

Fatherly subjectivities on TikTok parodies: The “typical Peruvian dad” 🌐



Florencia García-Rapp

University of Valladolid

Department of Sociology and Social Work

Florencia.garciarapp@uva.es

TikTok's increasing cultural pervasiveness leading to a myriad of practices and discourses turn it into a rich digital fieldsite to interpret local dynamics. Building on a more encompassing study on Peruvian TikTok and parodic motherhood (García-Rapp, and León, 2024) I delve here into the emerged theme of gender issues including videos performing the relatable social identity of “typical Peruvian dad” as well as the popular “arguments between my parents” to better understand how family roles are articulated, exposed, criticized, accepted, and contested. I analyze visual and textual discourses as sociocultural processes and reflect on popular media cultures drawing from videos and user comments around the content of male Peruvian digital creator @zagaladas (Álvaro Zagal, 28, 1M followers), who uploads humorous, parodic clips of himself re-enacting his parents. With the goal of contributing to media studies and anthropology, the article examines videos and comments filled with intergenerational tensions and implied gender differences as fruitful terrain to interpret legitimized and rejected fatherly subjectivities.

Keywords: TikTok; digital cultures; popular cultures; parody; fatherhood; media anthropology

Recognizing global trends and local appropriations within digital entertainment contexts as fruitful zones of contact to explore anthropologically, here I analyze visual and textual discourses on Peruvian TikTok. With the goal of theorizing about popular media cultures and contributing to media studies, I examine the content of @zagaladas (Álvaro Zagal, 28, 1M

followers), one of the most popular Peruvian digital creators. Since early 2021, he daily uploads parodic clips of himself enacting his mother recontextualizing the humorous ambivalence of everyday family life through intertextual audience engagement and identification. I explore this digital context of videos and comments to better understand how motherhood, fatherhood and domesticity are articulated, exposed, criticized, accepted, and contested. This includes assessing what viewers make of it and what benefits they draw from this in terms of self-development, reflection, well-being and entertainment, based on their own textual comments.

My scholarly contributions are empirical and anthropological: a micro-theory “about how some small part of the world works” (Wolcott, 2010: 26). By attending to user practices and expressions, throughout my research I interpret and report on them presenting a contextualized account, grounded in data. The goal of this contribution is to offer an empirically grounded conceptualization of contemporary, popular cultural patterns, practices, and understandings around fatherhood and humor on Peruvian TikTok, parting from a case study. On a more macro-level, the objective is to further advance scholarly dialogue and theorization around cultural identities, (apparently trivial) popular representations and practices, as well as mediated social roles. Analytically, the goal was to include the two dimensions of the phenomenon: dynamics and notions within the community as seen by textual user comments as well as characteristics of uploaded content as displayed by videos.

Considering how humour is often directed towards those in power and higher in societal hierarchies (Kuipers, 2011), Álvaro mocks his parents, representing authority, as well as inherited and imposed sensibilities. He does this in a critical light, but it can also be seen as an expression of affection. What do these visual discourses –and user textual responses– say about contemporary Peruvian, and even Latin American, notions of family, motherhood, and fatherhood? Further, I examine how gendered subjectivities within clips displaying “typical arguments between my parents” and “the typical Peruvian dad” are performed, re-enacted, and (de)legitimized.

This article builds on a more encompassing study on Peruvian TikTok and parodic motherhood (García-Rapp and León, 2024) performed during 2021-2022 that included two content creators, 80 videos and more than 10.000 user comments. In this context, four themes emerged: 1) “madre gringa vs. madre Latina”, 2) “the aggressive, unfair mother”, 3) “issues with technology” and 4) “gender issues”, including depictions of “the typical Peruvian dad”. Having previously discussed the other three themes, here I focus on the fourth.

A key element of Álvaro’s popularity is the performance of typical situations and well-known traits familiar to Peruvians and Latin Americans in general, resonating with many other children. These domestic scenes from (Peruvian) daily life, particularly those arising around motherhood and adolescence, or the ones related to gender differences and conflicts strike a chord with viewers increasing their cultural relevance. Discussions on principles relating to wider, communal, cultural identity issues are sparked by them.

Beyond the analysis of metrics such as number of followers, likes, shares, and comments, this account is framed by interpretive epistemologies (Merriam 2009; Saldaña 2009) following an anthropological understanding of visual and textual analysis (Wolcott, 2010; Lange, 2014; Boellstorff et al, 2012). The underlying principle of my work is that platforms, in this case TikTok, lives in and from what we –users, followers, fans, and citizens– put onto it. Therefore, instead of privileging a media-centric, industry-oriented perspective, often falling back into technological determinism, I work from a user-centered, contextual approach, foregrounding socio-cultural practices (Morley 1998, 2015; Bachmann and Lomborg, 2012; Schellewald, 2021).

