

# Reframing masculinity and fatherhood: Narratives on faith-based values in (re)shaping 'coloured' fathers

**Authors:**

Fazel E. Freeks<sup>1</sup>   
 Simone M. Peters<sup>2</sup>   
 Helenard Louw<sup>3</sup> 

**Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Unit for Reformational  
Theology and Development  
of the South African Society,  
Faculty of Theology,  
North-West University,  
Potchefstroom, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of  
Anthropology, Faculty of  
Humanities, University of  
Cape Town, Cape Town,  
South Africa

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of the Social Sciences,  
Vrije University of  
Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the  
Netherlands

**Corresponding author:**

Fazel Freeks,  
10589686@nwu.ac.za

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Stereotypes of 'coloured' men from marginalised communities in the Western Cape, South Africa, portray these men as violent, lazy, alcoholics, domestic and substance abusers and absent in the lives of their children. Although extensive research has been conducted on fathers and fatherhood, there is *still* a lack of positive constructions and representations of fatherhood. In narrative interviews with 11 fathers who reside in the Cape Flats, faith-based values were understood as possible restorative avenues for fathers. This article explores how faith-based values are used to redefine what it means to be a man and father but also to (re)negotiate their identity, role and responsibility as men and fathers. From a narrative thematic analysis, the findings present alternative narratives on 'coloured' masculinity and fatherhood that show 'coloured' fathers to be present and active in their children's lives.

**Contribution:** This article employed a descriptive *modus operandi* on masculinity and fatherhood. It focuses on (re)shaping fathers in South Africa to impede father absenteeism in families and communities.

**Keywords:** 'Coloured' identity; faith-based values; fatherhood; stereotypes; masculinity.

## Introduction

Research shows that in South Africa, there is a growing trend of fatherlessness, single parenting and child-headed households (Makofane 2015:22, 24; Stringer 2009). South Africa is currently experiencing swift family (re)construction and broken relationships with the noticeable issue of father absence and a lack of involvement of fathers in their children's lives (disinvolvement) (Freeks 2020:115–120; Kesebonye & P'Olak 2021:1). Researchers in the field of men and masculinities have grappled with this 'crisis in masculinity' that not only contributes to father absenteeism and father hunger but also has vast social implications in communities, particularly the 'coloured' communities in South Africa (cf. Freeks 2016:205–207; McGee 1993:15–24; Perrin et al. 2009:314–320). The absence of 'coloured' fathers in their children's lives is a pertinent and continuous challenge in South Africa. In this study, we present the narratives of 'coloured' fathers who reflect on the experiences of what it means to be present in their children's lives.

Research in the Global South, specifically South Africa and the African continent, has focused much on the construction and deconstruction of the 'African<sup>2</sup> man', with little focus on 'coloured' and 'mixed-race' masculinities (Peters et al. 2022). Here, we present a nuanced perspective on how 'coloured' men construct fatherhood. We conceptualise fatherhood as parental care practices embodied and performed by male-bodied persons. 'Coloured' men are historically and socially often perceived as violent men, alcoholics, drug abusers, domestic abusers, physically and emotionally unavailable and irresponsible fathers (Anderson 2009, 2010; Boonzaier & Van Niekerk 2018, 2019, 2021; Salo 2004). Research that investigated 'coloured' men and fatherhood practices has highlighted the lack of fatherhood presence and involvement, where 48% of families are without a father in South Africa (Posel & Devey 2006). The historical race and labour practices during the apartheid regime in South Africa contribute to this high rate of father absenteeism which disrupts family life. This is what Budlender and Lund (2011:926) construe as a 'crisis of care' for children in the country.

1. We refer to 'coloured' people as heterogeneous and comprising people from South Africa who have ancestry that is mixed and/or 'mixed race'. We acknowledge that this racial group was created by the apartheid regime and is a social construct which carries a negative connotation in some parts of the world. However, we use the term as it is still a commonly used racial category in South Africa. We intentionally place 'coloured' in inverted commas, to indicate that it is a contested term.

