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Atypical Motherhood and Fatherhood in Contemporary Times and Existential Phenomenology

Maternagem e Paternagem Atípica na Contemporaneidade e Fenomenologia-Existencial

Maternité et paternité atypiques à l'époque contemporaine et phénoménologie existentielle

Atália Maria Schaecken Silva¹

Isabela Gonçalves de Oliveira²

Débora Rodrigues Moutinho³

Abda Auanário de Souza⁴

Laís Mikaela da Silva Dantas⁵

Abstract

¹ Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Faculdade de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Amazonas. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Vice-Diretora de Extensão da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – LAPFE. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – GPPFE. E-mail: ataliassilva@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6578-3243>.

² Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Escola Superior Batista do Amazonas. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – GPPFE. E-mail: isa.belaolivergoncalves07@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8775-4230>

³ Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Faculdade Metropolitana de Manaus – FAMETRO. Apoio técnico em Psicologia no Serviço de Acolhimento para crianças e adolescentes sob medida protetiva (SAICA). Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LAPFE). Email: debora13rodrigues@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4873-8352>

⁴ Psicóloga graduada pelo Curso de Psicologia da Faculdade Metropolitana de Manaus – FAMETRO. Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – Labfen/Ufam. Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – Lapfe/Ufam. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – CNPq. E-mail: abdaauanariodesouza@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2771-5337>

⁵ Graduada em Psicologia pela Faculdade Santa Teresa. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – LAPFE (FAPSI/UFAM). E-mail: laismikaela28@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1087-3345>.

This article addresses the issue of atypical mothering and fathering in contemporary times in a critical and reflective manner, from the perspective of existential phenomenology. In this context, several fundamental, varied and relevant aspects that are directly related to the atypicality of this specific context will be discussed, including the significant challenges and emerging possibilities that may arise from these different experiences. In addition, the significant and profound impacts that these dynamics bring to both the family structure and the contemporary society in which we live will be analyzed, considering how these new family arrangements interact in a complex way with the established social norms and cultural expectations of our time. The objective is to contribute to a broader understanding of the new configurations of care and parental involvement in different contexts, as well as their implications for our daily lives and the interpersonal relationships that are established, thus, the complexity of the affective interactions that permeate modern family life and the challenges that accompany these dynamics. To this end, we used the qualitative research bias. Some topics are presented: mothering and fathering in contemporary times, social and family transformations, current challenges and demands, atypicality in fathering and mothering, and the phenomenological perspective. It is concluded that this study contributes to the field by offering an in-depth and multidisciplinary analysis of atypical mothering and fathering in contemporary times, incorporating the phenomenological-existential perspective. This brings relevant insights to professionals and researchers working in this field, expanding the understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by families in atypical situations. It is concluded that this is a phenomenon that impacts not only the individuals directly involved, but also the community as a whole, encompassing all members of society and causing important ethical, social, and educational implications that deserve to be discussed and understood in depth.

Keywords: Mothering; Fathering; Atypical family; Multidisciplinary perspective; Phenomenological-existential psychology

Resumo

O presente artigo aborda a temática da maternagem e paternagem atípica na contemporaneidade, de maneira crítica e reflexiva, sob a perspectiva da fenomenologia-existencial. Neste contexto, serão discutidos diversos aspectos fundamentais, variados e relevantes que estão diretamente relacionados à atipicidade desse contexto específico, incluindo os desafios significativos e as possibilidades emergentes que podem surgir a partir dessas experiências diferenciadas. Além disso, serão analisados os impactos significativos e profundos que essas dinâmicas trazem tanto para a estrutura familiar quanto para a sociedade contemporânea em que vivemos, considerando como esses novos arranjos familiares interagem de modo complexo com as normas sociais estabelecidas e as expectativas culturais do nosso tempo. O objetivo é contribuir para a compreensão mais ampla das novas configurações de cuidado e envolvimento parental em diferentes contextos, assim como suas implicações em nosso cotidiano e nas relações interpessoais que se estabelecem, assim, a complexidade das interações afetivas que permeiam a vida familiar moderna e os desafios que acompanham essas dinâmicas. Para isso, utilizamos o viés qualitativo de pesquisa. São apresentados alguns tópicos: maternagem e paternagem na contemporaneidade, transformações sociais e familiares, desafios e demandas atuais, atipicidade na paternagem e na maternagem,

