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Se Busca: Graphic Design as a Tool to Shift Attitudes about Violence in Chihuahua

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Se Busca: Graphic Design as a Tool to Shift Attitudes about Violence in Chihuahua

by

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Report

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Dedication

To all of the people who have been affected by the violence in Chihuahua, Mexico.

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Abstract

Se Busca: Using Graphic Design as a Tool to Shift Attitudes about Violence in Chihuahua

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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Since 2006, the city of Chihuahua, Mexico has been engulfed in a wave of drug-related violence that has resulted in thousands of murders, kidnappings, and "disappearances." Because bloody headlines sell newspapers, violence dominates the mainstream media, which contributes to residents' sense of hopelessness and helplessness. In response, in my graduate work I have investigated ways in which I can use the persuasive tactics and appearance of mainstream commercial graphic design to effect social change: specifically, to shift Chihuahuans' attitudes about their city. Through three interventions (The Graffiti Workshop, the Riberas school identity, and the *Se busca* project), I have attempted to encourage civic participation, recognize positive contributions within the community, and build an economic engine around local heroes. By doing so, I hope to reverse the prevailing belief that individuals are powerless to confront large, complex social issues. In addition, I hope these projects demonstrate some of the ways in which graphic designers can effectively apply their design skills to social as well as commercial problems.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Design is a process that creates order out of chaos."—Clement Mock[1]

Since 2006, the city of Chihuahua, Mexico has been engulfed in a wave of drug-related violence that has resulted in thousands of murders, kidnappings, and "disappearances." Chihuahuan newspapers are filled with disturbing headlines and photos that trumpet the drug cartels' latest murders; "wanted" posters paper the walls of post offices, police stations and random public spaces throughout Mexico. In addition, the Spanish-language publishing industry churns out book after book about the drug trade and its kingpins. *Telenovelas* often have storylines that are set in the context of the drug trade and the violence, and occasionally they glamorize it. Because bloody headlines sell newspapers, violence dominates the mainstream media, and contributes to residents' sense of hopelessness and helplessness. As a result, these horrific stories are having a numbing effect on citizens of Chihuahua.

During my graduate work at UT I have investigated ways in which the persuasive tactics and appearance of mainstream commercial graphic design can be used to promote social change: specifically, to shift Chihuahuans' attitudes about their city and to remind residents that the situation is not entirely hopeless. My thesis work is intended to do two things. First, I intend it to show how individual actions can have an effect at a systemic level. While the people of Chihuahua might think that they cannot do anything to help the situation, my work aims to shift that mentality in order to encourage civic participation. Second, I hope to inspire other graphic designers to use their design skills outside the commercial world to enact positive social change: in other words, to do what the *Design*

[1] Simmons, 105.

Activist Handbook characterizes as "not only doing good design but using design for good."[2] My three interventions—the Graffiti Workshop, the Riberas school identity, and the *Se Busca* project—are not direct solutions to Chihuahua's violence problem. However, I believe they are good starting points or models for a larger community based movement.

[2] Scalin and Taute, 3.

Chapter 2: Context

"As designers, we work according to our own interests and values (and/or those of our clients). When and where these motivations intersect with those of the broader profession and (more importantly) society as a whole, we realize the potential for our work to both be and do good." —Christopher Simmons[3]

For much of the twentieth century, designers, almost by definition, did commercial work primarily for the benefit of the clients who paid their fees. I doubt that people in the 1950s would have predicted that designers could reimagine educational environments and curricula like Emily Pilloton has done with Project H, prevent the spread of AIDS by developing a self-destructing syringe, as Marc Koska has done with the K1 Auto Disable Syringe, or help developing countries like the projects featured in the Design For the Other 90% exhibition have done. Until the First Things First manifesto (1964) and Victor Papanek's book *Design For the Real World* (1971), few graphic or industrial designers seem to have thought much about how they might use their commercial skills to effect social change. Since the 1960s, however, there has been sustained interest in using graphic design to effect social change, but there is still a lack of documentation of many of these projects and especially a lack of useful, generalizable theory about how to design effectively for social change.

Social design has redefined the traditional role of the designer, who historically was understood as a servant to commerce and to paying clients. Social design, in contrast, works from the assumption that designers themselves can identify and frame problems that need to be solved. William Drenttel argues that social design must be:

[3] Simmons, 3.

> expansively conceived beyond trained designers to include end users and social participants. Social Design cannot be a subspecialty of the design profession (like graphic design, package design, product design, services design and so on), but is a larger activity that depends upon design in all of its forms—thought, processes, tools, methodologies, skills, histories, systems—to contribute to the needs of a larger society. It implies at once an attitude and an approach to life: as such, it can help us frame how we want to live in the future. It is therefore inherently pragmatic and results-oriented, simultaneously humble and ambitious, and fundamentally optimistic and forward-looking[4]

Drenttel's notion of social design as optimistic and ambitious and participatory informed my work in Chihuahua, Mexico, where I undertook projects in which the clients were non-profits, or in which I acted as my own "client" by both defining a problem and attempting to solve it. In both cases, I was reacting to and attempting to change Chihuahuans' attitudes about their city.

People from Chihuahua started changing their lifestyle in 2006 due to the drug war. People locked up their houses and started placing gates in the entrances of neighborhood streets; people started carrying things like pepper spray and Tasers with them; people stopped going out to public places after the sun was down; and others who could afford it left the city and moved to border cities in the US. Although the drug war started the violence, it also led to other non-drug-related crimes that involve "easy money," such as kidnapping, robberies, rape, etc. These other crimes already existed, but they were not as common prior to 2006. However, they boomed along with the drug war because criminals were taking advantage of the paranoia in the city. The reason for all these crimes is the social gap that exists in Mexico. The following table shows the shocking disparity in income that distinguishes the minority in the high socioeconomic classes (AB) from the majority in the low socioeconomic classes (D+, D and E).

[4] Shea, Drenttel and Lupton, 7.

