

Slee, N., Porter, F. and Phillips, A. (eds.), *Researching Female Faith: Qualitative Research Method* (London: Routledge, 2018), x + 239pp, 978-1-138-73737-2, £105.00 (hb), 9781315185446, £20.00 (eBook).

This edited collection is a successor volume to *Faith Lives of Women and Girls*, published in 2013, and represents further work to emerge from a network of feminist qualitative researchers in practical theology which has been meeting since 2010. Like its predecessor, this new book aims to promote the fruits of such research, with the aim both of advancing a hitherto under-researched area, and of showcasing the collective achievements of the group itself.

When I reviewed the first volume for this journal in 2014, I commented that while the essays in themselves reflected high-quality and valuable contributions to the field of qualitative research in practical theology, a concern to give space to such a wide range and breadth of contributors tended to fragment the overall impact of the volume as a whole. Whether as a result of the evolution of the research network itself, or through the editors' exercise of a more explicit attention to questions of methodology, I find this volume altogether more successful in adding up to a coherent whole that is definitely more than the sum of its parts.

An emphasis on qualitative research methodology, then, runs throughout the book, and essays reflect aspects of the research process from initial conception and design through to approaches to data-gathering and data analysis. In that respect, these essays succeed in the volume's stated intention to 'demystify' the research process. The volume overall makes clear the importance of consistency between method (the technique or strategy undertaken) and methodology (the rationale for a particular research design, based on epistemological understandings of how we know what we know), and the extent to which research itself

might be understood as a *practice*, which is revealed to be transparent, unpredictable, sometimes serendipitous, contextual and experimental, rather than pristine, decontextualized and axiomatic.

As is increasingly the case in academic practical theology, issues of reflexivity – of the researcher as both subject and object of their own enquiry – feature prominently. This extends not only to the self-conscious accounts of methodology within the essays, but also to emerging consideration of what we might term the ‘representation’ of research outcomes: how qualitative researchers are mindful of issues of power, language, ethics and advocacy, not to mention choice of media, through which research data – and the lived experiences of their ‘subjects’ -- are collected and made public.

Inevitably, there are issues that await further exploration. If this is a collective account of the research journey from beginning to end, then more could be told about how feminist researchers and others negotiate the barriers to the validation and dissemination of research that is often innovative and experimental. Similarly, the significance of this network as a community of practice is certainly worthy of further exploration. Jan Berry’s concluding chapter on the relationship between researcher and supervisor begins to touch on this, as well as hinting at a deeper theological dimension to research practice in which the hallmarks of mutuality and shared accountability are embodiments of the relational, triune God.

Elaine Graham

University of Chester

e.graham@chester.ac.uk