Rather than focusing on, media-centric, stereotypes or negative and presumably false representations –which embody a main concern in academic practice in general and in particular of critical and political economy studies– often based solely on the scholar’s interpretation of audiovisual content, I attend to emic, vernacular user practices and expressions. I seek to foreground nuanced, complex experiences to examine how and to what extent these shared cultural identities (“being children of Peruvian parents”, “being a Peruvian mother”, “the typical Peruvian dad”) are engaged with by users. This includes the

creator as user and member of that culture (both Peruvian and parodic TikTok cultures). In any case, the clips show fun, loving, quirky, witty, accepting parents, without neglecting the inherent contradictions of human subjectivities (García-Rapp and León, 2024).

Latin American anthropologists of gender Norma Fuller (1988) and Sonia Montecino (1996), advocate for an intersectional understanding of identity and social roles, into which cultural categories as class, gender models of socialization, or language and nation come in play. This view is also shared by Alvermann et al (2022) when discussing gender on TikTok. During one single day we inhabit several differing social spheres, some even in stark opposition (García-Rapp, 2019). Identities are lived experientially in a simultaneous juxtaposition of singular elements, blending and transposing projects, contexts, social worlds. In this sense, away from essentialist approaches to identity, simultaneity and multiplicity are hermeneutical keys. Media texts and genres, cultural artefacts and people are messy, complex, and inhabit a wide palette of grays.

The socio-cultural value of the clips, and arguably its main point of interest for us social researchers, is that they give rise to moments of exchange. Attitudes, practices, and discourses are made evident, fostering the open defense and contestation of certain subjectivities. The videos can be seen as “pieces of shared historical, emotional, and cultural baggage repurposed as symbolic meeting point to laugh, revisit, as well as justify, expose, criticize” (García-Rapp and León, 2024) mothers and fathers, as well as gendered roles and practices. Fellow Peruvians and other Spanish-speaking users take Álvaro up on the offer to flesh out, unpack, rework their pasts and presents as sons, daughters, and mothers.

Peru has a population of 33 million and the large majority live in urban areas. 65% of Peruvians have internet access and most of them access it through mobile phones. One in two Peruvian Internet users use TikTok, implying a possible national audience of more than 12 million. Interestingly, women make up 60% of those, also seen in the overrepresentation of comments by female user to @zagaladas videos (Ipsos, 2022; Kepios, 2022).

Although in his beginnings Álvaro did post a mix of dancing videos, own's renditions of challenges, and other popular viral generic videos, from early 2021 onwards began focusing

on parodying his mother, probably due to the evident success in terms of viewership and reactions. The TikToker was treated for the purposes of this article as a public person considering the popularity, accessibility, and reach of his audiovisual performances embedded within the regular, sustained programming he offers to his online audiences. In addition, Álvaro 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 analyzed examples are never entirely representative but still fit within the broader spectrum of contemporary (popular culture) practices in Latin America, and, in a way also TikTok as a whole. The popularity of the content and the reach of the comedic performances implies they are not isolated cases. However, in this case, even though @zagaladas content shares platform's aesthetics, including on-screen memetic titles, dancing clips, and lip-synch, he as well as other popular creators in the subgenre of parodic family videos, such as @mikkele, present cohesive, consistent content (García-Rapp and León, 2024). This, in principle, does not agree with previous arguments that TikTok's algorithmic configuration made creators rely on video-based popularity through imitation and virality rather than on cohesive profiles (e.g., Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2022; Darvin, 2022; Abidin, 2021).

Mikele is a teenage amateur actor living with his mother and younger half-brother, who are present in some of his videos. Like @zagaladas, he has more than 1 million followers on the platform. The Peruvian creator uploads a variety of comedic clips, not restricted to motherhood. Even though he includes the hashtag #humor to tag the videos, his overall stance as son, as well as his portrayal of the mother, is more negative and angry 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 (García-Rapp and León, 2024). Álvaro's mother, Patty, as I will expand on below, shows a nuanced, ambivalent nature, when Mikele's mother is almost never funny, compromising, or playful. This can serve us as a contrast to deepen the interpretation of @zagaladas multifaceted work.

Methodology and methods: How I proceeded

My research aims are always framed by cultural relativism to offer nuanced, empathetic conclusions that increase our understanding of phenomena, rather than dogmatic, essentialist assertions or academic, critical “truths” (Rutsky and Wyatt, 1990). In my scholarship, instead of taking up a definitive, fixed position and presenting a tidy argument towards my conclusions through persuasive discursive strategies, I purposely present series of findings that are rather ambivalent, ambiguous, often polysemic or even contradictory, and always complex. Namely because this is an inherent part of the fluidity of human nature. Let us then explore our socio-cultural worlds from an axiology of fluidity, polysemy by foregrounding contextualism (Elliott, 2014, 2020; Livingstone, 2003).