2. African includes South Africans who are isiXhosa, Nguni, Sotho and Zulu and from other ethnic tribes in South Africa.

Some research on 'coloured' men and fatherhood has provided alternative narratives, but these remain minimal. Researchers who worked with 'coloured' masculinities in the Cape Flats<sup>3</sup> found that there is a relationship between 'coloured' masculinity and the politics of respectability (Jensen 1999; Peters et al. 2022; Salo 2003; Van Niekerk 2019). For example, respectable masculinities are often associated with those who practise religion to gain respect or violence in gangsterism (Jensen 1999; Mthembu 2015; Salo 2003). Salo (2003) showed that some 'coloured' men were more respected for their ways of practising fatherhood. Men often felt that their children and wives respected them for their breadwinner status. Thus, some men stated that when their wives or girlfriends were successful in their careers and able to provide for themselves and their children, the men were not treated with the respect that the men were due when they were the only breadwinner (Mthembu 2015). Helman Malherbe and Kaminer (2018) worked with young 'coloured' fathers in a community filled with high violence and showed in their findings how 'coloured' men presented narratives of being present and loving fathers to their children. Their participants showed emotional engagement and involvement in their children's lives. For example, the men were involved in childcare, housework and taking responsibility for their children. Similar findings with 'coloured' men were found by Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015) and Hartley (2014), who presented alternative narratives of fathers – those who were physically present, emotionally available and financial providers for their children.

In the following sections, we propose four significant components as possible ways of 'becoming better' fathers and ways of 'doing' fatherhood. These components are as follows: (a) mentoring, (b) the essence of role modelling, (c) the crucial role of faith-based values in the family, and (d) integrating the fatherhood of God in the family.

### a. Mentoring

There has been a major focus on the component of mentorship in the disciplines of e-mentoring, health, education, pastoral narratives, practical theology, business and the family 'arena' (Fourie & Van den Berg 2007; Lotter 2010; Masango 2011). Mentoring can be defined as a collaborative and personal one-on-one relationship where the mentor guides the mentee to learn, exchange ideas and experiences and, ultimately, achieve success (Clutterbuck 2013; Santora, Mason & Sheahan 2013:427–428; Tucker 2007:iii–vi). Here, mentoring can be given by spiritual leaders or priests to fathers, as well as fathers mentoring their sons on how to be better men and fathers to their own children and families.

Mentoring can become an ideal process to break the cycle of father absence because it involves clear guidance on coming to understand what fatherhood entails (cf. Freeks & Genade 2017:6–73).

<sup>3</sup>The Cape Flats is made up of different areas found on the outskirts of Cape Town. This area was a 'dumping ground' to house black people who were forced to move when the *Group Areas Act* was promulgated by the South African government (Boddy-Evans 2018).

Furthermore, mentorship can be based on biblical foundations. For example, forgiveness, a biblical aspect, can be crucial in the home context where fathers learn to forgive their children if they make bad choices and mistakes (Lk 15:11–32). Instilling religious beliefs in children from a young age allows them to foster a growing relationship with God as their spiritual and heavenly father, which may enhance the family's well-being and foster a spiritual closeness between the father, mother and children (Gn 2:7–25). Consequently, assurance and stability will be evident in the home (Dickie et al. 2006:58–59).

### b. The essence of role modelling

Role modelling can be defined as a certain form of learning, strategy and process that allows people to learn new and thoughtful things (Price-Mitchell 2017). There is a lack of positive father figures as role models to their children and community in the South African society (Barker 2008:1). Perceptions of manhood gleaned from role models, regardless of whether they are bad or good, motivate fathers toward positive or negative behavioural patterns (Munroe 2001:17–18). Numerous men, especially young men, and abusive fathers for that matter, have not had positive role models (Herald Reporter 2002:18). Men fulfil many roles, like a father, husband, teacher, community leader and spiritual leader. In this article, the focus is on the positive role model of a father to his children.

