

Researching Female Faith

*Qualitative Research
Methods*

Edited by
Nicola Slee, Fran Porter
and Anne Phillips

Explorations in
Practical, Pastoral and
Empirical Theology

Researching Female Faith

Researching Female Faith is a collection of essays based on recent and original field research conducted by the contributors, and informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives, into the faith lives of women and girls – broadly from within a Christian context.

Chapters describe and recount original qualitative research that identifies, illuminates and enhances our understanding of key aspects of women's and girls' faith lives. Offered as a contribution to feminist practical and pastoral theology, the chapters arise out of and feed back into a range of mainly UK pastoral and practical contexts. While the chapters in this volume will contribute to an enhanced appreciation and analysis of female faith, the core focus is on feminist qualitative research methods and methodology. Thus, they demystify and illuminate the process of research, including features of research that are frequently under-examined.

The book is a first in bringing together a specific focus on feminist qualitative research methodology with the study of female faith lives. It will therefore be of great interest to students, academics and practitioners with interests in faith and gender in theology, religious studies and sociology.

Nicola Slee is Director of Research at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, UK, where she oversees the doctoral programme, Professor of Feminist Practical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Visiting Professor at the University of Chester.

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‘Nicola Slee, Fran Porter and Anne Phillips have done it again, and I am delighted they have! Following their significant volume *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls*, the essays collected in this new book offer fresh insights into research frameworks, gathering and analyzing data, and reflexivity specific to the study of women and girls in contemporary Christianity. Finally, researchers and students in practical, contextual, pastoral theologies and religious feminisms have a resource that speaks to their qualitative approaches, and *Researching Female Faith* will challenge and enrich their methodologies and methods.’ – **Dawn Llewellyn**, Senior Lecturer in Christian Studies, University of Chester, UK

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Fran Porter and Anne Phillips**

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Nicola Slee is Director of Research at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education where she oversees the doctoral programme, Professor of Feminist Practical Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Visiting Professor at the University of Chester. She was involved in some of the earliest feminist Christian networks and groups in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s, contributed to some of the first publications in Christian feminist theology in the UK, and her doctoral thesis, published as *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), broke new ground in the qualitative study of women's faith lives. Since then, she has published widely in feminist theology, spirituality and liturgy, as well as in practical theology. She convenes the Symposium on the Faith Lives of Women and Girls and co-edited with Anne Phillips and Fran Porter *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). She is a poet and belongs to two writing groups, one of them a group of poet-theologians. She is currently working on a book on Sabbath and collaborating on a project on feminist liturgy. She is a lay Anglican and honorary Vice President of WATCH (Women and the Church).

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Introduction

Anne Phillips, Fran Porter and Nicola Slee

The nature, contexts and aims of the book

Researching Female Faith: Qualitative Research Methods is the second collection of essays to emerge from the Symposium on the Faith Lives of Women and Girls convened at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham, England, which has been meeting regularly since 2010. In our first edited collection, *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls*,¹ we narrated the genesis of the Symposium and described its ethos as a collaborative, feminist-inspired network of qualitative researchers engaged in researching female faith lives at postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral levels. As in that first collection, the work represented in this volume is based on original field research, informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives, into the faith lives of women and girls – broadly from within a Christian context. We continue our substantive concern to illuminate the still neglected faith lives of women and girls, but in this volume focus on issues of feminist method and methodology – on *how* feminist researchers go about doing their research.

We have been heartened by critical and conversational responses to our first book. Readers – both new and more experienced researchers – valued the self-reflexive, narrative accounts of particular projects that highlighted findings that throw new light on women's and girls' practices of faith. Our aim in that volume of demystifying the research process continues to inform this book by focusing specifically on methods and methodology. We explore explicitly how feminist researchers employ qualitative methodology and methods to study the faith lives of women and girls. Contributors offer both broad reflections on methodology and more focused accounts of particular research methods, with a detail that is still rare in many research methodology texts. Chapters trace different stages of the research process: the initial, sometimes hesitant, idea for a research project; the honing of a proposal; the choices in research design and the creation of an overarching methodology; and the conduct of the research, data analysis and writing up. Contributors describe in detail what they did and why, the challenges or difficulties they faced in developing their research design and how they overcame them or, sometimes, had to change tack and take a new approach. They discuss the variety of methodological frameworks

available to them and, in some cases, the development of new methodologies and new variations on well-worn methods.