Following 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, media genres, platforms, hashtags, and celebrities as symbolic arenas of contestation, identification, and representation. As Grindstaff (2008) explains, it is a sociology of popular culture that focuses on consumption and interpretation instead of macro level institutions and markets. The latter, even when looking at social media phenomena, often relies on a high-theory mode of analysis and scholarly legitimated arguments within the “serious” realms of economic, political, and organizational sociology. 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 according to their own understandings rather than foregrounding platform-based technical affordances and constraints or privileging top-down scholarly interpretations (Livingstone, 2005; García-Rapp, 2019).

As a qualitative social scientist working from constructivist and interpretive epistemologies, it is key for me to build and present a situated, close-up view of a certain social unit (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Fetterman, 2010). I believe in pragmatic approaches to research design, in the freedom of creatively combining features from several models, as well as being guided by data to modify questions and approaches (García-Rapp, 2016, 2019; Boellstorff et

al., 2012; Bazeley, 2013). This often leads to flexible, messy, ethnographic engagements with data.

@zagaladas was at time of data collection the most followed Peruvian creator in this theme with one million followers and he made a living from his content production. Data had already been collected as part of a previous article on Peruvian motherhood on TikTok focusing on Alvaro's representation of his mother Patty as well as another TikToker's parodies of his own (García-Rapp and León, 2024). A total sample of 80 clips and more than 10.000 user comments built the empirical basis for the article that presented a typology of three emerged categories that displayed into local, Peruvian sociocultural understandings: "issues with technology", the "unfair mother" and "madre Latina vs. madre gringa". The fourth category, "the typical Peruvian dad", together with gender issues more broadly, were reserved for this publication and based on the analysis of a subset of 8 videos and 5.000 comments.

During the phases of "pre-coding" and "first-cycle coding" (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009), also known as open coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) or initial coding according to Charmaz (2006), I highlighted expressions from videos' transcriptions and user comments to explore and index data. Attributes were listed in a spreadsheet, then clustered by using filters and colors to establish comparisons, contrasts, and make patterns explicit. I first applied descriptive and verbatim codes (Saldaña, 2006) and then performed theoretical sampling to complete (fill up) variations within the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). It was an iterative process alternating inductive and deductive phases; the latter performed when completing emerged categories through constant comparison (Merriam, 2009).

In terms of research ethics, I complied with the ethical code of University of Lima, as explained by Cuevas-Calderón, Yalán Dongo and Kanashiro (2022) as well as the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) which suggests a contextualized, case-based approach considering probable harm and risk, vulnerability of subjects, and respect for persons (Franzke, et al., 2020; Markham and Buchanan, 2012). As usual in practice, I did

not collect any user or screen names. Moreover, location and other personally identifying data were not collected either.

“Typical Peruvian dad attitudes”

Álvaro mainly parodies his mother Patty, while his father Augusto is less visible but the videos featuring him, either in person or as portrayed by Álvaro performing him, are highly popular. Based on @zagaladas’ videos and bearing in mind how users describe Augusto as “the typical Peruvian dad”, Peruvian fathers are not modern men. They are traditional, hardened, thick-skinned, and show certain additional traits: They do not cook or know much about domestic chores and kitchen labor, usually have hermetic, impenetrable facial expressions and gestures, even though they can be funny and playful when casually telling jokes at the dinner table, delivering a carefree, witty response to their wives, or surprising their family (sometimes rather embarrassing) with salsa hip moves during parties.

According to traditional patriarchal models, men are supposed to be distant, dominant, and privilege rationality over emotion (Jiménez-Guzmán and Terra-Guerrero, 2007). Parrini (2000) draws from Kaufman (1997) to argue that men must reprime a palette of emotions and needs such as any pleasure they may gain from taking care of others, receptivity, compassion, or empathy. They are “invested with various powers, stalked by innumerable demands” (2000: 74). In line with this, Fuller (1997) explains that how each man will then deal with the inherent inconsistencies of their gender identity privileging different aspects according to moments in their lifecycles, professional contexts, and their own sensibilities. There are those who emphasize idealism or rather pragmatism, those closer to the virility approach and the warrior model; or those who prioritize love and responsibility and seek to embody sensitive men and close fathers (Fuller 1988). The masculine experience is, thus, not universal but multiple, contradictory, and variable. Instead of examining one single, stable masculinity, we should be looking at masculinities in plural.

When Álvaro introduced his father for the first time to his viewership with a dancing clip titled “It was hard, but I convinced him” (figure 1) it was mid-2020, before focusing his content solely on his mother. Up to this point no one really knew much about Patty or had seen her. This is perhaps why, female users’ reaction was to effusively compliment the

father by underlining his attractive, sexy nature, and skillful dancing moves. The phrase “your dad is like wine” was used, referring to the saying by which men improve with age. They commented how Augusto looked young, how similar they both looked and that the father was actually moving cooler than the son, stealing the show. He had “swing”, “flow”, and some even disclosed he was their crush; they wanted to be his stepmothers and added “Hi, stepson”, greeting Álvaro. This agrees with research arguing that heterosexual men’s bodies are increasingly being publicly coded in ways that legitimize being desired (Foster and Baker, 2022).