We argue that a positive role model serves as an example to motivate and inspire children to live valuable and significant lives (Freeks 2021:117–118). Children need constructive role models to influence them positively (Mathwasa & Sibanda 2020:190). Fathers as role models are vital to their children regarding critical aspects such as discipline, training, authority, boundaries, characteristics, empathy towards others, protection and self-control (Joiner 2016:21; Popenoe 1996:12–14). For fathers to be positive role models to their children, it is crucial that they are cognisant of God the Father as a role model. God is the archetype and expression of fatherhood (cf. Schirmacher 2019:51). We argue that fathers can be successful role models if they adhere to faith-based values, which constitute a way of living.

### c. The crucial role of faith-based values in the family

Faith-based values can be understood as forming a worldview through which it is emphasised that the choices of a person could have positive or negative consequences (Banner 2009:11–14). Faith-based values are grounded on the ordinances of God for life. Worldviews refer to an extensive context of fundamental beliefs about things and through which values are activated (Van der Walt 2008:2). We are of the standpoint that a Christian worldview can be instrumental in bringing about change in the family. The Bible often refers to such change as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which engenders aspects (or fruit) such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, which are all faith-based values (Gl 5:22; Phlp 4:8).

The father should also see to it that faith-based values relating to faith (trust, devotion and surrender) are inculcated: the adoption of these values can constitute a huge contribution to children's spiritual lives (Freeks 2020:4–5). The same applies to moral values such as integrity, honesty and forgiveness: it is vital for the father to see that his children live an honest life, have integrity and have a forgiving spirit (Freeks 2020:4–5). Faith-based values also include political-judicial values, that is, justice and fairness. These values should be prioritised by the father as part of his mentoring process: he needs to teach his children to be just and fair in life, for example, in school and in their tests and examinations (Freeks 2021:101–102). More generally, the theological values of faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13) can be modelled by the father and also other mentor figures so that children can observe, emulate and apply these values in their own lives. Other key values in which the father can instruct his children include, among others, purity, patience, diligence, kindness, justice, gentleness and generosity. Fathers are obligated to implement the groundwork of faith-based values because they possess distinctive opportunities to invest externally in their children's lives (Munroe 2008:7).

#### **d. Integrating the fatherhood of God in the family**

The message of the Bible about the father's essential role within the family, and families thinking about the fatherhood of God, is paramount in this article. The authors argue that the cycle of father absence can be broken by integrating the fatherhood of God. The lack of father involvement and emotional availability is often a result of challenges such as intergenerational father absence, unemployment, intimate partner violence, being physically present yet emotionally absent and instances of a father residing in a different home as the mother and child or children (Carstens 2014:129; Mabusela 2014:13). Father absenteeism has a damaging effect on children. Therefore, breaking the cycle of father absence may be a challenging issue for family (re)construction in our society. However, breaking this cycle is a choice of agency that 'coloured' men need to hold themselves responsible for in 'becoming' better men and fathers for their children, community and society. Huerta (2020) suggests that God should be part of the decision-making process that enables men to be present and involved in the lives of their children. But why the notion of God, and how? Huerta (2020) elaborates that Christianity stimulates a person not only to study the Word of God but also to spend time in prayer, because prayer ensures comfort, gentleness and kindness, and God honours it. God can be the Heavenly Father that families are looking for in times of hopelessness, helplessness and need. Through Christianity, God can be of great assistance to families who experience father absence in the home (Gerrand & Nduna 2021:1, 187). According to Yi and Nel (2020:6), the tenderness and closeness of God can be experienced in the lives of people who grapple with father absence. The care of God is tender and affectionate towards families who are God-fearing (Boloje 2020:5).

According to Fry (2016), God presents himself as a Father throughout the entire Bible. Jesus makes more than 150 references to God as a Father, and he invites people to address God as their Father in heaven (Mt 6:9). It is also through the work of Christ on the cross that people are adopted into this family relationship (Eph 1:5). God the Father is not a distant or an impersonal ruler, but a warm and welcoming Father (Fry 2016). He is best understood as a loving and intimate Father (Fry 2016). The Bible indicated in Psalm 68:5 that God is the Father to the fatherless and the protector of widows. This truth is relevant to all families, whether broken, destroyed, dysfunctional or confronted with the cycle of father absence. It is important that all families realise that only *in* God is there hope for them, including the orphans, widows and lonely people, and *not* outside of him (Fry 2016).

