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#MADRES: Parodic Motherhood Discourses on Peruvian TikTok



By Florencia García-Rapp and Laura León

TikTok's increasing cultural pervasiveness, leading to a myriad of practices and discourses, has turned the platform into a rich digital field site to interpret local dynamics. Here, we analyze visual and textual discourses on (urban) Peruvian TikTok as sociocultural processes to reflect on popular media cultures and contribute to media studies and anthropology. This study examines 80 videos and more than 10,000 user comments around the content of two young male Peruvian digital creators—@mikkele and @zagaladas, who upload humorous, parodic clips of themselves re-enacting their mothers—to better understand how motherhood is articulated, exposed, criticized, accepted, and contested.

Filled with intergenerational tensions and gender differences, these videos and their comments are fruitful terrain to explore both legitimized and rejected maternal subjectivities. We focus here on three emerged themes: “the unfair, aggressive mother,” “technology in dispute,” and “madre latina vs. madre gringa.”

Bringing forward an interpretive contribution that improves our understandings of contemporary (digital) media cultures means building on collective, contextual, and dynamic constructions of realities (Livingstone, 2003). Considering TikTok's cultural pervasiveness and its implications for audience and digital cultures research, it is relevant for social researchers to interpret the platform's local dynamics and discourses.

Beyond the analysis of metrics such as number of followers, likes, shares, and comments, our account is framed by interpretive epistemologies (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009) following an anthropological understanding of visual and textual analysis (Wolcott, 2010). TikTok, as all other platforms, lives in and from what we—users, followers, fans, and citizens—put onto it by building “specific local communities ... whose stories connect each other” (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, p. 884), based on similar interests,

narratives, fun, and memetic visuality (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Therefore, instead of privileging a media-centric, industry-oriented perspective, often falling back into technological determinism, we work from a user-centered, contextual approach, foregrounding socio-cultural practices (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2012; Morley, 1998, 2015; Schellewald, 2021).

The long string of challenges born within YouTube culture, the pervasiveness of hashtags and emojis that add color and texture to communication, as well as the vernacular expressions borrowed from Instagram culture are part of TikTok. This, together with Twitter's self-deprecating, memetic humor, daily fills TikTok with relevant data for social research. Global trends and local appropriations within digital entertainment contexts are fruitful zones of contact to explore anthropologically. The rushed but repetitive temporality of endless gags, quick jokes, and viral challenges through domesticated technologies within the mundane

everyday seem to build a good part of the platform's leitmotif, "Make your day."

Here we analyze both visual and textual discourses on (urban) Peruvian TikTok to reflect on popular media cultures and contribute to media studies and anthropology. Parting from intertextual, postmodern understandings of adaptation studies (Elliott, 2013; Hutcheon, 2006), we look at videos and comments as sociocultural process embodied in pastiche, parodic, digital *oeuvres*. We examine the content of two young male Peruvian digital creators, @zagaladas and @mikepiazze, who upload parodic clips of themselves enacting their mothers to better understand how motherhood is articulated, exposed, criticized, accepted, and contested. They highlight the ambivalence and ambiguity of their mothers' behavior by often performing them as unfair, manipulative, contradictory, (over)protective, technologically challenged, and strict. In any case, in addition to showing "unfair mothers," these clips show independent, creative, fun, witty, and (over) protective women, without neglecting the inherent ambivalence and contradictions of human subjectivities.

Parodies can be used both to establish a critical distance or expressed as homage (Hutcheon, 2000). By identifying portrayed attitudes and practices in these audiovisual narratives, we look at both generalizable and vernacular conceptions around motherhood in Peru, included those found in implicit notions and assumptions within viewer comments. These are a way of taking part in the established (platform-wide) dialogue and often connote implied norms and expected behavior. These creative clips' discourses, embodied in humorous practices (Shifman, 2007), at the same time disclose and further create digital (TikTok) intimacies (Şot, 2022). There are overlapping trajectories of, on the one side, domestic, intricate, entertaining while "serious," intimacies of close familial relationship, and, on the other, a more "public" sort of intimacy (Redmond, 2014) built by people sharing their own experiences through textual comments to the videos.

What do these visual discourses—and user textual responses—say about contemporary Peruvian, and even Latin American, emic notions of family, motherhood, and womanhood? What about domestic technology and digital practices? Considering contemporary, creative, reflexive practices of memetic mashups, pastiche appropriations, and parodic textualities that celebrate discontinuity and playfulness, how do these interact with representation practices

anchored through humor, self-deprecation, and relatability? Further, we examine the way mothering as a socially constructed set of activities involved in nurturing children (Arendell, 2000; Molina, 2006) is performed, reenacted, and (de)legitimized through subjectivities such as "*madre Latina*," "*madre peruana*" and "*madre gringa*."

Research examining motherhood on TikTok (or Douyin, its Chinese version) looks at the self-representation of Chinese work-from-home and stay-at-home mothers in their videos (Han & Kuipers, 2021; He et al., 2022). Whereas these authors focused on self-representation of content creators who are mothers, our research analyzes parodic clips making evident through humor certain implicit notions and attitudes of Peruvian mothers as well as Spanish-speaking user comments discussing motherhood discourses. We use this digital context of videos and user comments to recontextualize the humorous ambivalence of everyday family life through intertextual user/audience engagement and identification. This involves assessing how the blending of memetic visual trends, together with narrative and textual composition tendencies—like the reappropriation of music and parodic comedy—configures a mode of (re)presentation of mundane mother-son situations.

Here we present research based on 80 videos by @zagaladas (Álvaro Zagal, age 28 with 1M followers) and @mikepiazze (Mikele Piazzè, age 18 with 1M followers). Both started their accounts in 2020 and rose to popularity during 2021. While Álvaro first used to upload a wide variety of comedic clips, since the beginning of 2021 he has focused solely on parodic reenactments of his mother, Patty. She recently participated in some of the videos, to which viewers reacted enthusiastically. According to information shared by Álvaro on a TV interview, he only recently moved out of his family home, having bought his own brand-new flat thanks to his TikTok income. Being the youngest of several children, he was the last to leave his parents' house. Mikele is a teenage amateur actor living with his mother and younger half-brother, who is present in some of his videos. He uploads a variety of comedic clips, not restricted to motherhood, and also enjoys popularity within Peruvian TikTok.