a perspectiva fenomenológica. Conclui-se que este estudo contribui para a área ao oferecer análise profunda e multidisciplinar da maternagem e paternagem atípicas na contemporaneidade, incorporando a perspectiva fenomenológico-existencial. O que traz insights relevantes para profissionais e pesquisadores que atuam nesse campo, ampliando o entendimento sobre as complexidades e desafios enfrentados por famílias em situações atípicas. Conclui-se que um fenômeno que impacta não só os indivíduos diretamente envolvidos, mas também a coletividade como um todo, abrangendo todos os membros da sociedade e provocando importantes implicações éticas, sociais e educativas que merecem ser discutidas e compreendidas em profundidade.

Palavras-chave: Maternagem; Paternagem; Família atípica; Perspectiva multidisciplinar; Psicologia Fenomenológico-existencial

Résumé

Cet article aborde la question de la maternité et de la paternité atypiques à l'époque contemporaine de manière critique et réflexive, sous l'angle de la phénoménologie existentielle. Dans ce contexte, plusieurs aspects fondamentaux, variés et pertinents, directement liés à l'atypicité de ce contexte spécifique, seront abordés, notamment les défis importants et les possibilités émergentes qui peuvent découler de ces différentes expériences. De plus, les impacts significatifs et profonds de ces dynamiques sur la structure familiale et la société contemporaine dans laquelle nous vivons seront analysés, en considérant la manière dont ces nouveaux arrangements familiaux interagissent de manière complexe avec les normes sociales et les attentes culturelles établies de notre époque. L'objectif est de contribuer à une compréhension plus large des nouvelles configurations de soins et d'implication parentale dans différents contextes, ainsi que de leurs implications sur notre vie quotidienne et les relations interpersonnelles qui s'établissent, et donc de la complexité des interactions affectives qui imprègnent la vie familiale moderne et des défis qui accompagnent ces dynamiques. À cette fin, nous avons utilisé le biais de la recherche qualitative. Parmi les thèmes abordés figurent : la maternité et la paternité à l'époque contemporaine, les transformations sociales et familiales, les défis et exigences actuels, l'atypicité dans la paternité et la maternité, ainsi que la perspective phénoménologique. Cette étude contribue à la recherche en proposant une analyse approfondie et multidisciplinaire de la maternité et de la paternité atypiques à l'époque contemporaine, intégrant une perspective phénoménologique et existentielle. Elle apporte des éclairages pertinents aux professionnels et aux chercheurs travaillant dans ce domaine, élargissant ainsi la compréhension des complexités et des défis rencontrés par les familles en situation atypique. Il s'agit d'un phénomène qui impacte non seulement les individus directement concernés, mais aussi la communauté dans son ensemble, englobant tous les membres de la société, et qui entraîne d'importantes implications éthiques, sociales et éducatives qui méritent d'être approfondies.

Mots-clés: Maternité; Paternité; Famille atypique; Perspective multidisciplinaire; Psychologie phénoménologique et existentielle.



The contextualization of the theme involves a detailed analysis of the social and family transformations that directly impact motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary times. In this sense, the evolution of traditional care patterns takes into account the new social demands that are constantly emerging, also encompassing the multifaceted challenges that parents face in their daily routine, which is marked by constant changes and surprises that can happen at any time (Mabasso, 2024).

It is necessary to identify and discuss relevant, significant and crucial aspects to understand the phenomenon of atypicality within this specific context, in addition to exploring the many nuances that permeate the complex family configuration and the multifaceted role of caregivers in what we call the rich tapestry of modern society (Matos, 2024).

This reflection promotes a comprehensive understanding of changes in family structures, new family configurations and arrangements that have emerged, and the increasingly high expectations placed on parents today, which have undeniably become more diverse and demanding than ever before, requiring them not only to adapt but also to innovate and be creative in their care and educational practices (Castro & Meira, 2024; Porreca, 2022).