Fry (2016) also argued that God is the literal Father to families and illustrates his statement by discussing five truths that paint a profound picture of the heavenly Father. Firstly, God is the source of life, and earthly fathers have a key part in contributing to and providing for the lives of children (Fry 2016; Kelly 1996). God the Father is the source of life, and he makes it possible for the earthly father to provide for his family. God's plan for families is the path to abundant life (Jn 10:10), but families need to recognise and integrate him into their earthly affairs. Secondly, God lovingly corrects us. The discipline and correction of God are always motivated by love (Heb 12:3–11; Fry 2016). Hence, earthly fathers should help their children to recognise the ways in which God's Spirit corrects them in their everyday decisions and interactions with others. Thirdly, God provides in our needs. Father God provides for the needs of the family according to Matthew 7:7–11. The earthly father should make his children aware of the ways in which God provides for their needs. Fourthly, God the Father gives wisdom. The earthly father should help his children learn life skills, and he should also encourage them in their talents and gifts. He should also help them see that truth and wisdom come from the heavenly Father, and his inspired Word is the ultimate source of wisdom and truth (2 Tm 3:16–17). Fifthly, God always welcomes his people back when they go astray. God is the ultimate model of forgiveness. All people sin and still mess up, but God the Father is constantly on the watch for his people to return to him. He is running to them with joy when they turn back to his family (Lk 15:11–32).

God's Fatherhood is perhaps the most overlooked feature of God in the Christian world (Freeks 2021:xxii; 4–9; 16–19; Fry 2016; Holmes 2021:253–257; Kelly 1996). Christians worldwide pray to God by uttering the familiar words, 'Our Father who art in heaven'. 'Father' is here the most familiar term for God in the Christian tradition and perhaps the most theologically significant title for God in all of Scripture (Dt 32:4; Ps 68:5; Mt 6:9; 7:11; Lk 15:11–32; Rm 6:23; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 1:5; 4:6; 2 Tm 3:16–17; Heb 12:3–11).

Furthermore, the fatherhood of God has significance in the life of human beings. Father in the Greek language literally

means upholder, nourisher or protector, and God has shown his fatherhood to humankind by creating a covenant with his offspring (Kelly 1996; Sarot 2016:1–2). God the Father is infinitely kind, and he is willing and allowing that all people must enjoy a generous participation in him (Holmes 2021:256). Human fathers provide, nourish and love their households, both physically and spiritually; so does God the Father, who cares, loves and nourishes us because we are his children and we belong to him (Freeks 2021:viii–ix; Fry 2016; Holmes 2021:253–257; Kelly 1996). It is key that people should understand God and his fatherhood before they can fulfil his fatherhood role to their families (Fry 2016; Kelly 1996; Sarot 2016:1–3). This role can be effective and impactful if men know and understand who Christ is. Jesus Christ as the Son of God conciliates God's fatherhood in the Trinity and manifests the godly structure of the Tri-unity with God the Father as the head. The conciliation of God's Fatherhood is flawless in Jesus Christ. Christ declares that those who have seen him have seen God the Father (Jn 14:8–11). Jesus Christ is further the eventual representation of God the living Father, as Paul indicated, because he is the faultless father image. Knowing Jesus Christ is knowing Father God (Fry 2016; Kelly 1996; Sarot 2016:3–4).

The relationship between God and humans is not only covenantal but pivotal in this article. God the Father is a protector, provider and nourisher of families, even to those who are without a father figure. However, having an involved and available father within the home context, transformed by the fatherhood of God and driven by faith-based values, can make a considerable difference within families, especially in the lives of children.

## Methods

The data were collected using 11 participants (see Table 1 for participant demographics). The participants were purposively selected based on the set criteria of: (1) being a father, (2) currently living in the Cape Flats and (3) historically classified as 'coloured'.

A narrative approach – particularly, a life history interview – was used to collect data. This approach offered the participants a space to narrate their life stories in a way that felt comfortable for them. Open-ended questions were used

to guide the participants' talk (eds. Goodson et al. 2016) and offered broader narratives about their lives. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 60 years. Most men identified as Christian. All participants were given pseudonyms and signed consent forms. The project and how the data would be collected were explained to them in detail. The narrative approach highlighted aspects that the participants regarded as the most important influences and lessons in their lives that shape their approach to fatherhood (eds. Goodson et al. 2016). The interviews explored their experiences as raced, classed and gendered beings and how they negotiated their identities as fathers.