Álvaro, being older, usually reenacts typical everyday situations from decades back, during his childhood, such as doing homework, receiving bodily punishments, or not wanting to eat vegetables, whereas Mikele discusses current conflictive situations with his mother, like

restriction of technology use. We identified several themes within their videos such as the sarcastic, mocking differentiations of *madre gringa* and *madre latina*, which generated thousands of user comments. The former is shown as permissive and tender whereas the latter is mean and cruel. The “technologically challenged mother,” together with the “unfair mother,” and its antithesis, “the good, permissive grandmother”—similar to the *madre gringa*—are also relevant analytic categories. In addition, the videos include tropes and tensions between genders, epitomized by “typical arguments” between parents and the “typical (Peruvian) dad.”

Most of the comments express identification with the presented situations from both the roles of mothers and children. Some mothers even jokingly acknowledge their faults. Some of the more serious user comments generate debate and ask to critically reflect on the apparent cultural legitimation of authoritarian, including aggressive parental behavior and bodily harm toward children in Peruvian—and, more broadly, Latin American—households (Gage & Silvestre, 2010; Instituto de Opinión Pública, 2017).

Rather than focusing on stereotypes, negative, or presumably false representations—which have already been dealt with by many other contributions from mainstream academic perspectives, such as critical studies, and based primarily on the interpretation of audiovisual content—we attend to user practices and expressions. As we detail in the next section, we choose to foreground experiences and subjectivities to examine how and to what extent these shared cultural identities (“being a son,” “being a mother,” “Latina mother”) are engaged with by users.

Methodological Reflections: Interpreting Digital Visual Communication and the User-Centered Perspective

Working from a user-centered perspective (Bachmann and Lomborg 2012) means focusing on people and those groups, cultures, and communities they build around media texts, including TV series, audiovisual genres, platforms, hashtags, and celebrities as symbolic arenas of contestation, identification, and representation (García-Rapp, 2018, 2019; Marshall, 2006). Prioritizing audiences—who necessarily are followers, users, fans, citizens, and often also creators at the same time—implies examining media uses and benefits they find for their identities and everyday lives (Livingstone, 2005). We consider textual comments and

audiovisual clips to assess the impact of chosen media texts or objects of fandom on people’s well-being and entertainment, as disclosed by themselves (see also Berriman & Thomson 2015). By empathetically interpreting audiences’ everyday needs and ritual practices, we are confronted with useful concepts brought forward by cultural studies and sociology such as “ontological security” and “domestication of technology” (Giddens, 1991; Morley, 2007, 2015; Silverstone, 1994; Thompson, 1995).

An audience-centered or user-centered perspective within media studies resonates closely with anthropological aims of interpreting emic knowledge and foregrounding cultural relativism together with theoretical plurality (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2010). Working with broad, flexible definitions attuned to vernacular codes and flows of experience, we embrace culture as relational and plural; it is always about cultures, with an “s” (Agar, 2006).

Bearing in mind the inherent complexity of our social realities and recognizing our perspectives as always incomplete, partial, and subject to revision allows us to propose nuanced, situated understandings (Livingstone, 2003; Morley & Silverstone, 1991) from an open socio-cultural perspective (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Sandvoss, 2005). As Markham and Baym (2013) wrote about anthropological methodologies’ disposition for media studies, “Our goal is not to convert others to our way of seeing. We are not after one true explanation. Rather, we are after a thorough, grounded, trustworthy voice that makes meaningful contributions to ongoing dialogues and on which others can build” (p. 189).

For us—an anthropologist and a qualitative social scientist working from constructivist and interpretive epistemologies—it is key to build a situated, close-up view of a certain social unit (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fetterman, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). At the same time, we have always believed in pragmatic approaches to research design, and in the freedom of creatively combining features from several models, as well as being guided by data to modify questions and approaches (Bazeley, 2013; Boellstorff et al., 2012). This often leads us to flexible, messy ethnographic engagements with data.

We practice ethnographic fieldwork not only because of its underlying goals of naturalistic and holistic understandings, but also due to an inherent epistemology and axiology implied by a certain ethnographic “way of seeing” (Wolcott, 2008). As Markham noted, it has to do with a particular “mindset or epistemological approach

more than a specific set of interpretive procedures” (2009, p. 149). In a way, we often explore field sites with ethnographic aims and techniques in mind as they embody a systematization of ways of operating and interpreting reality together with an intuitive sensibility that we had devised for ourselves long before starting our academic journeys. Whatever the collected data and impressions are, they will be interpreted in terms of a sociocultural perspective (Wolcott, 2008). We see our work as qualitative social scientists as a craft implying the “commitment to the value of understanding human social life” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 236; see also Morley & Silverstone, 1991).

When working inductively to generate theory, most of us adhere to some form of grounded approach to building theory (Hine, 2009; Merriam, 2009), independent of conducting a (phenomenologically oriented) grounded theory or not. We apply grounded theory techniques of data collection and analysis, such as the constant comparative method, theoretical sampling, and open coding (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Even though ethnography has many faces and there is no single model for it in general terms, its aim is understanding the “natives’ view” or emic perspective and, while emphasizing the extent to which human social life does not take standard forms, we also interpret what is happening, to make sense of it and explain it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2010). One cannot avoid employing analytical categories that presume general patterns, and categorizing is essential to produce findings (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Fieldwork is, then, both naturalistic and interpretive: “The basic ‘stuff’ of ethnography is contained in myriad raw facts of observation, little kernels that we collect, sort through, and later combine with the help of culture to achieve our synthesis” (Wolcott, 2010, p. 110).

Ethnography and Methods in Practice: How We Proceeded

The goal of this contribution is to offer an empirically grounded conceptualization of contemporary, popular cultural patterns, practices, and understandings around motherhood and humor on Peruvian TikTok, parting from these two case studies. An a more macro-level, the objective is to further advance scholarly dialogue and theorization around cultural identities, apparently trivial representations and practices, as well as mediated

social roles. Analytically, we aimed to include diverse aspects of the phenomenon: the processes within the community as seen by comments, and the characteristics of offered content as displayed by the videos.

