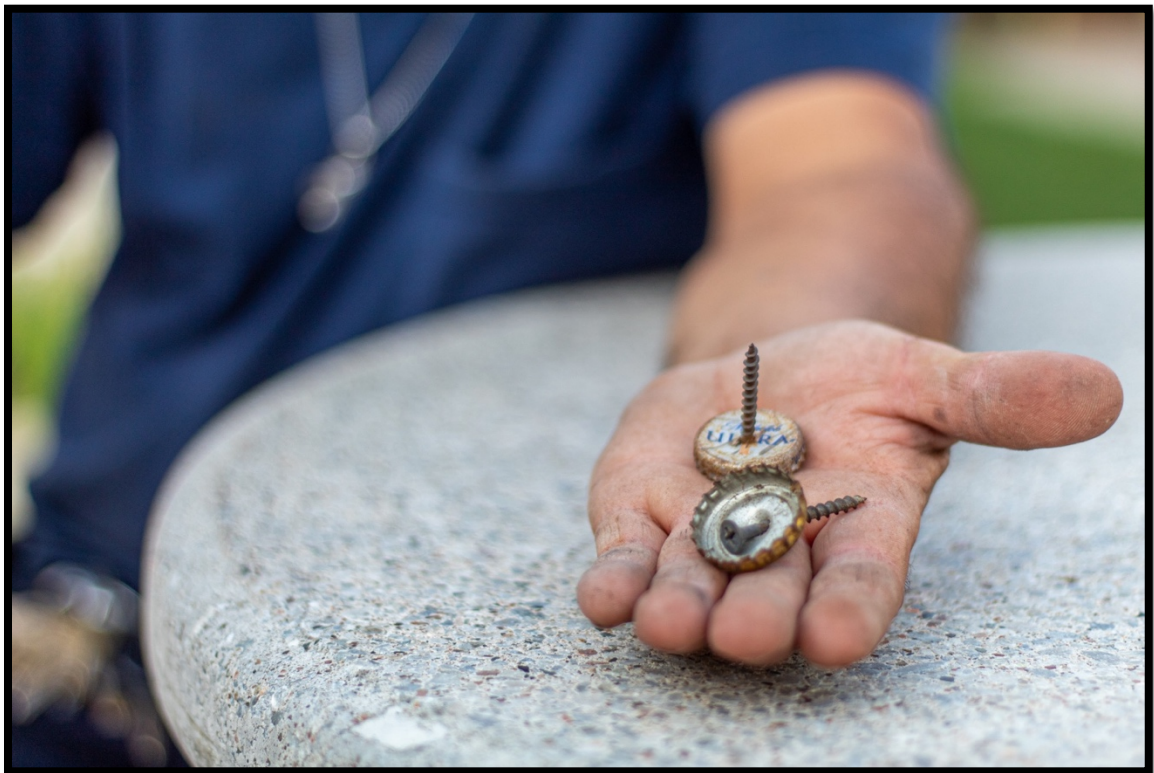
Photograph 64: Elote en vaso in all its glory ready to be mixed.



Photograph 65: Mariano has three coolers, one for the kernel corn, corn on the cob, and the last one with the ingredients like mayo and butter. He keeps the cups, napkins, and spoons on the cardboard box in the back.



Photograph 66: Mariano getting a corn on the cob ready.



Photograph 67: Robert Flores, shows me his mexicanada, that was passed down to him from his father. Its beer/soda caps used as washers to hold things down like a carp, preventing the carp from ripping through the carp when winds are strong.



Photograph 68: Robert Flores made a bird cage from recycled store racks, saving him hundreds of dollars.

Photograph 69: Robert, poses with his bird cage where he keeps his lovebirds.





Photograph 70: Old tractor rim used as a bonfire pit.



Photograph 71: Washer drum being used as a grill.



Photograph 72: Elias Guerrero using his lawn mower filled with mexicanadas.



Photograph 73: Elias poses with his mower.



Photograph 74: He lost the gas cap and fixed it with a mexicanada, a Walmart bag and a detergent cap.



Photograph 75: To let the grass fall out and not get stuck on the blades he permanently opens the side flap with a string. This mexicanada allows him to push with ease and get the job done much faster but it comes with a risk as it can send rocks flying.



Photograph 76: Elias starts his mower.



Photograph 77: A staple in any Mexican community is the paletero man, the ice cream man.



Photograph 78: Raul poses for the camera with his ice cream cart.



Photograph 79: He transports his ice cream cart using his minivan, to get to places where sales are the highest.



Photograph 80: He loads it into the minivan using a piece of wood he found.



Photograph 81: The cart surprisingly fits perfectly in the minivan.



Photograph 82: The last step in the process is giving it a flip.



