If You Have Ears To Hear, Listen; Let The Girls Speak!

A case-study of the faith development of girls aged 7–14 years

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has been produced by an educator/youth worker undertaking research for a professional doctorate whilst training Christian children and youth workers in a theological college. It has been generated by an inquiry set within Girls' Brigade Ministries (England and Wales) exploring *to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?*

As a case-study using ethnographic methods and interpretative phenomenological analysis, its approach has been to hear what girls *aged 7–14 years* understand of themselves, this girlhood phase and their lives whilst investigating the effectiveness of this kind of youth work practice to enhance faith development. By accompanying the group and through the use of fieldnotes, attentive listening and purposeful conversation, the outcome of this inquiry has highlighted:

- The need to amplify the voice of girls aged 7–14 years.
- The significance of the relationship with those who accompany them through this time, in both physical presence as well as encountered through scripture and literature.
- The messiness of this transitional phase of girlhood and its significance for girls making meaning of their lives and sense of self.
- The underlying thread of belonging that is interwoven throughout these themes and is key to this girlhood experience.

As a result of these findings recommendations have been made for the future practice of those in local groups, national teams and local churches. These

include practical suggestions to help reflect and build upon existing ways of working that contribute to creating a safe, nurturing physical space; to ensuring that resources and scripture use inclusive language that girls can relate to; and to practise the art of accompanying, to amplify the voice of the girls.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the culmination of part time study on the Doctorate of Practical Theology programme. Those who have journeyed along with me as fellow students in the DPT community have, through our triads and peer reviews, helped to shape this inquiry. They have provided a safe community of practice in which I have grown and developed as a practical theologian, guided by the invaluable wisdom and experience of our supervisors, Professor Stephen Pattison and Dr Amy Daughton. It is through their supervision and pastoral care I have remained on track and reached this point.

I have appreciated the encouragement and insight of my critical readers along the way, Revd Ken Stewart and Revd Rachel Haig. From the beginning they have accompanied me through this process. Their friendship, questions and reflections have helped to sharpen my focus and deepen my thinking.

This thesis has been proof-read for the conventions of grammar, spelling and language by Lucy Hannah Mills.

It was at a youth work conference whereby an incidental conversation evoked my curiosity to investigate single-sex group work. With the support of Hannah Field, Mission Co-ordinator and her colleague, Dr Claire Rush, Mission and Advocacy Enabler for the Girls' Brigade Ministries Team I was introduced to this fieldwork experience of GBM(E&W). I am especially grateful to the girls and

their leaders in Wales who hosted my visits, engaged in the exercises and let me accompany them in this way.

I am grateful to Revd Peter Privett, fellow Godly Player, whose insight into weaving helped me to understand the intricacies of the process to create a tapestry which enabled me to apply to this research process in each chapter.

It takes a robust loom to hold the many threads that weave a tapestry. Each thread adds something distinctive to the overall picture. Similarly, I recognise there has been a supportive network of family and friends *holding* me as I have worked on this thesis. They may not realise the full extent of their contribution but I could not have completed this without them.

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List of Terms and Abbreviations

DPT – Doctorate of Practical Theology programme

GB – Girls' Brigade

GBM – Girls' Brigade Ministries

GBM(E&W) – Girls' Brigade Ministries (England and Wales) community groups

GG – Girl Guiding

GP – Godly Play

Girlhood – term used to explain age phase of girls 7–14 years

Girl talk – youth vernacular

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

n:gage – younger focus group for 7–11-year-old girls

n:counta – older focus group for 10–14-year-old girls

PT – Practical Theology

Sisterhood – female peer friendship

TLR – Team Leader

ToL – Tapestry of Life

INTRODUCTION

To what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?

In this introduction I will explain my research question and what has prompted it; its practical context and the gap in research about it; and my approach to discussing these things in this thesis.

This question has caused me to ruminate as a youth worker and educator. In my professional role in a Baptist Theological College, where I have trained youth workers, I became aware of some who have intentionally chosen to work with one gender rather than mixed groups. My personal practice had been to work with mixed groups, so I was curious about their focus on one gender and its impact upon the nature of practice in that context. I was interested to see how it effectively enhances their growth and development, as well as the impact upon my professional practice.

The research question

This specific question emerged in response to an invitation to write an accompanying book to one on the faith of boys (Harding, 2016). There is a lot of material currently being produced about boys, debating their spirituality and what they need (Head, 1999; Martino and Meyeen, 2001; Eaude, 2004; Edwards, 2011). The education system, originally designed for boys, is now reported to often fail to engage them (Adams et al., 2009). There are concerns

regarding the feminisation of the Church and the lack of men in attendance. This reflects a view that sees boys as an issue, their lack of engagement and seemingly boundless energy creating more of a challenge than the complaisant accommodating girls, but such a view implies that everything is settled for girls, when in fact their voices may not vocalise their frustrations in quite the same way. Perhaps it shows that girls' 'usefulness' in leadership, power and gifts has not been nurtured or mentored in the same way as boys. Or perhaps they are simply not expected to have a voice, so no one is listening to them. It has been acknowledged that ethnographic study has neglected the world of girls (Mead, 1935; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2009). Little comparable work focusses specifically on girls until they become women, featured in feminist theology (Walton, 2007; Miller-McLemore, 2012, 2014; Graham, 1995; Johnson, 1992). This was my starting point for engaging purposefully in this inquiry as my Stage Two work on the DPT programme. Further questions emerged as I planned my research proposal.

Supplementary questions

With an implicit focus on hearing the voice of these girls, this inquiry seeks to bring together a rounded representation of its participants in terms of their life experience, personal interests and key influencers, and their spirituality. It may be said to be holistically on body, mind and spirit rather than homing in on one in isolation. Subsequently it has to be noted that this is a mere snapshot, which is why the group phenomenon is important, rather than individual perspectives.

These additional questions have helped this project achieve its objectives:

- What are the characteristics of girlhood (the term I am using to describe the 7–14-year age span)?
- Is there a need for sisterhood and, if so, what is its impact on the growth and development of girls?
- What are the distinct features of girl-only group work programmes?
- How might youth workers, groups and churches respond effectively to the needs of girls aged 7–14 to support their development and growth?

Key objectives

- To identify and evaluate the girls' perspective on self, girlhood and life.
- To observe, record and engage in the group programme to understand the culture of the world they inhabit.
- To identify the key influential factors that impact the identity, wellbeing and spirituality of girls aged 7–14 years.

Underlying and inferred through these objectives is the voice of the girls. My intention has been to access that, to understand how they see things. I explain this in more depth in Chapter One, but I mention it here to explain the title of this inquiry.

It is important to understand the relevance and significance of this research question focussed on girls' growth and development, which is rooted in the history of Christian youth work.

The context

The context for this study has been the uniformed organisation of Girls' Brigade Ministries (England and Wales) (hereafter GBM(E&W)) at a time when the organisation is celebrating 125 years as a Christian youth mission to empower girls (The Girls' Brigade, 2019). I have accompanied one GB unit for a year. It is one of the largest units, with 90–100 girls aged 5+ gathering together weekly in a Welsh Baptist Church. The girls are organised into age-related groups. The two groups for the participants of this study have been *n:gage*, for 7–11s to 'discover the adventure' and *n:counta,* for 10–14s to 'meet real life head on' (originally available from The Girls' Brigade Ministries, 2019). Chapter One will further contextualise this case study by describing the specifics of the national and local structure, values and content in more detail.

The significance of Mary Magdalene

Throughout this work, one approach I am taking is to reflect poetically on the character of Mary Magdalene as a methodological accompaniment to my experience with these girls in GBM(E&W). It is a distinctive contribution that I understand through the stories of Mary Magdalene's experience. Mary Magdalene is said to be one of the women who accompanied Jesus and the disciples (Luke 8:2–3). Bourgeault observes the way in which 'the Gospel of Luke tends over and over to reduce Mary Magdalene to simply "one of the faithful women" who "followed Jesus from a 'distance'"' (2010:75). She followed Jesus – this was not the done thing and certainly was not done by women in her day – and she contributed from her own resources, thus enabling the ministry of

Jesus! In her accompanying, Mary watched on. Okure (1992:181) notes that her presence is often left unmentioned, implied as being part of the crowd or referred to as 'one of the women', by which clouding her visibility (Mark 15:40). Okure observes that despite this, Mary is known by name to Jesus, as a disciple to the rabbi, a sheep to the shepherd (John 10:16). Bourgeault (2010:12,13) asserts Mary's love[1] for Jesus took her to Calvary as he was crucified (John 19:25). She was committed to him and willing to stand by him in his darkest hour and to her deepest grief, Mary waited. She listened to the conversations, the storytelling and teaching of Jesus. Often overlooked and rarely listened to, Okure (1992:185) argues that Mary's account is that of a witness, not the narrative of a storyteller (John 20:18). Mary was commissioned by Jesus to report back, to let the others know; 'this is all the more striking in an age and in a culture where the witness of women was considered null and void' (Okure,1992:185). Yet despite the negative diminished place of women, it was this special commission that caused Augustine to honour Mary as the 'apostle of the apostles'.

Mary Magdalene is a good metaphor for both the girls as disciples and as the researching ethnographer seeking to enable the ministry of girls. In my Baptist context, where a priesthood of all believers is a key principle, I question what that means to a group which is often part of the wider congregation, yet

[1] This love has been debated throughout history and this piece is not focussed on defining the basis of that. For the purposes of this piece, I am likening the love between Mary and Jesus as that of a soulmate.

normally overlooked and rarely listened to. Mary epitomises these girls, who may well have a personal relationship with God, yet are perceived to be needing to be taught about God. These are girls through whom God may well be speaking prophetically to the adults around them and the Church collectively, if they were to be attentive to their voice. Similarly, Mary's voice did not hold the same weight as the group of followers. She struggled to be heard and believed by the Twelve (Luke 24:11). In church history, she did not receive the same status as the disciples (Bourgeault 2020:22). Mary knew her voice did not count as much as the others, although Jesus tasks her to speak out and so legitimises her voice. The history of women in the Church bears witness to these girls experiencing the same dismissal as Mary. Which is why, like Mary, they need a space created with and for their voice to be heard and validated, to 'challenge the church to take seriously the contributions of women' (Okure,1992:188).

Mary waited, watched and reflected. In my role as the researcher/participant-observer, I relate to this. Accompanying the group through their weekly gatherings, I waited to see the experience unfold but also waited on evidence relevant to my research questions about the effectiveness of single-sex youth work. I waited expectantly to find answers to these questions about this phase of girlhood. Each week I watched, as I applied ethnographic methods to see the GB group in action and noted the interactions and exchanges witnessed. Watching the cycle of events that help explain this group, its vision and methods. Watching expectantly for data to support what I see, hear and learn. My professional curiosity evoked questions, as I reflected on this practice of

youth work. A theological curiosity engaging with the written reflections and correlating this with the character of Mary. My academic curiosity formulating findings to share and reflect back to others. Mary has multiple roles within this study, the significance of which I will now explain.