By examining both audiovisual content and user comments, the study sheds light on how familial contexts of action, experience, and socialization are represented. What are these young Peruvians’ notions and understandings of motherhood, womanhood, and family life? We chose @zagaladas and @mikkele due to their popularity and high rate of video uploads. They were, at the moment of data collection between early and mid-2022, the two most followed Peruvian creators in this theme, with 1 million followers each, and they make a living from their content production. Their videos garner many views and comments that sustain their popularity, and they upload new videos daily, which implies a large, rich breadth of data for us.

If we understand field site as “an assemblage of actors, places, practices and artefacts that can be physical, virtual, or a combination of both” (Taylor, 2009; cited by Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 60), their TikTok profiles—including audiovisual clips, textual descriptions, and emojis, together with subscribers’ comments and the practices of uploading, sharing, commenting, and liking(hearting)—are the constituting elements of our field site.

Following the classical anthropological premise: “culture is revealed through discerning patterns of socially shared behavior” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 71), we saw the need to look for patterns in their parodic performances, the socio-cultural value of the content they produce and share according to user comments, as well as contextual, underlying understandings about performed roles, the community of followers, and the platform as a whole in user comments themselves.

We researchers—one Peruvian and the other Argentinian but working from Spain—had a seven-hour time difference between ourselves when working on our coding sheet, which implied an alternated working rhythm. During the phases of “precoding” and “first-cycle coding” (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009)—also known as “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) or “initial coding,” according to Charmaz (2006)—we highlighted expressions from videos’ transcriptions and user comments to start exploring the data, indexing, and reducing it. This led us to a sample of 80 clips, more than 10,000 user comments, and a word cloud emerging from video transcriptions mainly

around domesticity and mothers' attitudes ("exaggerated," "overdoing it," "home," "unfair," "chicken," "hunger," "cell phone," and "anger"). Relevant for visual discourse, we also looked at the emojis used the most in Mikele's and Alvaro's video descriptions—namely, "loudly crying face" 😭, "face with tears of joy" 😊, and "red heart" ❤️ emojis.

Each video had an average of 860 comments, ranging from 40 to 4,800. To allow for qualitative analysis of users' discursive engagements, we reduced data in our spreadsheet in the following way: Only comments containing more than three words were considered, the rest were removed, including those comments containing only emojis, after briefly reviewing them for a general feeling. Repeated comments displaying the exact same wording were also batch deleted after taking a note on those most prevalent. We color coded comments for fast visualization of emerging themes. During analysis, we were able to order comments by most liked, analyze threaded replies between users, as well as quickly search and find Alvaro and Mikele's responses to comments.

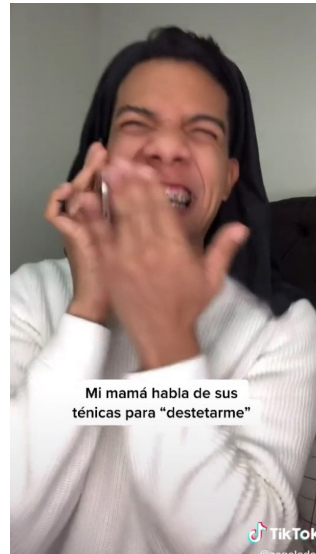
Videos and their attributes were listed in a shared spreadsheet, to be clustered by using filters and colors to establish comparisons and contrasts, and to make patterns explicit. Each row included, besides the title with an embedded link to the video, metrics such as likes and number of comments and hyperlinks to locally saved screenshots and to the spreadsheet containing the comments for that video. We had additional cells for description and memos, where we included quotes, text summaries, and arising thoughts. Keeping a record of researcher memos not only helped in the building of a trail to audit data collection but also was a meaningful way of advancing analysis. We usually stopped the video to write while watching, as writing "often provides sharp, sunlit moments of clarity or insight—little conceptual epiphanies" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 74; cited by Bazeley, 2013, p. 102).

The four video thematic categories were data-based; they emerged from videos and transcriptions and were not defined *a priori*. We first applied descriptive and verbatim codes (Saldaña 2009) and then performed theoretical sampling to complete (fill up) variations within the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It was an iterative process alternating inductive and deductive phases, the latter performed when completing emerged categories through constant comparison (Merriam, 2009). Based on the topics and structure of the videos, we explored specific

attributes to compare and contrast video categories and were able to expand the initial typology of "technology" and "unfair mother" to four categories, including "madre Latina/madre gringa" and "the typical Peruvian dad" to delve into certain, local, Peruvian sociocultural understandings. We include here our analysis of the first three categories and consider the fourth, together with gender issues more broadly, in another publication. We focused then on 25 videos, and these—together with 500 user comments—make up our main data sample and were used as empirical basis for this article.

In terms of research ethics, we kept with the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which suggest a contextualized, case-based approach always considering eventual or probable harm and risk, grade of vulnerability of subjects, and respect for persons (Franzke et al., 2020; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). As usual in practice, we did not collect any user or screen names. Moreover, location and other personally identifying data were not collected. Both TikTokers were treated as public persons, considering the popularity, accessibility, and reach of their audiovisual performances embedded within the regular, sustained programming they offer to online audiences. In addition, Alvaro appeared on a popular Peruvian TV show with his mother to be interviewed and regularly organizes meet-and-greets with fans, implying professionalization, as well as wider public sphere presence and influence. The use of screenshots of uploaded clips falls under the legal doctrine of fair use as we are critiquing their content with the aim of interpreting contemporary media representations.

When turning to the evaluation of research rigor and quality, we propose credibility and referability as frameworks. Credibility as criterion of quality replaces the positivist term of *internal validity* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Because videos are already searchable and publicly accessible, the internal consistency and trustworthiness of the research is achieved by prolonged engagement in the field, leading to immersion and persistent observation, as well as descriptions and interpretation grounded in examples including verbatim data such as comments. Referability, as a means for legitimizing naturalistic inquiry, replaces the quantitative criterion of *external validity* or *replicability* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Following this, qualitative studies are to serve as base for exploring different contexts, in this case, for comparing and contrasting with other platforms and communities (Baym, 2009).