Class Name	% of Mexican households that belong to this class	Minimum Yearly Income (USD)	Maximum Yearly Income (USD)
AB (Upper Class)	7.2%	78,200.00+	
C+ (Middle-Upper Class)	14.0%	32,200.00	78,199.00
C (Middle Class)	17.9%	10,700.00	32,199.00
D+ (Middle-Lower Class)	35.8%	6,300.00	10,699.00
D (Lower Class)	18.3%	2,500.00	6,299.00
E (Extreme Poverty)	6.7%	0.00	2,499.00

Figure 1: Socioeconomic distribution of classes in Mexico.[5]

The root of many of the crimes mentioned above is inequality and a lack of opportunities for those in the lower classes, who usually live in communities in the outskirts of the city. In addition to this inequality, Chihuahua has also faced the effects of industrial parks, better known as *maquiladoras,* which started growing in 1960 in Chihuahua.[6] Although constructing *maquiladoras* initially seemed to be a great idea because it would generate employment, it also had some unexpected consequences. These *maquiladoras* employed women and men who worked long hours at a low salary ($3700 USD/yr.). This meant that while parents were working multiple shifts, kids were left alone in their houses after school. Many of these unsupervised children got involved in gangs, drugs, early pregnancies, etc. Miriam Liciaga is a woman who conducts

[5] Content of table extracted from AMAI
[6] ESTO magazine website.

research in the city of Chihuahua about social issues such as these.[7] During an interview, she mentioned a cycle that tends to happen repeatedly in Chihuahua:

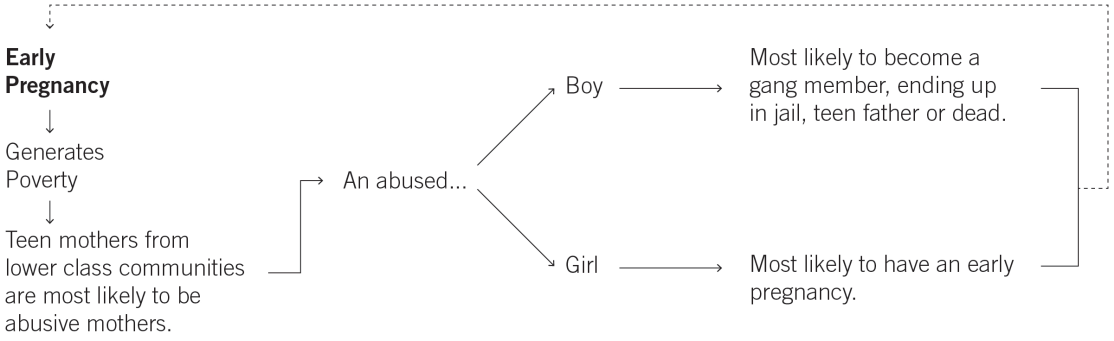

Figure 2: Cycle of problems specific to low socioeconomic status communities in Chihuahua.

After explaining this cycle (see above), she noted that as it keeps repeating, the statistics on poverty, violence, and domestic violence increase as well. In other words, these are consequences of the previous cycle and symptoms of the next. All of these issues—such as poverty, lack of parental supervision, early pregnancies, domestic violence, and lack of opportunities—create conditions that make it easy for people to get involved in crimes to get "easy money."

Furthermore, because the results of this cycle are unpleasant, people in Chihuahua typically use one or more of the following ways of "escaping" from or reacting to these realities:

[7] Miriam Rebeca Liceaga Muñoz in discussion with the author, Summer 2013.

- Media: Many people stay at home, isolating themselves from their dangerous surroundings, and as a result get immersed in media. There are no educational programs on TV during prime time and the most common shows are *telenovelas* that have very superficial content. Radio and newspapers bombards citizens with horrific stories about the violence.
- Gangs: Communities that have a low socioeconomic status tend to be fertile ground for gangs. Due to the absence of the parents, kids look for alternate "families" and often find them in gangs.
- Sports: Children believe sports to be a way to "make it" in life. Sports can get them occupied and out of the streets, and they can get scholarships to private schools and access to a good education. The only problem is that they leave and never want to come back; they do not give back to their original community. Many feel like failures because very few "make it."
- Alcohol, Drugs, and Sex at an early age: There is very easy access to all three, and kids are exposed to them from a very early age.

After analyzing these forms of escapism, I found the media to be a very interesting and potentially double-edged one, since it involves narrative and it can be manipulated for different purposes. I started wondering what would happen if the current stories about people in these communities were positive: what if I could shift the narratives of *telenovelas* away from superficial plots? What if newspapers were full of positive stories and people with positive initiatives? What if interventions didn't involve

big budgets and government funds (which is what interventions currently look like)? What if individual actions could tackle the violence in Chihuahua?

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

"Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design." —Charles Eames

I utilized two main paths of research in order to provoke change in the current wave of violence in Chihuahua, Mexico: theoretical research and field research. Theoretical research allowed me to establish strategies by borrowing models from other disciplines like branding, advertising, art, and psychology. On the other hand, field research allowed me to understand at first hand what communities are going through and what kinds of obstacles the nonprofits helping these communities experience; having these experiences and talking to people shifted the way I was approaching my projects. I used theoretical and field research reciprocally; each influenced the other. Field research, for example, led me to ask better questions when I went searching for useful theories, and theoretical research led me to ask better questions during the field research.

For instance, I found that the social gap in Mexico has affected the way people receive help, specifically in lower-class communities. María de Lourdes Cruz, who is the founder and president of a nonprofit called CAPTAR, outlined some key reasons why it is so difficult for people with resources to help those without. In a 2013 conversation, she explained that people often approach helping as if they knew exactly what others needed or wanted, but she affirmed that "just because people live in extreme poverty doesn't mean they don't know what they want and what they need."[8] CAPTAR's approach to helping people is therefore to wait for people in the community to request the specific things they need and then they must work for them; they do not get them for free. Cruz mentions that if they do receive something for free, they won't use it, and they will just

[8] María de Lourdes Cruz in discussion with the author, Summer 2013

let it sit there because they feel it was a result of someone else's pity for them, when "pride is all they have."[9] Through this system, which took CAPTAR much trial and error to develop, the agency has been able to help many indigenous communities in the mountains of Chihuahua.