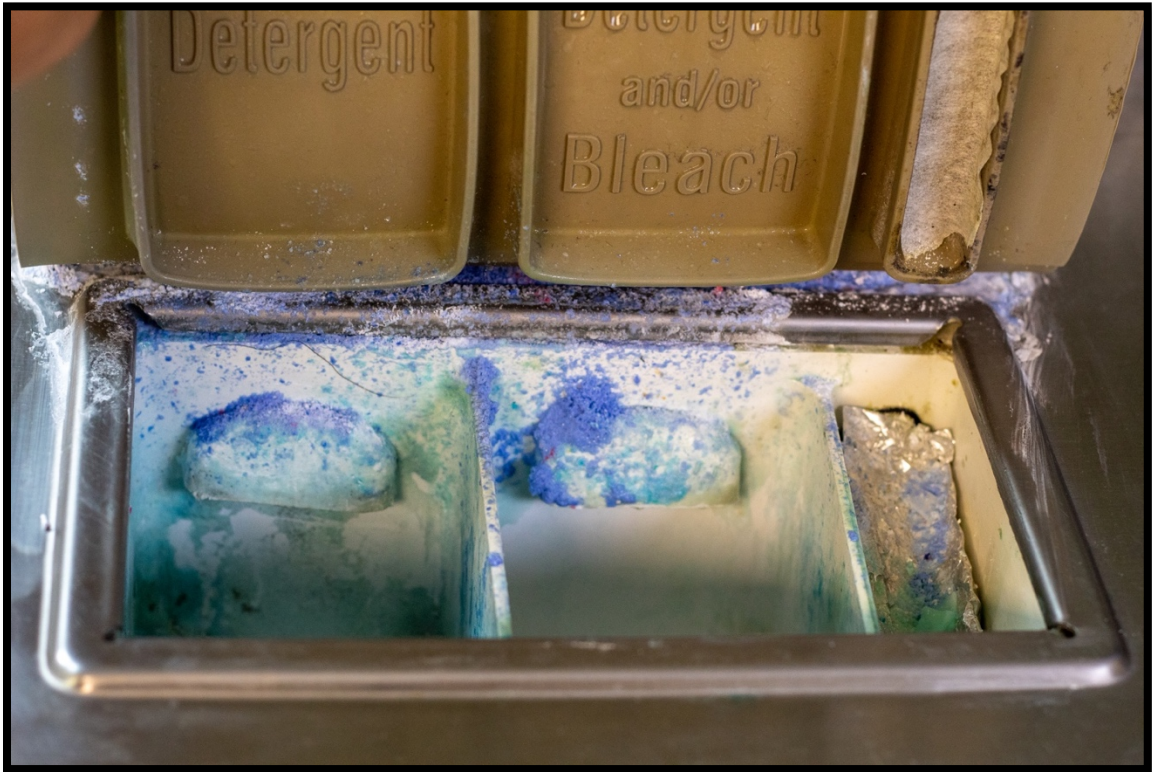
Photograph 83: The board also travels with the ice cream cart.



Photograph 84: George Selvera poses in his laundry mat's counter.



Photograph 85: Selvera shows me a hidden mexicanada he has installed in every machine.



Photograph 86: People kept putting detergent into the empty slot, this would mess with the machine and to prevent it he put foil paper on it to stop people from even thinking something goes in there.



Photograph 87: A customer left a cane in the business and never came back, Selvera now uses it to fix his machines.



Photograph 88: A/C water leak drops straight into the water faucet, avoiding cleaning or maintenance.

Photograph 89: When he bought the laundry mat the wheels on the carts needed fixing. He cut them off and welded a nut, then screwed a different wheel onto the cart. This mexicanada allows him to put them in and out whenever they had a problem.





Photograph 90 & 91: This mexicanada not only saved George money but it also allows him to continue saving money in the future. If a wheel were to mess up in the future all he has to do is unscrew it .





Photograph 92: George was tired of constantly having to unclog the drain, instead he put a wire mesh to stop the trash from going down.



Photograph 93: In his carwash people would often steal the vacuum head, to prevent this he screwed it on.

Educators and *Mexicanadas*

When trying to remember who I knew did *mexicanadas* who might be willing to talk to me, I remembered my time in public school and the different ways teachers often had to adapt. Public Schools, especially in minority communities, are notorious for having a lack of funding. Having to reuse old textbooks with outdated information, using equipment until breaking point, and many other things that teachers must do to provide the highest quality education they can to their students. This group was made up of four educators, one woman and three men, with their ages ranging from 40 to 53. All of them are experienced teachers who have worked with public schools for their entire careers.

My earliest memory of some *mexicanada* in school was when I was in kinder or first grade. One of my teachers, like many elementary educators, had a big box full of crayons that were broken or worn out. Whenever she found a crayon on the floor instead of throwing it away, she would put it in the box, and it would eventually be used. I remember using the 55-gallon barrels in football practice when I was in middle school as dummies, because we could not afford the actual football dummies. I remember my teammates stuffing socks in their cleats because they were too big for them to comfortably play. It was not uncommon for teachers to reprint material in the back of old worksheets they no longer needed, because the administration put a cap on the number of papers, they could print out to save money and paper. It was also common practice to see teachers folding the edges of papers when they would run out of paperclips so the papers would stay together. In band I remember my band directors teaching me how to clean

dirty pads ⁵from my saxophone with a dollar bill instead of taking it to the shop. This would not only save me the long line of instrument repairs in front of me but also save me from having to pay the expensive fees. Even though a lot of the times we did not have everything we needed in school, as any other normal public school, I am thankful for my teachers who did everything in their power, even if they used a few *mexicanadas* here and there, to give me the best education possible.