Pictures 1 and 2 Patty's mischievous grin.

Parodying Mothers: Between Critical Distance and Homage

Álvaro, who usually wears a black t-shirt over his head to resemble Patty's hair, shows accomplished acting skills and presents polished, humorous scripts underlying his parodic monologues. He depicts Patty (an abbreviation of Patricia) as an endearing character, scary and overwhelming at times but with defined, unmistakable gestures that users also came to cherish. One example of her wide gestural repertoire is her typical "naughty grin": her characteristic mischievous gesture of shrugging her shoulders while taking her hand to the mouth, shyly covering her grin (see Figures 1 and 2).

The real Patty was included in several of his videos: She is featured joyfully reacting to some of the clips as well as dancing with her son, something that users celebrated by massively liking the videos and commenting. In one video (Figure 3), her married but cheeky mother is on the phone with her friend Meche excitedly telling her that her first love sent her a friendship request over Facebook, which she mispronounces.

Figure 4 shows Patty's happy announcement to the family that the kitchen was officially "closed," and she will not be active in that area as it was a holiday that she wanted to enjoy too.

Patty's monologues are particularly popular with users, who find them amusing and funny as they recognize in them their own mothers or other close female pictures such as grandmothers and

aunts. The parodic clips include tropes and attitudes described as typical of Peruvian mothers—and more broadly Latin American mothers—during the 1980s and 1990s, such as their objections to kids staying longer out playing with neighbors whenever they would come up home for water or to go to the bathroom. The video showing Álvaro acting as his mother from her apartment door telling the other kids that he was not coming back down garnered nostalgic user comments pointing out to the need to drink from the neighbors' water tap or using their bathroom instead to evade the situation. The worst mistake would have to be precisely showing their faces back home for a second, as their mothers would be unwilling to let them go out again, even with their friends begging at the door and trying to negotiate.

These identifiable moments of everyday (Peruvian) life in a specific moment in time—namely, their childhood and teenage years—resonate strongly with users and strengthen these clips' cultural relevance. The videos generate debates around identification and contestation of values related to broader, collective, cultural identity issues. This is also seen in videos focusing on feeding and Latin American mothers' insistence on eating up, which opened debate regarding contrasting attitudes between so-called *madres gringas* and *madres latinas*. We will expand on this dimension below.

Álvaro stated in a TV interview—perhaps looking not to offend sensibilities or to remain politically correct—that he is simply enacting "his own mom," and not mothers in general. This seems

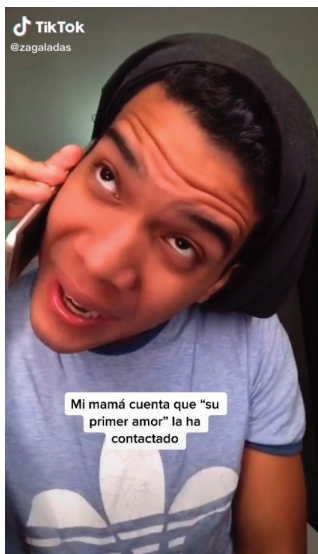


Figure 3 Patty on the phone with her friend Meche. Caption: "My mom says that her 'first love' has contacted her."



Figure 4 Alvaro performing Patty's announcement to the family.

counterintuitive, as it is not likely that many people would feel identified and ultimately respond positively to his content if he was "just" performing a particular unrelatable persona. Instead, a key element of his popularity is precisely the performance of typical situations and well-known traits in that specific cultural context that are, as comments reflect, familiar to Peruvians and South Americans in general, resonating with many other children.

Whereas Álvaro's mother, Patty, shows a nuanced, ambivalent nature, Mikele's mother is almost never funny, compromising, or playful, and is generally depicted in a negative tone. Patty is a quirky, witty, fun character, despite her unfairness and unapologetic mothering style, which includes physical violence. However, Álvaro does not judge his mother; rather, he laughs about, but also with her, and has an understanding attitude toward her role. Patty is annoying but lovable, and he is grateful to have her. This is probably why it is more difficult for users to judge Patty's unfairness, and at times abusive behavior, because her own son presents her in a positive, ambivalent light during comedy clips aimed at "just" entertainment. Whereas Álvaro's acting and his usual textual reactions to comments tend to minimize and dedramatize the more serious, abusive dimensions of the performed maternal attitudes, Mikele's creations are more critical.

Trouble with Technology 🎮 🎧 📱 and 'Blaming Everything on the Cell Phone'

As noted, Mikele's videos, possibly due to his

age, revolve mainly around contemporary situations such as technology conflicts. The videos often display his mother restricting and controlling the use of devices. To this he reacts with a clearer condemnatory discourse, be it as part of a conscious performative-artistic choice or as his actual stance as son.

Mikele's videos reflect a generational gap between mothers and children when it comes to technology. His mom is humorously portrayed as digitally illiterate, not knowing how devices work, not remembering where she left her phone or her passwords to social media accounts. She even reacts angrily when he does not help her remember passwords, and Mikele depicts her as unfair and putting a responsibility on her kid that he should not have. More broadly, as disclosed in user comments, mothers do not understand youth digital practices, their cultures, or their languages (memes, platforms, devices, consumption). They do not see youth digital practices as informal educational settings or tools for socialization, information, and entertainment. According to Mikele's performance of his mother, she claims he has an obsessive technology-use behavior and suffers from excessive attachment to his cell phone, something that user comments express agreement with, highlighting their own experiences with their own (exaggerated) mothers.

Based on comments and videos, the relationship between mothers and young people is problematic, wherein technology is in dispute, as a symbol of this generational misunderstanding and the abuse of power by mothers. Mikele's



Figure 5 Mikele performing his angry mother with the in-text, “My mother when she ‘loses her cellphone.’”

mother is portrayed as awkward and clumsy regarding devices as well as excessively strict, blaming her son unfairly and restrict his technology use, which is the ultimate punishment for him.