Figure 1. Álvaro and his father Augusto dancing.

These passionate comments, treating Augusto as a possible romantic partner, are unthinkable by mid-2021 when Patty had already turned into his profile’s main character. Once he had established the intimate details, intricacies of the couple’s domestic life. Álvaro has disclosed so much more now that users feel they know the family much better and respect Patty. Currently, comments are almost always positioned as “team Patty”, siding

with her, which includes making fun of the dad's typical attitudes, also found in many other Peruvian men.

In this line, in October 2021, Álvaro uploaded a video titled "Here I present The Augusto" (figure 2) with an in-text stating "a day in my father's life". He performs Augusto during domestic situations such as aggressively brushing his teeth, sneezing loudly and exaggeratedly before profusely rubbing his nose. He checks the fridge to see if there are any rests and takes whatever he finds after quickly smelling it, leaves his used glass on the counter if he drank "just water", to which users react entertained and surprised at seeing their own male family members reflected. They define him as "the typical Peruvian dad".



Figure 2. Álvaro performs his father Augusto

Users comment that they thought the strong, loudly sneezing was just their fathers or husbands. "My husband sneezes and it seems like the dragon is coming out. screams,

grunts, roars. That's to say: "I'm a man, damn!" to what Álvaro himself replied agreeing: "hahahha, my God. Why are they like this?" 😂

For the traditional Latin American imagination, from a moral point of view, men are like children and therefore less responsible for their actions (Fuller, 2001, 2023). Fatherhood opposes the wild side of masculinity. It is considered the most important and fulfilling experience in a man's life, the inauguration of a new period of the life cycle. (Giménez-Guzmán and Tena-Guerrero, 2007). It is the demonstration that a man is a "full man", in the hegemonic sense of virility and responsibility. At the same time, it is the nurturing, domestic aspect of manhood and what turns the immature man into a "true man". Being responsible, mature, and finding one's way is closely related to forming a family and settling down. Fatherhood has a domestic, public, and transcendental dimension (Fuller, 2005). In this sense, Augusto in this clip and other "typical Peruvian fathers" through comments all display some of their "old habits", and while they are mocked by their resistance to change some of their traits, they are implicitly forgiven acknowledging they were acquired through their socialization during earlier times.

Kuipers (2011) notes how scholarly critiques of humour do not deny the positive, pleasant, liberating, or critical aspects of it. The sociologist explains how humourists aim their jokes at those in power and their accepted truths: "The archetype here is the jester who has the freedom (and the duty) to mock the king" (2011, p. 71). In this case, Alvaro mocks his father, who represents, within Peruvian society and many other Western countries, authority, control, fortitude, and logical nature. He ridicules Augusto and his everyday habits while also extending a friendly-spirited understanding by generalizing his behaviours and marking him as one of many, as the "typical" Peruvian dad, of which there are numerous others. At the same time, including him in his content is a tender gesture of respect and honour. Making him visible and recognizing being inspired by him, even for a "silly", humorous TikTok video can be seen as an expression of affection and acknowledgement. This is something that users also take him up on, by commenting expressing identification and humorously including frustrated textual sighs about incorrigible men. These practices reflect and further sustain communal understandings around subjectivities and their representations.

The video “He does have a little heart in there” (figure 3 below) shows Augusto seating at the table eating while looking very serious, even defiant, and includes the in-text: “My dad with their children: serious, intolerant, unbreakable and all that”, while the next shot shows him slowly roaming around the living room on the phone with a smile on his face because his grandson came to visit. The in-text of the kid playing states: “My dad with his grandson. Loving, carefree, and on the phone just a couple meters from him”.



Figure 3. The clip showing Augusto’s different attitudes towards his children and grandson.

In this respect, Álvaro’s content agrees with videos from his fellow popular Peruvian creator @mikkele dedicated to satirical motherhood clips, already analyzed together elsewhere (García-Rapp and León, 2024). Mikelé’s videos portraying “latina moms” versus “gringa (here meant as North American or White) moms” were highly popular content garnering hundreds of thousands of views and comments. He performed (in English) a typical “madre gringa” during lunch time, as is flexible, permissive, and respecting the child’s preferences in terms of feeding. Following, he performed in Spanish a Latina mother, representing her as impatient, aggressive, and emotionally unavailable, forcing the child to eat helped by

threatening manners. 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 and Augusto as grandparents (García-Rapp and León, 2024).

Álvaro’s parents are permissive and flexible with their grandchildren, while Mikele’s mother is shown performing the same characteristics with his younger brother. User comments feel identified with the attitudes and provide additional examples of their parents’ styles when interacting with their grandchildren. They react by validating Álvaro’s observation and confirming that it happens to them too. It is users’ parents who now treat users’ children with “pure love” instead of the strict, detached style they had with them. Besides motivation, they even show more physical abilities than when younger, as the next comment notes:

My dad used to buy me what I liked but he didn’t play with me. But with my children he even lies on the floor to play 😂

Being a grandfather seems to be one of those times and spaces in their lifecycles in which many men feel free to let go of patriarchal mandates towards their identities and the way they treat others. By stopping to comply with hegemonic imperatives regarding the way they interact with others, they can be tender, caring, attentive selves.