Mary – a Christic link

As we examine Mary's actions and responses, we see the one whom she follows, Jesus. We look through the icon to see our maker, so we look at Mary and we can see Jesus, saviour of the world. By association within this piece, using Mary as a metaphor for the girls and my role as the researching ethnographer, I propose that they too are Christic links directing us back to Jesus. In this project, this will be most clearly visible in the way the girls attend to one another and how the adults (myself and the adult leaders) attend to the girls and each other, mirroring the way Mary and the other women gathered as a group and supported one another as they prepared to attend to Christ's body at the tomb. Another glimpse of this Christic link is as the girls express themselves through the Tapestry of Life research exercises (see 2.7 below) and the diverse range of emotions that come through this data. Considering the struggles present in some of the contributions made by the girls, they mirror Mary waiting at the cross and her jumble of feelings at that time. I am moved, both as researcher and youth worker, by these contributions – struck by the enormity and profundity of their words. Upon the death of Lazarus, 'Jesus wept'

(John 11:35).[2] Outside the empty tomb where Jesus body was laid, 'Mary stood weeping' (John 20:11) and through her grief and sadness saw and heard the risen Jesus (John 20:14). It is through the words of these girls that we hear the voice from the wilderness speaking truth to power, challenging and unsettling, but nevertheless embracing and expressing their humanity and the Christ within. Bourgeault cautions, 'The church's failure to distinguish between outer forms and inner authority is, then as now, the story of its tragic inability to corporately walk forth along the path the Master has laid out for it' (2010:79). The prophetic voice of the child, too, often goes unheard, to the detriment of those not attending to it. Considering these Christic links, what does it mean, as a Baptist, to be a priesthood of all believers?

Mary – apostle to the apostles

Mary was in a priestly role, attending to Christ as they journeyed with the Twelve. My researcher's role was to attend to the Christ in the lives of these girls. It is a priestly role in that it seeks to serve, to be attentive and to empower. The leaders and helpers at GBM(E&W) also attend to the girls and to one another, as the group gathers each week. They may not think of themselves in a priestly role but, through their service and their responses to my questions, they clearly seek to be positive Christ-like role models to the group. They share a vision of making Christ known and a mission to enable the transformative love of God to make a difference in their community.

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[2] English Standard Version

Mary was commissioned by the risen Christ to go and tell the others, to invite them to 'come and see'. Mary becomes the one to enable the disciples to look for Jesus for themselves. At other times, Jesus will arrive in their midst, but on this resurrection occasion Mary is the one who leads them – 'come and see' – to the risen Christ. The apostle to the apostles issuing that invitation – Mary, the one that invites and calls others, testifying to her own conversion from fear to belief. Priesthood is about Christlikeness.[3] In her experiences, Mary mediates Christ. Similarly, these girls offer something that is part of that Baptist principle of universal priesthood that is distinctive within my denomination. There is a priestly duty of sharing the research story or, as Moschella (2008) suggests, 'ethnography can become a form of ministry'. What do these girls have to say to the Church today? Too often these voices are neglected, yet 'the lives of women and girls as holy ground, a place where we expect to discern the presence and activity of the divine' (Slee, 2013:17), and Mary is a significant example of this.

Practical Theology as the poetic model of understanding

Speaking about 'the inner landscape of beauty' Celtic spiritual poet and philosopher, John O'Donohue acknowledges how poetry stretches one's own boundaries of thought, surprising the writer where it takes them. In his book *Anam Cara*, O'Donohue (1997:163,164) explains how the complexity of growth

[3] In Baptist terms, priesthood is explained using the language of covenant. It is about inter-dependents locating authority not in hierarchy but in community as the body of Christ (Kidd, 1996:10).

within the human soul can be seen by visualising the mind as a tower of windows through which new vistas of possibility, presence and creativity can be seen. Whilst there has been tension between Practical Theology (PT) and the poetics model (Walton, in Miller-McLemore, 2014:173), they have worked together influencing preaching, pastoral care, theological education and theological reflection over the years. The literary texts and conventions of creative writing have been particularly influential within feminist PT. Walton (2014: loc.2960 of 4375) explains how poetics enable 'interest in the way human imagination constructs narratives by winding its way among and between the factual and fictive. I am using the Mary Magdalene reflections to develop the narrative of my research and underline its theological meaningfulness. This construct creates the 'something else' that Cixous observes in the science of writing when things change for a new thing to emerge (1995:26). The character of Mary Magdalene is being used as a metaphor for the girls as disciples and the researcher seeking to amplify the voice of the girls to enable their ministry. Writing about poetics, Chopp firstly highlights the poetics of testimony as words of freedom in ways of life and, secondly, explains the poetics of proclamation as communal emancipation (2001:61,65). This epitomises Mary Magdalene's narrative as the trusted messenger and apostle to the apostles, and my intentions for this research. Practical theologians are using poetic models not just for research but also to express insight, empathy and new perspectives in reflective practice as a poem 'tethers in and also over experience, enabling insight and overview' (Pryce, 2019:92).

This record of the research journey, my experience and observations will be punctuated as I look through a series of metaphorical windows (O'Donohue, 1997). Firstly, each chapter heading has dual meaning that relates both to the art of weaving and the different stages of the research process. This is intended to heighten the image of the tapestry of life as a concrete research method as well as the purpose of this inquiry attending to the life of girls aged 7 - 14 years. Furthermore, each chapter will open with a meta-narrative in the third person describing the focus of each stage of the research process from the perspective of the researcher and her fieldwork experience. This enabled me, as a reflexive tool, to stand back and look at the stage of the weaving and the process of research at what is happening before zooming in onto the finer details of the process. Between chapters I pause to look through more 'windows' to reflect in the voice of Mary as a reminder of the challenge and importance of listening to this under-represented age group, whilst simultaneously helping to enrich, theologically, the academic practice of research. These vignettes have enabled me to sit with the data and theologically reflect as well as communicate some observations.

Alongside these reflections of Mary, I will look through another 'window' showing a visual image from the girls' contributions so that we can pause to attend to their voices and reflect upon their words and what image of Jesus they might be mirroring to us. Seeking to amplify the voice of the girls for whom this project has sprung, I shall not enter into an analysis of the visual but let them speak for themselves through their presentation of their 'lived experience'

(Radford, 2019). These images serve to keep the girls visibly at the forefront of the readers' thinking. They may not be the best reproductions, but they reveal the engagement by the girls in the activity. Where the lines in the image lack density the faintness evokes silence and reflects something of the missing voice of the girls highlighted in Chapter 2, section 2.6.

So collectively these creative poetic approaches give expression to the way the new possibilities emerge through the research experience and have impacted creatively upon myself as the researcher present and indirectly freshly upon the reader.

Overview

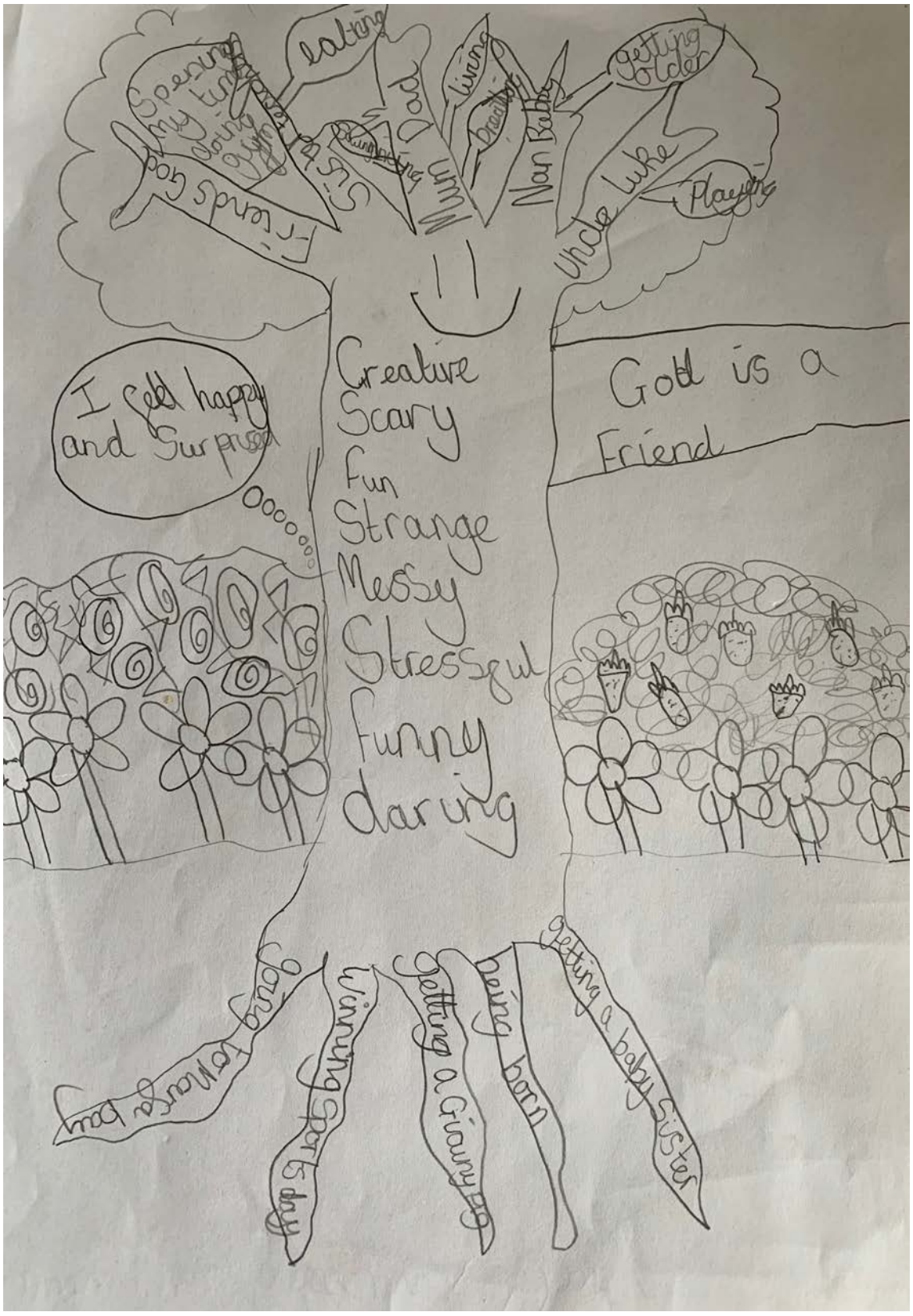
In addition to the poetic reference to Mary, my approach to discussing the research question, practical context and amplification of the collective voice of girls is through the succession of chapters. These chapters will:

1. Discuss the significance of the study in light of the messiness of this developmental stage for girls, sociological observations and the recent campaigns to challenge the silencing of female voices; and consider the theological endeavour of listening to the voice of girls and what the Church learns by tuning into them.
2. Use a case study framework to apply a collection of concrete ethnographic methods in fieldwork to gather data and undergo interpretative phenomenological analysis.