In a video from 2021 titled, “I’m not kidding when I say that this actually happened 🤔 #comedia #foryoupage”—with more than 26,000 likes, 1,100 shares, and 200 comments—Mikele’s mom is performed as chaotic and angry when she enters his room and blames him for having supposedly misplaced her cellphone, which she actually has in her hand during the whole argument (Figure 5 below).

Mother: Where is my cell phone? (hits his desk aggressively) where is my cell phone?! No, because you always take it from me to download things, you just take it and leave it anywhere. Where is my cellphone? I don’t have it. Where is my cellphone? Where is my cellphone?

Mikele: It’s in your hand!

Mother: Oh, it’s just that I walk around with my head elsewhere, well. The thing is I’m always so busy and worried and I don’t realize it, well...

According to comments, these situations are usual and frustratedly framed by children as mothers never acknowledging any faults, following the motto, “mothers never retreat” or “mothers never lose.” The justification mothers usually bring for their mistakes and unfairness is

being stressed and worried, which is finally attributed to their children: “You are to blame for all the headaches you give me, I don’t even know where I leave things anymore.”

Another celebrated example of mothers’ war against cellphones is a video through which Mikele criticizes his mom for blaming his purportedly excessive use of the phone, and the device itself, as the reason for any sort of negative outcome, even earthquakes:

My mom blaming the cell phone for EVERYTHING:

“Mom, my stomach hurts.”

“Because you’re on the cell phone a lot, I’m telling you”

“Hey mom, did you know? Milagros got COVID”

“Surely it was the cell phone ... the cell phone is a way of passing it”

Mikele thinking: “What the shit!?”

...

Mikele shouts: “mom, mom! Temblor!! (earthquake temblor)

Mom: “That’s because of the cell phone too. ... Yes, it’s because of that ... but we’d better get out.”



Figure 6 Mikele, as his mom, tries to read a meme.

Most comments show an overwhelming identification with this video. The most “loved” comment (160 hearts) highlights the “we’d better go out,” perhaps because it is the part of the speech that highlights the incoherence of the mother’s approach. A follower’s comment suggests that mothers’ perceptions about using the mobile phone as a device with which unproductive activities are carried out and is counterproductive for their lives: “When I tell my mom that my head hurts, she takes the mobile phone away from me and says: ‘so do something productive, then.’”

Furthermore, we are presented with impatient, disorganized mothers whose children are responsible for managing their social media accounts, as the video below shows. According to comments, they see themselves as acting secretaries or managers when they do not want to play those roles, so some of them directly ask for compensation for this be it money or gifts. They devise strategies for remembering the passwords, such as choosing one for all her accounts and writing it down for her.

An example of mothers being unfamiliar with youth interests and digital communication practices is the following video (Figure 6), in which he performs his mother being shown a meme. She puts on glasses, looks at the cell phone for a long time from afar, looks at it without the glasses, and brings it closer trying to decipher something, then moves it away and asks: “I don’t understand, who is it?”

Followers enthusiastically agree with the video’s

reenactment and mockingly provide more examples of their mothers’ inability to understand memes, and take the opportunity to further ridicule mothers for being overly protective, such as with the following “typical” worried motherly remark:

The “are you talking to strangers?” is missing (hearted 677 times)

The reply “make it brighter, I can’t see anything” is missing hahaha (hearted 533 times)

The crucial reply: “who’s that one?” 😊 (202 hearts)

Oh, I don’t know what I just touched, it’s gone! 😊 (341 likes)

Unfair, Aggressive Mothers

As noted, even though Mikele includes the hashtag #humor to tag the videos, his overall stance as a son, as well as his portrayal of his mother, is more negative and angered than Álvaro’s. Mikele’s mother, whose name is not disclosed, is intransigent, yells at him almost daily, and threatens him with punishments such as internet restrictions or slapping him. In the following two videos, Mikele details his mother’s unfounded anger and aggressive stance, which spoil his day:

(Looking into the camera, confessional style, performing himself) I’m having a nice day. I woke up happy: singing, dancing, enjoying

life. ... The birds, I look at the sky, the sun ... it's beautiful. And out of nowhere comes this lady called "mom" and she gets upset for anything, for the most whatever-thing. ... She's like: "Mikele, why is there a bug on your desk? You're dirty! You don't clean" and I'm like "mum, it's a f*** fly, it's going to fly away in a second." I mean, I really think these women want us to get upset so they can ask us why we are upset and that then we can't yell at them.

"When Mikele felt real horror 😨" is the second video's caption (Figure 7), in which he acts compliant and docile toward his mother's negative attitudes. Particularly this clip, including a long, angry monologue by the mother, underlines an authoritarian parenting style, as also recognized by followers, responding to traditional Peruvian family values.

(Caption) My mom when we're in an argument:

(he performs the mother) Hey! Change your tone, who do you think you are talking to? Maybe you think I'm one of your friends. ... No! You've got it all wrong, what's wrong with you? You're talking to your mother! I am not your equal! You cannot talk back at me because I will take just one (slap) to end your tantrum (threatening with a slap). ... No, no, no, no, I never yell at you. And even if I did, I'm your mother and this is my house. ... So, don't you compare yourself to me, you hear me? ... This is the last time, Mikele, last time, because you know that I take everything away from you and I don't care. I'll leave you without your mobile, tablet, iPad for a week.

Latin America has high rates of violence affecting both women and children (Benavides, León, & Ponce De León, 2015; Gage & Silvestre, 2010) For all their strengths in terms of affection, involvement, and close ties (López et al., 2000) South American, and particularly Peruvian society, tends toward authoritarian parenting styles (Instituto de Opinión Pública, 2017). This involves the foregrounding of obedience and tradition reproducing authoritarian styles and vertical relationship models previously learned at home and at school. For Peruvians, preference toward nonauthoritarian parenting styles are correlated with higher levels of educational levels, younger age, and left-wing political orientation (Instituto de Opinión Pública, 2017). In an environment in which obedience, immediate self-control, and disciplined households are clear expectations, restrained



Figure 7 Mikele, as his mother, making a slapping gesture.

autonomy and negative parental control emerge as long-term parenting strategies (Burela et al., 2014; López et al., 2000). User comments, as we will detail below, refer to authoritarianism as an age-based vertical hierarchy with detrimental developmental and emotional consequences.