We consider that this volume makes a valuable addition to the research literature and will be of great benefit to new researchers in the field of gender and faith, demystifying and illuminating the process of research, including features of research that are frequently under-examined. We know of no collection of essays that focuses on feminist research methodology in the study of female faith *per se*. There are, of course, a growing number of texts on feminist research methodology more generally,² but none of these addresses the study of religious faith. Conversely, there are texts exploring research methods from a theological perspective and we welcome the growing literature within practical theology attending to the conduct of qualitative as well as quantitative research,³ but few if any of these address issues of gender or, if they do, only in passing. Our text is the first in the field to combine a specific focus on feminist qualitative research methodology with the study of female faith.

We hope that this text makes a significant contribution to feminist practical and pastoral theology, to the social scientific study of religion, to feminist research methodology more generally, and specifically to feminist-inspired qualitative research on religion. We anticipate that it will be a valuable text for students in theological education (those preparing for various forms of ministry in the churches), for those working in the field of practical/pastoral theology, particularly at master's and doctoral level, and for researchers in the field. While located primarily in a UK context, we believe that the research here may speak to a wider international readership.

A note on method and methodology

It is important to be aware that there are differences in the way writers define 'method' and 'methodology'. After pointing out that the terms are frequently used as if they were synonymous and interchangeable, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat offer helpful definitions, making the distinction and connection between methods and methodology clear:

Methods are specific techniques that are used for data collection and analysis. They comprise a series of clearly defined, disciplined and systematic procedures that the researcher uses to accomplish a particular task. Interviews, sampling procedures, thematic development, coding and recognized techniques and approaches to the construction of the research question would be examples of qualitative research methods.

Methodology is connected to method, but in a particular way. The term 'methodology' has a number of different meanings. Formally it relates to the study of methods. More broadly, the term methodology has to do with an overall approach to a particular field. It implies a family of methods that have in common particular philosophical and epistemological assumptions.⁴

They go on to discuss the ways in which particular methods are employed within the methodological assumptions of specific interpretative paradigms. For example, the philosophical perspective of logical positivism within the natural sciences is based on an objectivist epistemology in which there is a sharp distinction between knower and what is known, and understands the role of science as that of measurement and prediction. This approach tends to employ quantitative methods, which are presumed to be able to measure accurately and objectively the phenomena under investigation. By contrast, what they call the ‘hermeneutical/interpretative paradigm’ is based on a social constructivist understanding of knowledge in which the boundary between knower and known is blurred, and in which the knower therefore always impacts upon what is known as participant and co-creator. The creation of theory is seen as a heuristic exercise leading to more or less satisfying accounts of reality, and qualitative methods are favoured by this approach because they take far greater account of the porous line between the researcher and the researched.

This understanding of methods and methodology is shared by a number of other British practical theologians, for example Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce,⁵ who offer a helpful, simplified summary of Swinton and Mowatt’s approach. Cameron and Duce emphasize the ways in which methodologies – what we might call overarching theoretical frameworks that shape and guide the research and give meaning to specific methods – are themselves shaped and guided by the underlying epistemological frameworks of the researcher(s). Methodologies, in other words, tend to enshrine and express fundamental orientations to truth and knowledge, whether these are made explicit in the research or not; and this may be true, to a lesser extent, of research methods. They identify four basic paradigms (objectivist, critical, interpretivist and action research) that tend to be operative in practical theology, each of which operates with different epistemologies, methodologies and, to a certain degree, methods.

Other writers use the language of theory rather than methodology to differentiate between discrete research methods and the larger epistemological frameworks within which research is conducted. Particular paradigms within theology, as well as specific geographical and socio-political contexts, powerfully shape the ways in which it is understood knowledge is derived, including the purpose and outcome of research. For example, emancipatory theory, feminist and womanist theories, narrative approaches, ethnography and participatory action research offer specific approaches to the conduct of research shaped by epistemological, political and practical factors.⁶

Sandra Harding helpfully distinguishes between epistemology, methodology, and method.⁷ An epistemology, according to Harding, is a theory about knowledge; a method is a technique for gathering and analysing information, and a methodology ‘works out the implications of a specific epistemology for how to implement a method’.⁸ Joey Sprague, discussing Harding’s clear and useful distinction, suggests that, ‘when we decouple the elision of epistemology

and method, methodology emerges as the terrain where philosophy and action meet, where the implications of what we believe for how we should proceed get worked out'. She continues:

Reflecting on methodology – on how we do what we do – opens up possibilities and exposes choices. It allows us to ask such questions as: Is the way we gather and interpret data consistent with what we believe about how knowledge is and should be created? What unexamined assumptions about knowledge underlie our standards for evaluating claims about how things are or what really happened? We can even pose questions rarely considered in relation to methodology, questions about how knowledge fits into the rest of social life: Whose questions are we asking? And to whom do we owe an answer? Thinking about methodology in this way puts the technical details into a social and political context and considers their consequences for people's lives. It gives us space for critical reflection and creativity.⁹

It is precisely to create such a space for critical and creative reflection that we offer this volume.