The study is fully justified by the growing and urgent need to understand in greater depth and meet the complex and often challenging demands arising from atypical motherhood and fatherhood. It is important to consider their significant influence on the dynamics of family relationships and on the broader society that surrounds us. The relevance and importance of the topic are largely due to the scarcity of research that explores this theme from a phenomenological-existential perspective, and this approach is fundamental to understanding the nuances and singularities that permeate these experiences. This highlights the urgency of a more attentive, critical and in-depth look that seeks not only to describe, but also to interpret the realities that these families face. This situation presents a valuable opportunity to advance knowledge in this specific area, while also enabling reflections and debates on the topic. It is a phenomenon that impacts not only the individuals directly involved, but also the community as a whole, encompassing all members of society and causing important ethical, social and educational implications that deserve to be discussed and understood in depth (Albuquerque, 2015).

The objectives of the research include analyzing the characteristics of atypical mothering and fathering in contemporary times, identifying the factors that influence atypicality in this context, and understanding the impacts of this phenomenon on the family and society. Furthermore, it seeks to provide support for the application of existential phenomenology in studies related to atypical mothering and fathering, aiming to broaden understanding and promote a more holistic approach to the topic.

Mothering and Fathering in Contemporary Times

With the recent social and cultural changes that have occurred over the years, mothering and fathering practices have undergone significant and profound transformations, reflecting new family dynamics, roles, and responsibilities that were not previously so widely recognized or valued (Silva & Castro, 2025).

Contemporaneity has brought with it greater recognition of the indisputable importance of the presence and active participation of fathers in the upbringing and development of their children, which has resulted in the redefinition of family and gender relations in a more inclusive and equitable way. This social and cultural evolution not only led to the reconstruction of traditional concepts of motherhood and fatherhood, but also enabled the inclusion of new forms of care, affection and love, rich in diversity and meaning, which enrich the family environment and its interactions (Castro & Meira, 2024).

In addition, there was a growing appreciation of co-parenting as an ideal and desired model for raising children, where both parents share responsibilities in a more balanced and cooperative manner, thus ensuring that the emotional, educational and social needs of children are fully met (Silva & Castro, 2025).

These dynamics present in family ties promote a supportive environment and favor the healthier and more harmonious development of children, contributing to their becoming more balanced and aware adults. Careful analysis of these transformations is essential to understand the current and complex demands related to parenting, as well as the challenges that arise in this constantly evolving and adapting context. It is vital that researchers, educators and those responsible for family education recognize these changes and seek to adapt to new family realities, balancing traditional ideals with contemporary practices that best suit the current scenario (Castro et al., 2025).

In view of this, raising awareness among all those involved in the family structure can result in enriching experiences of mutual learning, promoting personal and emotional growth for all members, thus highlighting the relevance of emotional bonds and the renewed commitment to raising children, in a world that is constantly changing every day. Fundamental definitions and concepts

The fundamental definitions and concepts of motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary times encompass not only the important and traditional functions of context and protection, but also a series of extremely relevant emotional, psychological and behavioral elements that profoundly influence the relationship between parents and children (Meira et al., 2025; Zanette, 2024).

A detailed understanding of the importance of emotional bonds, active presence and parental sensitivity has become essential and undeniable in the healthy development of children, resulting in an important and necessary reconstruction of parental roles in today's society. In this context, the definition of mothering and fathering has expanded substantially to include a considerably wider range of activities and feelings, more effectively meeting the varied and complex emotional and mental needs of children in a dynamic and diverse family environment (Silva & Castro, 2025; Guidugli, 2022).

The family environment reflects the profound and significant contemporary cultural and social changes. Expectations about what it really means to be a father or mother have transformed and evolved over time, promoting greater awareness of the role that parents play in the growth and formation of their children, always aiming for a balanced, healthy and nurturing development that meets all the demands and challenges of this new emerging society (Oliveira, 2021).

Furthermore, parents are increasingly involved in education and emotional support, recognizing that building emotional bonds is fundamental to their children's psychological well-being, and therefore, they seek ways to connect more deeply and effectively with their children, understanding that love, patience and dedication are key elements in creating a welcoming and supportive family environment (Guidugli, 2022).

Social and family transformations

Contemporary social and family transformations have had a significant and notable impact on mothering and fathering practices, influencing family configuration, gender relations, and the various models of child rearing (Frata, 2024).

Evident changes in this configuration, such as the emergence of single-parent families, reconstituted families, which often bring together elements of previous ties, and the increase in ontext participation in the labor market, have contributed to the redefinition of parental roles and responsibilities, bringing new perspectives and challenges. This new configuration brings to light a series of challenges and opportunities that need to be explored and discussed in the current context (Silva & Castro, 2025; Oliveira, 2021).