The following example shows how Mikele's room is not seen as his private, individual space, as his mother reaffirms her authority in the ownership of the family home. Users also reveal mothers' common controlling and suspicious attitudes toward children's activities as reasons for insisting on them leaving the door open, which can be broadly extended to other South American households, including for example Argentina (Figure 8).

Mom comes into my room: (Mikele's mother suddenly enters the room, without knocking)

(angered) Why are you asking me to leave your room? This is still my house. ... No, I don't care if it's your room, I can stay here if I feel like it, did you hear me? ... why are you throwing me out? ... I'm going now ... (she walks away, looking at her mobile phone, stands in the doorway, and from there she says:) Careful, you're not throwing me out. ... I'm leaving because I want to. ... Don't close the door, shit, what are you doing? (leaves the door open).

Violence threats, as expression of power abuse, are reported on the most liked comment: "at the end they say 'next time I will punch your head'" (1,854 likes). A humorous user comment asserts



Figure 8 Mikele's mother enters her son's room and refuses to leave.

in the same line: "Mikele, don't forget the popular, well-known quote: 'I gave birth to you, I gave you life and I can take your life too.'" Most user comments share the same experiences and understand these traits as typically cultural describing them as Peruvian mothers or Latin-American mothers, either humorously downplaying the severity or frustratedly comparing these irredeemable mothers with theirs. Other users attribute this behavior to health or physical conditions such as thyroid disease, menopause, or mental health issues.

Mothers' unfairness and inconsistent attitudes are highlighted by sons and daughters commenting: "I feel that she is not respecting me, and I don't want her to respect me as her equal, but as her daughter," or "I once told her, "There must be mutual respect," and she ran out of arguments." Children do not feel respected and sarcastically refer to contradictions between their mothers' loving words and negative actions.

In this line, many users are critical of the violent environment that seems to be part of many mothers' cultural background and ask them to change: "your childhood must have been very hard!!! heal your emotional wounds!!! let's not normalize authoritarianism at home!!!" The most liked comment of a similar video sums up users' critical perspectives: "I know this is just a joke, but it's sad to see the reality: so many feel identified, so many parents are in need of psychological treatment" (1,372 likes).

The span of mothers' reactions stretches from reaffirmation to critical self-reflection.

Interestingly, several mothers see themselves reflected in the videos and leave comments accepting the portrait, but most of them do not consider them thoroughly negative attitudes. Some even expand on their aggressive stance: "I do not take technology away; I just kick his table until I destroy it. That's my punishment." There are also a few mothers who interpret this sort of behavior as care and justify it: "It's because we love you that we draw your attention to issues when you do something wrong ... we are not going to be here always to take care of you," or, "all of us moms get our souls killed after giving you a fight ... it hurts us more than it hurts you."

The performance of either democratic or authoritarian parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971) in Peru has been linked to socio-economic context and level of overall well-being in families (Majluf, 1989; Manrique, Ghesquière, & van Leeuwen, 2014). Authoritarian parenting styles often include absolutist norms, harsh discipline, and physical violence such as slapping, throwing objects like shoes, and pulling hair or ears (López et al., 2000). Related to this is evidence of overlapping relationships between domestic and child violence: Children whose mothers experience physical violence are almost twice as likely to suffer themselves (Benavides et al. 2015). What is more, because violence engenders violence, these patterns create a vicious circle through which Peruvian children who were victims of physical violence during their childhood legitimize these attitudes, perpetuating these situations (Burela et al., 2014; Gage & Silvestre, 2010). We will see below diverging positions on this causing debate in Alvaro's



Figure 9 Patty (left) has been violent with her son (right) and regrets it.

profile, when several user comments, including his own, legitimate and jokingly seek to dedramatize parental negative behavioral control—more specifically, bodily punishment—as corrective method for misbehavior.

Physical violence as a way to discipline and successfully raise children is also justified by mothers commenting as means to an end: “We love our children, but we have to be a little bit harsh for their own good 😊.” In a similar tone, other comments advocate to accept and understand mothers in the same way they exercise patience in raising their children. Meanwhile, some mothers acknowledge in their comments their mistakes and unfairness toward their children and apologetically promise to better themselves.

I identify so much with your videos. Sometimes I do it unconsciously and then I say to myself, “well, actually he was right, next time I’ll knock 📵”

It’s me 😊😭 I’m embarrassed. 🙈

Oh God, what sort of mom have I turned into!

In one highly commented-on video that received more than 700 textual replies, Álvaro as a child acts out in public and the mother, while looking composed, makes a hand gesture implying a future (physically violent) revenge at home. In the background song in Spanish a female voice sings, “very smoothly, very quietly, I breath in, and that’s all,” describing the mother’s usually calm

attitude in public whenever he does not behave. Comments evidence shared knowledge and experience about the eventual revenge following up at home, which would include physical violence. The video resonates with users and generates debate because of its familiar nature. It is funny and comical precisely due to its implicit reference to another, more intimate and domestic side of the mother she is careful not to disclose in public.

Álvaro jokingly replies to some of these comments confirming his mother’s reaction back at home as something he had deserved and describing it as a useful, effective way of correcting negative behavior. In this line, many users agree and express a nostalgic, romanticized view, seeing it as a control strategy: “If your mom couldn’t control you with her sight 😊 it was because she didn’t use to beat you.” Some subthreads were formed in response to this popular video in which users reply to each other disagreeing with this apparently common and culturally legitimized attitude and ask not to normalize violence: “Does this really make you laugh? Beating children only calm your own adult frustrations of the day, it has nothing to do with the children, educating without violence is possible.”

Patty’s contradictory attitude after exercising physical violence is also portrayed. Álvaro’s video, “After breaking my snout,” shows Patty feeling guilty for having been physically violent with him. She is quietly standing at his bedroom door while sipping some tea with the in-caption “regretful,” while the son is in bed sobbing

(Figure 9). When the child discovers his mom is looking at him with regret, he seems surprised and hopeful, perhaps expecting an apology, but she quickly turns her back and leaves the room obfuscated. Alvaro is frustrated and dispirited.