Angel Martinez, director of band in McAllen Memorial Highschool, said that what he likes the most about *mexicanadas* was that they bring the community together. He shared that he has had many positive experiences with band parents and band directors who have helped him come up with quick solutions that came up during football games or performances. Finding a creative solution to fix a problem brings people together, as it forces you to throw around ideas with each other it is not until the adrenaline has passed that the smiles break out as they realize how funny and unexpected the idea was. One of the most successful *mexicanadas* that he has done was when he to repair a marimba with line from a string trimmer, when the original string became popped. Marimbas are percussion instruments that have wooden planks ranging in sizes, hanging with a specialized string, on top of cylinders which amplify the sound when they are hit. He now does not leave the band hall without carrying an extra pair of string trimmer line.

For Benjamin Pena, a physical educator and coach, *mexicanadas* are the way he shows his students to persevere. Every time a problem arises, and he solves it with

⁵ To change notes in woodwind instruments like a saxophone, you need to completely cover the wholes they have. After playing it for a while saliva and dirt would build up on the pads used to cover the wholes making them sticky when playing.

creativity he makes it a point to share it with his students and friends, as to inspire them to be more resourceful in all aspects of their life. He has not only been able to use *mexicanadas* in his coaching style, by using the 55-gallon barrels and picking up old tractor tires to take them to practice but has also used *mexicanadas* at home. His most recent project at the time of the conversation was a playground he had built with no experience and just the help of YouTube. Just like him many of the teachers used their position as role models to inspire their students to think outside the box and not give up. In the words of Cesar Castro, college counselor, *mexicanadas* are in our blood and because they are we look at the world differently, nothing is trash to us.



Photograph 94: Coach Peña poses with his homemade playground.



Photograph 95: Tree stumps used as seats



Photograph 96: Coach Peña tries to make it a point to show his students that with creativity anything is possible.



Photograph 97: Coach Peña was able to build the playground for his children during quarantine with no prior experience and the help of the internet.

Photograph 98: Even the decoy owl, to scare birds away, is attached using a mexicanada.





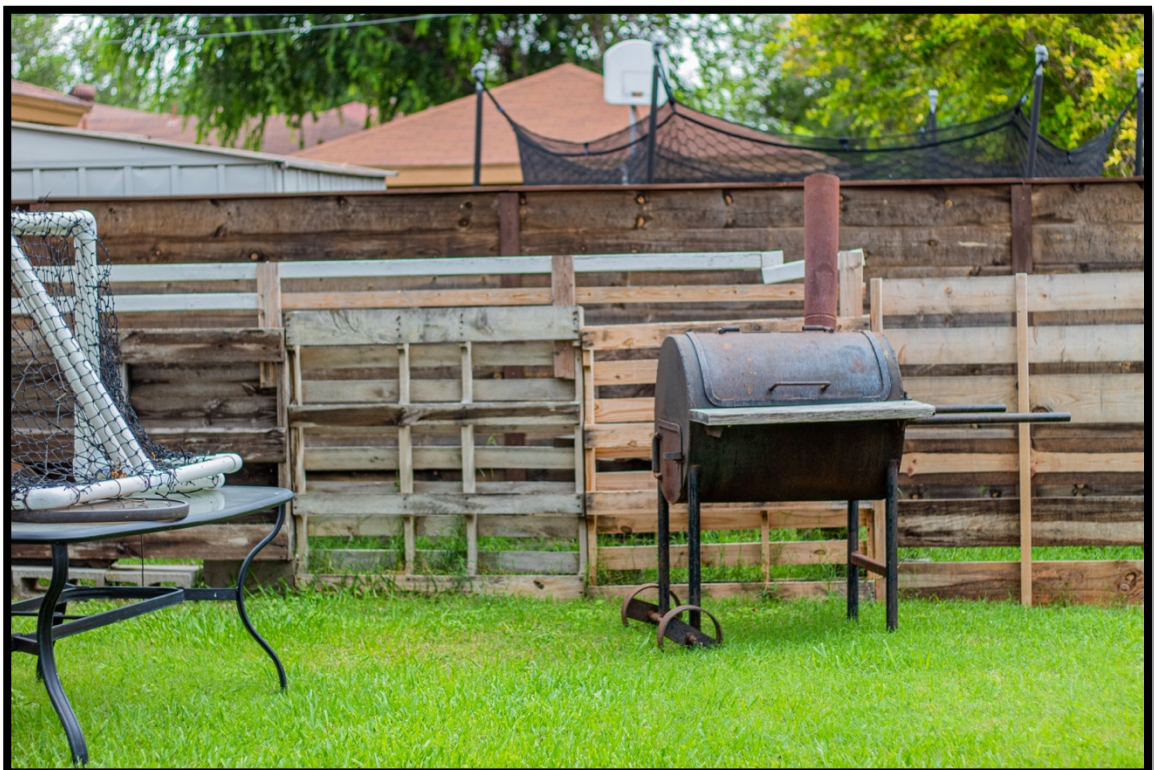
Photograph 99: He made these two goalies out of PVC pipe and paracord string.