In addition, the search for gender equity and the effective deconstruction of traditional gender stereotypes have promoted an environment more conducive to the valorization of the role of the father, who has shown himself not only as a provider, but also as an active caregiver, performing essential functions in the lives of his children. This change challenges pre-established paradigms, encouraging more balanced participation in the responsibilities of raising children and in the task of educating them. This transformation highlights the importance of open and sensitive dialogue about new ways of experiencing fatherhood and motherhood in modern society, showing that collaborative work between parents is essential for the well-being of the family as a whole and for the healthy development of children in a world that is constantly changing and evolving (Silva & Castro, 2025; Guidugli, 2022).

Current challenges and demands

Considering what has been said so far, the challenges and demands that characterize motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary times are complex, multifaceted and constantly evolving. They involve the delicate and often difficult reconciliation between the demands of work, which are becoming increasingly rigorous and intensive, and the needs, desires and aspirations of the family (Silva & Castro, 2025).

The equitable redistribution of parental responsibilities is a fundamental aspect that is urgent and necessary, promoting a fairer, more balanced and healthier environment for both parents and children. The promotion of co-parenting, which

involves the active and effective collaboration of both parents in raising and educating their children, is vital and essential for the emotional, social and psychological development of children throughout their lives (Zanette, 2024).

Furthermore, it is essential to address the stigmas, prejudices and barriers that still persist in relation to new family arrangements, such as single-parent families, same-sex families and other configurations that deviate from the traditional model that is still widely promoted and valued (Oliveira, 2021).

The need to implement public policies and support programs that genuinely recognize, value and respect the diversity of family configurations is a growing and urgent demand in modern society. These initiatives are essential and fundamental to ensuring that all different types of families receive the emotional and material support they need to thrive (Meira et al, 2024).

Thus, the importance of parental involvement in children's lives becomes increasingly evident and undeniable, since the active and participatory presence of parents, regardless of how families are structured, is absolutely crucial for the well-being and healthy development of children (Frata, 2024).

Understanding the current challenges presented in this multifaceted context is essential to favor the adoption of more inclusive, respectful and equitable parenting practices, thus ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up in a loving, safe and supportive environment that dignifies their experiences (Frata, 2024; Zanette, 2024; Oliveira, 2021).

Atypicality in Motherhood and Fatherhood

Atypicality in motherhood and fatherhood refers to the unconventional or non-standard form of parental care, which goes far beyond what is normally expected. This may include the presence of special circumstances, such as the occurrence of physical or mental disabilities in both parents and children, or the adoption of non-traditional gender roles that challenge established and conventional social norms (Oliveira, 2021).

Atypical parenting often results from a complex interaction of several factors, such as cultural, socioeconomic, medical and psychological issues, which significantly impact the way parents exercise their parenting in their daily lives and in different

contexts. This diversity in parenting approaches can have considerable and profound impacts, not only on family structure, but also on society in general, affecting family configuration, interpersonal relationships between family members and social acceptance of the different family configurations that currently exist (Silva & Castro, 2025; Guidugli, 2022).

The way in which children are seen, treated and integrated into society can be influenced by these atypical factors, shaping their developmental experiences and growth throughout life. Therefore, understanding and addressing these issues is absolutely fundamental to promoting inclusion, empathy and healthy development of children and their respective families, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up in welcoming environments that respect their individuality and the diversity present in society, preparing them to interact positively and constructively with the world around them (Albuquerque, 2015).

Concept of atypicality

The concept of atypicality in motherhood and fatherhood is an idea that is closely associated with a range of different situations in which the parenting practices performed deviate from the standard that is considered typical and traditional by the society in which we live. This may involve the conscious action of parents in unconventional and diverse contexts, such as single-parent families, which are formed by only one person responsible for performing the parental role, or adoptive families, in which love and care are generously offered to children who, due to various circumstances, do not have a stable and safe home (Porto, 2022).

In addition, this atypicality may manifest itself in very specific situations in which there are special care needs that require an extra level of attention and dedication, both emotional and physical. Atypical parenting practices may be directly related to social expectations imposed on gender roles, which in turn challenge established conventions about who, in terms of gender, should effectively perform certain parenting functions within the family (Martins, 2022).