Cruz's insights shaped the way I did my subsequent research and the way I designed my interventions. I began thinking about how to tap into people's intrinsic motivation. I started wondering how to get people to participate in community-building events or projects without extrinsic rewards and without imposing upon them what I thought would be "the correct solution." Daniel Pink, summarizing Karl Dunckers' studies on motivation, suggests that there are three main elements that drive intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.[10] What these concepts suggested to me was that my designed interventions had to be open-ended enough that people could be autonomous and have the freedom to participate or not, and if they did, to feel like they were engaged with others in a common purpose.

Also useful in shaping my design approach was the concept of branding. Stephen Ross, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota whose research describes how marketing models work in the context of sports, outlined a brand equity model I found particularly helpful.[11] He proposes that organization-, market-, and experience-induced elements build brand equity, which has two components: brand awareness and brand associations. Brand equity has also been defined by Douglas B. Holt, a professor of

[9] María de Lourdes Cruz in discussion with the author, Summer 2013
[10] Pink, 40-45.
[11] Ross, 28.

marketing at Oxford University, as "Brand Culture," the "shared, taken-for-granted brand stories, images and associations."[12]

Chihuahua's brand, unfortunately, has mostly negative associations having to do with violence and drug cartels. So I started examining how brand identities are built and how I could identify or create points of intervention in Chihuahua's current "brand" or identity. Ross's and Holt's models suggested that the negative associations of Chihuahua's brand could actually be edited, or positive alternative narratives could be highlighted, in order to create positive change. The CAPTAR example suggested that the positive stories had to emerge from collaborative processes in order to persuade people to actually listen and respond to them. Robert Cialdini's book *Influence: Science and Practice* proved especially helpful in thinking about how to craft persuasive messages; I applied some of his techniques, such as Reciprocation, Social Proof, and Scarcity to branding models and solutions.

Cialdini defines Reciprocation as "the rule that says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us."[13] This is why marketers and salespersons give free key chains and pens, among other things. People then feel obliged to give back in some way. Social Proof is when "we view a behavior as correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it;"[14] in other words, it is the belief that if everybody does it, it is okay to do it yourself. The Scarcity principle suggests "that opportunities seem more valuable to us when they are less available;"[15] this is why Amazon, for example, gives cues like "2 left in stock." Although designers use

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[12] Holt, 3.
[13] Cialdini, 19.
[14] Cialdini, 99.
[15] Cialdini, 200.

persuasion techniques intentionally or unintentionally all the time, my approach was very deliberate, as I wanted to be able to measure results and understand people's behavior and how they might start working together to shift the current negative narratives about Chihuahua.

These concepts and the previous theory led me to the work of Candy Chang, an artist who explores the relationship of public spaces and individuals' well-being.[16] With her project *Before I Die* (a wall on which people write what they want to do before they die) Chang was able to transform an abandoned house into a space of reflection, of happiness, and of community. She started this project as an experiment, and, because of specific characteristics such as its low-tech components, the option it provided people to participate or just be a spectator, the simplicity of the prompt, and its spinning of a negative concept like death into a positive message of hope, it is now a worldwide project that exists in more than 60 countries and on over 450 walls. In addition, she was able to keep this project ongoing by making a DIY kit for people to create their own wall, and people in many communities have embraced this project as their own. Analyzing case studies such as this and exploring fields beyond design helped me create more insightful interventions and develop a method or a plan of action that all of my projects now follow.

[16] Biography accessed from Chang's official website.

Chapter 4: Method

"We cannot solve problems using the same thinking that created them."
—Albert Einstein[17]

This method that I employed for the three projects I undertook (figure 3) involved identifying a pre-existing visual artifact in the local environment, such as a passive space, a building, a newspaper, or a "wanted" poster, and altering it to give it a positive spin. This process uses local visual traditions as a means of communicating with Chihuahuans, who are often skeptical of "outside" interventions, as staff at the CAPTAR charity testified. The goal was to use familiar visual language as a starting point for a new message, to make the message more palatable to viewers.

[17] Simmons, 132.