Feminist approaches to methodology and method

Feminists by no means agree on questions of method and methodology any more than they agree on epistemological commitments or understandings of feminism. Mary Daly is typical of those who hold a scathing antipathy towards method. 'One of the false gods of theologians, philosophers, and other academics is called Method', she opined in *Beyond God the Father*,¹⁰ going on to claim:

The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible.¹¹

Nevertheless, Daly went on to develop her own highly distinctive methods and methodology, what she described in *Gyn/Ecology* as 'Gynocentric Method', built on the 'murder of misogynistic methods (intellectual and affective exorcism)' and the 'free play of intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multi-dimensional, independent, creative, tough'.¹² When Daly castigates method, what she is really railing against and rejecting wholesale is androcentric, patriarchal application of methods, rather than method itself.

Following Daly, feminist scholars in every field have sought to develop feminist means of knowledge production commensurate with the emancipatory and liberating aims of feminism. Numerous accounts exist of the debates

within feminist methodologies and methods over the past two to three decades, and readers are referred to these for wider discussion.¹³ Broadly speaking, the debate has centred around the question of whether there are specifically feminist methods and/or methodologies, or simply feminist approaches to method and methodology. In *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*, Slee categorized three main stages of the debate and, more than 10 years later, we suggest this categorization still holds. The first phase, designated 'the critical stage', was stimulated by contributions from feminist scholars in the natural and physical, as well as social sciences, who called attention to the sexism and androcentrism inherent in generally accepted scientific procedures, for example, in the common use of male-only subjects in studies of human participants, and male activity and male-dominant animal populations in experiments using animals. This phase was also characterized by a wider critique of quantitative methods, 'widely regarded as alienating and inimical to women's experience, rooted in a positivist empiricism which reified objectivity and philosophical neutrality whilst masking its own commitments to such culturally conditioned (and male) values as autonomy, separation, distance and control'.¹⁴ A second, constructivist stage built on this earlier critique and deconstruction by seeking to develop new research methods and methodologies grounded in 'feminist standpoint' epistemologies, 'characterised by the commitment to researching women's experiences, worldviews and meanings using methods grounded in their own social practices'.¹⁵ Participatory methods of research were developed and advocated, in which participants were regarded as co-researchers sharing in the task of knowledge production, rather than as 'subjects' under the critical gaze of the researcher(s). In practice, qualitative methods were favoured by the majority of feminists working in the social sciences 'as the only ones capable of yielding such mutuality of participation'.¹⁶ Feminists made adaptations of existing methods – in particular, the interview, but also oral history and so on – in order to minimize, as far as possible, the power differential between the researcher and researched and to allow for genuine collaboration, even 'friendship', between researcher and researched.¹⁷ There was also a strong commitment to disseminate research findings in non-standard academic forms (for example, popular forms of writing, political and feminist gatherings, and media presentation), which could be more accessible to research participants. The third phase, categorized as one of 'diversification and self-reflective critical sophistication', is still ongoing (although of course there have been significant publications in the past decade and more). This phase has been marked by a move away from the earlier search for exclusively 'feminist methods' towards a broader consideration of the principles and epistemological commitments that shape research practice. The simplistic binary between quantitative and qualitative research approaches, and the assertion that only qualitative research is authentically feminist, have given way to a more inclusive recognition that both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods can play their part in feminist research and can helpfully critique and enrich each other. Another characteristic of this third, ongoing phase is the recognition and assertion of plurality and diversity within

feminist practice and epistemology and the dismantling of singular notions of either feminism or research.

As a result of these debates and contributions to feminist research practice, there is now a widely shared view that the pursuit of specifically feminist research methods or even methodologies is both obsolete and erroneous. It is obsolete because feminists use any and all of the existing research methods that have been used in earlier, androcentric research – albeit with adaptations, applied to new contexts and research questions – so that it is contradictory to declare any method feminist per se. It is erroneous because it is to impose a unitary view and practice upon feminists and to exclude work that does not fit such criteria – an approach that seems inherently anti-feminist in its imperialism. Nevertheless, as Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner suggest, ‘While it is difficult to argue that there is a specifically feminist method, methodology, or epistemology, it is the case that feminist scholars have embraced particular characteristics in their work’.¹⁸ They suggest the following: first, ‘that feminist research should be not just on women, but *for* women and, where possible, with women’; second, ‘feminist researchers have actively engaged with methodological innovation through challenging conventional or mainstream ways of collecting, analysing, and presenting data’; third, ‘feminist research is concerned with issues of broader social change and social justice’; fourth, feminist research is marked by critical attention to power, exploitation, knowing and representation and aims for ‘accountable and responsible knowing’; fifth, feminist research is marked by explicit reflexivity and transparency about such core issues as social location, the co-creation of data and the construction of knowledge.¹⁹ Gayle Letherby shares a similar stance when she asserts:

although there is no such thing as a feminist method, and there is debate over the usefulness and even the existence of feminist methodology and a feminist epistemology, there is a recognition that ‘feminist research practice’ (Kelly, 1988) is distinguishable from other forms of research. Feminist research practice can be distinguished by the questions feminists ask, the location of the researcher within the process of research and within theorizing, and the intended purpose of the work produced.²⁰

The debates about what makes for good and authentic feminist research practice, and the specific characteristics advocated by Doucet and Mauthner, as well as others, will be evident in the following chapters and form part of the background to this book. In this sense, *Researching Female Faith* contributes to the ongoing debates about feminist methods, methodologies and epistemologies. What is new is the bringing to bear of such methodological perspectives onto the study of female faith – itself as varied and diverse as the perspectives and approaches of the women who have contributed to this book. These chapters constitute only a partial record of such debate and a partial contribution to debate about the best ways for feminists to engage in research and, specifically, the most authentic and empowering ways for feminists to research other women’s and girls’ faith lives.

We hope what follows will stimulate ongoing discussion and debate and, above all, further research that can enrich both substantive knowledge of female faith and offer new and creative methodological perspectives.

A synopsis of the book

In Part I, we offer some broad feminist methodological perspectives as a way of setting the discussions of specific research methods that follow into a wider framework. These chapters, by Anne Phillips, Nicola Slee, Helen Collins and Janet Eccles, discuss the development of broad, overarching perspectives or frameworks for research, the metanarratives or theories that give meaning to, and shape, specific research methods, although those methods may well also – and do – reciprocally shape the broader methodological framework that emerges generally slowly and gradually out of the trial and error processes of conducting research. If, as Letherby suggests, ‘thinking methodologically is theorizing about how we find things out; it is about the relationship between the process and the product of research’,²¹ then these first four chapters offer theoretical, as well as practical, approaches to the conduct of feminist research and to the production of feminist theory. However, they do so by keeping close to the actual practice of research itself – which is a key aim and intention of the collection as a whole.

Writing on research methodology can become divorced from the detail of the daily practices, choices and dilemmas faced by researchers in the field. We asked all contributors, whatever their stance or approach, to describe as clearly and precisely as possible, what they actually *did* in developing a specific research method or broader methodology; how they did it and why; what this produced by way of knowledge as well as research process; how it impacted on themselves as researchers as well as the participants; what worked and what did not, and what they did then. Throughout, we hope that readers will get the sense of the actual practice of research – its ups and downs, its surprising twists and turns, its frustrations and dead ends as well as its sudden moments of illumination and discovery. Research is a dynamic, active and emergent process and, however experienced the researcher(s) or well prepared for entering the field, there are always unpredictable factors that cannot be planned or even known beforehand. We believe that the chapters that follow give a real sense of this emergent aspect of research; we are invited into the process as it takes shape, and we join the questioning, questing and experimental journey of each researcher as the research progresses.

It has been a deliberate choice to start this book with Anne Phillips’ chapter, which reflects on her research with girls and the methodological choices she had to make in researching the spiritual lives and faith of girls. We start here, not only because, chronologically, girlhood precedes womanhood, but more significantly because the experience of girls is still a neglected site in social scientific research (although this is changing), most particularly where the faith lives of girls is concerned. Phillips’ pioneering work in this field is gaining

broad, international recognition, and we hope it will stimulate much more research. In her chapter, she describes and reflects on the participative nature of the methodology and methods she used in her interviews with girls in a British Baptist context, a methodology grounded in the commitment to the empowerment of the girls and to advocacy on their behalf. Phillips reflects on the limits, as well as the strengths, of her participative methodology, particularly in light of the constraints imposed by working within a faith community. By comparing and contrasting her study with both adult-led projects and a substantially child-led project, she draws out the particular contribution of her own study. Messy, unpredictable and ‘immature’ at the same time as being open-ended, innovative and experimental, such participative research has the capacity to create a space in which the newly emergent subjectivities of both researcher and researched can interrelate, in respectful and playful dialogue.