It is extremely important to recognize and respect the diversity of family arrangements and parenting practices that exist in our contemporary society, thus expanding the understanding of what can be considered valid and effective in the vital

task of raising and educating children. This appreciation of family diversity not only enriches the experience of each family, but also contributes to the healthier and more balanced development of new generations to come, promoting a more inclusive and welcoming future (Winnicott, 2023).

Factors that influence atypicality

Several factors can exert a strong and significant influence on atypicality in mothering and fathering, covering a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, medical and psychological aspects that are fundamental to understanding parenting in contemporary times. Issues such as the availability and quality of social support offered to parents, which can often be decisive in the emotional well-being of the family, access to financial resources that directly impact the type of care that can be offered, as well as the availability of adequate information about care and development related to the child, are essential factors to be considered (Silva & Castro, 2025).

Furthermore, prejudices and distorted views that still persist in society regarding what is considered "normal" or "ideal" in terms of parenting, in addition to gender stereotypes that can limit the role of fathers and mothers, among other relevant elements, play a crucial and determining role in the way parents exercise their parenting in different social and cultural contexts, affecting both the development of children and the family structure (Porto, 2022).

In addition, the presence of special conditions, whether related to parents or children, can significantly and often complexly impact parental atypicality and its nuances, requiring adaptation and in-depth understanding of each situation. Understanding and addressing these factors in a sensitive, respectful and inclusive manner is fundamental and essential to promote a broader and richer vision of the diversity of parenting practices in our contemporary society (Castro, 2024).

Valuing plurality in parenting experiences, which includes recognizing the particularities and needs of different types of families and their specificities, becomes increasingly essential and relevant to strengthening harmonious and respectful coexistence between the different ways of being, caring for and educating children. This not only enriches the experience of being a father or mother, but also helps

prepare children for a diverse world, where acceptance and respect for differences are fundamental (Winnicott, 2023; Costa, 2017).

Impacts of atypicality on the family and society

The impacts of atypicality on motherhood and fatherhood are far-reaching and extend significantly, and can, in their entirety, affect both family dynamics directly and the broader social structure in several different dimensions. Within the family configuration, atypicality can profoundly influence the way in which members interact, communicate and relate to each other, as well as the demands for care, support and acceptance that become necessary in this more intimate and personal context (Veigas, 2022).

In addition, the distribution of responsibilities that each family member assumes, as well as the expectations and norms regarding the family roles that must be performed, are equally affected and can change significantly with the presence of this atypicality. This can lead, in a striking way, to a reassessment of how traditional roles, such as those of mother, father and other family members, are seen, valued and exercised in the family's daily life (Gomes, 2023).

In society as a whole, atypicality not only impacts the way families are perceived, but also how they integrate and interact with the community around them, thus creating new dynamics of coexistence. The opportunities available to these families can be drastically altered, as can their access to services, essential resources, and support that ensure their well-being, development, and stability. This extends broadly to issues such as education, health, and even social assistance, highlighting the importance of adequate support. This even includes the social and cultural representations that exist regarding parenthood that prevail in today's society, influencing the way families are viewed and treated in a broader and deeper way (Veigas, 2022).

In our view, addressing and understanding the impacts of atypicality is essential to promote inclusion, equal opportunities, and, above all, the well-being not only of children, but also of all families that find themselves in diverse and varied contexts.

Phenomenological-Existential Perspective

The phenomenological-existential perspective presents itself as a profound philosophical approach, seeking to understand the human experience in its purest and truest essence (Castro, 2023). It is important to highlight the importance of considering subjectivity and individual experience as fundamental and indispensable elements for a more comprehensive understanding of motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary times (Castro & Meira, 2024).

In addition, existential-phenomenology can offer valuable theoretical support to broaden our understanding of family relationships and the complex current demands related to parenthood, allowing for a critical reflection on the challenges faced by families today.

Principles and foundations of existential phenomenology: correlating atypicality

Existential phenomenology has had a profound and significant influence from great philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger throughout the history of philosophical thought. Among the most striking theoretical constructs we find intentionality, when we direct our focus to an object (the child) that, upon becoming the center of attention of the father and mother, reshapes the lived world, or the experience of being a father and being a mother.

