

The Mother of All Expressions in Mexican Spanish

Mexico's widespread use of a word whose English equivalents have nothing to do with matriarchal figures

by [PinPoint Spanish](#)



Mothers are widely revered in Mexico, and although Mother's Day on May 10 isn't a national holiday, not a great deal gets done that day.

It isn't moved to the nearest Sunday like Father's Day, or Mother's Day in other countries: when it falls on a weekday, so be it. Working mothers are given the day off, some people leave early for family gatherings, and any employer who refuses to allow this without good reason may be said to "not have a mother."

Which brings this entry to its point: the widespread use of the word *madre* in expressions whose English equivalents have nothing to do with matriarchal figures.

When it's said of a person, "no tiene madre," it means they are shameless or unscrupulous. It can also be applied to things that are disgraceful or simply unfair. A variation is "¡qué poca madre!" which amounts to the same thing.

These two expressions, however, can also mean something quite different, in fact something quite positive:

“Este juego de video no tiene madre” means the video game is very good—extraordinary, in fact; a football team that played “de poca madre” played extremely well; and a great party can also be said to have been “de poca madre.”

A car that whizzes past at breakneck speed “va hecho la madre,” although “va hecho la raya” means the same thing and is more fitting in polite company.

Hasta la madre is a versatile expression that suggests testing limits in a variety of ways. Its basic meaning is fed-up, or sick-and-tired. “Estoy hasta la madre del tráfico,” or the more personal and unpleasant “me tienes hasta la madre.”

Someone who is very drunk can be described as being “hasta la madre” with alcohol, and a bus that is so crammed-full with passengers that they are hanging out of the doors is also packed “hasta la madre.”

“Hasta el gorro” — literally “up to the cap” — is a valid alternative.

In Spanish “mentar la madre” means to insult — literally “mention or refer to the mother,” even if the recipient’s mother or mother-child relationship isn’t alluded to.

Threats to visit bodily harm on a person can be expressed as “te voy a romper la madre” or “dar en la madre” which make as little sense, literally considered, as some of their English equivalents. And if you run headlong into a brick wall or fall off a bike, a bystander may observe that someone “se dio en la madre.”

A standalone expression of surprise or shock, “¡en la madre!” can be elicited from someone observing an accident or disastrous event.

But the real Mexican classic is “me vale madre” — “I don’t give a damn” — used widely across classes and [immortalized by the illustration](#) of late cartoonist [Rogelio Naranjo](#). This mother of all expressions even has its own noun form: someone in Mexico who habitually couldn’t care less is known as a “valemadrista.”