

Spring 2022

Minero Magazine, Vol. 34, Spring 2022

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Minero Magazine

Vol. 34, Spring 2022



Student tips for success
by Brandy Ruiz

Dating six feet apart
by Brianne Williams

K-POP on the border
by Ariel Castillo



TAKE CARE OF YOUR WATER. KEEP IT CLEAN.



Properly dispose of hazardous wastes, pesticides, and fertilizers. Call UTEP EH&S to schedule waste pickups.

Deseche correctamente los residuos peligrosos, pesticidas, y fertilizantes. Llama al departamento EH&S en UTEP y agenda fecha para recoger los desperdicios.



Recycle oil, antifreeze, and other vehicle fluids, or dispose of them properly to prevent the pollution of stormwater, groundwater and the Rio Grande.

Recicle aceite, anti-congelante y lubricantes o disponga propiamente de ellos para prevenir contaminación del sistema de drenaje pluvial, mantos acuíferos y el Río Bravo.



Do not dump waste, chemicals, paint, custodial waste, and general rubbish items (tires, old car parts, shopping carts, etc.) into storm drains, channels, or ditches.

No tirar basura, aparatos electrodomésticos, muebles, llantas, y chatarra a canales y acequias del sistema de drenaje pluvial.



Keep material out of the stormwater conveyance system (curbs, gutters, sidewalks, streets, drains, culverts, and arroyos). Dispose of grass, leaves, yard waste, and construction debris properly.

No tapar el flujo pluvial a canales, alcantarillas y arroyos con basura. Disponga correctamente de desechos de jardín (césped, ramas, y hojas), así como basura de construcción.



Leave natural vegetation in place where possible to prevent erosion.

Si es posible, deje crecer la vegetación en forma natural para evitar la erosión.



Storm drains are easily identified with "NO DUMPING" decals at stormwater inlets.

Alcantarillado de aguas pluviales es identificado con anuncios de "NO REVERTIR DESECHOS AQUI"

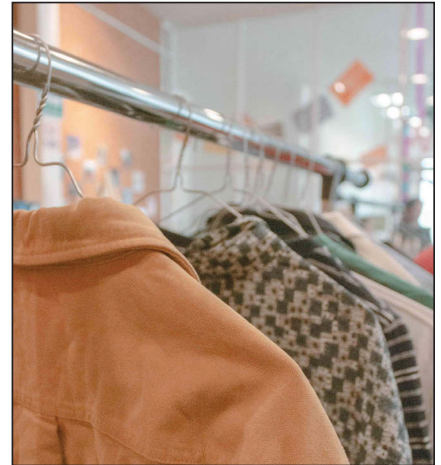


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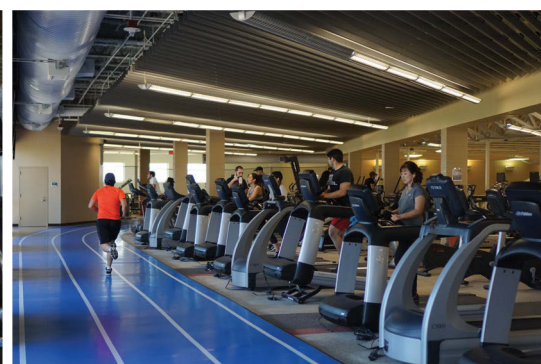
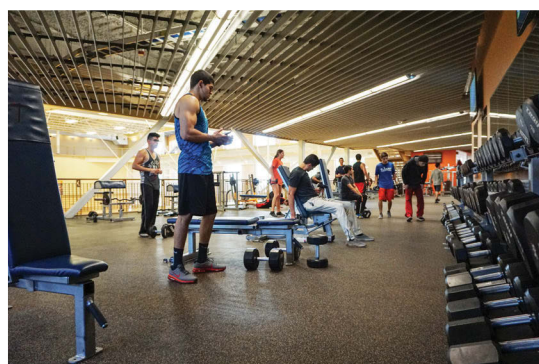
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from the editor

The year 2020 was a lot of things, but above all, it was a time of self-reflection and learning something new. It was a precursor to the following years where the world is learning what normal means in the middle of a pandemic. We turned to social media, we turned to baking, fashion, dating or working out and the outcome of it is a new perspective or even a new “normal” for ourselves.

This edition of Minero Magazine is reflective of this transition that not only the world, but that UTEP students have collectively gone through. If you are an active reader of our publication, you’ll have noticed we have completely changed our look and style. The clean and simple design is not only an aesthetic choice but a sign of the times, a time where, it seems, we care a bit more about cleanliness.