On the face of it, Nicola Slee’s discussion of the development of a research methodology using poetry as a means of data analysis, presentation and reflexivity appears to have little in common with Phillips’ chapter, but closer scrutiny suggests shared themes of evolving a methodology experimentally, committing to the full participation of research subjects, and understanding research with women and girls itself as practices of solidarity and advocacy. Slee’s chapter offers a case study of ‘Meg’, one of the first cohort of women priests in the Church of England, who Slee had originally interviewed more than twenty years ago. Returning to the transcript and re-analysing it through a range of poetic responses, the chapter charts the ways in which this experimental method enabled the re-opening of a dialogue with Meg, who was gradually drawn into the reflexive scrutiny of the earlier conversation and offered her own poetic response to it. The chapter sheds light on the respective journeys and life choices of two Anglican women – the researcher and the researched, lay and ordained, one of whom has left the church and the other of whom has remained – as well as offering a creative case study of the potential insight poetry can offer to qualitative data.

Helen Collins’ chapter is also marked by experimentation, trial and error and the gradual evolution of a novel methodology emerging from and integrating her respective identity markers as feminist, evangelical and charismatic. She describes her endeavours to find an existing methodology that would be suitable for her study of first-time mothers from charismatic evangelical backgrounds and the impact of motherhood on their experience of charismatic worship. None of the existing methodological frameworks – feminist or practical theological – seemed to offer what she needed, although she drew widely on existing models and approaches in the development of her own. The chapter offers a reflexive narrative of her research journey, in which she describes in some detail how she developed a novel methodology of ‘web-weaving’, drawing on Mark Cartledge’s practical theology methodology and enriching as well as critiquing it from feminist perspectives. Having described the creation of this new methodology, she goes on to show how she used it to analyse data from her interviews and how it enabled the complexity of her participants’

lives, as well as her own, to find a more adequate expression than would have been the case if she had been forced to choose a pre-existing methodology.

Janet Eccles' research methodology, like Collins', took shape over many weeks and months because pre-existing categories in the sociology of religion did not fit or appeared inadequate to theorize the complex and nuanced accounts offered by her participants as they narrated their religious/spiritual lives and practices. Within her study of older women church affiliates and nonaffiliates in the South Lakeland town where she lives, Eccles hit the problem when she was beginning to search for a typology to enable her to code and categorize the transcripts of interviews with women. Thus, the chapter contains helpful and illuminating insight into the processes of data analysis, and might have gone into Part III; we have placed it here partly to demonstrate how larger methodological issues arise out of data analysis, but also because, in her wrestling with existing categories available from the sociology of religion, Eccles eventually came to develop a new typology. Her work demonstrates, along with the other chapters in this section, how feminists are developing new frameworks for the analysis of female faith: critiquing, adapting, revising and expanding existing models or bringing them into unlikely conversation with each other. These methodologies suggest new ways of doing research at the same time as offering new theoretical perspectives on female faith. Thus, Eccles became dissatisfied with existing typologies that make a hard and fast distinction between 'religion' and 'spirituality', or between Christian and non- or post-Christian believers. Her research participants offered many examples of women who contradicted the categories: women who attended church for many different reasons, by no means all of them obviously devotional; dechurched women who still considered themselves Christian and engaged in practices such as prayer, Bible reading and so on, often more devoutly than some of the affiliates; women who both attended church and other practitioner groups, such as pagan/holistic groups, critiquing both in the light of the other. Thus a new typology gradually developed, through much trial and error, and Eccles offers this as a more flexible and nuanced model that can account for the fact that '[w]omen may be both religious and spiritual whether they "belong" to the institutional church or not'. At the same time, she encourages feminist researchers to 'refuse previously (often male) defined categories', arguing that '[o]ur subjects deserve their own, which reflect their lives as they live them, not a standard off-the-shelf model'.

Part II turns to the stage of data gathering in qualitative research and offers a range of chapters discussing the use of different kinds of data and different ways of generating data. While the focus here is on specific research methods, larger methodological questions and issues are never far away. It is unhelpful and unrealistic to make too sharp a division between discrete research methods and larger theoretical or methodological frameworks, since there is almost always a backwards and forwards iterative process in the development of research methods and the broader methodological framework. Thus the lines between Parts I and II of the book are inevitably blurred (as are the