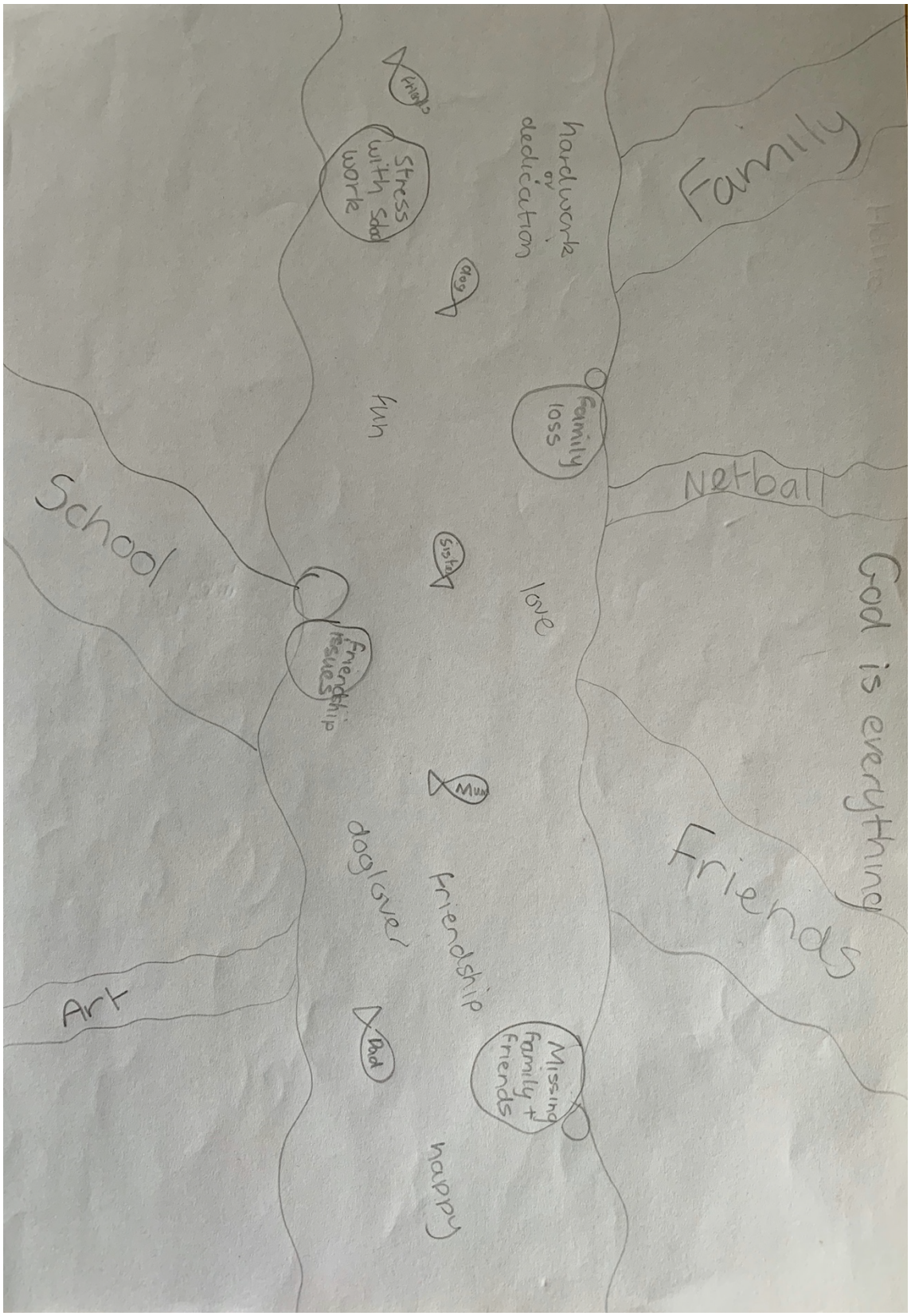
3. Detail accessing and amplifying the voice of the girls through the Tapestry of Life and pop-up board exercises throughout the different stages of the research process, sharing the hopes of their leaders too.
4. Examine the gathered data and reflect personally on the research process as a pilgrim's journey.
5. Apply interpretative phenomenological analysis to identify the emergent themes of voice, girlhood and relationship; whilst reflecting theologically on each to explore the underlying theme of belonging.
6. Discuss the interconnection between themes and consider their contribution to the spiritual nurture of girls through practical advice for practitioners and churches.

I conclude with a summary of the research process, its findings and suggestions for future practice, all focussed on letting the girls speak – and listening to them.

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 1



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 1



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER ONE – BUILDING THE LOOM: THE RATIONALE

1.1 Introduction

Preparing the loom is time-consuming, yet essential for the creation of a robust theological endeavour.

In the beginning, there was a practical theologian who trained Christian children and youth workers at a Baptist theological college. She was involved in community-based youth work for over thirty years and a teacher in primary education for twelve. She had completed her Master's in Researching Education before moving to the college. She had noticed that some trainees elected to work exclusively with either boys or girls, advocating that their approach offered opportunities that mixed group work could not. She pondered on this, as her own experience had been working with both boys and girls together. She wondered to what extent single-sex uniformed group work enhances the growth and development of its participants?

Not so far away, in a Baptist Church in a Welsh city suburb, there was a group of nearly 100 girls, dressed in red, blue and turquoise sweatshirts bearing the logo of the Girls' Brigade Ministries. Each Friday they would meet from 6–8pm, together and in four different groups by their ages. The researching practical theologian and the girls began a journey. Two of the subgroups were populated

by about half of the group and were aged 7–14 years. For the purposes of this study, those recruited consisted of 19 participants aged 7–11 in the n:gage group and 25 aged 10–14 in the n:counta group.

This opening chapter advocates for the need and value of the question *to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?* I will argue that listening to the voice of girls is a theological endeavour and will unpack this further, exploring it through a developmental lens, a sociological lens and a theological lens. I will contextualise the nature of the case study, introducing Girls' Brigade Ministries as the overarching organisation and Girls' Brigade Ministries (England and Wales) as the community groups offering girls a weekly social gathering where they can learn and grow as girls together. In a society that consistently undervalues the voices of girls and women, should we think about the action of researching girls aged 7–14 years as a theological imperative?

1.2 Listening to the voice of girls aged 7–14 is a theological endeavour

Arguably this inquiry subverts the popular idiom of 'needs a good talking-to', changing it to 'needs a good listening-to' – let the girls speak! The following sections build on my rationale for the importance of the research question. I use the terms growth and development interchangeably. My experience as an educator and parent has covered the full breadth of the recognised age phases of childhood and this has been informed by my understanding of youth and

community work and shaped by my teaching trainee Christian youth, children and family workers in Higher Education. As a practical theologian, I am examining this through engagement with relevant literature of the social sciences of developmental theory, cultural study and theology. I argue that these girls matter in body, mind and spirit. I give the cultural backdrop for the girls participating in this case study, to highlight that for too long the voice of young women has been silenced. Finally, in response to the wider sociological and developmental context, I begin to introduce the value of listening to girls as a theological venture that benefits both the Church and community-based youth work. It is by attending to and engaging with the collective voice of these girls that their awareness/understanding of God within the spirituality of their childhood is revealed for their leaders, ministers and churches to hear and learn from.

Overall, I am seeking to identify the effectiveness of single-sex youth work, like GBM(E&W) supporting and nurturing these girls as they grow. By identifying what issues are faced during these years of girlhood, we gain insight into the culture of their time and their world view. Knowing what characterises life for these girls, alongside the content of the weekly GBM(E&W) programme, should highlight the relevance of its curriculum and existence. Examining the impact of friendships or sisterhood and influential relationships on development will confirm the value of single-sex group work and how a girl-only group like GBM(E&W) uniquely nurtures and supports.

I move on to contextualise the stage of life these girls are at by examining the complex process of growth and development.

1.2.1 Body, mind and spirit – a developmental lens

The first 12 years of life have the most significance in terms of the biological developmental journey of an individual. That does not mean it ends at the age of 12; the brain continues to develop and the child's physique undergoes the hormonal changes that take them into adolescence and then adulthood. The first six years are foundational in terms of physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth. The next six years embed this, as fine and gross motor skills are refined, language acquisition becomes more sophisticated as social networks grow, and abstract concepts, divergent thinking and a personal moral compass develop (Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt, 1980; Steinberg, 1987, 2008, 2010 and Johnson, 2005 in Smith et al., 2011).

The complex age of girlhood participants is an unusual focus and one that is often overlooked in developmental studies. It is a transitional phase from childhood into adolescence; primary (key stage 2 or Juniors) into secondary (key stage 3) education; and from *n:gage* to *n:counter* groups in Girls' Brigade. Plenty is written about the developmental journey and education of early years (up to 7) and regarding adolescence (from 12 years), but there is little attention given to the liminal space navigated through ages 7–14. This group is distinctive. Their social network has begun to extend beyond family and the

home. Their thinking is being shaped and opinions formed about their understanding of self, other and God.

I use the term girlhood to capture the experience of being a girl in the age range of 7–14 years. The transitional phase young pre-pubescent girls navigate through adolescence and puberty to become young women is a messy phase, not coinciding with the usual school transitions. I call this ‘messy’ but I am aware that the term can be interpreted in many ways. I illustrate this myself by using other words like ‘liminal’ and ‘age of transition’. Messy is a felt reaction because it is not one thing but lots, multi-layered and complex. It can be more easily explained in terms of what it is not, no one size fits all. This is what these girls embody at this phase of life. I say more specifically about the nature of this messiness in Chapter One as I expand on what these girls are experiencing physically and sociologically as they develop and grow. This helps us to understand firstly that growth at this stage is not linear. It adds to the complexity and impossibility of giving a clear classification to what is messy. Secondly, this messiness reflects something of the lived emotional and hormonal turbulence experienced by the girls. At this stage of life girlish living is compounded by the internal turbulence and instability of hormonal and physical changes that affect feelings and actions discussed further in developmental theory. In summary, this messiness reflects the development from concrete to abstract thinking; logical to divergent problem-solving; the physical and biological changes moving from prepubescent to puberty and the onset of menstruation; and the maturing of spirituality into faith for some that is experienced individually to different degrees at different times. This helps us to

begin to see the pluralistic meaning to the term and something of the undetermined, precarious nature of girlhood that makes it a messy phase.

Professionally, I have always sought (and taught student youth workers) to value the experiences that an individual has lived through before the age of engagement with them. Early childhood experiences create memories and research shows that the trauma of acute childhood experiences has lasting impact, so it is important to know a person's story (Anda and Felitti, 1998). Similarly, in education it is important to know what comes next for an individual, so that practical and life skills, including the accompanying knowledge and understanding, are relevant, linking back to their developmental needs and equipping them for their future.