Our team has put together a collection of stories that we hope reflects this idea that we think is Winter & Spring 2022. This might look like becoming more sustainable with your fashion choices as our writer Ariel Castillo explores in her story “Environmentally Friendly.” Or it might look like starting a new relationship or even learning how to be in one, whichever it may be, you can read about similar stories in “Dating Six Feet Apart” by our newest writer, Brianne Williams, who dived into this experience at every angle. Or you might have found yourself humming and in love with one of K-Pop’s biggest boy-bands, BTS, a band myself

and Castillo wrote about in KPOP Army. Or you might have been wondering where to find a nice, quiet study space off campus...preferably with coffee. We’ve got that too.

But, if none of these stories exactly reflect your experience, check out our website, mineromagazine.com where we have many more stories about UTEP students, our community and our culture.

I first began at Minero as a writer, then became a copy -editor and now I find myself as Editor-in-Chief of an amazing team of creative writers and editors that are not only overwhelmingly professional, but are also full of amazing ideas that we can’t wait to show you in this and the upcoming editions. I’d like to thank them for their hard work and dedication and I can’t wait for you, the reader, to check out the rest of this magazine.

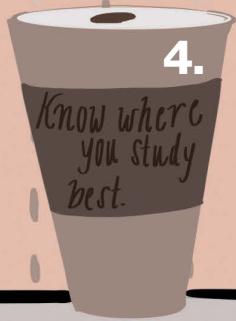
Brandy Ruiz
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1.
USE DOWN-
TIME TO YOUR
ADVANTAGE

2.
Space
out
your studying
over several
short periods

3.
Reading
is not
STUDYING
engaging in active
reading involves
making connections to &
forming examples from
lectures



Study Guide.

WHERE CONTEMPORARY ART
MEETS CONTEMPORARY LIFE

RUBIN CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

2022

SPRING EXHIBITIONS

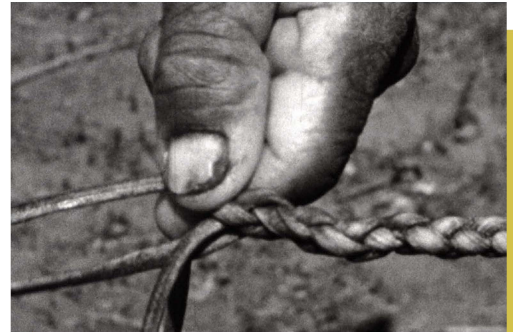
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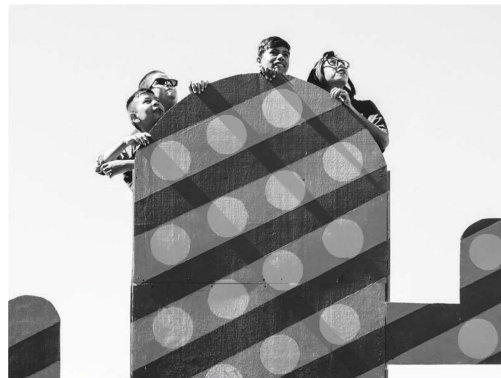
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Minerva Cuevas
MIGRATORY
Rubin Gallery
Jan 27 - Apr 15



Carolina Caycedos and David De Rozas
The Blessings of the Mystery
L Gallery
Jan 27 - Apr 15



**The Fund for Ethical
Practices of Transborder Art**
Project Space
Nov 1, 2021 - Feb 25, 2022





SUSTAINABLE FASHION:



IMPROVING WORK
CONDITIONS



REDUCING WASTE



DECREASING WATER
POLLUTION



RENUMERATE WORKERS



DECREASE GREENHOUSE
GAS EMISSIONS

Environmentally Friendly: Sustainable fashion on the border

By Ariel Castillo / Photos by Hugo Hinojosa / Cover image by Brandy Ruiz.

In recent years, a growing phenomenon has changed the trajectory of fashion, encouraging consumers to take a deeper look into not only the brands they buy from, but the amount of clothing they go through.

Sustainability is increasingly becoming a high priority of the environmentally-conscious and sustainable fashion is just one way that participants in the practice feel they help out the planet.

Though the definition varies on who you ask, sustainable fashion, according to the United Nations Fashion Alliance, “encompasses social issues, such as improvements in working conditions and remuneration for workers, as well as environmental ones, including the reduction of the industry’s waste stream, and decreases in water pollution and contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.”

The UN Fashion group, established in 2019, touts a comprehensive perspective on the impacts of fashion in the larger conversation about the ever-declining state of the environment.

The term commonly used to describe the fast production of cheap, trendy clothing is ‘fast fashion’, a practice, which according to a New York Times article published in 2012 about the clothing store Zara growing into one of the world’s largest retailers which “essentially imitates the latest fashions and speed their cheaper versions into stores.”

According to Lily, a recent college grad and creator of Imperfect Idealist, a blog about “sustainable fashion literacy,” clothing companies that produce fast fashion have poor practices that have a “severe impact on the planet and its people.” Materials used, dyes, animal products incorporated in their products, water and textile waste, poorer quality, and excess packaging are just some of the few items she has listed on her site as

reasons not to contribute to “fast fashion.”