## Theoretical approach

This article employs a narrative theoretical approach to identify the complex relations between being identified as of a 'coloured' race, fatherhood and Christianity. Narratives in this article are understood as a way through which sense is made of experiences and preferred versions of identity (Riessman 2002). Participants chose to tell specific narratives to make sense of their experiences of constructions of masculinity and fatherhood and how this relationship is constructed in scripts on the self (Bamberg 2004; McAdams 1987). In using a narrative approach, we were primarily interested in the language that participants use to talk about the ways in which they construct themselves, others and their identity.

The narrative approach is appropriate for this study as it is a highly participant-centred, open and enabling process that is useful in trying to produce more nuanced narratives on 'coloured' men's experiences of fatherhood. Understanding how men talk about Christian values shaping their sense and practices of fatherhood will contribute to the growing literature on masculinities in the Global South. Narrative research also allows for 'dialogical, socially responsive and accountable forms of knowledge' to surface about a phenomenon (Sonn, Stevens & Duncan 2013). This approach is also an empowering method that seeks to provide a platform where power relations within the interview space can be challenged, counter-narratives can be produced and marginalised groups are given a voice, and it provides a space for a nuanced understanding of a phenomenon to emerge (Hooks 2004; Sonn et al. 2013).

## Data analysis

A thematic narrative analysis (TNA) as described by Riessman (2008) was used to make meaning of the data. Thematic narrative analysis facilitates a process of reading narratives and allowing themes to emerge across narratives. In order to assure trustworthiness, the interview transcriptions were read by the authors, and together they decided on the themes. A narrative approach allows one to understand that narratives change according to the audience, and thus, no one objective truth exists (Riessman 2008). As a way of coming to understand the data, similarities and differences in narratives are drawn out (Wiles, Rosenberg & Kearns 2005). This analysis focuses

**TABLE 1:** Participant demographics.

Participant list pseudonym name	Age	Length lived in the Cape Flats	Religion
Paul	41	41	Christian
Stanley	54	54	Christian
Jack	72	72	Christian
Dean	40	40	Christian
Eddie	56	56	Christian
Mark	19	19	Christian
Brandon	25	25	Christian
Liam	20	20	Christian
Leon	21	21	Christian
John	21	21	Christian
Michael	23	23	Christian

particularly on the content of the narratives and 'what' is being narrated. We used an inductive approach wherein we looked for patterns in the data. The theorising of those patterns happened across several interviews as participants co-constructed and gave meaning to the events they narrated (Riessman 2008). The interviews were transcribed and read multiple times by the second author. The narratives highlighted experiences of being gendered and raced. Experiences were extracted that focused on what it means to be a 'coloured' father and Christian in the Cape Flats. These narratives were then coded with keywords and phrases used to encapsulate the essence of the following narrative themes: 'constructions of fatherhood and Christianity' and 'using fatherhood to challenge stereotypes'. In the next section, we unpack the results from the interviews conducted.

## Results

### Constructions of fatherhood and Christianity

This theme examines how the men constructed meanings of a 'good father' in relation to faith-based values. Throughout the narrative interviews, Christianity was constructed as being of great significance in their neighbourhood, communities and their lives. Places of worship and fellowship are accessible to residents in the Cape Flats. This was evident in the ways that the participants spoke about the importance of religion, specifically Christianity, in their lives. Christian values which relate to faith, trust, devotion and surrender (Van der Walt 2008:2-3) are explored in this section. These values are modelled around God the Father as provider and protector and can constitute a huge contribution to men and their spiritual life (Van der Walt 2008:2-3). Most participants identified themselves as Christian, while one participant identified himself as Muslim. The participants who identified as Christian spoke about the Christian values that were instilled in them since childhood. Subsequently, these values assisted the men to become who they are:

Mark: '[...] One time, that was now last year, so I got stabbed and I saw my death in front of me, but God gave me another chance and I made use of the chance [...] I am, I am a Christian boy. I go to church every Sunday, no, I must.'