Photograph 100: Net was attached to the goalie with zip ties.



Photograph 101: Like many of his mexicanadas, these goalies were for his kids.



Photograph 102: In his backyard he has a fence made from recycled pallets, where he keeps his dogs.



Photograph 103: Mrs. Rosa's desk has an ice cream tub used to store micellenous items.



Photograph 104: This is the "Xylophone that never dies"



Photograph 105: Mr. Martinez, director of bands at McAllen Memorial Highschool poses with the band's xylophone.



Photograph 106: The instrument is still fully functional and has had many mexicanada repairs throughout the years.



Photograph 107: Tape holds together what a screw once did.



Photograph 108: Paracord also helps hold together the xylophone's pedal.



Photograph 109: Paracord is also used to hold together the tone plates.



Photograph 110: Mr. Castro, needed to paint his kid's playground, instead he used leftover tile from his home to put it on the playground.



Photograph 111: This mexicanada saved him time, money, and future maintenance since it will last a lot longer.

Photograph 112: Not only that but the playground now matches the aesthetic of his house.



Mexicanadas as Self-Expression

A fine line exists between a *mexicanada* and *rasquachismo*, the art form. The key difference between the two is intentionality. Without getting into the philosophy of what is considered art or not, I differentiate the two by determining the intent of the action. If a person makes something with the intent of it being aesthetically pleasing or trying to make a statement, then it will fall under *rasquachismo* and not a *mexicanada*. For art to be *rasquache* it must have been born out of the Chicano experience, it must have some elements of creativity, humor, ingenuity, rebelliousness, and tackiness. On the other hand, a *mexicanada* is not art, it is what Ybarra-Frausto describes as the day-to-day *movidas* that the Chicano community uses to survive. A *mexicanada* is used to solve a problem or to save time, money, energy, etc. In this section I have put the people who titter totter that fine line between *rasquachismo* and a *mexicanada*. It is made up of four people, between the ages of 53 and 60 years old, who have been able to find a way for self-expression.

Belinda Rosa, a music educator, tells me that the *mexicanadas* her family used to do out of necessity are now inspirations for her to use new crafts. One of her most treasured crafts is a decorative piece that she made with her grandmother, it is made from fishing line and plastic beads. This she says is one of the many things that her grandmother did, with other creations being purses, coin bags, tabletops, among other decorative pieces. This invention would be hung up on the wall of a house and typically hold decorative flowers. Not only are her crafts made in this style but so are little things in her office and purse. Like re using plastic containers, such as an ice cream container, to hold materials or the plastic bags.



Photograph 113: Decoration made from fish line and plastic beads.



Photograph 114: Mrs. Rosa reuses food container to stay organized.

Raymundo Almendanez was born in the RGV in 1960, after serving in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper and suffering from a traumatic brain injury, he came back home. Avoiding traditional therapy or medicine, he began looking for a way to cope with his experiences. He found refuge in his art, which is the perfect example of rasquachismo art. His art is in every room of his home, but his most famous piece is his 1987 Chevrolet S10 pick-up truck. He has been working on this truck since got out of the service and it has made him into a local celebrity.

What stood out the most from my conversation with Almendanez was the way in which he was able to find peace in his art and the way in which this ongoing piece has united a community. He explained that he tries to put something new on the truck every day, he gives priority to the objects that were gifted to him by the community. Often

inviting them to participate in the adornment process. Decorating his truck takes his mind off things, giving him a new purpose and a conversation starter. Raymundo stands as a perfect example of the beauty that can come out of rasquache art if we nurture it.

When he invited me into his home, I was in awe of all the things he had, I attempted to photograph everything that I saw. Most of the things he had are considered rasquache art and not mexicanadas, because they were made for aesthetic purposes or to make a statement and not for practicality, he did have some *mexicanadas*. These are some of those photographs I took that day.



Photograph 115: Raymundo's stove, decorated with his unique style



Photograph 116: Microwave plate cover decorated and attached cabinet knob for convenience



Photograph 117: Every room in Raymundo's home is decorated including his sink



Photograph 118: The door net used to keep insects out had a small hole, he mexicanada his way by putting tape on it, making it functional again



Photograph 119: Makeshift door hinge



Photograph 120: Lamp shade turned upside down and used as a light fixture



Photograph 121: Raymundo poses with his truck



Photograph 122: He has been decorating this truck for years, this is his third motor



Photograph 123: Tractor decoration made from sowing machine, shovel, tank of gas, and lawn mower wheels



Photograph 124: "this is my medicine"



Photograph 125: Rear end of the pick-up



Photograph 126: Bed of the truck is filled with decorations like these



Photograph 127: Bed of the truck is filled with decorations like these

Jesus Oyervides, an electrician by trade and an experienced wood worker has been making things out of recycled wood from pallets. He makes all sort of things, like benches he needed for his front porch, and more artistic pieces like birdhouses and coolers. Oyervides sees it as a personal challenge to make the most beautiful and useful things he can from material that other carpenters and woodworkers would never use. Not only is he reusing material that would go to waste and giving it a second purpose but creating rasquache art, people like him are what give the RGV its distinctive culture. His front and back yard are surrounded by finished pieces and works in progress; these are some he had at hand the day I interviewed him.