In developmental studies, there are many perspectives on how people develop and mature from early childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. These perspectives take different assumptions about the nature of how knowledge is formed. This is their epistemological stance, their hypothesis and starting place. These perspectives maybe classified by three overarching stances to consider the way an individual develops in body (physically), mind (mentally) and spirit (emotionally/morally). There is no hierarchy, nor is there a clear sense of chronological development from perspective to perspective; each of these priorities has informed the ongoing disciplinary discourse. Closer examination (beyond the remit of this thesis) would indicate how theories have been developed over time.

In summary:

- Behaviourism argues that all behaviour is determined by the environment, either through association or reinforcement. The work of Ivan Pavlov, John Watson, Albert Bandura and Frederick Skinner offers experiments that demonstrate how physicality influences the responses of their participants (Beckett, 2002:91-98).
- Cognitivism argues that learning can occur without reinforcement, resulting in an organised body or map of information. Jean Piaget's work is foundational to this understanding of behaviour being influenced by linear building blocks of cognition, starting with an event or activity (the schemata) that creates a sensory impression (images), which builds concepts that, once understood, enable propositions to be made (Schaffer, 2004:160). Craik (1943) believed that by using these internal models of reality, people could make predictions in their everyday work.
- Constructivism uses a social interaction to extend learning. It proposes knowledge is constructed where there is the active process of creating meaning from different experiences. Social constructivists like Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner are informed by attachment theory and have subsequently contributed to social learning theory, which also recognises the dramatic impact culture has on language acquisition, thought and reasoning (Smith et al., 2011:71, 72, 219–223).

For the purposes of this inquiry and based on my experience, I am more influenced by the socially-focussed approach to development, whereby the

social interaction and exchanges within this case study are of paramount interest, as it is through these that the collective voice of the girls will be heard. These exchanges will be girl:girl; adult:adult and girls:adults and adults:girls. The multi-directional exchange will reflect the power dynamic between adults and girls by the time given for each voice and, within that, also indicate something of the relational dimension between the girls and adults. When observing group work methods, I expect to see evidence of some reinforcement of positive behaviour to manage the numbers within the groups, as well as to guide the girls in their commitment to the uniformed faith organisation of the GBM(E&W) and as they grow in their 'discovering Jesus' (Girls' Brigade Mission, 2020). Within this age range, most participants already have the cognitive ability to cope with abstract thinking and logical reasoning.

Having discussed developmental perspectives for the nurturing of human flourishing and holistic development, it is right we attend to the bank of work relating to spirituality and faith. It is important to clarify here that I do not equate faith and spirituality as being one and the same (Cook et al., 2009:4). It is my belief you can be spiritual without having faith. For the purposes of this study, I am defining spirituality as a search for meaning – the purpose of human existence, the mysteries of the cosmos and an understanding of self and other. This definition is fitting for girls aged 7–14 years, as their search for meaning sharpens with the growth of their social network beyond the home through school and leisure activities. This search is as much about the world and life as it is about their understanding of who they are and why they are living this life.

This search for identity is what psychologist Erikson (1968:23,24) recognised to be a lifelong search that depended on the nurture of relationships developed with those around one. Bradford argues that spiritual development should not be separated from one's being: 'For a human being, especially a child or young person, to have a full quality of life, spirituality in all its aspects must be nurtured and affirmed' (1995:72). As this inquiry focusses on children and young people, I find there is an emergence of literature about children's spirituality (Hay and Nye, 1998; Hyde, 2008; Bellous and Csinos, 2009; Miller, 2015). This helpfully engages with the more reflexive actions and behaviours like breath, state of animation, satiation, consumption, body language and position best seen in children in contrast to the older models which I shall discuss later, that give most attention to the cerebral in terms of knowledge and understanding . This non-verbal sensory approach features in the flexible, instinctive, internalised personal nature of children's play and where language is not known or able to be articulated. It is from these early childhood experiences that the older and adolescent girls have grown and are shaped by. These sensory encounters, along with their concrete and verbal exchanges, have been fundamental to the development of their brain, as well as their bodies and spirit (Gerhardt, 2004:32-55).

Thinking about childhood spirituality, it will be helpful to consider what spirituality is and to explore that in relation to the spirituality in childhood. Sheldrake (2012) presents four types of spirituality that resonate with this work on children's spirituality:

1) *mystical spirituality* where ‘the everyday can be transfigured into something more wonderous’. This links with children’s play, their search for the elusive presence of God and experience of awe and wonder.
2) the *active-practical* takes an Ignatian-type approach, promoting the ordinary as a spiritual pathway, ‘The kingdom of God is among you’ (Luke 17:21), which resonates with the immediacy with which children engage with the world here and now, moving fluidly (or mystically) from reality to the imaginary and back again.
3) the *prophetic-critical* is rooted in the prophet’s voice speaking out against injustice and wrongdoing. Young children may consider things naughty, whilst older children (aged 8–12) can have a moralistic sense of injustice that calls out a wrongdoing. In turn, young adolescents would be able to rationalise their reasoning for a situation/action being right or wrong. I have given some contemporary examples of this in section 1.2.2. (see page 45)
4) the *ascetical* type focusses on God’s transformative power that takes someone into training and discipline, like a monastic life. Arguably, children in the Christian Church will not have this experience until they are deemed of age, so this may be discounted, but for girls in GBM(E&W) there is evidence of a preparing-and-discipling process that some, including the adult leaders in this case study have experienced and been changed by.

My focus on the spiritual will not be restricted to individual responses but the collective voice of the group, to help determine a generalised phenomenon rather than critique a personal account. I will explain theories of faith development when I look at the theological perspective in the theology section later. At this point, it is important to note that there are significant viewpoints offering paradigms to understanding how faith grows and matures (Westerhoff, 1976; Fowler, 1981; McLaren, 2012). Arguably there are different Christian theological perspectives on children as disciples (Berryman, 2009:202). Some believe them to be born sinful and in need of God's grace (Augustine, 354–430 and Calvin, 1509–1564); others have believed that they have a natural potential to develop, even in the context of sin (Aquinas, 1224–1274). Other views include children to be seen to be 'God's little jesters' (Luther, 1483–1546); or preparing to be adults and needing to leave childhood behind for the adult's spiritual journey to begin (Bunyan, 1628–1688 and Barth, 1886–1968). Accepting children as having faith in their own right has been problematic for the Christian Church, which has struggled to recognise children's agency, and continues to be so.

Being 'a girl' has never been more complex and, Rippon (2019) argues, it is time to debunk the myths and misconceptions. Neuroscientific research, explaining the neural plasticity of the brain, challenges the previously held perception of gender being a binary system of male and female (Fox, 2019). Modern brain science argues that the brain continually changes; it is entangled with its environment and a constant two-way flow of world:brain:world; 'it will

work out the rules of the world, learn the applications, go beyond what was initially thought possible…a combination of astute detection and self-organisation' (Rippon, 2019:xvii). The implications of this challenge our existing understanding of language, education, parenting, marketing, authority and even theology. Gender theorist Judith Butler argues that gender is not a stable concept and that there are particular behaviours associated with girls that she categorises as 'girling' (2011:xvii). This performative act of gendering continues as an individual matures and seeks their meaningful identity. 'One is not born a woman but becomes a woman,' writes Simone de Beauvoir (cited in Hardy, 1975). Gender is shaped further by socio-cultural norms. Childhood, its experiences and events, along with those significant people within it, will shape and form this social construct as it continues to evolve over the years. Taken together, this underlines the meaningfulness of body, mind and spirit as a holistic way of considering girls. I will now examine literature on the cultural patterns influencing this social construct and the experience of girlhood.

1.2.2 To be seen but not heard? A sociological lens

Moving from the girls' journey of developmental maturing to the world in which they are growing up in, the impact of external sociological influence will be outlined. The significance of being seen but not heard for young girls growing up today in our Western European culture is hugely important, because they have a more fluid understanding of themselves, identity and gender than many of the adults around them.

Girlhood as a construct is always changing. Media, contemporary theory, pedagogical and psychological discourse have much to shape and define girlhood (Aapola et al., 2004). This is the complexity of this age range, as many see the transitions when children become tweenagers and then adolescents happening sooner than traditionally believed. Its influence has cultivated crises in body image, gender and sexuality, which in turn has had a negative impact on the girls' mental health.

McRobbie highlights the omission of girls as a subculture in ethnography, asking: 'how do we make sense of this invisibility?' (1991:12). Self-esteem, confidence and wellbeing is impacted by the hiddenness of girls. Girls struggle when their voices go unheard and with metaphorical masks, for instance, the ideal selfies or the status updates on social media worn by individuals. Coupled with the tendency for groups of girls to become cliques, mixed with the sophisticated emotional games that toy with who is 'in or out' of the friendship group, no wonder girls struggle (Lees, 1993; Goodwin, 2006; Wiseman, 2002). The sociologist Wiseman uses the image of the queen bee to exemplify this struggle, whereby girls often have to yield something of who they really are to fit in with friends and are shaped by those around them (2005:19, 35-36). When seen for what it is, Frost (2001) writes, the struggle many girls face to be accepted and affirmed by peers is tortuous, which may explain a contributing factor to the rise in mental health issues faced by girls within this age range.

Timing is crucial. This inquiry came as the GBM(E&W) were preparing to celebrate 125 years empowering girls and seeking to transform their lives through Christian mission. This was a significant landmark within the organisation informing the curriculum for the year ahead.

Coincidently, alongside this was also the backdrop of the commemoration of the historic Suffragette Movement. This momentous anniversary was being addressed within school curriculums nationally. The stories of the Suffragette Movement and key individuals were heard with new insight – Emily Wilding Davison's action at the Epsom Races in 1913 (Horrie and Paxman, 2013). Or, for the first time, letters deploring the method of forced feeding those imprisoned and on hunger strike (The National Archives, 2018) – inspiring today's young women, including the participants of my inquiry. I am struck by the three-worded slogan – 'deeds not words' – of that campaign, in response to the 1832 Great Reform Act. The campaign sought to enfranchise all women; it highlighted the inequality both between the rights of women and men as well as between social classes – property/landowners and their workers (The National Archives, 2018). One of the reasons for this inquiry is based on an awareness of the imbalance of literature on girls of this age and their lack of voice, not only in academia but also within the Church. It seems to me the suffragettes subvert the inaudibility of the female voice by acts of civil disobedience that demand attention. Breaking out of their hiddenness from within the home or factory, the profile of women was projected to the centre of public life and politics

advocating for their right to be heard. What might be the actions of today's young women as their voices go unheard?