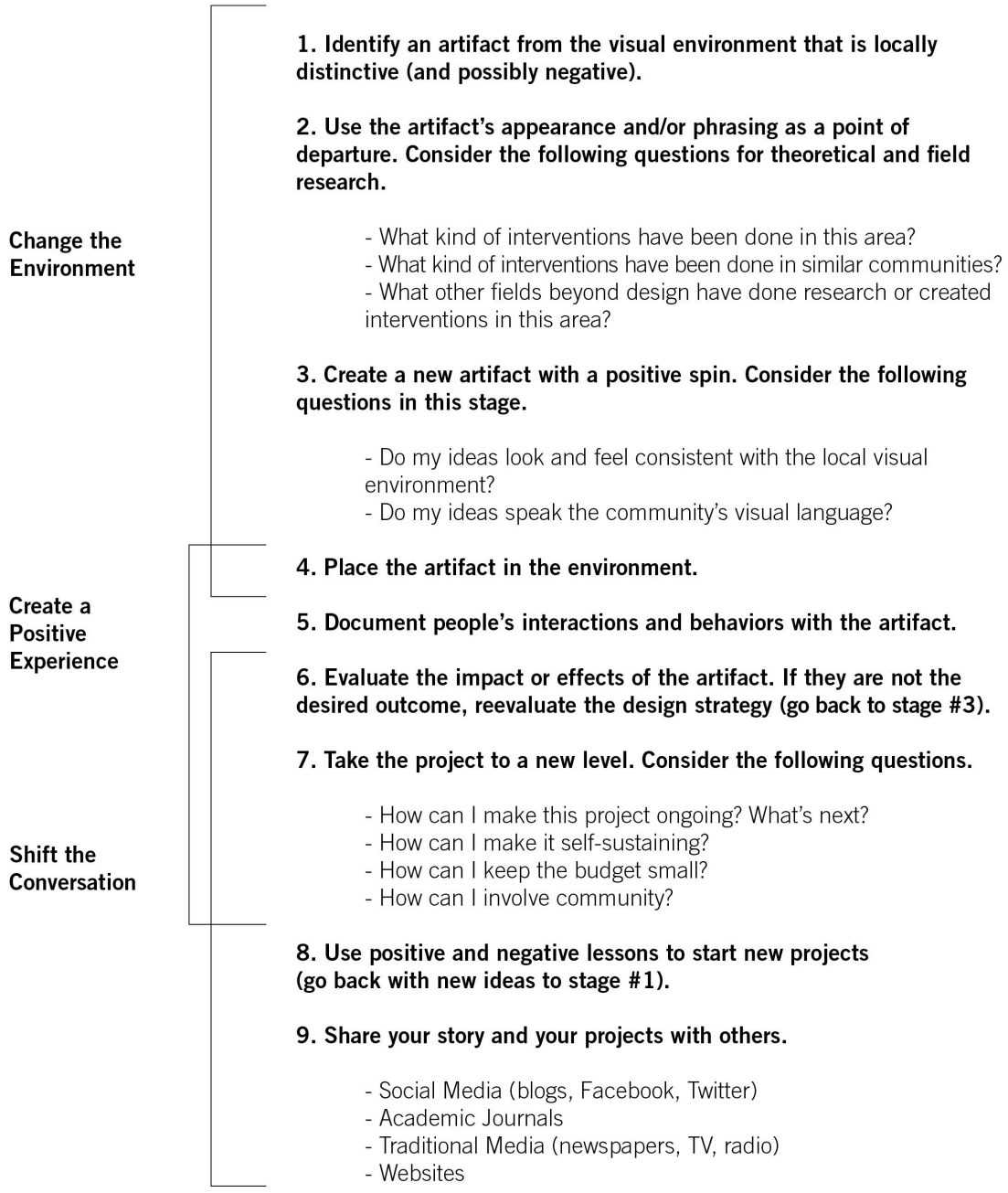

Figure 3: Design method for the three projects described in this report. Image by author.

Chapter 5: Interventions

"Graphic Design can bring an idea to life, and tell stories in fluid, personal ways through visual stimuli." —Emily Pilloton[18]

The three projects that ultimately came to fruition—the Graffiti Workshop, the Riberas elementary school identity, and the Se Busca project—used the same general methods and process. The three projects took place in Chihuahua but the first two (workshop and identity) were specific to a community within Chihuahua called Riberas de Sacramento. I chose this community because it theoretically has the potential to grow in any way its residents want, but its identity thus far has been defined primarily by violence, poverty, and social incohesion. People refer to it as "a violent place," "a poor place," "a place where there is nothing," and statistics suggest that 38% of the community members are children from the ages of 1 to 14. 80% of the community did not complete high school, much less undergraduate studies. Most of the parents work at *maquiladoras*, earning $3700 USD per year. 28% of the families have single mothers as the head of the household.[19] All of these non-drug-war related statistics only add to the current problems of living in Riberas. I found that recent efforts to make improvements in the welfare of Riberas residents (social campaigns, nonprofit programs etc.), tend to have big budgets, but often fail because they do not require initiative from community members: it is usually government placing things in the community or nonprofits starting programs which tend to burn out due to the lack of resources.

I spent summer 2013 doing field research in the area. I observed and talked to people, took pictures, ate at the local restaurants, etc. The director of AC4D, Jon Kolko,

[18] Simmons, 77.
[19] Information accessed from INEGI.

said recently in a talk at the University of Texas that the process of gathering and synthesizing all this information through this process and finding insights is the most valuable one, and will give you a completely different perspective of what you thought the problem was.[20] This was no exception for me.

THE GRAFFITI WORKSHOP (SUMMER 2013)

> *"Life would be richer and safer if we had deeper, ongoing relationships with those in close proximity to us." —Tyler Galloway*[21]

Many lower-class communities like Riberas de Sacramento in Chihuahua have struggled with juvenile delinquency. Due to a huge socioeconomic gap and a lack of opportunities, parents in these areas have to work during most of their waking hours because of the nature of their job schedules and their minimum wage salaries. Kids in Riberas often grow up essentially on their own in violent and dangerous environments. Children's isolation and lack of parental oversight means that many of them look for alternative families or groups to belong to, and unfortunately many of them find gangs to serve as their surrogate families. Because gangs often use graffiti or tagging as a means of marking territory, the Riberas neighborhood had a lot of graffiti. I wanted to use this form of expression, which has been used mostly to vandalize, in a positive way.

My original idea to shift negative narratives in this community was to invite community members to do a theatre workshop. I had decided this because at the time I was doing research on *telenovelas* and drama-based strategies for social change.[22] But

[20] Jon Kolko, UT Design Lecture Series, February 20, 2014.
[21] Shea, Drenttel and Lupton, 7.
[22] Boal, Theatre of the Oppresed.

after realizing that the theatre concept was somewhat unfamiliar to this audience, I looked for a more relevant and accessible idea that built on a form of expression already present in the community. I looked back at my field research and noticed that graffiti was part of the culture. This led me to change my idea from drama to collective creative process, which seemed more likely to resonate with residents in the area.

I met Ericka Borunda, a staff member of Promesa Educativa para Mexico A.C. She was already embarked on a project intended to explore what a collaborative creative process can contribute to problems like violence, poverty, and social inequality. During our conversation we agreed that building on a form of expression already used in this neighborhood would be more appropriate. In addition she noted that "Murals give identity, it generates that because people feel they belong to something, they are part of something, it's theirs." We decided to run a Graffitti Workshop; through it we were able to evaluate the benefits not only for participants but also for the artists who participated, the nonprofit who collaborated, and the community as a whole. This impact was measured by interviews with the kids, with the graffiti artists, with the nonprofit, and the community. Kids met new people (which is very hard to do in a community where everybody shuts themselves off from each other because they think that their neighbors might be dangerous). Other kids that would usually be isolated watching TV were engaging in a creative process. Artists shared their stories and talked about sharing art to those who don't have access to it and the benefits of graffiti as an art form. The community was thankful to have a passive space transformed into an active one, and pleased to know that their own people made it. It brought pride to the community, as it gave them an opportunity to put the spotlight to their kids and give them a voice. One important lesson I learned through this project was about the need to think ahead about

how a project like this could be sustained without help from the people who initiated it. How could we make the community take ownership of the project?

Figure 4: Graffiti workshop and mural finished. Image by author.