But, with the rapid change of trends, what’s in and what’s not, (according to TikTok that apparently means skinny jeans and infinity scarfs) consumers are sifting through their closets, dumping what’s no longer in fashion and rapidly making more orders for online sales.

Though, some like Katarina Blanco, a 17-year-old senior at Franklin High School, have taken to thrifting as a way to limit their carbon footprint in the midst of an increasingly worsening global climate.

Blanco said she often finds herself digging through used T-shirts at local thrift stores in El Paso.



We try to be very conscious of our footprint and our impact on the environment. For our line, we take clothes that would most likely be thrown away and turn them into wearable, essential pieces.

– Mina and Mathew, owners of Thrft Store and Thrft on Wheels

Sustainable clothing has become a better option than purchasing from companies who mass produce clothing, and in turn, have their products remain on the planet even after their use, Blanco said.

“I don’t think (fast fashion companies) are good stores to buy from, but I know some people don’t have the option in terms of money,” Blanco said. The fashion industry produces 10% of all carbon emissions and 25% of textiles end up in landfills each year,

according to Princeton’s Student Climate Initiative (PSCI).

Thrifting businesses, such as Thrft (321 E. San Antonio Ave.), offer a more sustainable option. While their vintage clothing and vintage aesthetic surely have the El Paso hipsters in awe, the business encourages El Pasoans to save the planet, one garment at a time.

“We try to be very conscious of our footprint and our impact on the environment,” said Mina and Mathew, owners of Thrft Store and Thrft Store on

Wheels. “For our line, we take clothes that would most likely be thrown away and turn them into wearable, essential pieces.”

When you purchase any item from Thrft’s, Save the Earth collection, the proceeds go to an organization that helps plant one tree in a designated location, Mathew and Mina said.

Their recent environmental project encompasses planting trees in California to help replenish what was lost during recent forest fires.

Lexi Bautista, 23, a psychology major at the University of Texas at El Paso and part-time employee at Thrft, said she loves her job, because of their mission to provide more sustainability with their business.

“We don’t get our clothes from Goodwill, Savers, or anywhere like that,” Bautista said.

Some online thrifting companies, like Depop, have received backlash because of the reselling of clothing that has been taken from thrifting stores meant to be a more affordable option for the community, said Terry Nguyen, consumer and internet trend reporter at Vox.

Although thrifting can be a better alternative than buying fast fashion, consumers must be wary of overconsumption, which can still happen even when buying recycled clothing.

Valeria Herrera, 20, recently started up her own online thrifting business, Imperfect Thrifts (@imperfect.thrifts on Instagram) where she promotes living a sustainable life, even though it may look imperfect at times, Herrera said.

Herrera suggests that when it comes to building a more sustainable closet, the clothing you already have is a great starting point because leaving fast fashion does not mean you have to leave your whole closet behind.

“I notice that I spend less money, and in return, I get unique pieces of clothing that 9/10 you won’t see again,” Herrera said. The idea behind Herrera’s online shop is to give people an option to buy second-hand items and in turn, support a greener world.

“Sustainability isn’t perfect, but it feels good when you know you are helping the environment as much as you can,” Herrera said. Living is imperfect and can be an overwhelming task, but with small steps, your efforts could help lead you to live a greener life, starting with the companies you choose to give your business to and how much clothing you consume.

En Breve:

Moda sustentable.

En años recientes, un fenómeno creciente ha cambiado la trayectoria de la moda, invitando a los consumidores a reflexionar a fondo no solo sobre las marcas que consumen, sino la cantidad de ropa que utilizan.

El término moda sustentable hace referencia a ropa que fue “diseñada, distribuida y manufacturada de manera respetuosa hacia el medio ambiente” dijo Faye Lesser del podcast Green Dreamer.

Fast fashion (moda rápida)

Un término común que está surgiendo para describir la producción rápida de ropa barata y a la moda es “fast fashion” (moda rápida).

Compañías que producen fast fashion tales como Shein, H&M y Forever 21, a pesar de vender sus productos a precios bajos y accesibles, tienen un impacto perjudicial en el medio ambiente debido a sus altas cantidades de ropa producidas durante el año.

Con el cambio constante de tendencias, lo que está de moda y lo que no, los consumidores examinan seguido sus guardarropas, desechando lo que ya no está de moda y haciendo ordenes en línea de lo que sí está.

La industria de la moda produce el 10% de las emisiones de carbono y el 25% de los textiles terminan en vertederos cada año, de acuerdo con la Iniciativa Climática Estudiantil de Princeton (PSCI).

A pesar de que las compras de segunda mano son una mejor alternativa a comprar fast fashion, los consumidores deben estar al tanto del sobre consumo, el cual puede seguir pasando a pesar de comprar ropa reciclada.