lines between all of our section divisions). What unites the discussions by Fran Porter, Sarah-Jane Page and Kim Wasey in these chapters is their detailed and careful attention both to the minutiae of research practice and to wider theoretical – philosophical, sociological and theological – questions that give meaning to specific research practices. First, Fran Porter discusses a research method much used and favoured by feminists, the interview; unusually, Porter advocates the usefulness and value of a highly structured interview format in contrast to the looser narrative or semi-structured interview schedules adopted by the majority of feminist practitioners. Situating the argument in a review of some of the key debates about feminist interview methods, Porter then goes on to describe two research projects in which she employed highly structured interview schedules to interview women, offering a rationale for this choice based on the desire to cover specific areas and avenues of enquiry that, at that time, had received very little research attention. Porter shows that a highly structured approach can still be used flexibly, and can elicit a very wide range of responses; she counters the contention that a highly structured interview makes the process of data analysis easier, since participants can and do respond in a highly individual manner to standard questions – and this, of course, is part of the fascination and value of the approach. Above all, she demonstrates that a highly structured research instrument can be used to advance feminist aims of empowerment and reciprocity, and can offer to participants opportunities for self-expression and understanding.

The following chapters by Page and Wasey offer contrasting discussions of research methods that employ new technologies and social media unavailable to earlier generations of feminist scholars. Sarah-Jane Page discusses the use of video diaries in a research project exploring young adults' faith lives, offering a nuanced account that acknowledges the complexity of ethical issues arising in such research, especially around issues of consent, voice and power. While Page acknowledges the arguments for inviting research participants to make video diaries on the grounds of giving them more power and enabling research to be more collaborative, she goes on to question the naïve assumption that such methods ensure the balance of power in favour of participants. The discussion of visual methods is set within the framework of the debate about feminist research in which Page problematizes the notion that any specific method can be guaranteed to be non-exploitative and participatory. Page then goes on to review studies that have employed new technologies, such as the smart phone and the video diary, to access the social worlds of vulnerable or marginalized groups, noting the potential strengths as well as pitfalls of such methods. She goes on to describe the use of such methods in a project on young adults' faith and sexuality, arguing that video diaries may be particularly powerful in capturing the everyday religious lives and practices of participants. At the same time, she notes some participants' ambivalence about using video diaries and the operation of class and other forms of privilege that shaped the confidence and ease with which participants were able to construct narrative

identities. She argues that the video diary method ‘privileges certain ways of knowing’, those ‘supported by dominant Western norms’ and, conversely, is more problematic for members of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Nor are all narratives equally permissible or supported, and she notes a number of constraints and controls, including gendered ones, that were operative in the study and impacted on participants’ sense of voice and agency. This careful and nuanced discussion of new technological methods in research gives the lie to any assumption that new technologies are automatically benign, especially for female participants. Moreover, as a study that included male and female participants, there are some helpful comparative findings that illuminate gender analysis.

Kim Wasey is, perhaps, rather more upbeat about the potential for new technologies in research, agreeing with a number of feminist commentators on the potential for new technologies to create online feminist communities and engage participants in genuinely collaborative dialogue and interaction. After reviewing a number of studies that have employed blogs and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, Wasey describes her own use of social media in a pilot study exploring women’s experiences of Holy Communion. She compares and contrasts the research process conducted through a social media platform with her earlier study, which had used more conventional methods of interviews. Using social media enabled her to access a far larger number of research participants from a wider range of contexts more quickly than traditional methods of accessing interviewees (although of course it would be perfectly possible to access interviewees by use of social media – something Wasey did not do in her earlier study). She also notes ‘a significant difference in the nature and quality of the data which was generated by this social media method in comparison with data generated through face to face interview and transcription’. Tweeted and posted comments created ‘more concise and formed data’ than interview transcripts, obviated the need for transcription and all the technical and ethical issues involved in transcribing verbal data, and thus speeded up the process of analysis considerably. Acknowledging legitimate concerns that can be raised about the functioning of on-line spaces, Wasey nevertheless argues for a number of benefits of using social media ‘for engaging with marginalized, dispersed and isolated groups in a reflective, transparent, practical and collaborative research process’.

Whether the reader sides more with Wasey in her optimism about the use of new technologies, or Page in her more qualified view, these two chapters between them shed significant light on the development of new research methods and raise a range of philosophical, ethical, practical and methodological issues, which helpfully move the debates in feminist methodology on.