COLEGIO RIBERAS IDENTITY (SUMMER 2013)

> *"Remarkable things can happen when empathy for others plays a key role in problem-solving." —Katja Battarbee, Jane Fulton Suri, and Suzanne Gibbs Howard* [23]

During the summer of 2013 when I was doing field research in the community of Riberas, a nonprofit called Promesa Educativa para Mexico contacted me to participate in designing a graphic identity for Colegio Riberas, a new elementary school in the Riberas neighborhood. This school is using the KIPP model for education, and the nonprofit recently finished erecting the school building.[24] I was interested in participating in this project since I had already done field research in the area. I found it surprising that the

[23] Battarbee, Fulton, and Gibbs, 1.

[24] KIPP is an acronym for the Knowledge is Power Program. According to the organization's website, "The mission of KIPP is to create a respected, influential, and national network of public schools that are successful in helping students from educationally underserved communities develop the knowledge, skills, character and habits needed to succeed in college and the competitive world beyond." About KIPP, available at www.kipp.com/about-kipp.

board members had a very positive image about the Riberas neighborhood, since the community living there had told me otherwise. I interviewed the current school leader, who had spent more time in the community than me, and while she also had a positive image, it came not so much from the area but rather from the character of the people. She mentioned that "Riberas is a community of people that want better opportunities and they have dared to break the cycle, they have bravery, hope and a lot of vision, they are willing to do anything for their kids." In addition she identified a problem: "The community has no identity, they don't have anything to represent them, not even a landmark. They have nothing to refer to, to be proud of. This school is the first thing that will represent them; we want them to feel proud of it." [25]

Building a very large, high-quality school in a place where there is not even a grocery store meant that the school would likely become either an icon or a target for the community as a whole, not only for the students. It is easy to assume that by having good intentions and in this case by building a high-quality school, neighborhood residents would feel grateful and embrace it, but that might not have happened had there not been a strategy to help make this successful. Other well-meaning non-profit groups had had some notable failures in having their "help" accepted; María de Lourdes Cruz mentioned that a rainwater collection barrel distribution program had been a flop because the barrels were not requested by the people. Although the community needed them, no one wanted "charity" rain barrels, so they remained empty and unused.

With these past failures in mind, Promesa Educativa para Mexico and I, as designer, concluded that the identity for the school should not be based on its future students, or even on the fact that it was a school; rather, the brand or identity for the

[25] Teresa Ávila in discussion with the author, Summer 2013.

school needed to represent the community as a whole, since for good or bad, the school would represent the neighborhood and become a landmark and a point of pride in an area of the city that had few distinguishing visual features. Our objective was to instill a feeling of ownership in community members and future students so they would feel this school was theirs and not a "charity."

As I mentioned before, brand culture or brand equity is the "shared, taken-for-granted brand stories, images and associations." This identity, then, was a new story and a positive one. I started thinking of Riberas as a brand and visualized it borrowing Stephen Ross's model and reinterpreted it with the current situation of Riberas and the anticipated outcomes.

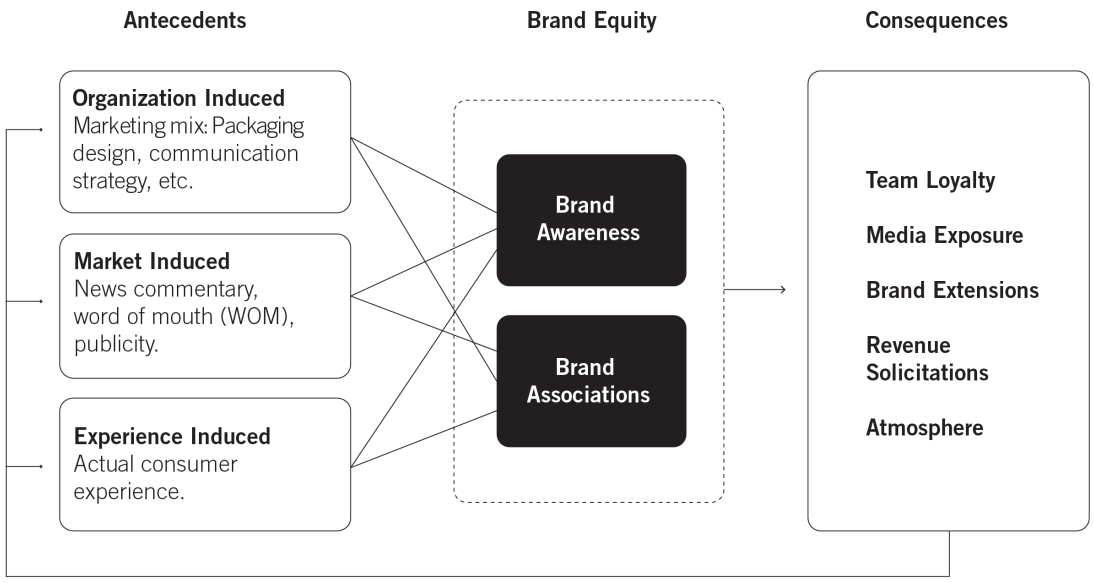

Figure 5: The Ross Model of brand equity. Diagram from Stephen Ross, "Conceptual Framework for Understanding Spectator-Based Equity," *Journal of Sports Management*, 20, no. 1 (2006).