Mark, throughout his interview, talked about how God saved his life and 'gave him another chance' and how the church helped him live a better life. In his talk, he highlighted the character of God as his protector and the one who guides him and gave him grace to be alive but also to have a second chance to live. Mark wanted to honour this second chance by living a life that is meaningful and that resembles his faith and Godlike principles. This is what 'becoming a man' meant for Mark. He emphasised the importance of the church by saying, 'I must attend church every Sunday'.

Researcher: 'Would you say the church played an important role in your life?'

Jack: 'Yes, and the people in the church as well. When you were caught doing something wrong, they would tell your parents, you see? You were too scared to do anything wrong because of all the people in the church watching you [...]'

Jack's experience highlighted a fear that is often felt or experienced in the religious community, as the perception of living righteously is often misunderstood as being a 'perfect human'. Jack reflected on the lack of acknowledgement that he is human, after all, who sometimes makes mistakes and engages in 'sin'. However, being a part of the Christian community also offers a structure of support that looks after and over a person, who will guide them in a direction of righteousness without judgement, which is a form of Godly love that is shared in the Christian community. Godly love and loving one's neighbour are paramount because they have their significance in God's compassion for people. God cares for and loves people unconditionally, and irrespective of their background or status (Das 2016:34-36). Therefore, it is key that we should love and care for our neighbour (Mt 22:37-39; Mk 12:31). However, it is not always easy, and for that reason, God made it a command. In this context, a commandment means that we must be intentional about it. Stanley expanded on this by talking about the role that faith-based values, taught to him by his parents, played and the significance of God in shaping the man he is today:

Stanley: 'Your parents make you a good man because they instil the Word and it must carry you, so that you as a parent can say you taught your kids this and made them understand life [...]. A man for me, it's not what other people can do but what God has done in me because it was only him. Before I was in my mother's womb, he already knew me and what I would be [...]. You must first seek the kingdom of God and then all the rest shall be added unto you. Sometimes you hear the Word, but you still want to go there and there [...]. You must know that God will provide and guide you [...].'

Many of the men told narratives of growing up in the church and positioned the church and Christian values as vital and important in producing men and fathers of character and dignified stature. In their talk, Christianity is constructed as a means of gaining social capital. In their talk, they show this by stating that the 'church is watching you' (Jack). He further noted that the church also holds one accountable for their actions. In their talk, we also see how these men found a sense of purpose and belonging through Christianity because 'the Lord created me' and 'in my mother's womb, He already knew me' (Stanley). The three narratives above, told by Mark, Jack and Stanley, position faith-based values as significant factors in shaping them as men and fathers. Stanley also drew on faith-based values and how God raised and knows him so well. Meanwhile, Mark spoke about God giving him a second chance to live, and thus he made the decision to live for God in this second chance that he got.

Paul, like many other men in this research, stated that as fathers, it is their responsibility to ensure that their families go to church and instil Christian values in them:

Researcher: 'And for you, what makes someone a man?'

Paul: 'Firstly, if you can stand up for your family, if you can tell them, "Listen here, on a Sunday, it's church time; we can stand up early so that we know we have our blessings for the week."'

In his narrative, Paul states that what makes one a man is tending to their family's spiritual well-being. Their families

going to church and living moral lives were seen as part of a man's duty and as a sign of being a good father. A good Christian father for them is thus constructed as a man who provides for his family, protects them, takes responsibility for his family and is the head of the household. Many of the participants emphasised the importance of fathers being the head of the household and providing for their families:

Researcher: 'Do you believe that a man should put food on the table?'

Stanley: 'Yes, he must; I believe that he must. He is the head of the house, and as a head of the house, you must always make sure there is food in the house.'

Jack shared a similar view when he stated that these are all written in the Bible:

Jack: '[W]hen you go to the scripture, it says that the man is the head of the house.'