“Vivir de manera sustentable”, dice propietario local de negocio ahorrador en línea Valeria Herrera, 20, ‘es imperfecto y puede llegar a ser una tarea abrumadora, pero con pequeños pasos, tus esfuerzos pueden llevarte a vivir una vida mas verde, empezando con las compañías a las cuales decides consumir y en que cantidad”.



DATING SIX-FEET APART

By Brianne Williams / Illustration cover by Brandy Ruiz

El Pasoans have worried about transitioning back to in-person, after dating virtually during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic altered dating for single El Pasoans, however some long-term couples are still going strong.

After nearly two years of living in a pandemic, many have adjusted to the fact that this may be the “new normal.” Quarantine forced people to stay in their homes, forcing most to interact through social media. Yet, nearly a year later and a more vaccinated county some UTEP students are finding themselves struggling to get back to in-person dating.

Lilly Arvizu, 18, and Herman Cantu, 19, started dating in their freshman year of high school. After dating for a few months, the couple split, but then got back together “a year and a half later,” and have been inseparable ever since.

“He’s my best friend,” Arvizu said.

Arvizu is currently a freshman at UTEP, while Cantu is not enrolled in school. Just like much of the world during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two lost physical contact with one another, but used technology to stay connected.

“I didn’t get to see him often,” Arvizu said about his relationship. “Communication through facetime and texting all day kept the love alive.”

According to an article from CNET, a website dedicated to making the “ever-changing world useful” reported in August 2021, that the three most popular dating apps in 2021 were Bumble, Tinder and OKCupid. When quarantines started in March 2020, these dating apps received a major increase in swipes and downloads, according to a Fortune report from February 2021. Fortune report-

ed that Tinder had reached its highest recorded swipes in a single day, totaling 3 billion. Dating through OKCupid increased by 700%, and Bumble’s video chatting increased by 70%, from March to May.

But, some noticed, this kind of dating might have also hindered a person’s ability to socially interact with others.

“I lowkey forgot how to flirt,” UTEP computer science major and sophomore Jeremiah Clark said.

“When we did see each other in person, it would be car ride dates since everything was shut down,” Arvizu said. “Due to lack of face-to-face connection it made things awkward whenever we did see each other.”

Eventually, Cantu contracted COVID-19, putting yet another obstacle between the two.



Are you vaccinated?

“It was important to me and he was very hesitant at first, but I got him to get vaccinated,” Arvizu said. “We are both vaccinated. We got vaccinated around March or May.”

COVID-19 has caused millions to lose their jobs, homes, family members, and friends. For a while during the pandemic, there were no hospital beds available, nor were there places to discard the bodies of those who lost the battle. This stage in the pandemic seemed like an eternity for some. Necessities such as food, water and toilet paper were limited, causing many to go into a state of panic. Everyone was required to social distance six-feet between one another to avoid close contamination. With the introduction of the Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson vaccines, along with the decrease in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in El Paso, these restrictions have either been loosened or gotten rid of altogether.

Though lonely El Pasoans may be excited to start dating again, this new terrain comes with nerves, fears and tense conversations about controversial topics.

At the start of a new relationship, some may ask the status of one’s sexual history to determine

if sexually transmitted diseases are present. Now, with the pandemic, “Are you fully vaccinated?” is added to the list of getting-to-know-you questions as relationship seekers found themselves taking more precautions to defend themselves against COVID-19.

In fact, at one point a trend that has died down was sparked to promote getting vaccinated, social media users would post a picture of their vaccination cards to social media, to show all of one’s followers that they were fully vaccinated. But, some students at UTEP do not look for vaccination records and out of what they say is the respect for others’ decision to get vaccinated or not.

“I can’t determine a relationship based on if they are vaccinated,” UTEP sophomore Jeremiah Clark said. “If they are that’s great, i; if not they have their reasons.”

Besides that, face masks, which are still required in many public places and cover the bottom half of the human face have sparked the term, “Mask Fishing,” coined on TikTok through a trends where people record themselves wearing face masks and at the end, they reveal what their face looks like, asking people to comment whether they look like what the viewer expected. Even though wearing face masks has made

wearers more comfortable, some members of the TikTok community see “mask fishing” as an opportunity to expose and embarrass those who prefer wearing a mask.

“It’s become harder to find a trustworthy and dependable partner,” Clark said.

On top of this, El Paso’s close-knit community seems to have also presented a problem in the dating world.

“El Paso is so small,” Clark said. “Most people know each other; you could be talking to your best friend’s ex.”

Aside from El Paso being a “small” city, others feel that the lack of diversity adds to the struggle of dating.

“There technically is not a lot of diversity when it comes to dating in El Paso,” Ortiz said.

First dates

The most common first date, according to a New York Times article published in May 2021, is dinner and a movie. For the city of El Paso, which some El Pasoans say, does not have much to do, one of the most common attractions is Scenic Drive. Much like dinner and a movie, Scenic drive is up for debate on whether it is considered romantic or “basic”, which is another term for mainstream.