Arguments over the phone and in person

The next video is actually one of Álvaro’s first paid posts. It is an ad for a Peruvian app to make payments and charge mobile phone credits, giving him the perfect excuse to create a hilarious monologue in which Patty’s fight with Augusto is cut short because he had run out of balance for calls. Users compliment Álvaro on his creation, admitting that they had not even realized they were watching an ad. This was even though he had included the usual #ad and the name of the promoted app in the title. Users were entertained by it and saw this as a fair exchange: they would happily watch his ads if they were this relatable and amusing. They even wished all other ads were this subtle, as it seemed one of Patty’s

regular scenes. This further enforces the idea of his viewers acting as loyal followers, who return to his profile for more thematic content (García-Rapp, 2016).



Figure 4. Patty having a heated argument with Augusto over the phone.

In-text: my mom is having a fight with my dad.

No, Augusto no, the thing is that you always say the same. That's why you call me, huh? to upset me? No, not crazy! Crazy: your mother!

He hung up!! (Obfuscated, clumsily dialing)

(Says to herself) Oh, no, this one doesn't know who he's messed with. You have no idea!

(defiantly) Hello, who did you think you were to cut me off, huh? No, I haven't finished yet. Here the only one who hangs up calls is me!

What, how did you run out of credit? Then recharge your phone, Augusto. Just recharge it. No shop nearby? No, don't worry, Augusto, I'll charge your phone right

now, Augusto. I'll put 5 soles into your account through "yapeapp". Of course, you can, Augusto. It works with all operators. (Types on the phone) I charged it, done. I already charged you 5 soles. There you go, to keep fighting! Yes, another half hour, now. You call me. (Hangs up)

(Her phone rings, she says to herself): Oh, yes, one must have men like this, like in the military. (Answers the phone looking mischievous) Hey, hello? yes, fight part 2!

In line with the contrasts with other works on TikTok that were mentioned earlier, @zagaladas sustained popularity through thematically cohesive content does not agree with studies connecting the platform's swiping system with the need for immediately grabbing viewers' attention at risk of being skipped over (e.g., Alvermann et al., 2022). Since it is a fast-paced environment oriented towards immediate, often ephemeral visibility, one would assume there is no room for long narrative. Nevertheless, Álvaro has a stable viewership, as I also had noted for the case of YouTube beauty content creators (García-Rapp, 2016).



Figure 5. Patty is angry at Augusto during an argument.

The video titled "I have NEVER been there!" shows Patty angry at Augusto because she suspects he's been cheating on her only because he mentioned they have been somewhere together when, according to her, they have not.

In-text: my mom getting mad at my dad's confusion.

Patty giggles looking in love and tenderly says "oh, Augusto, you remember!"

Suddenly pauses and quickly turns her head with a serious look, "What? when we went where? Where?!" (Increasingly angered).

"I never, I have NEVER gone to that place, Augusto" (exaggeratedly gesticulating).

"Let's see, keep talking, no, really. Keep telling the story. (Faking interest while rolling her eyes) "Let's see if I 'remember'" (sarcastically, while raising her little finger).

Defiantly: "With which one you've been there? You don't even remember!"

Speaks fast and distressed: "Oh well, there it is. The fish dies through its mouth.

Lies have short legs. I had already dreamed of knives. You don't have to explain anything to me, leave me alone now. leave me alone".

"Oh, and you just go. No, don't worry anymore, go away, leave me. Wow, what a coward!"

The humorous aspect of the clip is heightened by her using three popular sayings, one after each other, adding a playful reference to vernacular magical, superstitious thinking. "El pez por su boca muere" is a saying that literally means "the fish dies by the mouth" but could be translated as "loose lips sink ships". Bad luck and Augusto's supposed treason are represented by her dreaming about knives.

It was commented 885 times by users celebrating his inventive but identifiable script and disclosing their own anecdotes. Many women acknowledge being just like Patty, when getting angry at their husbands because they bring up a certain situation they do not remember with the suspicion, they spent that time with another woman. They see their mothers reflected in Patty's attitude or feel identified themselves, commenting how it reminds them of their "own toxic phrases" or how glad they are to know they're not the only ones reacting that way.

I suspect we've been raised by the same mom 😏😂 (335 likes)

"dreamed 🗡️" haha my mum is just the same with her dreams and interpretations 😊 (96 likes)

it happens when my husband says: "that movie we've watched before",
"what? when? I don't remember! 😂"

Two users even admitted having done it too but, in the end, it was them not remembering the date. This is their way of keeping men on their toes, signaling that they are astute, awake, and paying attention to any suspicious activities, as a warning. It works as a future deterrence or discouragement, "just in case" they might want to take a bad turn by hiding a parallel affair. Patty and the other women commenting do not trust men to be always honest and are not going to be outsmarted or humiliated.