The participants above use their talk to emphasise that the role of a man is to be the head of the house. As the head of the household, men are required to do particular duties that are expected of them; thus, one's commitment to one's family is seen as a masculine duty (Campbell 1992; Hunter 2005; Mthembu 2015; Niehaus 2005; Peters 2016). Stanley uses his talk to highlight the responsibilities of the head of the house, which include feeding one's family. He states that it is a duty that a man 'must do'. Pre-existing research shows a consensus that as a father 'you must' provide for the family. These pre-existing definitions of a man as the head of the household alongside the phrase 'you must' may be a way for these men to emphasise the significance and enormity of their masculine duty and responsibilities (Mthembu 2015). In the narratives told about being the head of the household, the men drew on biblical discourses to validate their views and tried to emulate the characteristics of God the Father (Freeks 2011:58, 127–141; Kelly 1996). In the above section, the article focused on how Christianity intersects with masculinity and fatherhood. The participants used their narratives to position the church as a source of support and an influence on them being more present fathers.

### Using fatherhood to challenge stereotypes

This section explores the language that 'coloured' men use to contest the dominant narrative that paints all 'coloured' fathers as absent in their children's lives. Furthermore, these fathers have also been constructed as men who do not take responsibility for their children. The men used their talk to produce narratives that challenge these notions of them as absent fathers who do not take responsibility for their children.

Michael: 'Well, being a father in this place is so hard, because you must work and provide for the child and so on. And you have the financial muscle too, because the mother always puts pressure on me to go work, because I must. [...] I will do anything for my child.'

Researcher: 'What does it mean to be a father for you?'

Michael: 'Well, it's quite an honour to be a father, because at the beginning it was hard, you know, but I was there even despite it all. I am a proud father.'

Michael took pride in being a present father, especially considering the social context in which he resides, where the absence of fathers is prominent. For him, taking responsibility for his child started by owning and claiming his role as a father and then ensuring that he has taken care of his child in all aspects of their life, not only his or her physical needs. Paul also alludes to this and resonates with Michael's script:

Michael: 'It's not just about making children and having sex, and if you have children take full responsibility for that child. Emotionally, care for their body. Spiritually, it's a lot you must put into a child.'

Much research on fatherhood has continued to produce research that shows 'coloured' men as uninvolved and not present fathers and as men who do not take responsibility for their children (Anderson 2009; Salo 2004). In the participants' excerpts, they contest these dominant narratives by presenting narratives that show them accepting and taking responsibility for their children and choosing to be present fathers (Hartley 2014). Their narratives reveal that the participants purposely accommodated their children by shifting their life focus.

In all the men's narratives, they were actively renegotiating their masculine identities from how they were previously taught on what it means to be a man (violent, irresponsible, emotionally unavailable), and now how fatherhood has allowed them a chance to rethink and renegotiate those perceptions and ideals of masculinity. This was evident in their talk on being responsible fathers who take care of their children, which is also found in previous studies (see Enderstein & Boonzaier 2015; Hartley 2014; Swartz & Bhana 2009). Michael (aged 23) continually used words such as 'my child', stressing in his story how he deliberately decided to accept responsibility for his child. It is significant that the participants described fathers' responsibilities as being emotionally present and spiritually guiding their children, alongside physically and financially providing for their children. However, good fathering in their local contexts still has a fixed idea of a good father, which is linked to being able to provide for his family and children's financial needs. This was emphasised in Michael's narrative when he stated that 'you have to be the financial muscle too' (Hartley 2014; Helman et al. 2018).

By taking responsibility and claiming fatherhood for their children, these marginalised men are using fatherhood as a means of 'doing masculinity' (Salo 2004). The participants showed how contested the meanings around what makes a good father are. These men find themselves wanting to uphold hegemonic gender ideals while also challenging this thinking by demonstrating new ways to care for their children. We thus see how fatherhood can be a possible site to challenge stereotypes on 'coloured' fathers.

Researcher: 'So, what kind of father do you want to be for your children?'

Michael: 'I always want to be there for my child, to guide them because I didn't have the same guidance from my father. I think I was a few months, so he left because he and my mother always fought, so yes, be better [...]. The thing is, basically, most children need a father in their life, to guide them. If a father isn't there, let's say, for example, to talk to them about sex, then they will mess up [...]. So, if someday you make a child, just stick with it till the end, and I know times will be hard and stuff, but just, you know, if you are there to support them throughout their years then they will never forget you because you were always there. Don't just throw money at him, once in a while, you see.'