En Breve:

El amor en la pandemia

Después de casi dos años de vivir en pandemia, muchas personas se ajustaron al hecho de que tal vez esta sería la ‘nueva normalidad’. La cuarentena forzó a personas a estar en casa, forzando a la mayoría a interactuar por medio de las redes sociales.

Aun así, casi un año después y con más personas vacunadas, algunos estudiantes de UTEP se encuentran batallando para regresar a tener citas en persona.

De acuerdo con un artículo de CNET, una página web dedicada a reseñas, demostraciones y lo último en tecnología, reportó en agosto 2021, que las tres aplicaciones más populares en 2021 fueron Bumble, Tinder y OKCupid. Al inicio de la cuarentena en marzo 2020, estas aplicaciones recibieron un incremento exponencial en swipes y descargas, de acuerdo con un reporte de febrero 2021 de la revista Fortune. Fortune reportó que Tinder alcanzó su más grande récord de swipes en un día, llegando a un total de 3 billones. Las relaciones por medio de OKCupid incrementaron un 700%, y las videollamadas por Bumble incrementaron un 70% de marzo a mayo.

“Cuando nos veíamos en persona, tenía que ser en citas en coche ya que todo estaba cerrado”, dijo Lily Arvizua, estudiante de primer año en UTEP. “Debido a la falta de conexión en persona, las cosas eran incómodas cada que nos

veíamos”. Eventualmente, Cantú contrajo COVID-19, poniendo otro obstáculo más entre ellos.

¿Estas vacunado?

COVID-19 ha causado que millones de personas perdieran su trabajo, hogares, familiares, amigos y demás seres queridos. Por mucho tiempo, durante la pandemia no había camillas disponibles en los hospitales, ni lugares para desechar los cuerpos de aquellos que perdieron la batalla. Esta etapa de la pandemia parecía eterna para algunos. Artículos básicos tales como comida, agua y papel de baño eran limitados, provocando que muchos entraran en estado de pánico. Todos se vieron forzados a practicar el distanciamiento social de seis pies entre cada uno para prevenir el contagio. Con la llegada de las vacunas Moderna, Pfizer y Johnson & Johnson, y con la disminución en casos de COVID-19 y hospitalizaciones en El Paso, estas restricciones han disminuido o desaparecido por completo.

A pesar de que los paseños están emocionados de tener citas otra vez, este nuevo terreno viene con nervios, miedos y conversaciones tensas sobre temas controversiales.

“No puedo determinar una relación basada en si están vacunados o no” dijo el estudiante de segundo año Jeremiah Clark. “Si lo están, bien; si no, ellos han de tener sus razones”.

“It’s a little basic,” Ortiz said. “It’s what you make of it.”

“Romantic,” Villarreal said.

There are some El Pasoans however that may argue that there is plenty to do around town if you are open-minded.

“We have Urban Air, Bob-O’s, bowling,” Clark said. “There’s many places, you just got to be willing to go out and explore. You can even take something so basic and make it memorable.”

Aside from activities around town, quarantine has given El Pasoans time and creativity to come up with their own fun, increasing stay-at-home dates.

“It’s not boring when you’re dating the right person,” Arvizu said. “You don’t have to go out and do stuff to have fun. Being at home learning to do stuff like cook and try to bake or do crafts is always fun.”

Coffee

The ultimate staple of the college experience: the coffee shop. Maybe you like one that has a bit of a darker, cozier ambiance or you prefer one that feels light and open. Or maybe, you just have never found the right place to really hone your focus.

Like many of the students at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), if you haven't found yourself on campus in a little over a year, no worries. Whether you're in the mood for some iced coffee, some horchata and donuts, or maybe just want some good ol' coffee shop vibes – the Minero Magazine team has compiled a list of local coffee shops near campus for you to check out.

**1. North Mesa
Capri Coffee &
Cocktails:**

This coffee and wine spot is the newest on the list. It opened Nov. 2021 with a modern-neon pink aesthetic that matches their sweet-tasting signature latte: the Capri Latte.

111 E Robinson Ave,
El Paso, TX 79902

**Kinley's House
Coffee and Tea:**

Kinley's isn't just your local coffee shop. Sure, they sell coffee but they also sell items for students in the mood for a quick bite, a variety of teas or even a smoothie.

2231 N Mesa St, El
Paso, TX 79902

The Glazy Donut:

The Glazy Donut offers a variety of sweet treats in case you want to snack on something while you try their tasty drinks like the lavender horchata.

2119 N Mesa St, El
Paso, TX 79902

Philia Coffee:

This coffee and wine stop is hidden in a corner on the edge of the freeway yet remains surprisingly quiet. This bright and airy stop has lots of space and many different seating options for you to sit on a couch, at a table or study in the sun on a quiet patio.