Historically, Peruvian public policies aimed to consolidate nuclear monogamic families consecrating mothers as queens of the home, and fathers as main providers. The mother being a "guardian" of moral dimensions of her family. She is the authority within the home and has enormous weight in political decisions through her moral influence (Fuller, 1996, 2005). The home is a space where crucial political transactions take place, as we see in Álvaro's videos (García-Rapp and León, 2024).

Relatedly, Jaramillo-Dent et. al (2022), as well as Wentker and Schneider (2022), examined digital linguistic practices of identity and affiliation that create a sense of national or cultural belonging. Following on my approach foregrounding practices and communities, privileging cultural instead of socio-technical approaches, the latter show how these phenomena also happen within other digital environments. This also agrees with my previous research on YouTube's beauty community (García-Rapp, 2016, 2017).

When examining YouTube and the comments section of a BuzzFeed video titled "Things our Latina moms say", the scholars, as myself, followed a social constructivist perspective on social practices and identities. They found linguistic practices of inclusion creating a shared

experience and sense of belonging. LatinX identity as a “shared endeavour” (2022, p. 222) through vernacular phrases and contexts. This included cultural and linguistic repertoires of ‘Latina moms’, for example the “chancla” (the flip flop) or the “cinto” (belt) symbolizing physical punishment. A discussion about the blurry lines between satirical humor and a public debate around the denunciation of abusive parent behaviours within Peruvian TikTok is provided in our earlier article (García-Rapp and León, 2024).

Through discussions about witty, sarcastic replies, cooking and feeding habits, Indian, and Albanian users commented that their non-Latina mothers were the same. Users highlighted similarities and with almost no rude comments or negative interactions. An inter-cultural awareness of a broader representation of Latina mother can come to denote, a “culturally-flavoured” (Wentker and Schneider, 2022, p. 221) family context and upbringing.



Figure 6. Patty angry at Augusto

In-text: Mom fighting with my dad because he does not “invest” in her.

- (passive and demotivated) Patty, Patty, can't you do another hairstyle?

-(angered) what thing?!

-(quietly) all day with that same hook in your hair

-Have you given me any money for the hairdresser's, no. I'm asking you, have you given me any money? (defiant)

-(disappointed) Oh, Patty.

-(gesticulating) no, "Patty", nothing, if you want a different look, invest then, son, invest.

-(compromising) No, but, just a neat little combing, right?

-(dramatic) Hey, you go too far, boy. What do you think? That I'm going to be in a gala dress and with a wedding hairstyle cleaning the bathroom?!

-(obfuscated) Yeah, yeah, ok, I better not say anything...

-Yes, better, better. Stay quiet because you don't even give me (money) even for shampoo. So, it's better, hm (gesture), that mouth of yours tightly closed.

(says to herself): Or do I tell you anything about that rat belly of yours? Prick!

The supposed monetary influence of a husband in his wife's grooming practices or looks, is further exemplified by a user commenting: "When my husband tells me 'honey, I've just been paid', Me: 'Let's invest in something that is going to give you full happiness'. That's me. 😂" In the same line, another user wrote "There is no scruffy women, just stingy husbands. hahaha I love you, Mrs. Patty" (1561 likes). The rationale being men should not criticize her style or efforts in grooming since he has not provided the means to achieve those attractive looks. According to this, expectations cost money and beauty is expensive.

To this argument, another user questions "Can't Patty work?" implying that having a salary would offer her more chances to work on herself aesthetically, but the claim Patty is making is not actually monetary. She is using money as a way of dismantling and circumventing her husbands' subjective appreciation regarding her aspect by questioning his own behavior. This is her way of quickly, wittingly diverting attention from herself and instead put him under the spotlight during the argument. A comment that follows Patty's same strategy but using a different fault, liked 278 times, is namely "Well, no, Augusto. Don't ask for Barbie if you're not Ken yourself! 😏😌 Besides, Patty doesn't complain about that beer belly" 😊😂

Some users commented on how the clip reminded them of their parents' "toxic arguments", recognizing a detrimental effect of these tensions in relationships. A touching comment, liked 276 times, was by a viewer reflecting on how much she missed these arguments now that her father was in Heaven looking after her mom from there.

Although not liked or further engaged with by other users, there were a couple of exceptions. These outliers were rather conservative comments regarding the influence of staying at home in women's motivation to groom themselves and their feelings of boredom, or that usual comment complicit with an ideology of women as trophy. The purported male logic being, if attractive, she will be sought-after and courted by other men, who could "take her way" from them, so they are pleased if she stays "under the radar" by not investing much time or effort in taking care of her physical appearance.