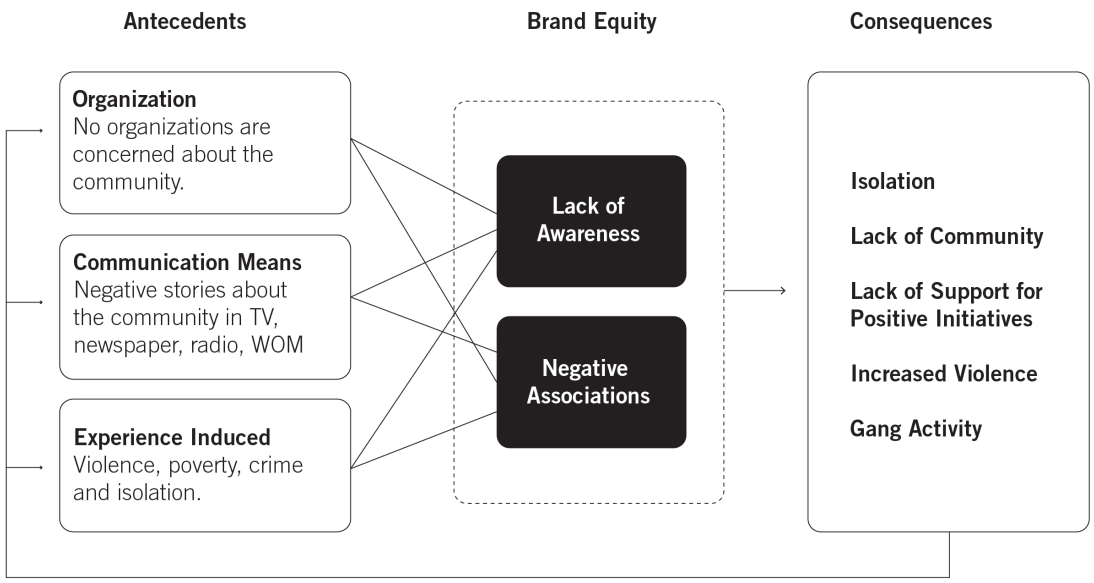

Figure 6: The Ross Model used to describe the current brand identity of Riberas de Sacramento. Image by author.

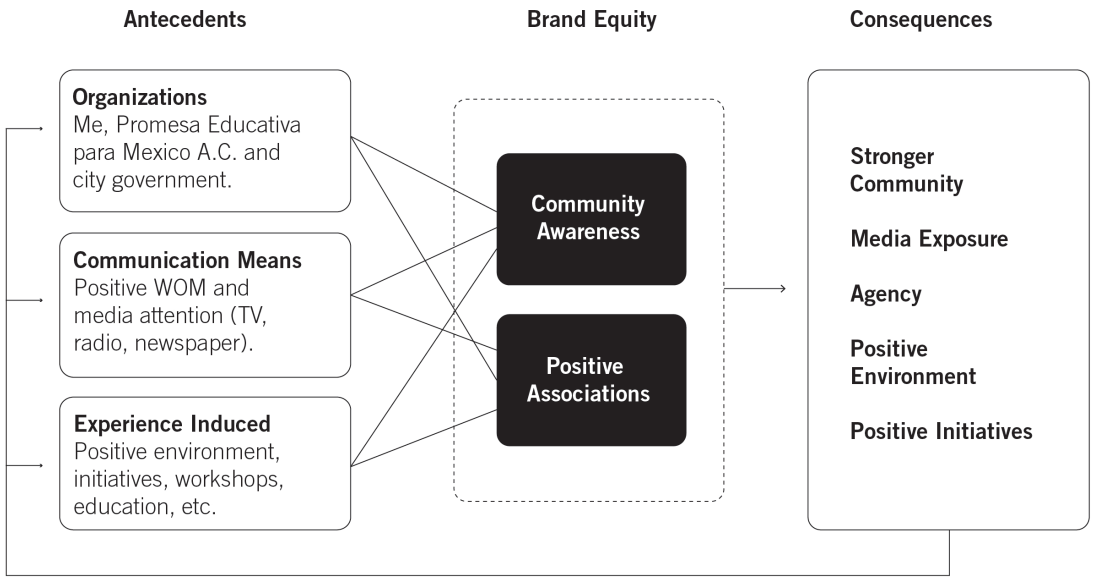

Figure 7: The "Cano Model": The Ross Model used to predict brand equity change in Riberas. Image by author.

After doing this analysis, the questions remaining were: What positive story are we going to embed in this logo for Riberas in order to start positive associations? What story is realistic so we create community awareness? What story will they be willing to share among other people?

In an attempt to shift the existing negative antecedents toward a more positive balance, I looked back at the survey drawings, interviews and images I had collected prior to being invited to this project, and identified some patterns: people in Riberas value home and family. When I asked the community members to draw the best thing about Riberas, most of them drew houses (figure 8).

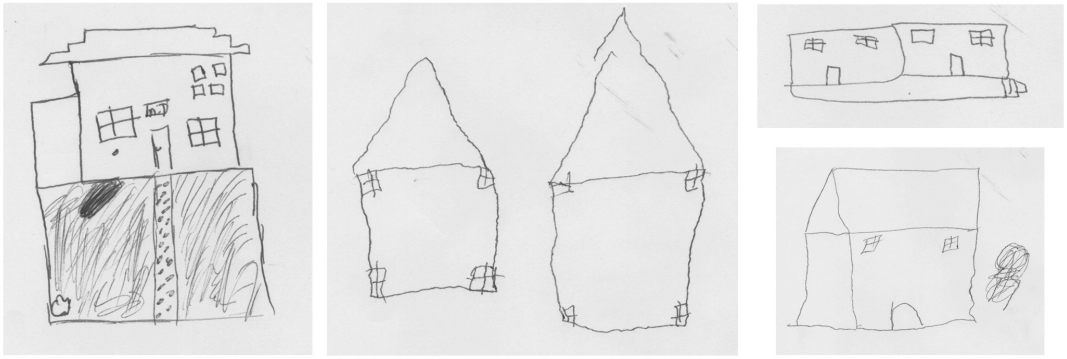

Figure 8: Drawings from surveys run at Riberas de Sacramento in response to the following statement: “Draw something that represents Riberas.”

Figure 9: Houses from the community of Riberas pointing out the geometric pattern. Photo by author.

When looking at the actual houses, we saw that they all had the same geometric pattern (figure 9), so that visual element is the one we chose to highlight in the visual identity of the school. I included those shapes in the logo and now people in the neighborhood love telling the story about how their logo was inspired by their homes. Additionally, Colegio Riberas has been embraced as a second home by the community; there has been no vandalism or theft from the school. Although surely a large part of the school's positive reception has been that residents acknowledge the real benefits that education brings, and the work of the staff of the school with the community has done, I

would argue that having a logo for the school that reflects what the neighborhood's residents value has contributed to its acceptance by the community.

Figure 10: Identity of Colegio Riberas, featuring a geometric pattern derived from neighborhood houses. Photo by author.

THE *SE BUSCA* PROJECT (FALL 2013)

> *"We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers" —Carl Sagan*[26]

The last project I engaged in in Chihuahua was a self-initiated one that I hoped would help people feel empowered, rather than numb, even in the face of the constant stream of violent media imagery. Called *Se Busca,* the project had two primary objectives: 1) To shift people's attention at least momentarily away from negative conversations about the violence and start new conversations about individuals who are doing positive things in Chihuahua, and 2) to create a sense of community by asking Chihuahuans to identify and support people who are making a positive difference in the

[26] Chang, 7.

city. I also wanted the project to have the potential to be ongoing, and to elicit participation from both upper-class and lower-class communities. It also had to be low-budget.