Photograph 128: Jesse makes these bird houses out of recycled wood.



Photograph 129: He also makes these cooler holders, and burns art onto them, this one was Cowboys themed.

The last person in this group is Felix Ibarra, who works as a maintenance man at the San Juan Diego Catholic church in McAllen. His job is filled with normal maintenance tasks such as mowing the lawn, cleaning, repairing, and replacing things which of course this is an almost perfect environment for *mexicanadas* which he practices. But on his free time when he is not fixing things he makes art, for himself and the church, I consider to be one of the most beautiful examples of *rasquismo* that I have found. The entire art making process utilizes *mexicanadas*, from reusing materials to the way in which he puts them together. Here are his most recent pieces made for commission and some of the *mexicanadas* that I saw around his workshop.



Photograph 130: Jose Felix Ibarra makes rosaries out of recycled materials using mexicanadas throughout the entire process.



Photograph 131: He makes different sizes, depending on what it will be used for.



Photograph 132: He shows me the wooden bead which he made himself.



Photograph 133: This is the most common size that his clients ask for.



Photograph 134: This is how he makes the inside lining of the beads.



Photograph 135: Instead of having to measure, mark, and cut each one he put a cylinder and a nail on his work bench. He feeds the tube through the cylinder all the way until it hits the nail and then cuts flush on the end of the cylinder. Giving him a lot of equidistant pieces in a fraction of the time it would normally take him.



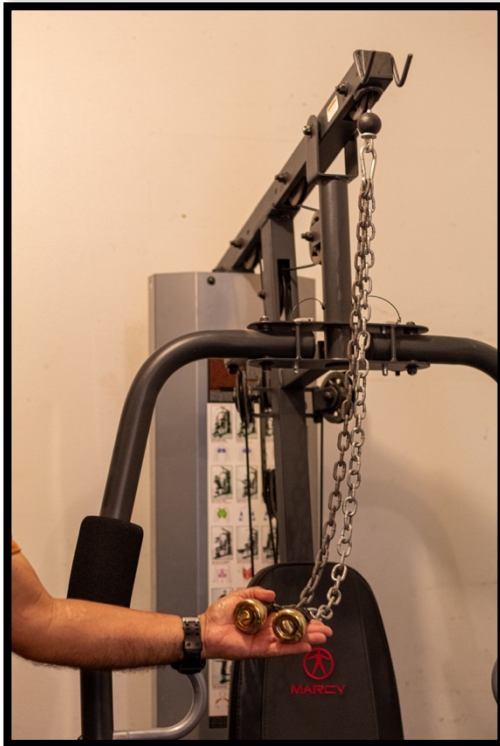
Photograph 136: This is his work bench.



Photograph 137: Felix poses with the rosary beads.



Photograph 138: This is how Felix plugs in his extension cords. Prevents it from being unplugged when it is pulled.



Photograph 140: The original part it came with did not let him stretch his arms in front of him. To solve this problem, he got a chain he had laying around and attached doorknobs to stop his hand from slipping off the chain.

Photograph 139: Felix shows me how he uses his exercise machine.



Honorable Mentions

I have had an interest in the way people creatively solve their problems for a long time, finding humor in many of them it became a habit to photograph some of the things I saw on my day-to-day life. Even before I formally started this project, I have been collecting pictures of Mexicanadas, some of the pictures in this section are some of them. The rest of the photographs in this section were taken at the same time I was doing the interviews, from people who did not want to formally participate. Many of them talked to me about the project and shared with me their experiences with *Mexicanadas*.