When a woman stays at home all day, she gets demotivated. In other words, boredom demotivates 😞

My husband is glad of finding me all scruffy, because he says that no one will look at me that way 😊

Patty, Augusto, and Álvaro: the typical Peruvian family?

Álvaro's TikTok handle "Zagaladas" can be translated as "The Zagal's stuff" or "The Zagal's style" showcasing his family name. Who are these family members? Who is the Zagal family? (Or at least those three members of the family we know). Are they merely, plainly performed, caricatures of themselves or do they show the depth needed to take them seriously? Do they offer room for people to self-reflect on their own roles, mistakes, relationships with those they love?

Within anthropologic epistemologies, we seek to expand knowledge about people, accounting for their diverse expressions, abstract their similarities to reach conclusions about common traits to all human cultures. At the same time, we know that most cultures are in contact with and influenced by their neighbors and every cultural system presents

inconsistencies and internal conflicts. Different groups coexist according to their economic, ethnic, gender interests and, as such, cultures cannot be understood as coherent systems. As Fuller (1996, 2001) argues, each cultural tradition and era build their own model of a human being, therefore humans do not exist in the abstract. She draws from Bourdieu (1991) to argue that people use in a flexible, creative way that turns culture into a generative endeavor: One incorporates dispositions to act in a certain direction, not rigid recipes.

If taking a broader perspective and “zooming out”, the remix, repurposing and pastiche we witness within visual online contexts, can be also seen active in the broader realm of culture and in our everyday lives in offline contexts: “the recycling of disparate criteria collected from different localities and disseminated (...) to various parts of the globe, which are then appropriated according to local uses”(Fuller, 2001, p. 7).

Shortly after starting on TikTok in 2020, Álvaro officially introduced in public his long-time boyfriend by including their vacation pictures in a video. This romantic relationship with another Peruvian male seems to have ended shortly after. In one posterior video, he referred to his mother finding out he was back with his “girlfriend” and another time he, performing Patty, admits having given up trying to “figure him out” by claiming “your girlfriend, or boyfriend, who knows at this point?”. Replying to the dancing video with his father, a user wrote: “Aw, that’s what gets me. Seeing a father that accepts his homosexual son and loves him, as it should be” 🥰🥰🥰 This comment shows how it still does not go without saying that parents will accept their children not being heterosexual.

This is particularly true for a Catholic region as Latin America, where, as in many other countries, there are structural levels of homophobic attitudes and beliefs at play framed by heteronormative ideologies. As Fuller explains (2021) for the Latin American case, right-wing conservatist streams have been gaining popularity and legitimacy in their “cultural wars” against the so-called “gender ideology” and “LGBTIQ+ agenda” that are, as they argue, destroying fundamental values, including the notion of (Catholic) family.

Although his sexuality has not been further openly discussed in the videos, Álvaro still receives flirty comments from women, which he sometimes acknowledges with shy, embarrassed emojis. He replies to around ten comments on a video, which is considered a lot for popular, highly followed, content creators.

Users congratulating Augusto for being there for his son, dancing with him, accepting him, hugging him, and participating in his videos agrees with slow but marked changes within Latin American societies (e.g., Fuller, 1996, 2005; Almerás, 2000). Within ambivalent, reflexive masculinities (Fuller, 2023), in a path to plurality and equality, there is increasing criticism of authoritarianism, and clear expectations for fathers to be physically and emotionally close. This implies the performance of expressive qualities traditionally associated with maternity and femininity. Within these new configurations, maternity loses its symbolic leading role in favour of paternity, giving back to both parents their parental responsibilities. In line with the point made earlier about grandfathers letting go of patriarchal mandates, examined clips and comments go hand in hand with changes in terms of cultures of care, demand attention and affectivity through expressions of love.

Patty's portrayal by her son Álvaro reveals a multi-faceted personality. Despite being harsh and using physical violence as part of her unapologetic parenting style, she is funny, protective, clever, amusing, and takes care of her family daily. The more severe, abusive aspects of parental attitudes are generally minimized and dedramatized by Álvaro's acting and his textual responses to critical comments. He does not condemn his mother, instead, laughs with and about her with a sympathetic attitude toward her. She is bothersome yet loving and he is happy to have her. Because her own son portrays Patty in a conflicted, yet favorable light in comedic videos, it is likely harder for viewers to criticize her unfairness and occasionally aggressive conduct.

Álvaro said in a Peruvian TV interview that he is merely portraying "his own mom" and not all (Peruvian) mothers, maybe to avoid upsetting sensibilities or to maintain political correctness. Being as it may, it is unlikely that many people would feel identified and subsequently respond favorably to his material, if he were simply enacting a certain unrelatable persona. Instead, as stated in the introduction, a major factor in its appeal is

precisely portraying commonplace events and culturally recognized characteristics. Performed situations are well-known among Peruvians and Latin Americans in general, as seen by their remarks, and they resonate with many other sons and daughters (García-Rapp and León, 2024). Once again, as is often the case with popular culture, it seems there is more than meets the eye beyond the surface of triviality, and allegedly complacent, banal entertainment.