And when this motherhood and fatherhood are atypical, the appreciation, acceptance, listening and care of these parents for their child becomes greater. It is worth noting that true existential immersion occurs in everything related to this child. We observe fathers and mothers, increasingly attentive to everything related to atypicality (Bittencourt, 2018)

Atypical motherhood and fatherhood is, without a doubt, in a broader sense, living with the gaze on oneself, considering the questions that arise even before the diagnosis, since they observe behaviors and attitudes and, with that, the attention on the possibility of not having “produced satisfactorily”, as Castro (2020; 2023;2024) tells us in several situations, the gaze on oneself goes through distortions due to facticities that drive self-questioning. Castro (2020; 2023) in *The Clinic of Three Perspectives*, by highlighting the second perspective, reveals the grandeur of the other's perspective, which is often of unparalleled cruelty, where the experience of issuing value judgments,

discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes are continually experienced by atypical fathers and mothers, which causes them anguish and existential suffering. The complexity, nuances and multifaceted nature of the experience of being a father and mother throws them into a true daily emotional whirlwind. The subjectivity of each one is taken over by issues related to the differentiated and changing nosological picture. The fear of their child suffering any discrimination and/or prejudice from the other who, most of the time, does not know how to deal with diversity, is frightened by the child's behavior, generating discomfort in the coexistence. However, the look cast is not always one of judgment, only of surprise.

However, parents, because they continually deal with relational difficulties in all sociocultural and historical niches in which they live, often become defensive, interpreting that the other “may be looking this way or that way”, triggering suffering and anguish. However, this other is not, peremptorily, judging or discriminating. This is what Castro (2020; 2023; 2024) calls “the look on the other's look”.

We realize that Phenomenological-Existential Psychology makes it possible to understand the atypical family configuration, considering the subjectivity and the lived experience in its complexity.

Final Considerations

At the end of this study, it is possible to conclude that atypical mothering and fathering in contemporary times present significant challenges, but also opportunities for growth and learning. The phenomenological-existential understanding brought a new perspective to the analysis of these phenomena, highlighting the importance of subjectivity and lived experience. Atypical parenting is a complex and multifaceted topic that deserves attention and in-depth study both in theory and in practice.

During this study, the fundamental concepts of mothering and fathering in contemporary times were addressed, as well as the social and family transformations that impact parenting, atypicality in this context, the phenomenological-existential perspective applied to these topics. The complexity of these phenomena and the importance of considering the subjective experiences of families and atypical fathers/mothers are highlighted.

This study contributes to the field by offering an in-depth and multidisciplinary analysis of atypical parenting in contemporary times, incorporating the phenomenological-existential perspective.

A limitation of this study is the lack of longitudinal data that could provide a broader understanding of the development of atypical family dynamics over time. In addition, we suggest that qualitative studies be conducted that address the subjective experiences of atypical parents in order to broaden our understanding of the impact of atypicality on parenting and society more broadly.

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Autoras:

Atália Maria Schaeken Silva

Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Faculdade de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Amazonas. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Vice-Diretora de Extensão da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – LAPFE. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – GPPFE. E-mail: ataliamssilva@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6578-3243>.

Isabela Gonçalves de Oliveira

Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Escola Superior Batista do Amazonas. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – GPPFE. E-mail: isa.belaolivergoncalves07@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8775-4230>

Débora Rodrigues Moutinho

Pós-graduada em Psicologia Clínica de inspiração fenomenológica pelo IEV/Manaus. Graduada em Psicologia pela Faculdade Metropolitana de Manaus – FAMETRO. Apoio técnico em Psicologia no Serviço de Acolhimento para crianças e adolescentes sob medida protetiva (SAICA). Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LAPFE). Email: debora13rodrigues@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4873-8352>

Abda Auanário de Souza

Psicóloga graduada pelo Curso de Psicologia da Faculdade Metropolitana de Manaus – FAMETRO. Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – Labfen/Ufam. Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – Lapfe/Ufam. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – CNPq. E-mail: abdaauanariodesouza@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2771-5337>

Laís Mikaela da Silva Dantas



Graduanda em Psicologia pela Faculdade Santa Teresa. Membro do Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (CNPq). Membro do Laboratório de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial (LABFEN/UFAM). Plantonista do Projeto de Extensão Plantão Psicológico em escolas do sistema público de ensino em Manaus. Membro da Liga Acadêmica de Psicologia Fenomenológico-Existencial – LAPFE (FAPSI/UFAM). E-mail: lasmikaela28@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1087-3345>.