The participants in my inquiry are growing up with the backdrop of the #metoo movement.[4] It soon became viral as a hashtag on social media and has subsequently gathered momentum. Mendes et al. (2018:236) explain that, as one of the most prolific online campaigns, #metoo has showcased the magnitude of sexual violence. Now a catalyst for international debate, naming and challenging systems that have promoted privilege, abuse of power and systemic abuse (namely structural patriarchal hierarchy), it advocates for justice and equality. The title of this thesis is about the female voice being heard; those who spoke out early on in the #metoo campaign were sullied for doing so (Alcorn, 2018). Conversely, Lane (2017:19), in her study of African American girls, notes that 'through the practice of coming to voice, those from subordinated groups are frequently empowered to have their presence recognised and, beyond that, valued as fully human'. Digital feminist activism of this kind is important, but it is complex and nuanced. It is an under-researched area and, as Mendes et al. found, schools are lacking in their response to online conflicts like trolling and digital harassment (2018:241, 243). For girls aged 7–14 to know that there are fair systems in place where they can safely report and

[4] The #metoo movement was borne out of a community-based project supporting survivors of sexual violence in 2006. Its origins focussed mainly on economically impoverished communities and black female survivors but gained momentum when taken up by already visible white women. Followers, stories and supporters are raising and championing the rights of the victim to tell their story, be heard and for it to be investigated for justice purposes.

speak out against injustice empowers them to do so and is key to their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

With the backdrop of a new sexual revolution, or perhaps the retribution and clarification of the original presented by the media, these girls know of the historical child-sex-abuse reviews and how the voices had been silenced from speaking out. The sexualisation of young women perpetuates stereotypical images rather than acknowledging and celebrating the strength and diversity of female prowess. McRobbie (1991:12) is referring to the objectification of women being valued for their physical attributes and hormonal cycle rather than their intellect and achievement. This change is best understood when the contemporary backdrop to these girls growing up is acknowledged, which we are moving on to next. The timing of my inquiry is significant for all women, but especially those in this age range as their self-identity is formed. This cultural perspective is another important facet in what is a multifaceted situation.

All these events influence popular culture and a tide of films and books raising the profile of significant women reveal what has previously been ignored. In 2016, the movie *Hidden Figures* brought the little-known story of the contribution of three African American mathematicians at NASA into the public domain. Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan's efforts enabled astronauts to enter orbit. Since then, to redress the imbalance in

history books, more pioneering and leading-lady stories are being published.[5] What was a missing narrative is now accessible to younger girls in the form of bedtime stories, and to teenagers as podcasts, as well as being integrated into the educational curriculum. These stories encourage female prowess, and achievement although the progress is slow and there are many obstacles that girls face.

Still, the power of story inspires and motivates. Already it has empowered the voices of young women within this age range: Malala Yousafzai gained global prominence advocating for every girl's right to free, safe, quality education. Climate Activist Greta Thunberg challenges world leaders and policy makers and invites young people to join her in her #FridaysForFuture climate strikes. A recent tweet by theologian Diana Butler Bass (2019) reminds us that this is not a new phenomenon, but that young women have spoken out throughout history:

> Those commenting on Greta Thunberg would do well to remember that Joan of Arc led an army, Jane Austen wrote her first work, Sojourner Truth escaped slavery, Anne Frank kept her journal, and Malala won the Nobel Prize at the same age. Young women are fierce when changing the world.

These examples help illustrate the power of women and the vital contribution they have made to our world – the intellect that enabled space exploration to develop; the passion to speak out against the injustice of prioritising the education of boys to the exclusion of girls; the inspirational stand challenging

[5] For example, **Rebel Girls.**

world leaders and everyone to engage with the scientific evidence of climate crisis and the need for change.

This is the world in which the girls in this study are growing up. They are hearing about leading ladies. It is this cultural backdrop that shapes the books they read, the music they listen to, the clothes they wear, the media they watch and the activities they get involved in. It is this backdrop that has included them – giving them opportunity to participate and for their voice to be added to the growing cacophony as 'These [digital] platforms are making women's and girls' voices and participation visible' (Mendes et al., 2018:244). This same cultural backdrop threatens some into considering themselves second to their male peers, believing they don't have the right to speak.

Leading ladies on stage and in film are those who take centre stage, a key role and the focus of attention. However, mostly in the Bible, however, women significant in God's purpose and story remain nameless. They have a key role to play and yet their identity is often unrecorded. As a practical theologian, I cannot separate out these Christian perspectives and keep them in isolation from the place of girls' faith, their development and theological issues of justice. For me to understand and make sense of my question, I need to consider God's purposes and girls' identity in the image of God and why this question about 7–14-year-old girls is so vital to the academy and to the Church.

As well as the girls being the social actors of the study, their leaders are also participants. They serve as positive role models and there is an expectation that, through their actions, character and teamwork, they demonstrate what it means to be united in vision and purpose, 'joining in with God's mission of restoration to see lives transformed and enriched as generations seek, serve and follow Jesus. All share three hallmarks that we believe, follow Jesus' example and restore life into God's image!' (originally available from The Girls' Brigade, 2018). The way the team models this is an important factor in the rationale for a single-sex group like GBM(E&W).

Times are changing and, for girls growing up in today's world, this is significant and overwhelming. Its totalising effect impacts their own expectations, aspirations and intentions for a fairer society. The construct of girlhood is always changing (Aapola et al., 2005). Therefore it is our moral duty to be attentive to their experiences and consequent self-understanding. I now bring a theological lens in response to attending to the voice of these girls.

1.2.3 Talking theologically – the lens of theology

This question about the growth and development of girls aged 7–14 years has theological importance to the Church, the academy and my youth-work practice. Many biblical texts reinforce a paternal narrative presenting a male God. What does this mean for these girls as they are also told that they are made in the image of God? How is their femininity affirmed? Women in ministry and leadership – both church and business – have experienced the challenge of

‘glass ceilings’ where limits are imposed because of their gender; the mask of ‘complementarianism’[6] that gives a platform to some women because they are accompanied or supported by men, who may be their husbands or counterparts, acting as gatekeepers or permission givers; and ‘collusion’ by the denial of their natural disposition or soft skills in response to the pressure to be more controlling, driven and competitive (or masculine) in their leadership (Coleman, 2010:54-56, 232,233).

As a Baptist, the principle of a priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) underpins my thinking around girls. Scripture tells us that we are ALL created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6). A triune God, whose characteristics present a more fluid dynamic of inter-relating, celebrates and affirms the feminine and masculine qualities (Fiddes, 2000:49-51). Girls (of all ages) should see something of themselves reflected back through scripture, through the language, names and imagery, that informs and enriches their understanding of God and what it means to be made in the image of God. I will argue a

[6] Complementarianism is a belief that focuses on the distinctions between men and women. It asserts women and men have naturally different, complementary roles. It upholds the view that men are superior to women and reflects this hierarchically through systemic organisation. The root word to complement means ‘to make something else seem better or more attractive when combining it’; in this theological context that means believing in a biblical hierarchy whereby God made men superior to women whom together complement one another and make each other whole. This stance of the subordination of women is contested by feminist theologians who advocate to ‘make women visible as active participants and leaders in the Church, to underline women's contributions and suffering throughout Church history, and to safeguard women's autonomy and freedom from spiritual-theological patriarchal controls.’ (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1984:37).

theological response to the silence of girls, drawing on literature about the spirituality of childhood and theoretical stages of faith development, but first I will clarify my distinction between spirituality and faith/religion.

Christian identity can be misunderstood at times, especially by those not fluent in the Christian language (Cook, 2009:5). Understanding the categories of faith and religion can be where this is most revealing. There is a close yet complex relationship between the two concepts and practices. Neither can be easily defined, but for the purposes of this thesis I will try to define my understanding and usage of them. Dykstra writes that, for some, faith 'starts with the general human phenomena such as believing, trusting, committing, and orienting life' (1999:17). These human activities show faith as inherent to our humanity, whether that trust and belief is in someone, something material, or a deity. It is a universal characteristic. He asserts that others argue that it is not human activity but a relationship with God that is the catalyst for faith; 'Thus, faith is primarily a response to a gift, an activity of recognizing and accepting God's grace, which gives rise to a way of life – a way of believing, trusting, committing and orienting all one's thoughts and actions' (Dykstra, 1999:17). He concludes, 'Faith gives rise to a new kind of life. The "life of faith" is the way of living that is organized by faith and that flows out of faith' (Dykstra, 1999:19). This universal characteristic of faith is the starting place for Fowler who writes 'We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith. How these capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and what kinds of environments we grow in'(1981:xiii). Professionally, I

have found this openness in Fowler's theory of the stages of faith helpful, especially in respect to the spirituality of childhood, which is identity-forming and meaning-making as the child explores the existential questions of self-hood – 'who am I?', otherness – 'who are you?' and existence – 'why are we here? What is life?' It seems to me that Fowler gives distinction to the affective experience aside from the religious concept. I say more on his theory shortly (see page 56).

When living a life of faith that is based on the belief of and commitment to a higher being, companionship with a community of believers sharing that trust helps to orient and develop the practice of thinking, expressing and living (Bass, 2010). This leads us to consider how religion might be defined.

> The word *religion* is based on the root *lig*, meaning 'to bind or connect together' (as in *ligament*), so *religion* means reconnecting or re-bonding broken relationships – with God, with neighbour, with stranger and enemy, with non-human life, with all creation. (McLaren, 2012:233)

It is this connecting together that begins something of the order and organisation of people, beliefs and values that support personal faith and are foundational to the worshipping communities within the Christian Church. There are a range of perspectives on religious communities, some influenced by personal experience and others formed by those outside looking in. It is here that personal internal belief is expressed through communal practice, grounded by tradition and doctrinal insight as well as sacred texts.

In summary, faith and religion are related yet distinct. Put simply, faith is the basis of many religions. Faith is the internal emotion of complete trust and

confidence in something or someone. Religion is the external expression, system and practice of the beliefs that underpin that faith. Religion has a shared language to communicate shared values (Cook, 2009:5). There are structures for leading and decision making. Faith is personal, with a personal set of beliefs that underpin it.

As a Christian, a person of faith, I belong to a worshipping community that is part of the Baptist denomination of the Christian Church. My reasons for making the distinction between the two terms of faith and religion are, firstly, my personal resistance to the negative language associated with religion. Often people use 'religion' derogatorily, separating out the power elements of institutional boundaries from the church elements of traditional practice. This is not helpful; 'Organised religion is not an end in itself. It organises for a purpose,' (McLaren, 2012:233). Secondly, Christian religious structures make use of the language and practice of priesthood. This can absent voices in its leadership and service. Thirdly, the term 'faith' says more about the precise personal trust of an intimate relationship with God. So, for the purposes of this thesis, I am using the term 'faith', to clarify my interest in spiritual flourishing that is often seen as faith development.