These, apparently banal, “videos of affinity” (Lange, 2009, p. 73) strengthen feelings of closeness and connection between viewers and content creators and among users. As found for the case of YouTube (Wentker and Schneider, 2022) as well as regarding TikTok and marginalized groups (Vizcaíno-Verdú and Aguaed, 2022), here we also witness the rise of empathetic communities that value self-reflexivity and self-esteem. The sociocultural relevance of Álvaro’s videos as texts, sites, and signs of both the symbolic and the mundane of everyday life, lies in them providing (and viewers actively making use of) those paradigmatic opportunities once solely reserved for the consumption of traditional media outlets: to discuss, learn, emulate, admire, and criticize (Marshall 2006), both content and their producers/performers.

Conclusions: The worth of (TikTok) Entertainment

Throughout my research, I question prescriptive modes of argumentation that quickly classify people, cultures, and objects of fandom as normative/resistant/legitimate/trivial. Rather, I approach audiences (users, fans, citizens), as the study not of distant “others” but of ourselves in our juxtaposed, dynamic, socio-culturally embedded roles and practices. I argue for research engagements that acknowledge subjectivities within global media landscapes, by foregrounding cultural relativism and emic, local perspectives. As there is no paradigm-free way of seeing, I seek to bring forward research that tolerates ambivalence, contradictions, and embraces the complexity of social worlds and human interaction (García-Rapp, 2019).

By continuing to reclaim and reconfirm the worth of the popular culture project as arena of expression and exploration of identities (Morley, 1998, 2015; Morley and Silverstone, 1991), I foreground the worth of destabilizing patronizing accounts and deterministic tendencies of

scholarly circles that –while proclaiming their progressiveness– exclude texts, objects of fandom, and fans from the realm of intellectual worth (García-Rapp, unpublished). Critical theorists declare that “being bored is a privilege” and by extension TikTok as platform together with its content and people producing and engaging with it, are all complicit with corporate interest that reproduce inequalities (Kennedy, 2020).

Differences in ascribed cultural value imply the assumed loss of complexity, aesthetic value, and textual density (Mittell, 2003, 2004). Fun pleasures, entertainment, or “guilty pleasures”, are to date still regarded as easy, ignorant, and embodying a false consciousness (Dyer, 2002; Hudelet, 2021). As argued about reality TV by Su Holmes back in 2008, TikTok as platform and genre, in its apparently exhausted aesthetics and politics, offends certain intellectual sensibilities spilling over into the realm of value judgment, and (academic) self-legitimation. Its frivolity, melodramatic stylistic excess, material persistence and cultural prominence touch a nerve with the evaluative rhetoric of critical discourse; those that close off alternative meanings and resist multiple interpretations (Hutcheon, 2006; Elliott, 2014, 2020).

The media texts we choose to spend our time with are linked to affectivity, companionship, imagination, motivation, relaxation, escapism and well-being, including the comfort and familiarity afforded by a sense of “ontological security” (Silverstone, 1994; Thompson, 1995). “Silly shows, life-changing shows, narrative and aesthetic experiences that touch us. Media that save us from life and from ourselves” (García-Rapp, unpublished). In October 2021, Álvaro received another praiseful comment: “Thanks for helping me deal with depression. You’re worth a lot. Blessings” to what he replied “wow!! 🥰 What a great comment!”, including a blushed emoji.

Through humor, @zagaladas denaturalizes attitudes, offering users a chance to reflect on similar familial landscapes and parental governance. The clips are used as symbolic meeting point to laugh, like, debate, providing a safe space to be, and feel, together, to not take it too seriously, to enjoy and have fun (García-Rapp and León, 2024). They spark social electricity and effervesce (Durkheim, 2002; Duffett, 2017) of shared interpretations and reappropriations. As our favorite fictional media texts do, they ignite “guilty” and “non-

guilty” pleasures of going back to those worlds to spend more time with those people (Scott, 2019).

There is a sense of collective, semiotic, experiential meaningful exchanges. The videos form a collection of collective remembrance; a postmodern, parodic, digital pastiche but also a cohesive oeuvre that brings questions to the foreground. Their digital visibility allows for the explicit discussion of otherwise implicit notions and feelings, part of offline contexts, usually hidden in the mundane, intimate intricacies of everyday childhoods within the ambivalence of routinized domesticities.

Álvaro’s underlying message brings joy, establishing a context for people to open up, perhaps even heal, move on. Its philosophy being “a vivir, que la vida son solo dos días” (let’s live, as life’s just two days). So, seize the day, be happy. Be grateful. Content. If creating and uploading videos of the “unfair mom” and the “typical (unconcerned) dad” implies exposing, criticizing, and laughing about them, it also means humorously dedramatizing and understanding, in a liberating act of acceptance and forgiveness towards parents.

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