In Part III, Susan Shooter, Kate Massey, Alison Woolley and Manon Ceridwen James each offer chapters on various aspects of, and approaches to, the task of data analysis. This is usually the point at which the researcher needs to bring together and integrate theoretical perspectives from their reading of

the literature with the mass of collected data. Research methodology textbooks offer a wide variety of possible methods of data analysis, and many existing models and methods are available from the field. Yet, as we have seen with Janet Eccles' account of her data analysis, existing methods and models are by no means unproblematic and do not always serve feminist goals or data from women's lives. Thus feminist researchers often revise or reject existing approaches and develop their own unique methods of data analysis. In these chapters, we find a range of approaches and methods, some researchers sticking more closely to tried and tested methods than others, and some evolving new methods or at least new approaches to well-tried methods. Each of these studies employed interviews as their basic data collection method, but used a variety of approaches to analysing the data.

Feminist and other qualitative researchers often favour grounded theory approaches to data analysis, although some use this term rather loosely, with minimal reference to the original principles and approach as developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Susan Shooter offers a careful and nuanced description of grounded theory, highlighting a discrepancy in the views of Glaser and Strauss concerning coding. She discusses her use of Glaserian grounded theory to analyse data from women survivors of abuse, favouring his approach because of his commitment to allowing categories to emerge from the data rather than forcing data into predetermined categories. This was as much a moral as a methodological commitment for Shooter, based on a determination to allow her participants' voices to be heard and to frame a theology *of* survivors rather than *for* them. Following a careful tripart coding of the data, she goes on to discuss her use of NVivo computer software as the next stage of enabling her to store and sort efficiently the vast amount of data resulting from the coding process. She describes the ways in which NVivo can be used to build up models of complex and advanced relationships between the various codes and, eventually, to identify core categories – higher level concepts that offer hypotheses about the data.

Kate Massey discusses her use of a voice-centred, relational analysis in reading data from a study of mothers' dual sense of calling (i.e. their sense of vocation to some kind of professional or creative work alongside their sense of vocation to motherhood). She sought an approach that would do justice to the complex interactions between motherhood, vocation and spirituality within each of the women's narratives at the same time as allowing her to pay attention to each voice (including her own) in a multi-faceted group interview of four women. The voice-centred, relational methodology advocated by Mauthner and Doucet,²² developed from the interview studies of Carol Gilligan, provided the key to such an approach. In her chapter, Massey describes this approach and gives an insightful account of how she adapted it to her own study in ways that enabled her to practice reflexivity and transparency. She highlights and discusses three particular aspects of the method: the value of the method in paying attention to the voices of both researcher and researched;

the benefits and limitations of using the method in a group interview situation; and the significance of the use of indirect speech by the women in the study. Her skilful use of this method enables her to offer a perceptive theological reading of the relationship between faith, work and mothering in her small research group that enhances other contemporary studies of motherhood.

Alison Woolley's chapter, like Massey's, focuses in detail on the process of analysing interview transcripts, but in this case she is particularly concerned with the methodological, substantive and theological significance of *silences* in the interview encounter. She describes how she developed a particular approach to interviewing women about their chosen practices of silence, which, rather than regarding pauses in the interview as problematic, held them as an intrinsic part of the meaning-making. Challenging negative notions of silence in feminist theology, Woolley offers an alternative reading of silence in the interview exchange, arguing that it may be something the interviewer offers to her interviewees as a space for reflection, contemplation and recognition, and as a way of being more fully present to the other. Woolley's work is an important corrective to approaches to interviews in which the focus is on words as the sole carriers of meaning. It also points towards one of the myriad ways in which researchers who pursue their scholarship within a context of faith may seek to discern the activity of God in their participants' lives, by paying acute attention to the relational process of the interview encounter – of which silence is one important dimension.

Manon Ceridwen James discusses her use of poetry in a study of Welsh women's identity and religious belonging (or lack of it), in a way that both connects with and stands in contrast to, Slee's earlier chapter. James takes the work of one of the most prominent female poets writing in Welsh, Menna Elfyn, and brings it into conversation with data from her own interviews with Welsh women about their social and personal identities. After identifying key themes and tropes in Elfyn's work (offering fascinating analysis of religious faith in Welsh society in its own right), James brings these into dialogue with similar themes in her interview transcripts. In particular, she explores how the women in her study, and Elfyn, approach religious faith both more personally and in the contexts of public liturgy, motherhood and the trope of the 'Strong Woman', highlighting issues of voice and voicelessness. The result is a rich and textured probing of her interviewees' experience and ordinary theologies and a case study of how an individual poet's work can be used to triangulate and illuminate qualitative data.

The final part of the book, Part IV, offers two reflections on reflexivity in feminist qualitative work. Although questions of reflexivity and the use of the self in research are woven throughout this book – arguably, this is a key characteristic of feminist research – it becomes the main focus here. Jenny Morgans and Jan Berry discuss feminist understandings of reflexivity and illustrate some of the issues – including tensions and problems – which can arise in the researcher's use of self in the research enterprise.