The Victorian idiom that 'children should be seen but not heard' suggests that children and young people utter little of substance and value worthy of listening to. Whilst this outdated patriarchal perspective has been subverted by more progressive thinking – including Article 12 in the United Nations Conventions of

the Rights of the Child, which states, ‘Every child has the right to be heard and to have their decisions taken seriously’ – the current mental health crisis amongst our young people suggests that we still have not got the balance right (DfE, 2019). Wellbeing is fundamental to our human state; theologically, the term ‘wholeness’ or ‘shalom’ is more commonly used to describe where the physical, psychological, social, economic and environmental intersect (Willows and Swinton, 2000). So this multifaceted concept interlinks with our sociological lens as well as this theological lens. I raise it here as I am arguing for the theological discipline of listening to the voice of girls which, when silenced or unheard, impacts upon their wellbeing, as The State of the Nation 2019 Report on Children and Young People’s Wellbeing states:

> Psychological health was poorer for girls than boys of the same age but declined over adolescence for both boys and girls. This emphasises the importance of understanding teenage girls’ experiences. [...] (DfE 2019:10).

It is when we listen to one another we show how much we respect and value the other (Stonehouse and May, 2010:22,23). Giving space to tell one’s own story affirms and nurtures our sense of significance (Haven, 2007). Making use of open-ended Socratic questions as we talk together helps prompt and provoke conversation to grow rather than close down (Paul and Elder, 2016). As children and young people speak, those listening begin to see the world through their eyes. This in turn gives insight and helps build understanding and trust (Petrie, 2011:18).

Research examining the spirituality of children has homed in on the nature of consciousness and sensory awareness that is perhaps more acutely evident in

children than in adults (Coles, 1992; Kegan, 1994; Bradford, 1995; Hay and Nye, 1998; Hyde, 2008; Nye, 2009). Hay and Nye's (1998:109) formative study identifies a relational consciousness that develops spiritual sensitivity in three key areas of sensing – awareness, mystery and value. This study helps deepen understanding of self-knowledge, social awareness of others and otherness, a sense of belonging and the search for meaning in life. These senses can be activated at any point and in any place, which is why they are more apparent in children than adults, who hurry through life, often pre-occupied with their responsibilities and duties.

In this context my interest is in the spiritual flourishing that is often seen as faith development. The academic study of the faith of girls has been more focussed on older teenage girls, their spirituality and transition into womanhood (Mercer, 2008; Phillips, 2011). These have been extended longitudinal studies, which focus on what girls say about themselves, God and the Church. Mercer's focus group is representative of a range of Christian denominations in the American Bible-Belt south. Phillips's context is British but focusses on those who would call themselves Christian. Whilst Phillips focusses on the transition from childhood into adolescence (11–13-year-olds); Mercer concentrates more on post 16-year-olds. Both Mercer and Phillips pick up on key female issues: subjects like boys, periods, parents and body image. They draw on relevant developmental theory to support some of the anthropological observations made of the girls' behaviour, responses and outlook. This is important, considering the length of these studies and the fact that the participants are ten

years older by the end. Both studies offer rigorous biblical and theological observations on the girls' experiences.

There are several distinctions between these studies and my own. The age range in this inquiry is wider and younger. The girls are from the uniformed group with some attending the church, rather than being solely from within the church. I seek to evaluate the context for working with all-girls and the methods used, to see what can be achieved in a single-sex group and how that might enhance their growth and development. By gathering more of a phenomenological response to group work, my focus is on the collective voice of the girls rather than individual personal insights in one-to-one conversation. This is to focus on the lived experience, impact and effectiveness of those methods used for these girls and in youth-work practice. The methods used focus less on God talk and more on the life of girls. PT of this nature, I would argue, is more of a sociological case study that offers pedagogical strategies for other youth-work practitioners in a faith-based context.

There are other key Christian writers seeking to engage with girls at this stage of life, to encourage them in their faith and to build their confidence up as they enter womanhood (Gardner, 2009, 2015; Redman, 2000, 2004). These mostly focus on behaviour and the religious life rather than the thinking and understanding that grapples with understanding God or how they might express themselves spiritually. Focussing more on how to be girls/women of faith to honour and credit the male to whom she belongs is a more tenuous link to growth and development than a focus on what it takes to develop as

girls/women of faith, which would take into account the skills nurtured through discipling.

As with all development, it is not about reaching a destination and rarely is it a linear process. However, our understanding of it is often best understood using the paradigm of theory. Here I want to note that it should be recognised that all developmental theory has its limitations and therefore should be held lightly as a guide for healthy growth being mindful that understanding of the human body at the time of writing may now be outdated and the inclusion of ages can make development appear linear when it often is not in reality. It should be noted that many of these theorists are male. This would be representative of society at the time of writing but needs to be related to current ways of thinking which is why the ongoing work of the likes of Rebecca Nye (1998, 2009), Joyce Mercer (2008), Anne Phillips (2011), Lisa Miller (2015), Nicola Slee and Fran Porter (2013, 2018) are key to our understanding of the faith and spirituality of girls.

Westerhoff (1976) offers the image of the concentric rings on a tree trunk to show how faith grows in a way similar to how the life of the tree grows around the sapling at the centre; faith grows like the rings expanding from one to the next but always with the earlier ones still at its heart. I use a similar model of concentric circles in Chapter 6 to help organise my findings (see figures 37-39). This four-staged analogy defines faith as 'an action which includes thinking, feeling and willing. It is sustained, transmitted and expanded through our interaction with faithing selves in a community of faith.' Similar to performative 'girling' (Butler, 2011: xvii), Westerhoff's analogy affirms the value of enacting

'becoming' before it is embodied and the individual becomes what they have enacted. The trajectory Westerhoff proposes is where stage 1 is based on what is experienced or inherited – children being born into a household of faith experience the faith of their parents; stage 2 affiliates to trying to belong – what has been experienced is mimicked to be part of the same; stage 3 is a searching stage, when questions and doubts cause an individual to examine the meaning behind what they have assumed, so that by stage 4, faith is owned by the individual for themselves, having worked things through and being clearer on what they hold sacred. When considering children and young people, Westerhoff's analogy is helpful, albeit simple. The searching stage may coincide with adolescent years of peer pressure and awareness of alternative beliefs, or sometimes later, as young adults leave home for the first time and have an opportunity to decide for themselves, or are away at university and needing to sustain their own expression of faith for the first time. Westerhoff cautions against 'hot-housing' children, but to nurture them at their pace. Interestingly Westerhoff's model grows outwards with maturing faith, whereas my model in Chapter 6 has what is most important at its centre and ripples out with lessening importance.

My understanding of faith formation is shaped more by Fowler (1981), who defines faith as universal trust and the emphasis on *how* that faith evolves rather than *what* is believed. Fowler's work has been criticised for being too sophisticated with its focus on intellect and moral reasoning (Hay and Nye, 1998:50). Dykstra (cited in Astley and Francis, 1992:88) challenges Fowler's

understanding of the term ‘faith’ arguing it focusses too much on moral understanding (Lawrence Kohlberg, 1974). Fowler maintains that his broader meaning of faith enables ‘…persons, both religious and secular, to name and affirm the role of valuing and the composing of meaning in their lives’ (Astley and Francis, 1992:x). The staged theoretical framework for the growth of faith is also criticised for being too linear, almost hierarchical with its age-related stages. However, my professional insight helps me to see beyond this in light of it being a guide alongside my observation of today’s generation of unchurched adults to whom it can be applied. I am seeking to do something different with Fowler’s paradigm to avoid the problem of its linearity and to highlight the connectedness of the aesthetic and affective mood that others highlight and value in the spirituality of childhood (Jamieson, 2002; Hay and Nye, 1998; Kegan, 1994). I believe the essence of what Fowler offers is as relevant and applicable to all ages in this post-Christendom time, from the cradle as a baby in ‘holding’ arms, to the seventh stage of grave and martyrdom.

Fowler’s model is more detailed and aligns with the cognitive development of the growing child. The ‘Innocent’ takes into account the primal foundational stage, where the meaning-making and sense-making of the sensory experience of the preschool child moves into the unordered stage 1. This stage captures the chaotic montage of ideas a child first encounters as they experience the world around them. The stage 2 ordered ‘Literalist’ begins to sort and categorise these ideas to have a more ordered concept of concrete thinking. These

correlate with Westerhoff's 'inherited faith', as the maturing child experiences the beliefs of their family and primary care givers. The 'Loyalist' stage 3 conforms to these shared beliefs and finds their own sense of belonging within that, akin to the affiliative stage Westerhoff writes about. For the 'Critic' at stage 4, choosing faith, Fowler argues that individuals are able to critically reflect. Westerhoff likens this to searching, as the world opens up to the individual. Fowler stipulates that individuals at this stage are not yet open to other belief systems that the 'Inclusive' stage 5 is able to show, with more empathetic understanding of commonalities rather than differences. The move from concrete to more abstract thinking and then onto critical reasoning reflects the maturing thinking mind; arguably it is not clear with Westerhoff's model when the searching moves into being owned faith. Fowler argues that most adults in churches remain unfulfilled at stage 4 and that the 'Selfless' stage 6 is only achieved by those exceptional, selfless beings striving to unify others. The simplicity of Westerhoff's 'owned' faith implies a destination has been reached, in contrast to the ongoing thinking, advocating and unifying work of Fowler's final two stages, which bring us back to it being *evolutionary growth* rather than its focus being on *what* is believed.

Continuing this faith development work, Jamieson (2002) reworks Fowler's model into more linear progression, to show how Fowler's 'Innocent' become more 'awareness-sensing' of themselves and those around them. It marks the shift from Fowler's 'Literalist', whose interpretation and understanding becomes less abstract and moves into 'mystery-sensing', as Fowler's 'Loyalist' conforms

and holds on to a growing understanding that is continuing to merge the earlier images and values with a better sense of personal identity. Fowler's 'Critic' uses 'value-sensing' to determine which beliefs and values to retain and what to let go of. 'Mystery-sensing' re-emerging as a matured openness, is evident when life and faith is examined in these later years. This re-working shows that development is not as formulaic as theoretical frameworks can appear. However, this more linear approach is not helpful as I have argued the growth and development of these girls is not linear (see section 1.2.1) and this needs to be reflected. However, the use of the aesthetics and senses resonates with the 'relational consciousness' of Hay and Nye, (1998:59) which is helpful for these girls. It also links with the growing child's developing social awareness and relationships – 'impulsive and instrumental minds' (Kegan, 1994).

Another more recent reframing of growing faith has been to liken it to giving birth to a new life coming from us into the world to share amongst community so that, through the gathered group, the world may be transformed (McLaren, 2011). Each trimester or stage has a word to capture thinking and understanding at each phase and the way self is developing through each. Whilst birthing might be considered to be a feminine analogy, it is interesting that there are four stages rather than the trimester model of pregnancy.
I will briefly summarise this framework and then explain its significance to this inquiry.

McLaren is keen to stress that, whilst using the analogy of birthing, he does not see these stages as linear, Fowler and Westerhoff do. McLaren (2011) acknowledges that each stage is built up as it continues to grow and mature, rather than being left behind as if proceeding to a set destination.