100 Porfirio Diaz St,
El Paso, TX 79902

Savage Goods:

Maybe you're in the mood for a bit of a bite, Savage Goods has food and more. You can stop by and try an item from their lunch menu, drink some wine, or even try some coffee!

1201 N Oregon St, El
Paso, TX 79902

**2. Downtown
Coffee Box:**

If you're looking for a bit of a longer drive (though, it's not too long) stop by the Coffee Box downtown. Its right next to the Plaza and offers seating in a nicely decorated and unique storage container structure.

401 N Mesa St, El
Paso, TX 79901

DISTRICT:

District is located amongst El Paso's downtown office buildings, it offers a variety of Lattes and food items for any mood!

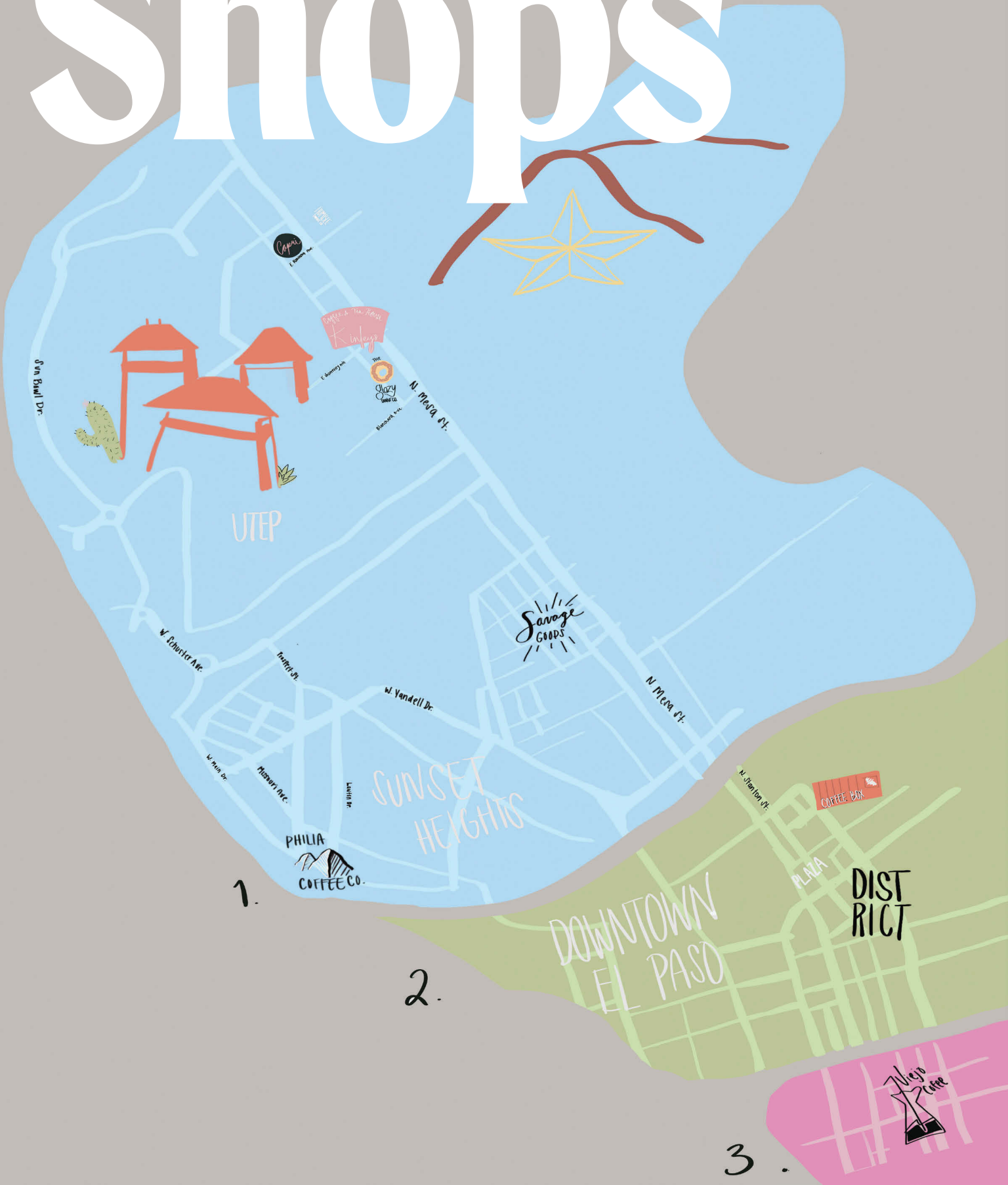
222 Texas Ave Suite
F, El Paso, TX 79901

**3. Lower Downtown
Viejo Coffee:**

Viejo Coffee is a small shop located South of the UTEP campus in downtown El Paso that features some different takes on the traditional hot chocolate and lattes.

518 W San Antonio
Ave Space G, El
Paso, TX 79901

Shops



1.