Patty's unapologetic, proud attitude underlines her sudden rejection of feelings of remorse from moments earlier and the reticence to acknowledge mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Rather, as comments show, Peruvian mothers often do this by cooking their children's favorite meal instead of using words. A few children remember mothers regretting violence and apologizing afterward while offering physical affection, and some caution, "your child will grow up thinking that she can be abused and then with just being offered an apology, it will be resolved. Don't repeat the aggression." Some users explain that apologizing would even distort the nature of disciplinary parenting practices, resulting in inconsistency and diminished authority: "it's not about pride, one does NOT have to give up when correcting and educating a child because it'd mean that you made a mistake, and it's not the case."

As Marshall argued for the case of traditional mass-media celebrities, these digital creators promote the chance of "talk[ing] about sometimes very intimate and personal topics, but in a very public way" (2006, p. 639). People—in this case, mothers and children—often reciprocate by engaging in self-disclosing narratives through comments. For both content creators and users, engaging in this sort of "public intimacy" (Redmond, 2014) about their familial roles turns into a mundane, everyday cultural practice, intertwined with the boredom, laughter, excitement, joy, and stress of any day in a continuum of experiential moments with other funny, trivial, ephemeral but repetitive (digital) exchanges.

These apparently trivial "videos of affinity"—as Lange (2009, p. 73) defined YouTube videos that strengthen feelings of closeness and connection between viewers and content creators—are part of an ever-expanding database of dynamic webs of production, interpretation, and consumption. We users advance scrolling, clicking, liking, and disliking from medium to medium and text to text, from books to TV series, to memes and beyond, following the messy flows and volatile spread of cultural artefacts that are continuously being remixed, repurposed, and resignified within today's complex digital pop culture.

Here there is a sense of collective semiotic, experiential meaningful exchanges. Each of these

clips is considered by users one additional example of relevant and shared historical and cultural baggage. The videos form a string forming a collection of collective remembrance; a postmodern, parodic, digital pastiche, but also a cohesive oeuvre that brings questions to the foreground. They are used as symbolic meeting points to debate, bond, do catharsis, laugh, and heal, as well as justify, expose, criticize, and even forgive irreverent, imperfect, relentless, and often abusive mothers.

Good and Bad Mothers: Madres Gringas 😊 vs. Madres Latinas 🇵🇷

Further aggressive practices are also discussed on two popular videos uploaded by Mikele in which he compares Latin-American mothers—*madres gringas*—and North American mothers—*madres gringas*—with respect to their child-rearing practices and states that "the difference is ✨ huge ✨." The videos garnered more than 1,000 replies each and were liked about 100,000 times. In the first video, he performs (in English) a typical *madre gringa*, who is flexible, permissive, and respects the child's preferences in terms of feeding habits, as well as a *madre latina*, this time in Spanish, representing her as emotionally unavailable and forcing the child to eat helped by threatening, aggressive manners.

(caption) Gringas moms when their child isn't hungry:

(Mikele enacting a *madre gringa*) – What's the problem, honey? You don;t wanna eat? Oh, you are not hungry, ok. (calmly) No problem. I will throw it out of the window, doesn't matter. Ok? (tenderly) You are my baby boy. ... I'll do whatever you say, my dear.

(caption) Latinas moms when their child is not hungry:

(Mikele enacting a *madre Latina*) – And you will eat it anyway, *carajo*, by hook or by crook. I'm not getting out of here until you put all that stew in your effing mouth, you hear me?

In general, textual discussion revolves around the sounded representation of Latin American mothers, and shared experiences of this kind. Many users mention mothers' common strategy—manipulating children and making them feel guilty for people who cannot afford food: "and then they'd tell you about African children" (most liked comment: 2,186 likes). Considering historical socio-economic crises in

Peru, eating everything there is on the plate and not wasting food respond to deep-rooted cultural practice within families (“because food is not given for free here :P;” exemplifies a comment citing a mother, earning 546 likes). Contrastingly, North American mothers, typically perceived as white and upper-middle-class, living in a “first world country” (as Global North nations are often known in Latin-American contexts), have the privilege of literally “throwing food out the window,” according to the video.

As negative outcome of these forced feeding practices during childhood mentioned is obesity, thanks to difficulty in identifying fullness and an inappropriate relationship with food. Contrastingly, one of the most liked comments highlights a positive learning effect and admits that, thanks to the mother’s insistence in eating what they did not like, they learned to appreciate a wide diversity of food: “And that’s how I learned to eat loco (typical Native Andean stew) and now I even like it” (414 likes).

A second popular video of Mikele’s establishes further contrasts between reactions of madres gringas and madres latinas when their children accidentally fall. North American mothers would worryingly look out for the physical well-being of their children, whereas Latin American mums decidedly blamed the children themselves for the accident.

Footage of someone falling from an upper bed

(caption) Gringas moms:

(Mikele performing a madre gringa in English) Oh my god! (worried) Let’s go to the hospital now!

(caption) Latina moms:

(Mikele performing a madre Latina in Spanish) Did it hurt? You deserve it! That’s what you get for being on your phone. Now stand up, you piece of shit, you’re dirtying the floor.

Users compliment Mikele for his English pronunciation, a relevant aspect within South American labor markets, in which language skills often demarcate best-paid job positions from regular ones. Besides, they describe Latin-American mothers as cold: “typical Latina mom attitude, always cold 😏.” These are strong and even cruel mothers who treat their children harshly for their own sakes, in order to “build character.” The most liked comment added

another typical phrase by them: “don’t even look at him, otherwise, he’ll cry 😊” (3424 likes). A user summarized the general stance with, “That’s Latin America for you. Not going to the hospital unless you’re actually dying.” Whereas madres Latinas are mean, madres gringas are responsive and affectionate.

The two videos portray madres gringas exerting a mothering style known as intensive parenting. According to several scholars, it is the white, European-American, middle-class cultural system that reflects this intensive mothering ideology (Arendell, 2000; Garey, 1999; Seperak Viera et al., 2019). Relatedly, the standard North American family as domestic configuration usually operates more independent of extended kin and community systems than Latin American families. Intensive mothering involves a high level of energy and resources, labor-intensive activities, and positions the mother as central caregiver, including selflessness and self-denial demands (Hays, 1996).