- Simplicity: starting with the season of awakening to the spiritual life and learning the language. Perspectives can be dualistic – either for or against, good or evil and so on.
- Complexity: the season of strengthening the spirit is pragmatic, with a desire to keep learning and to understand the rules of the game to be effective for God.
- Perplexity: a season of surviving spiritually with the humility to admit that one has not got it right and being honest about the difficulties and challenges.
- Harmony: ongoing spiritual deepening, integrating wisdom and seeking wholeness.

I am mindful that, in society today, there are many adults who have no church-going tradition, lack knowledge of the biblical stories and are unfamiliar with the cultural material that has majorly influenced how Western European culture understands itself. This may be symptomatic of the loss of the oral tradition in society, whereby familial stories, including those relating to family faith, are passed down the generations. This is a relevant reminder to us that taking footsteps into faith is a lifelong journey and some are only just encountering it for the first time in adulthood, which may be true for some of the adults participating in the study or parents of the girls participating. How do these

various models of faith development then relate to this study of girlhood? We may be able to consider that their experience in Girls' Brigade (hereafter GB) could well be, for some, the season of awakening to the spiritual life (simply learning the language, perhaps alongside their parents), whilst others may already be intentionally, pragmatically building on their Sunday School experiences and strengthening their understanding (complexity) and yet others could already be striving to survive spiritually when faced with the challenges of adolescence (perplexity). For the purposes of this study, McLaren's (2011) model in particular is more open to holding both spirituality and faith loosely, allowing each to gestate, incubate and grow without judging one more superior to the other – a non-linear process. This will be helpful to my open position about where the girls are, when I analyse the data in Chapters Three and Four.

Listening to a group within the Christian Church that has rarely had the expectation of a theological voice is, in itself, a theological endeavour and this is reflected in the methodology framing this study. It demonstrates how the catalyst for listening, as well as the act of listening well, are theological tasks. It might be that the voice of the child is indeed prophetic – 'Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity', writes Paul (1Tim. 4:12). Valuing this possibility in girls' spirituality means paying attention to youth work with girls; it implies that this is a worthwhile venture – that there is something to take note of. Questioning the extent that single-sex group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhances their growth and development raises the profile of this youth-work

practice. It assumes that personal growth and development should be occurring. It calls others to consider this group, to engage purposefully with them to understand them better. It requires both listening and how to listen well, which my methodology considers (see Chapter Two).

In this section I have offered a critical correlation with interdisciplinary practice, to provide a kaleidoscope of perspectives from social science, socio-cultural study and theology to reveal the significant influences upon these girls as they grow and mature. Practical theologians value such intersections between these three lenses as giving the metaphorical 'straw for the bricks' (Pattison, 2000:136) to understand the depth of this research question and the key influences within which it is set. I now contextualise the study.

1.3 Contextualising the inquiry

A historical backdrop to the context of my inquiry will help to give the meta-narrative to the group in the case study. The GB was started in 1893 by Margaret Lyttle in Dublin and grew to include England and Scotland before becoming an international organisation.[7] Throughout the years, GBM has

[7] Initially a girls' fitness club set within Sunday School, at a time when women had no right to vote and only the privileged had access to education, its motto was 'establishing Christ's kingdom amongst girls'. This was formalised with the introduction of a constitution and uniform to set the girls apart and foster a sense of belonging. The emergence of Christian uniformed organisations, including the GB (Ireland) gathered momentum. In Scotland the Girls' Guildry was formed for girls in 1900, with the motto of 'helping girls mature into Christian women'. In 1902 in England, the Girls' Life Brigade was established outside of Sunday School, for girls to consider where God fitted into their lives and to mature as Christian women. In 1965, the three organisations came together as Girls' Brigade Ministries (GBM), a global family with international partners.

continued to provide a welcoming, safe meeting space for girls and young women. It has developed its skills-based learning curriculum to address their needs and its groups are united by their motto ‘to seek, serve and follow Christ’. For over a decade, GBM headquarters were based at Baptist House, partnering with the Baptist Union of England and Wales along with the other main denominations. Out of 200 groups, just under 7,000 members are in Baptist churches in England and Wales.

The community groups, which this inquiry focusses upon, are known as GB units. A unit has four age-related groups within it:

n:vestigate, for its youngest members, aged 4–8 years, focusses on joining in the journey following Jesus.

n:gage is aimed at 7–11 year olds and seeks to help them discover the adventure of following Jesus.

n:counta members are aged 10–14 years old; it focusses on helping them meet the realities of life head on.

n:spire is for 13–18-year-old girls and seeks to help them to experience the challenges they set themselves.

These groups can access mission trips abroad as well as offering volunteering opportunities with training.

In addition to the weekly GBM(E&W) groups for girls, there is the Esther Collective for women aged 18–30, offering retreats and worship gatherings, which can be accessed online as well as face to face. The collective seeks to enable the ongoing discipleship of women in an encouraging community. Koko

is an online blog for teenage girls, encouraging them to 'keep on keeping on' with hope. The blog also includes resources for youth leaders to enrich the group work of GBM(E&W), as well as to stand alone for those who won't or can't attend. GBM provides opportunity to have fun, develop confidence and raise self-esteem amongst 14–24-year-olds through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and Girls' Brigade's own Queen's Award programmes.

Personally, I had no experience of GB, having been a Brownie Guide and for a short while a Girl Guide whilst growing up – neither of which I had enjoyed much. Ironically, in my late teens I did become a Young Leader and later an Assistant Guider in the Brownies, which I enjoyed more and was probably quite formative for me as a youth worker. I had hoped to be able to do a comparative study between Girl Guiding (hereafter GG) and GBM(E&W) but was unable to recruit support from GG. Whilst this was a disappointment, it did cause me to reflect on the volunteer structure of these uniformed organisations that operate at grassroots level and the way those employed in the national structures of the organisation seek to protect their volunteer leaders from being overloaded. My introduction to the case-study group was through an established relationship with a colleague in the national staff team at GBM. I reflect more on this in Chapter Two. For now, it is important to note that the research journey continually raises challenges that cause decisions to be renegotiated as difficult choices are made. Arguably, research with under-18s is deemed to be riskier

due to their vulnerability as minors, and some 'looked-after children'[8] had to be exempt from participating.

GBM(E&W) have three hallmarks that underpin and unite the work of their teams in their purpose to seek, serve and follow Jesus. The hallmarks are being:

- Relevant – staying connected to the culture and context of its members and locality
- Relational – focussing on community (within the group and beyond it), people and others
- Responsive – to needs and seeking to share the transformative love of Jesus.

As I sought to negotiate my entry into the group as a participant researcher, these hallmarks of the three Rs as values in action helped me to orientate myself, to assess the context and to structure my recording, along with themes that correlated to the supplementary questions I had underlining my key question, *to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?* Although GBM(E&W) was unfamiliar to me, I believed these significant threads would be interwoven throughout the programme to look for and reflect on.

[8] Children in the care of the local authority, placed with foster carers, living in residential homes or with other family members are referred to as 'looked after children' (LAC). This can be a voluntary arrangement or by court order.

1.4 Summary conclusion

This chapter has set out the context within GBM(E&W) for this case study. Key theoretical perspectives have been applied to show the natural course of physical, cognitive and emotional development girls are experiencing in this phase of girlhood. Socio-cultural themes have been set out as the backdrop to the time in which these girls are growing up. Finally, key theological principles have been argued to justify:

- the significance of this less-researched messy age of girlhood
- the value of a socially focussed, whole-person (body, mind and spirit) approach to development
- the importance of the spiritual discipline of listening as a theological endeavour to affirm the speaker, as well as to learn from them to deepen understanding.

The next chapter will explain the methodological framework that supports this research, along with the data collection tools used. It will highlight the process and illustrate how the methodology and researcher need to adapt when challenged along the way. Before that, a short reflection on Mary Magdalene, reflective of my approach as researcher, and a few words from the girls themselves.

MARY… ETHNOGRAPHER AND DISCIPLE

Mary, one of *those* women, my reputation goes before me
I know what they say but I can't keep away.
Often the men don't notice me so I go unseen,
watching on from a distance, listening in.

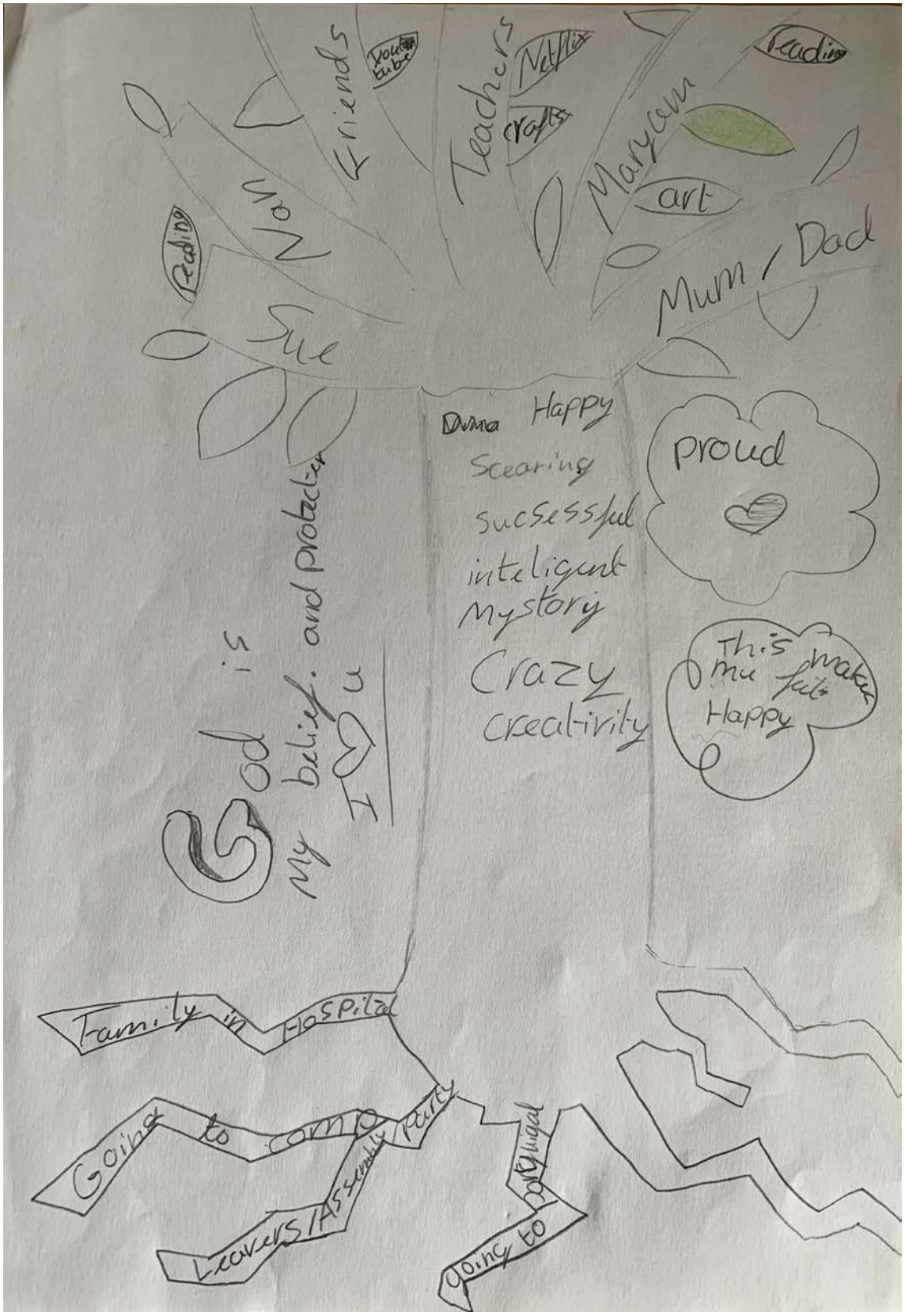
It's a quest that I'm on as I soak up His teaching.
Like a shepherd He's showing me the way.
I'm a truth-seeker wanting to learn
I'm following as close as I dare.