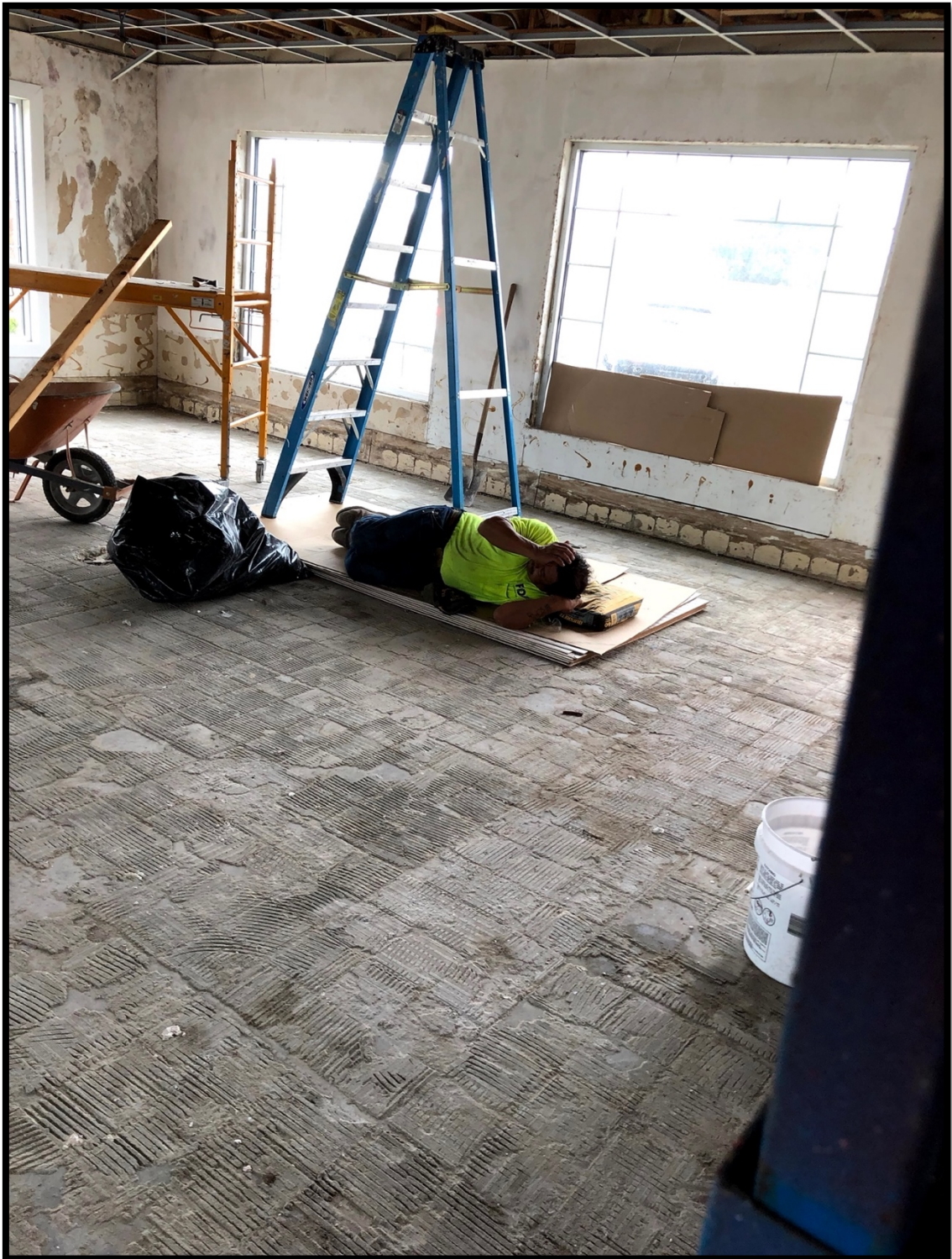
Photograph 141: This door could only be opened from the inside, to solve this my grandma made a whole in the mesh and attached a wire that can be pulled from the outside.



Photograph 142: My uncle shows the camera how the door is opened from the outside.

Photograph 143: The inside of the door, with the wire attached to the locking mechanism.





Photograph 144: After lunch Lupe lays down for a few minutes using FRP material as a bed and a concrete bag for his head.



Photograph 145: A light post on the roof lost its cap, to prevent water from going into the pole and potentially touching wires we wrapped a piece of tarp around the whole with electrical tape.



Photograph 146: "El Tio" only had one ladder and to finish the work faster, he made a ladder out of scrap wood.



Photograph 147: The homemade ladder allowed both men to work simultaneously.



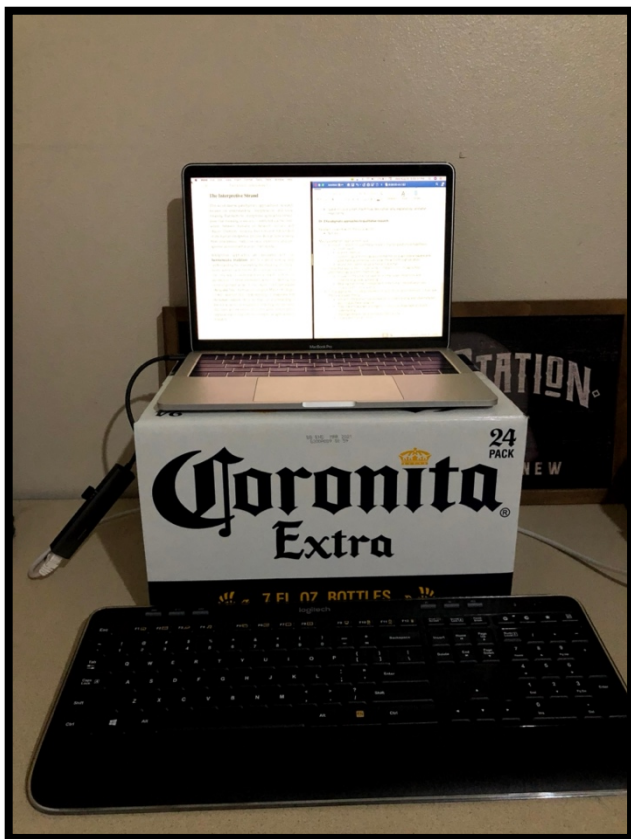
Photograph 148: I found this soap dispenser in a gas station of the valley, being held together with tape.