Interestingly, however, we might consider another side of madres Latinas that brings them closer to a madres gringas’ subjectivity: When performing their roles of grandmothers, madres Latinas somehow resemble madres gringas, as evidenced by Álvaro’s videos displaying Patty as grandma.

Álvaro’s parents are permissive and flexible with their grandchildren, whereas Mikele’s mother is shown performing the same characteristics with his younger brother. Patty’s overly permissive attitude with her grandchild is displayed in a video titled, “(I’m) increasingly stricter,” in which she is enacted in “grandma mode,” happily allowing the child to paint on the walls, not to eat if she does not feel like it, and watching TV until very late. User comments identified with the attitudes and provide additional examples of their parents’ styles when interacting with their grandchildren.

luckily, the child is “still learning,” for us children it was the flip flop (throwing) 😊 (205 likes)

for grandchildren chicken and fries, for children: soup or lentils 😊 (572 likes)

my children watch TV with her until 1 a.m. ... 😊 then she says “I didn’t even realize it, I thought it was 9 p.m.” 🙄

Some users reflect on the contrasts and offer explanations related to the parents’ performance of an inherently different familial role, with different expectations and rules:

those responsible for EDUCATING are the parents, they are only there to give love. (6 likes)

It is not the same, if they were their own children, they wouldn't be so soft, it's not that they have really changed.

They don't have to deal with the problems they dealt with when they were younger and that gives them the calm to exercise respectful parenting. (17 likes)

It would seem that Peruvian mothers often play the role described as *madre Latina* when it comes to their eldest children, while assuming a *madre gringa* persona when interacting with their younger kids, as Mikele complains about. Could these then be two sides of the same mom? By linking themes and interpreting videos, we came to see these two divergent trajectories as two versions of the same multifaceted mother. We could argue that a *madre Latina* includes a *madre gringa* in her inner self, which she only shows in certain situations. A *madre gringa* is always, deep down, inherently part of a *madre Latina*, in a sort of Mamushka arrangement.

Collectively Working It Out Through Humor: Arriving at Different Sides of the Same Mom

We believe in the value of understanding each other and ourselves entangled in emotional investments and subjected to worry, pleasure, excitement, and dread beyond the dogmatic rubric of (political) production and participation (Jenson, 1992; Lewis, 2003). This is particularly relevant when risk, technological determinism, moral panics, and paternalistic accounts continue to shape academic discourse around digital media (Berriman & Thomson, 2015; Morley, 1998), especially, as we note, in Spanish-speaking contexts. As Livingstone has argued: “the more contradictory the claims about citizens versus consumers, individuals versus crowds, participants versus couch potatoes, the more interesting the task to explain how they can, as they must, all be part of the same population” (2015, p. 3; see also Livingstone, 2005).

Socio-cultural roles and practices are immensely diverse and contingent. In this sense, the analyzed examples are not entirely representative but still fit within the broader spectrum of contemporary popular culture practices. Considering the ambivalence of the ephemeral but repetitive, the popularity of their content and the reach of their comedic performances are in a way unique but not isolated cases. These comedians, dancers, singers, personalities, influencers, subcultural

celebrities, digital entrepreneurs with differing grades of professionalism act as “discursive vehicles” (Marshall 2014, p. 246), always on the verge of being legitimized as a “voice above other(s)” (p. XIVIII) and being condemned as “fabricated commodity” (p. XIIIV). Still, for researchers, their sociocultural relevance as texts, sites, and signs of both the symbolic and the practical of everyday life lies in them providing (and viewers actively making use of) the same paradigmatic opportunities once reserved for the consumption of traditional media outlets: to discuss, learn, emulate, admire, and criticize (García-Rapp, 2018; Redmond, 2014), both content and their producers/performers.

As it was argued about the earlier emergence of “new” media—first the cinema, then television, later YouTube, and now TikTok—we (users, fans, audiences, and scholars researching them) continue being told that certain platforms, media forms, and texts, along with entertainment and pleasure, are (still) irrelevant, trivial, and reproachable. The academy that prescribes, delimits, and polices moral, aesthetic, humanistic, and socio-cultural borders proclaims that boredom is nothing but a privilege (Kennedy, 2020), and that our TikTok engagements necessarily are—by extension applicable to pop culture as a whole—not more than a complicit guilty pleasure (Baym, 1999; Guilluy, 2018; Rutsky & Wyatt, 1990).

Still, beyond high- and low-brow culture definitions, or traditional, illustrated, top-down assertions (Elliott, 2014), the I as project to complete and oeuvre (Giddens, 1991; Thompson, 1995) serves itself daily from platforms as tools to think about oneself and others. By paying attention to the ways of domesticating and inhabiting digital media ecosystems, by learning, sharing, and experiencing through and with others following collective, constructivist strategies (Tobeña, 2020), we see how digital practices, media texts, and platforms work as encouragement, aid against anxiety, and conform (collective) spaces from grim realities (Morley, 2007, 2015; Schellewald, 2021; Silverstone, 1994). By telling stories, experimenting, learning by trial and error, and recontextualizing “technosocial knowledge” (Peirone, 2018), webs of support and shared fields of reference are knitted.

As noted, these clips are pieces of shared historical, emotional, and cultural baggage repurposed as symbolic meeting point to laugh and heal, as well as justify, expose, criticize, and forgive mothers who, after all, stayed by their sides. People take Alvaro and Mikele up on their

offer to flesh out, unpack, rework their pasts and presents as sons, daughters, and mothers. Through humor, they collectively work out and reflect on similar familial landscapes and parental governance. Their digital visibility allows for the explicit discussion of otherwise implicit notions active within everyday offline contexts. Attitudes, practices, and discourses are made evident, fostering the open defense and contestation of certain subjectivities.

Even though Álvaro and Mikele have different familial contexts and an age difference of a decade, their mothers' divergent trajectories could still be seen to depict versions of the same mom. If they can be the typical Peruvian mom but also a gringa mom with their younger children or grandchildren—if they are unpredictable, always unapologetically themselves, and represent multi-faceted roles—are these apparently divergent subjectivities not overlapping versions of the same mom?

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