The Design Strategy

My strategy in this project was to reimagine a common, negative form of Chihuahuan visual culture—the *se busca* or "wanted" poster—so it could be used to identify local heroes rather than criminals.

Like the rollout of a new product, I provided teasers through social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) that asked questions about the process: "What color should this be?" or that read simply "*Se Busca* coming soon to Chihuahua!" (figure 11)

Figure 11: Teasers for the *Se Busca* project. Image by author.

This made people curious and caused them to begin asking questions about the project. I also did this as a phased rollout in order to familiarize and include as many people as possible in the process; my hope was that when they actually encountered the interactive portion of the project, they would already be familiar with the ideas.

After two months of making noise in social networks, I launched the actual project, comprised of both physical (printed) objects and an interactive website, and which would last only ten days with one single prompt: Who do you consider a local hero in your community? I placed posters, booklets, and bulletin boards in different places in the city—churches, schools, coffee shops, tortilla shops, gyms, etc. (figure 12).

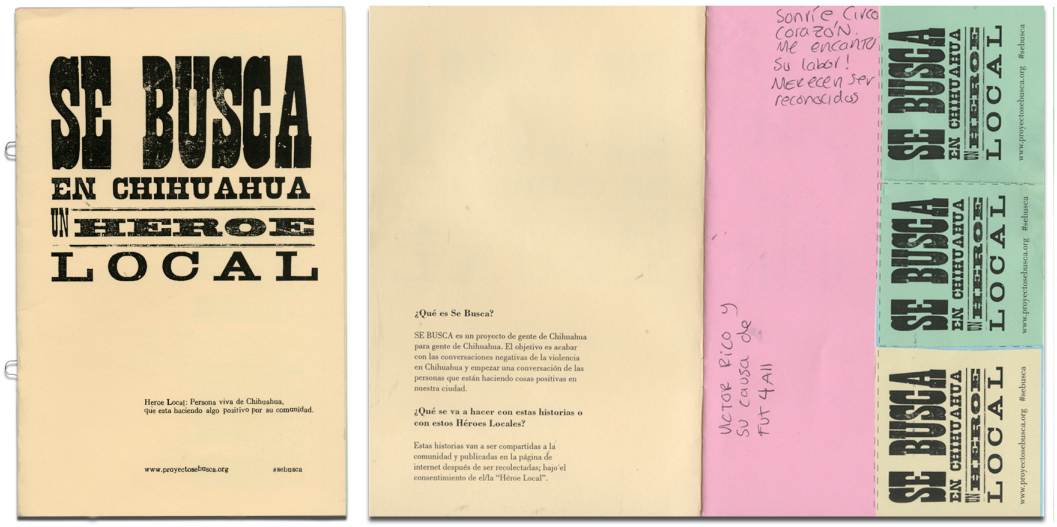

Figure 12: *Se Busca* project booklets placed in coffee shops, restaurants and gyms. Photo by author.

Figure 13: *Se Busca* project poster and bulletin board, placed in churches and public places. Photos by author.

The *Se Busca* project website provided a point of entry where people could write the name of a person that they considered a local hero and explain why. The website was promoted through two different Facebook groups that had a larger fan base and were local to Chihuahua; one belonged to a digital newspaper called *Chihuahua Noticias* (*Chihuahua News*) and has over 70,000 likes; and the second one was Chihuahua Mexico, with over 200,000 likes. The reason for this is that I did not have enough time to create a large fan base; by having the support of these two groups I was be able to get the name of the project out to a wider audience. After talking to the managers of these groups, who wanted to support the project, I was allowed to post to those networks the same question I asked during the same ten days that the print elements were out: "Who is

a local hero in your community and why?" People then were able to comment on the post or were redirected to the *Se Busca* project website or a new Facebook *Se Busca* Group. In addition to this, the digital newspaper itself, Chihuahua News, published an article about the project in the middle of the launched campaign.

Figure 14: *Se Busca* project website. Image by author.

The physical part of the *Se Busca* project not only enabled people to contribute in analog form, but also invited them to contribute to the website, if that were easier for them. To encourage people to contribute to the website, I used a persuasive technique called Reciprocation as outlined by Cialdini: I provided an attractive tear-off "coupon-looking" piece of paper as a takeaway placed in the posters, booklets and the bulletin

board that had the logo and the URL of the project. While people could take a coupon and still not participate, the principle of Reciprocation suggests that by giving them something, in this case for free, people might feel obliged to give back. It was my hope that people would visit the website and thus become invested in the project, perhaps even writing down the names of a local hero or two. During the ten days of this phase, I posted comments like "more businesses are joining the project, thank you for being part of *Se Busca*" or "more than 50 heroes already reported." These comments tap into the principle of Social Proof, which suggests that people feel motivated to change behavior if they believe many other people are participating. The last persuasive principle, Scarcity, was embodied in comments like "only 5 days left, don't miss the chance to recognize somebody who you consider a local hero." These messages were meant to provoke participation by suggesting the opportunity was a limited one. It was important for me to avoid a straightforward advertisement campaign aesthetic, which is usually created on glossy paper and with government logos, and placed in traditional spaces like billboards. While these elements seem unimportant, they can elicit immediate rejection from audiences. Using the nostalgic visual elements and persuasive techniques in a subtle yet whimsical way, helped people identify with and connect to the project and encouraged their participation.