Here, Michael reflects on the emotional connection that is important in developing between the father and son. This intimate connection fosters trust and openness which allows for difficult and important conversations that are valuable in constructing a particular kind of manhood – one that is present and emotionally involved and available. This way of 'doing' fatherhood is how John (aged 21) expressed the importance of fatherhood for him. For John, fatherhood is more than just being a financial provider; it entails being more involved in his children's upbringing. In John's larger narrative, he spoke about wanting to do things better than his father and saw his involvement in his two children's lives and providing them with love and care as a means to achieve that.

Researcher: 'So, you say you don't know what people expect from a man, but what did you expect from your father?'

John: 'I expected him to be there for me and support me – say the school has a rugby game on, for him to have been there and support me in times when there was pressure put on me or I have too much on my brain, for him to be there to motivate me and uplift me with a good word. "You can do it, my child, you can do it, there is far more in life" [...] He must be a good role model.'

The above excerpts are narratives taken from young men. From these young fathers' narratives, we see how they prioritised care, emotional connection, respect and being present in their children's lives (Enderstein & Boonzaier 2015; Hartley 2014). Early fatherhood may be a likely avenue for developing 'coloured' masculine identities which are progressive. Growing up without their fathers being present in the participants' lives was an experience that they constructed as detrimental (Enderstein & Boonzaier 2015; Swartz & Bhana 2009). The participants used their stories to construct the fatherhood identity, where they acknowledged the significant role fathers have in their children's lives. Fathers were thus positioned as crucial to a child having a good life (Enderstein & Boonzaier 2015; Swartz & Bhana 2009). Both the young men continually constructed themselves as 'real fathers' because they 'looked after their children' and are present fathers who take responsibility for their children. This was not what their fathers did. Good fathers, according to the participants, were men who inspire their children to be better. In spite of not having the financial resources to sufficiently provide, the men constructed good fatherhood as being emotionally and physically present and 'not just throwing money' at a child. Such narratives may have been a strategy the

participants used to renegotiate their fatherhood identity even though they lacked the finances. Existing research has shown 'coloured' fathers as absent, irresponsible fathers; however, the participants used their talk to imagine their masculine identities in alternative ways through a view on fatherhood (Hartley 2014) that challenged the stereotypes that exist about them.

## Concluding thoughts

This study explored the narratives of 11 fathers who identify themselves as 'coloured' and reside on the periphery of Cape Town, South Africa. The participants who formed part of this work reflected on the intersection between fatherhood and religion. The narrative approach provided these men with a means through which to tell their stories in adequate and self-representing ways, including values and the Bible. The Bible provides human beings with a clear elucidation of the origin of values, specifically faith-based values. These values are stated within a value system that holds the Bible as the reliable Word of God. Faith-based values do not exist in seclusion, but they have a significance which is based on God's ordinations for life. Thus, faith-based values serve as guidelines for behaviour. This approach to do research has, in this study, shown to be an effective tool in challenging existing dominant narratives around 'coloured' men as fathers who are 'absent fathers', 'irresponsible', 'alcoholics', 'lazy' and 'crude' men. This approach allows for a reframing of 'coloured men', masculinities and fathers and provides a space to explore alternative ideas about being a father in the Cape Flats.

Our research has highlighted the complexity of men's experiences around fatherhood. Existing research on 'coloured' men and fatherhood looked predominantly at them as absent fathers. The participants' narratives in this study, however, show how they are redefining what it means to be a father using faith-based values. Furthermore, their narratives challenge the dominance of hegemony in 'coloured' masculinity, by choosing to do fatherhood differently and by being emotionally expressive. The participants used the interview space to confront those single-sided narratives and construct themselves as respectable men who are present fathers and provide their children with love and support while upholding faith-based values that are instilled in the upbringing of their children.

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### Authors' contributions

F.E.F., S.M.P. and H.L. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

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## Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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