Situating herself as a younger researcher nearing the completion of doctoral studies and growing in an awareness of the complexity of her own investment in research, Jenny Morgans offers a reflection on her own journey of reflexivity. She writes with painstaking honesty about a number of incidents in her encounters with first-year female undergraduates in the context of university Christian societies, as she began her study of young Christian women's transitioning to university. From her very first interview, Morgans found many of her assumptions about her professional and personal identity and her role as a researcher confused and shaken. She narrates both the emotional intensity of the resulting reflexive process and its intellectual, as well as personal, demands. She describes the work of reflexivity as 'useful, ongoing and hard', demonstrating how crucial it was to her own growing understanding of herself and of her participants. More than being a matter of ethical care of self and other, or of mere transparency about the research process, Morgans renders reflexivity as a vital and embodied means of thinking and knowing that contributes core insights to the research. She discusses the use of a research journal as well as the practice of prayer, as sites for working through the complex and sometimes confusing emotions arising from research encounters.

Finally, Jan Berry offers distilled wisdom on the use of self in feminist qualitative research from her own research experience but also, significantly, from her experience of supervising doctoral students from a range of cultural contexts. Drawing on literature in feminist research methodology, practical theology as well as published and unpublished accounts of research by women from the Symposium on the Faith Lives of Women and Girls, Berry writes autobiographically and reflexively on her understanding of the self as research instrument, problematizing the notion of the self as fluid, constructed and culturally located. What she calls the trajectory of using self in research is complex and unique for each researcher, and her many examples of researchers' struggles to locate their selves in their research, as well as the creative ways in which they do so, illuminate the thickness of research accounts that take seriously the dialogical nature of research. Berry's insights into the use of self in the supervisory relationship between doctoral student and supervisor(s) will be helpful to supervisors and students alike. Her strong affirmation of the positive theological significance of the female self also offers a distinctive perspective to broader methodological discussion of reflexivity from the faith perspective shared by contributors to this book.

Some key themes and issues arising

Without wanting to impose uniformity on the varied contributions in this volume, there are a number of recurring motifs which are worth noting. Some of these themes are familiar from the literature and practices of feminist and qualitative research studies, but they take on new significance by the focus of each contributor on the study of (female) faith. If there is something

new and distinctive about this volume as a whole – which we believe there is – it is precisely in this intersection between feminist and qualitative research methodology and methods, on the one hand, and the focused research on lived religious faith in the experience of particular groups of women and girls, on the other.

First, we note a strong emphasis on the convergence of the research process with the content, values and the outcomes of research. One of the defining characteristics of feminist research – and we could say the same about research that is explicitly theological – is that the means of research must be commensurate with the topic of research and the core values of the researcher. Feminist theological research is not defined merely by its subject – the faith lives of women and girls – but by the ethical norms of its practices: the openness and transparency of its aims and procedures; the relational and collaborative approach to its participants; the honesty of its self-involvement; and the intentional openness of its orientation and methods to a faith perspective. Where feminist research would endorse most of these characteristics as axiomatic, what is novel about the discussion in this volume is the deliberate contextualising of the debate in the environment of faith, where qualitative and feminist approaches are employed to shed light on and to expose the quality of women's and girls' faith lives. Another way of expressing this is to say that the research methods and methodology described by the contributors to this book are a core expression of their own lived convictions as they pursue more thorough, complex and rigorous accounts of the lived faith of women and girls. Thus ethical considerations – or what might also be described as spiritual and theological considerations – run as a current through all of the chapters, rather than being compartmentalized into one or two specific sections.

Second, the chapters each highlight in different ways the experimental and creative nature of feminist research, whether on the macro or the micro level. While there is nothing new under the sun and no such thing as an entirely novel research method or methodology, most of the research studies described here narrate the development of fresh approaches to or particular adaptations of existing methods or methodologies, on the grounds that none of the existing approaches could be applied wholesale to the particular fields of study and/or to the particular research participants without development or revision. The scale of the adaptation varies, from Helen Collins' endeavours to create a broad, overarching model of doing a piece of practical theology informed by evangelical, charismatic faith, to the apparently more microscopic attention of Alison Woolley to the significance of pauses within the interview process or Kate Massey's adaptation of a voice-centred method of data analysis to a particular research group of mothers with dual callings. Perhaps because the qualitative study of women's faith is still relatively new, the field is marked by an experimental approach characterized by innovation, playful and metaphorical creativity, trial and error. Or perhaps it is of the nature of all qualitative research that the specificity of the context and the focus of each research study