2.

3.



Lizbeth Lopez has collected K-pop merchandise since 2018 but one of her most recent pieces is a black long-sleeve shirt from BTS' Permission to Dance concert in Los Angeles.

PERMISSION TO STAN

By Ariel Castillo & Brandy Ruiz / Photos by Brandy Ruiz

There hasn't been a dedicated place for K-POP fans to go to in the far-West tip of Texas... until now.

Lizbeth Lopez, a 21-year-old Korean pop (K-Pop) fan, doesn't speak Korean, but her favorite songs are in Korean and her favorite artists are the members of the Korean Pop boy-band BTS which stands for *bangtan sonyeondan*, translated literally in English: "Bulletproof Boy Scouts" or "Bangtan Boys."

"It's not something that bothers me," Lopez said. "I like to also look at the romanization (pronunciation) of the Korean lyrics so that I can pronounce the Korean lyrics as close as possible when singing along."

It's just a small part, she said of what it is like being a fan of "good music."

BTS, TXT, EXO, ITZY, STAYC – no, that is not a bunch of gibberish. These are the names and abbreviations of Korean Pop star boy-bands, girl-bands and idols all of which have followings that amass in millions.

These followers, fans, stans, or "army" (just some of the many names they use to refer to themselves based on the group that they follow) come together to support their favorite boy or girl bands and even connect with others across continents. Maybe you've seen the

accounts of some of these followers comment under a random tweet or viewed a Korean pop-star's dance routine on TikTok, posted by a fan account with a profile image of their favorite group-member, whatever it may be, they're everywhere – in New York, Florida, California and Texas, including El Paso.

K-What? Why?

According to RollingStone, recent Korean Pop (K-Pop) stardom began making an appearance in the United States when Korean pop-star Psy released his song, "Gangnam Style", in 2012. The official music video has racked up 4.2 billion views since its debut and is ranked as the number one most viewed video by a Korean artist.

Even though Psy is widely credited as the first K-pop artist to go global for his viral success, K-Pop groups like the 1950s women-trio, The Kim Sisters, have existed long before his debut. In fact it was actually The Kim Sisters who introduced Korean "popular entertainment" to the United States.

Then, a 2019 TeenVogue story

reported, in the 90s we saw groups made up of trained entertainers and later a shift to what is called "idol culture." It was this shift that eventually produced the modern-day group, BTS, who broke into the scene at number one on the May 2018 US Billboard 200 chart and later completely blew past any previous records and are now often credited as the direct result of the evolution of K-Pop.

That same year, Lopez, who was in high school then, had first discovered the group BTS.

"I was just really bored one day and I searched one of their music videos and I was amazed. Their performances were amazing," Lopez said.

Lizbeth Garcia is a creative writing major at UTEP and was first introduced to K-pop when she began watching K-dramas (Korean television shows). After finding that one of the actors performed in K-pop group, ASTRO, she became a fan of the music genre.

Although a world filled with vibrant colors and a different sound, Garcia wants those who aren't fans to know that there is more to K-pop than what it presents itself to be.



Lopez has both versions of 2021 Butter, as well as posters and figurines of her favorite idols from BTS.

“It is much more meaningful and diverse,” Garcia said. “A lot of being a K-pop artist comes with pain and success.”

The struggle is real!

Since that moment, Lopez has built a collection of BTS memorabilia, photos, albums and more that takes up two-bookshelves, an entire wall of her room. Though, that is not uncommon in the world of BTS army.

In fact 31-year-old Mercedes Reyes has been a K-Pop fan almost her entire life has cultivated a collection of items like posters, cassette tapes, toothbrushes and even concert memorabilia called “army bombs” that cover almost every inch of her room.

CNBC estimates that each year, BTS adds \$3.6 billion to the Korean economy and more than \$1.6 billion to consumer exports. Lopez has all of their singles.

“I try to buy everything just because I like having them,” Lopez said.

But, sometimes buying the same merchandise as fans in other states or

even different merchandise proves to be somewhat difficult in El Paso, Reyes said.

In the month of July 2021, Reyes organized a meet up event where other El Paso BTS fans could trade merchandise or even buy some photocards or posters of their favorite members. Reyes’ efforts are just one example of what local fans do to overcome the hurdle of finding the merchandise of their favorite groups in El Paso.

Even though the spread of K-Pop in America was rapid and has underscored many viral TikTok trends, fashion and more, there hasn’t been a dedicated place for fans to go to in the far-West tip of Texas. That is, there hadn’t been until October 2021, when Instagram account @kpopelpaso announced K-POP El Paso, a now-opened business that sells K-Pop albums, goods and “K-stationary,” on Instagram in a “Now Hiring” post.