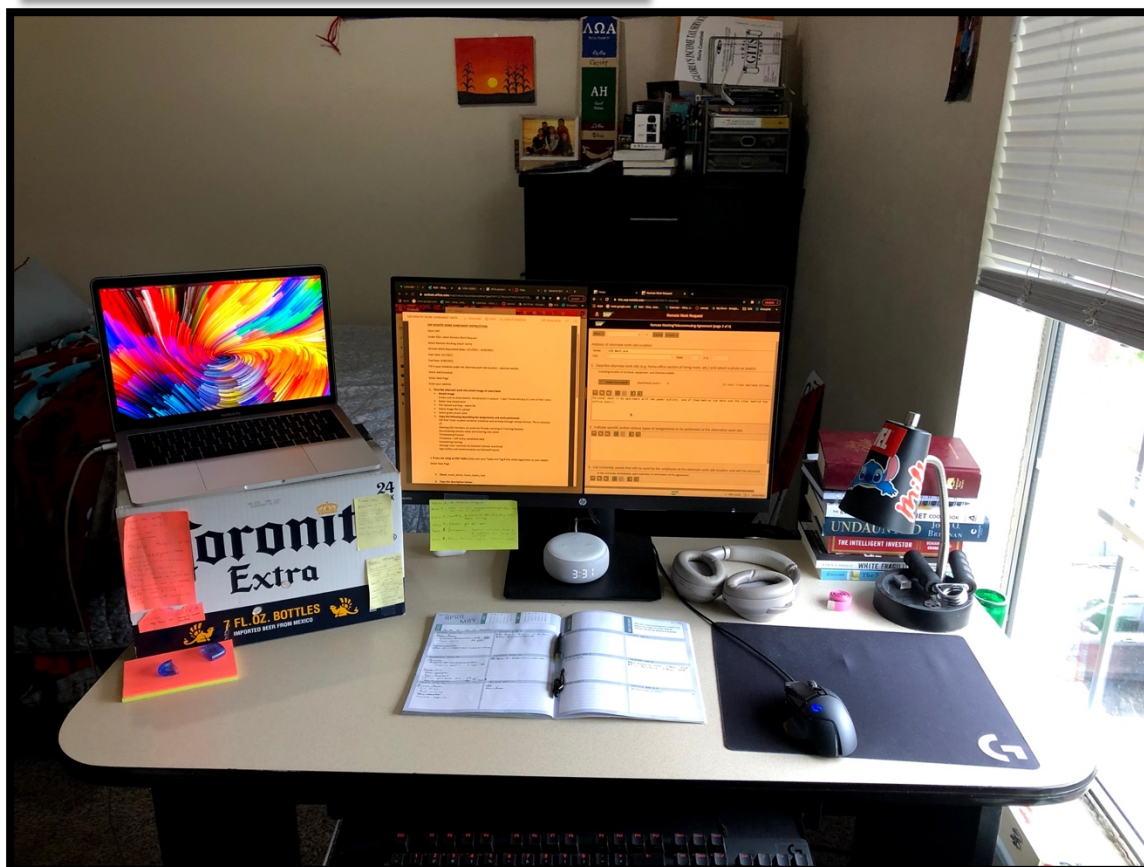
Photograph 149: TV on an ironing board.



Photograph 150: Fan would not stay up because it was broken, so a book was placed as a wedge to hold it up.



Photograph 151: During Covid-19 I was forced to take online classes, being in front of the laptop so much started hurting my back. So, I wanted to buy a laptop stand to help my posture, but I could not find any since everyone was buying them during this time. Instead, I took this box and started using it as a temporary one. I ended up using it for a whole year.



Photograph 152: My desk set up for online classes.



Photograph 153: Cooler doesn't fit in car? No problem put it on the table.



Photograph 154: This photo was sent to me by my friend Rodrigo Rios, whose grandfather took in Doctor Coss, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. It is a bike with a bus's steering wheel instead of the handlebars.



Photograph 155: I saw my neighbors taking their groceries down in a single trip with their mop, impressed I asked how they thought about it, and they said, “we saw it on TikTok”.



Photograph 156: Restrooms in a bar of McAllen TX, they used old kegs as urinals.



Photograph 157: People who buy used clothes in bulk can typically be seen around the Valley moving their pallets of clothes like this.



Photograph 158: On a short trip to Nuevo Progreso, Mexico with my college buddies we saw this merchant selling signs made from recycled license plates from different states of Mexico. I took this picture with him after I bought one, he's standing on the left and I am on the right.