The Results

I anticipated that the analog components of the project would generate more participation than the digital components, but it was the opposite: the physical elements worked as promotion, but most of the participation happened online, through mobile phones. The results of the ten days of online participation were surprising: 806 likes,

1123 shares, 107 comments, 5505 website visits, and, most importantly, 223 local heroes reported. What people wrote was really inspiring: people wanted to recognize family members, people doing acts of kindness, nonprofits, pets, and many other kinds of people who they felt were making a difference. The following are some examples:

> "Father Angelo for his great work on supporting people with addictions."
>
> "Vanessa Negron Hernandez: An 11-year-old girl who saved the lives of two children by protecting them with her body when a monster truck during the Aero show lost control on October 5th. This girl suffered fractures and bruises that endangered her life, while the two children she protected received only minor injuries. She deserves public recognition for what she did."
>
> "Cesar Guilbert has something few have: a desire to help and a light that draws in others. He has great projects to help all kinds of people do good things. He is a person to admire. :)"
>
> "That great hero is next to you!"
>
> "To senior citizens for their experience, their work, their anecdotes, their legends, their bravery against adversity, their vision, and most of all their wise advice."
>
> "For each of us, there are no heroes like our parents! But if I have to name someone in our city, it would be the firefighters! They are true heroes! They risk their lives for any person! Regardless of whether they will lose theirs! My respect to the firefighters!!"
>
> "We need to fall in love with our city, with our country and with our people. We need to learn to love based in example. We are anxious for a leader, somebody who teaches with example, who guides us, somebody who truly loves our country. We need to be an example for the entire republic. There has been violence but there have also been many good people wanting to live in harmony with everyone else. There are some of us wishing to find... you."

All the comments people posted were published on the website. People even suggested what the next step of the project could or should be. Many people suggested printing all of the responses in the newspaper or adding pictures of the local heroes.

Project Expectations

After this response I realized that this project had the potential to be ongoing, and that there was support in the community to recognize these local heroes.

The next step is still in development phase. The plan is to select three local heroes to receive a form of recognition that goes beyond being identified on the website. The *Se Busca* project (in this case me, but maybe in the future it will be a committee of people as the project grows into an organization) will select the first person, the second will be the person whose name was mentioned most frequently by respondents per edition, and the third will be a random selection from the people who were nominated. The awardees will receive a card to recognize their status as local heroes, and community members and businesspeople will be invited to support them. For instance, a coffee shop that might want to participate could decide on the type of support they want to provide, which might mean providing a free cup of coffee to the awardee.

This plan generates benefits at three levels: personal, local, and systemic. At the personal level, local heroes will feel a united community supporting them and they will be motivated to continue their work because it will be appreciated and recognized. At the local level, businesses will attract positive attention for participating in a social activity without compromising their business time; they will offer something very minimal for them that will nonetheless mean a lot to the people they are recognizing, and the recognition they provide will motivate other local businesses and people to do something that merits recognition. At a systemic or community level, people will have a way to publicly identify somebody heroic in their community, which will help promote a culture of support and generosity in Chihuahua. The plan is to repeat the *Se Busca* project once a year, and hopefully it will gain momentum with each edition.

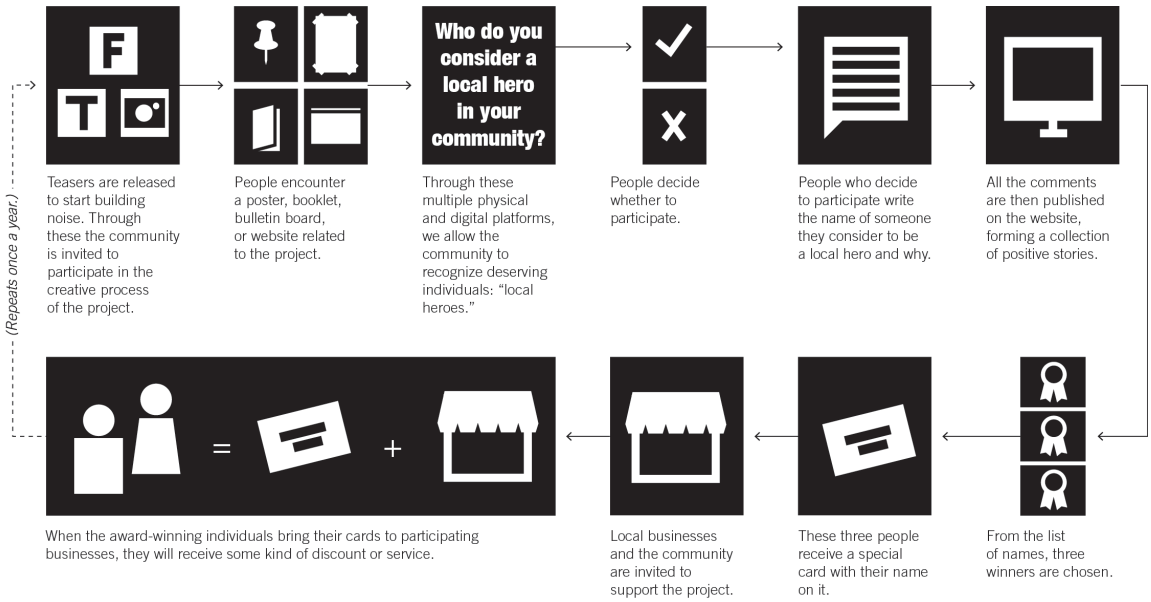

Figure 15: *Se Busca* project process diagram. Image by author.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

"Design creates culture. Culture shapes values. Values determine the future."
—Robert L. Peters[27]

Designers have the ability to use their skills beyond commercial use. The three projects mentioned in this report and their positive results suggest that graphic designers have skills that are socially (as well as just commercially) valuable, and that they can work in collaboration with other experts as well as ordinary people to change the world. Not only are these projects a case study for social design, but they also created an impact in the city of Chihuahua: a flurry of positive conversations started to occur, people stopped talking about an ugly space and started admiring the art in the streets, citizens of Chihuahua shared stories behind landmarks in their community and stopped thinking about the negative things portrayed on the media in order to give recognition and support to people doing positive things.

During an interview with Teresa Ávila, she stated that "we behave in relation to the place were we develop and grow," by which she meant that people who grow up in dangerous environments are more likely to behave in dangerous ways.[28] This is why it is crucial to change the environment to create more positive experiences for the residents of Chihuahua. My hope is that these projects provide an example, and perhaps even a model, for others in the field of social design to follow. By documenting and sharing methods, frameworks, and strategies of making social interventions, as I have done in this thesis report, future designers can better understand the possibilities of social design and the impact it—and they—can have on society.

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[27] Simmons, 111.
[28] Teresa Ávila in discussion with the author, Summer 2013.

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