The store is one out of a eight K-Pop stores in Texas owned by Kihun Lee, who opened his very first shop in Mcallen, Texas during the rising years of K-Pop’s entry into mainstream media in the United States. It was during a visit to his Houston store that a customer told Lee

that he “had to open a store in El Paso”. He considered the location, its proximity to Mexico and got enough requests that he finally opened the store just behind El Paso’s Fountains at Farah outdoor shopping center.

“In the beginning, I think, almost five or six years ago after EXO there was a small wave (of fans & excitement). After that, the BTS boom,” Lee said.

Conversations with fans and even El Paso’s only K-Pop shop owner all tie back to BTS, who debuted in 2013 and paved the way for newer groups like TXT, who debuted in 2019 under the same music label, to occupy the hearts of fans across the world, open minds to foreign media and even hold spots on Lee’s store shelves. Seven years later, BTS makes up about 80% of sales, Lee said.

In fact, even still, the growth of K-pop popularity in the states is rapid and growing at a rate that’s even faster, Lee said.

“I don’t know how... one time someone came and asked (about) a new group, but I didn’t know it,” Lee said. “They teach me. I’m the owner or I have

business here but I cannot gather all the information now. Our customers and K-pop fans, they teach me.”

Laura Gonzalez, 25, and a University of Texas at El Paso alumni, created and dedicated an Instagram account, with two others, to BTS with the handle @btsxelpaso to reach out to “individuals who shared the same interest in the Korean boy group BTS.”

In fact, it was thanks to Gonzalez’s account that Reyes was able to connect and meet other El Paso BTS fans for a BTS movie premier.

“We all got to know each other like it was just like one big family,” Reyes said.

Initially, the three had a goal of “mass requesting local radio stations in El Paso, TexasX, (to play BTS’ music) like we saw many other individuals doing in their cities in other states,” but, Gonzalez said, but it has become difficult to balance it with the “regular work we do” and the pandemic.

As of November 2021, the last image posted on the Instagram account was of a screenshot of a Ticketmaster description for a concert in Los Angeles with a caption encouraging followers to purchase tickets.

Fans like Reyes and Lopez, were of the many fans nationally who attended the concert in November.

According to Garcia and Reyes, though many are reluctant to lend an ear to K-pop because of the language barrier and because “perhaps, it’s different”, the underlying messages of some of the songs about mental health and self-love, just might be what convinces a person to join the BTS army.

“It doesn’t matter what language it is. No matter if they sing in English, Korean whatever language... We can connect with them,” Reyes said.

En Breve:

EL K-POP EN LA FRONTERA

Lizbeth Lopez, una fan de pop coreano (K-pop) de 21 años, no habla coreano pero sus canciones favoritas están en coreano y sus artistas favoritos son los miembros del grupo de K-pop, BTS, que significa ‘bangtan sonyeondan’, en inglés, “Bulletproof Boy Scouts” o “Bangtan Boys”.

“No es algo que me moleste”, dijo López. “También me gusta mirar la romanización (pronunciación) de las letras coreanas para poder pronunciar las letras coreanas lo más cerca posible cuando canto”.

BTS, TXT, EXO, ITZY, STAYC-- – no, eso no es un manojito de incoherencias. Estos son los nombres y abreviaturas de las boy-bands, girl-bands e ídolos de estrellas pop coreanas, todos los cuales tienen fans que se acumulan en millones.

Estos seguidores, fans, stans o “army”, (ejército) son solo algunos de los muchos nombres que usan para referirse a sí mismos basados en un grupo que siguen. Estos se unen para apoyar. Tal vez hayas visto las cuentas de algunos de estos seguidores comentar bajo un tweet aleatorio o hayas visto bailando K-Pop en TikTok, publicada por una cuenta de fan con una imagen de perfil de su miembro favorito del grupo, sea lo que sea, están en todas partes.

A pesar de que Psy es ampliamente acreditado como el primer artista de K-pop en globalizarse por su éxito viral, los grupos de K-Pop como el trío de mujeres de la década de 1950, The Kim Sisters, han existido mucho antes de su debut. De hecho, fueron las hermanas Kim quienes introdujeron el “entretenimiento popular” coreano en los Estados Unidos.

Entonces, informó una historia de TeenVogue de 2019, en los 90s vimos grupos formados por artistas entrenados y luego un cambio a lo que se llama “cultura de ídolos”. Fue este cambio el que finalmente produjo el grupo moderno, BTS, que entró en la escena en el número uno en la lista Billboard 200 de mayo de 2018 en los Estados Unidos y más tarde superó por completo cualquier récord anterior y ahora a menudo se acredita como el resultado directo de la evolución del K-Pop.

CNBC estima que cada año, BTS agrega \$ 3.6 mil millones a la economía coreana y más de \$ 1.6 mil millones a las exportaciones de consumo.

López tiene todos sus singles y asistió a su actuación más reciente a partir de noviembre de 2021 en su gira mundial llamada Permission to Dance.

Incluso ahora El Paso tiene su primera y única tienda de K-Pop.

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