Photograph 159: This is a picture of my dad and me, after a long day of working near Dallas TX. He is the one who has taught me all the Mexicanadas I know, and I wanted to include a picture of him because he is one of the major inspirations for this project. Gracias Papa

Conclusion

Mexicanadas are a generational phenomenon, all my respondents agree that this way of thinking is first taught at home with things that Latinx children see their parents and relatives do and then reinforced by their communities. In the Valley, a part of this socialization process involves learning how to solve different issues using *mexicanadas*. I was particularly interested in finding out if this is something parents explicitly taught their children, or if it was simply picked up along the way. Therefore, I asked the respondents if their parents had in fact taught them what a *mexicanada* was when they were growing up. For the respondents that had children, I also went ahead and inquired if they taught their children what a *mexicanada* was. Most interviewees said that even though their parents never explicitly explained it, they picked up on it as they grew older. The story seems to repeat with the following generations who did not make it a point to show their children what *mexicanadas* were but did express hopes that their children would pick up on this way of thinking just as they had. They went on to say that they wanted this perspective to be learned by their children because they believed it would help them in their future regardless of where or what they decided to do with their lives.

For my family, as is the case for many others across the Valley, the spirit of the *mexicanadas* was passed down from the generations before. This was not done intentionally but silently through the trials and unexpected challenges of everyday life. Amid frustration and necessity, innovation is born, giving us a renewed sense of hope. In the words of my father, "*Las mexicanadas me an enseñado a sonreir le a la vida*" *Mexicanadas have taught me to smile at life*. They teach us not to take life too seriously and empower marginalized communities like my own to dream big.

As I reflect on my experiences in the Rio Grande Valley and of all the people that I spent time with for this project, a feeling of satisfaction and happiness overwhelms me. I am lucky to have been born and raised in the border next to the Rio Grande River, where the water flows just as beautifully as the creativity. Even though my community has had a long history of struggles that continues to have negative ripple effects, they have continued to persevere with a smile on their face. Growing up there, as in any other Chicano community, you must learn how to be disappointed, how to bow your head, how to accept less, how to be humble, but you also learn through concepts such as *mexicanadas* to never stop trying. *Mexicanadas* give the power back to the people, something that American society often denies them and reminds them that regardless of the obstacles they face there will always be a solution.

It does not matter what you call *Mexicanadas*, MacGyver-ing, Mexican ingenuity/engineering, rigging, al troche moche, movidas etc. *Mexicanadas* have existed across time and geographical space, it is not a strictly Mexican/Chicano experience. Any person, primarily but not limited to lower-class individuals, has at some point solved a problem like this. After talking to these 29 individuals in the Valley and many others who were interested in my project, I now believe that it is human nature that we might solve our problems in this way. What makes the RGV and its *Mexicanadas* unique is that people from the Valley, unlike other places, have not only given them a name but have embraced them as part of their culture and identity. *Mexicanadas* live in the minds and hearts of the people of South Texas and will continue to do so as for a very long time. It is clear after surveying different people across the Valley that an environment will heavily influence the *Mexicanadas* it produces. It is very probable that the *mexicanadas*

will continue to change as society moves forward and almost guaranteed that they continue to exist, as long as people continue to have problems.

I was very impressed with the inventions that my interviewees had, and I know that there were hundreds of more *mexicanadas* for each one that I was able to find and photograph. It is important to highlight the people's creativity with their solutions because too often communities like mine are overlooked and undermined by people and institutions that see no value in our culture. One of the goals for this project was to celebrate the people of the Valley and show everyone that talent and intelligence do not always come from higher institutions or years of formal education. I sincerely believe that this way of thinking could be taken and applied into business, policy, diplomacy, medicine, and many other situations where difficult problems need to be solved. I say this not because I believe that a literal *mexicanadas* can solve all the complex problems of the world but because the first step in solving such issues would be having the right mental space and I cannot think of a more appropriate mental state to be in than the endlessly hopeful *mexicanada*.

It is my greatest hope that this project will inspire others to be more resourceful, help them break away from consumerist thinking, and allow other minorities and marginalized communities to dream big. Que Viva La Raza!

Limitations

It is important to note that 6 out of the 29 interviewees were family members, which could have skewed the results. Nonetheless, my family's opinion offers some helpful insight to the phenomenon of Mexicanadas as they have been living in the border regions since the 1970s. Their stories and experiences are very similar to other families

who live in the Valley, dealing with the daily toils of living in Northern Mexico and South Texas. I would recommend that future researchers try and get a more representative sample of the RGV population, trying to exclude personal ties. This, as explained in the methods sections, is very difficult for the time constraint needed to establish a relationship with people to talk about this somewhat embarrassing topic.

This is a qualitative research project whose objective is to explore the theme, and even though its findings are very real in the lives of the subjects I interviewed. It does not mean that they are generalizable to all the people living in the RGV. Future researchers might consider implementing more quantitative methods to get more generalizable data. Something else I would advise future researchers who try and take on this topic, is that they attempt to try and spend more time in the RGV doing data collection. Even though the month and a half I was there collecting data was enough to interview a substantial number of people, more time would have been useful in establishing relationships with interview subjects and increasing the snowball sampling effect.

This topic is interdisciplinary in nature and touches other fields such as engineering, art, psychology, politics, power dynamics, history, environmentalism, race and ethnic matters, and many other fields. The year I spend researching, interviewing, and writing this thesis does little justice to it. My greatest recommendation for future researchers is to keep exploring the topic in whatever capacity they can and take the innovations of marginalized communities seriously.

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