I witness so much yet still I want to know more.
To most I'm invisible, yet He knows my name.
I am woman yet called out of submission
a woman commissioned to speak out truth.

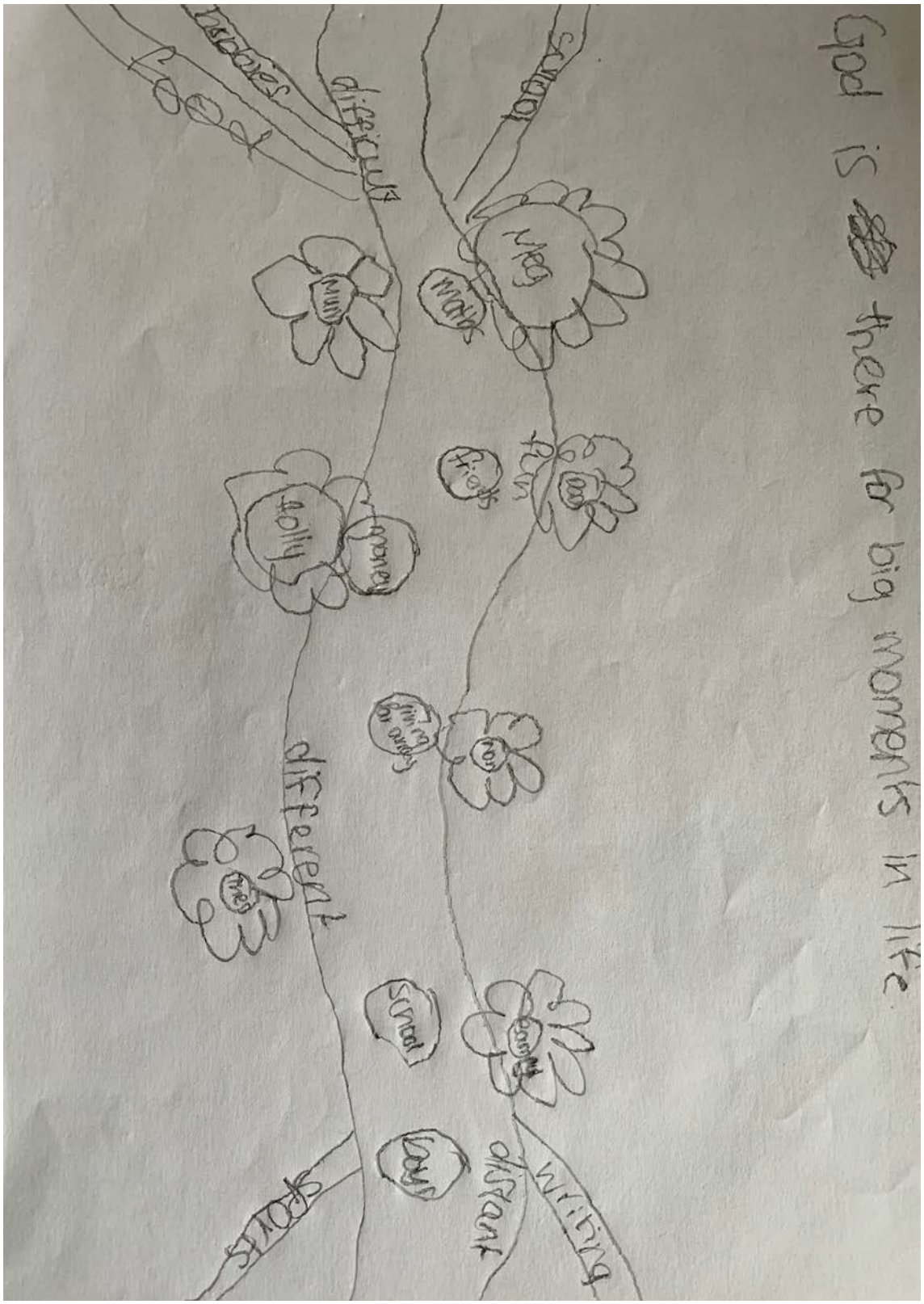
Apostle of the apostles, a trusted messenger.
Sent to your brothers, my brothers
as you return to your father, my father
to honour your God, my God… yet my word was not enough.

I am Mary the one who sees
Mary the one who reports
Mary the one Jesus called
Mary the one who was sent.

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 2



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 2



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER TWO – STRETCHING AND TYING THE WARP: THE DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Introduction

The warp was stretched taut to hold the weight of the threads. Tied tightly onto the loom ready to begin weaving.

The practical theologian set out to design a research inquiry to explore her question: to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development? She needed a clear methodological framework within which to operate and appropriate methods to collect relevant data. A robust structure to safeguard its participants would be required to get ethical clearance for research. Efficient data-collecting tools to amplify the collective voice of these girls would need to be applied. Only when all that was in place could participants be recruited.

The previous chapter has argued the importance and need for this research question. It has set out the GBM(E&W) context and presented a socio-cultural backdrop to this time when the girls are growing up. In this chapter I will now explain the design of this case-study, setting out its methodological framework, wherein I shall locate my role as the researcher and the philosophical commitment integrated throughout. I will present my data collection methods

and argue for their effectiveness before explaining the research process. I will highlight an ‘aha’ moment when challenged by the fieldwork observations and my subsequent response.

2.2 The methodological framework

2.2.1 Philosophical commitments

The working title of this project has been ‘Let the girls speak...’; ethnography is a methodological framework that seeks to give ‘voice to the people in their own local context’ (Fetterman, 2010:1). As researcher, my aim is to amplify the voice of the girls participating in all-girl groups like the GBM(E&W). I start from an egalitarian perspective with an emphasis on allowing the girls’ own voices to be heard; it is this priority that shapes my rationale and what follows in this chapter. My interest, as researcher, is to learn more about the life of girls aged 7–14 years to deepen my understanding of how they inhabit the world. I believe there is something significant at play during this messy phase of girlhood that is worthy of attention. The empirical methods I am employing are chosen for their ability to aid reflection and to generate questions as I consider my observations, exchanges and the participant responses. The nature of a work-based project like this is that it is a systematic small-scale localised inquiry that generates new but limited insights and questions for the wider context.

2.2.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Phenomenological study engages with the lived experience and, in this context, the experience of girls in this phase of girlhood. It is an interpretive endeavour

that will seek to ascertain the common shared experience of the group sessions and the individual responses/opinions; in this project, that means the focus is on the collective group of girls (Fetterman, 2010:12). IPA takes a philosophical approach to determining what the human experience is like, focussing on the personal meaning for those sharing an experience (Smith et al, 2009:45). This resonates with the formulation of my research question: *to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?* In this instance I shall be considering the individual experiences of these girls, as I seek to understand their collective experience at GBM(E&W). It is considered to be a 'double hermeneutic' as it is layered in its interpretation, as I seek to understand what the participants are seeking to understand for themselves. As Smith et al. acknowledge, 'human beings are sense-making creatures' as they live life and seek to understand their experiences (Smith, et al., 2009:3). In this project obviously I am unable to give the voice of the girls literally, but I can give an interpretation of what I hear them say. It is through the interpretative power that is at play within this study that I will seek to identify relationships between the individual responses and the group as a whole. I will look at the dynamics between what is done and what is said to help build the picture of the lived girlhood experience and the influence of belonging and attending the group of GBM(E&W). IPA requires 'rich' data for interpreting, but generates this through its engagement with the different perspectives/layers/participants which, in this study, will be my observations, the girls' responses, the views of their leaders and the collective group reflections.

It will require me to identify the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that characterise the group to understand the culture, which is important as this has been shaped by the underlying values that unite the group (Strauss and Quinn, 1997). Particular interest in this inquiry focusses on what the girls understand of themselves, their world and of God. This will be examined in the context of GBM(E&W) which, as the group that unites and gathers them, has its own set of values underpinning its purpose and lived out in its work with the girls. This work includes the Christian vision of GBM(E&W) – 'lives and communities transformed and enriched as generations seek, serve and follow Jesus Christ'. It is within IPA that my philosophical commitment to amplify the voice of the girls pulls together with my ethnographic methods; 'IPA research is always concerned with the detailed examination of lived experience' (Smith, et al 2009:47). This interpretative dynamic will be key to the analysis of data, and the layered approach to reading the data will highlight this close examination further (see Chapter Three).

Ethnography sits within this interpretative phenomenological approach and ethnographic methods are being applied in this case study. This is because my methodology reflects my epistemological perspective, as I will now explain.

2.2.3 Ethnography

> Conventional ethnographers generally speak for their subjects… Critical ethnographers, by contrast, accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak to an audience on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice. (Thomas, 1993:4)

In Chapter One, I referred to McRobbie's (1991:12) observation of the omission of the subculture of girls in ethnography and their invisibility in youth culture; it is this gap that I am seeking to engage with and whose voice I seek to amplify. An ethnographic study enables this to happen more naturally than other research methods. I am seeking to interpret the experience of these girls within GBM(E&W), to evaluate the effectiveness of this youth-work approach to awaken the Church to these marginalised voices (Cresswell, 2013:90). Ethnography remains focussed on the subjects rather than the researcher, in contrast to the Action Research I conducted as a 'teacher as researcher' examining my teaching methods to refine my classroom practice (Bell, 1987:5). This inquiry is intended to focus on what the girls have to tell me, while recognising that my listening interprets. The fluidity of ethnography is less disruptive to the context and its subjects than most other empirical methods. Dawson (2013:75) cautions of the need to match purpose, audience and style when designing research. Greig et al. (2007:173) recognise the debate about children's involvement in research and their right to participate or not and argue for research *with* children rather than them being subjected to research done to them. This is a value I uphold, as it correlates with one of the defining principles of youth work, voluntary participation whereby young people freely choose to participate (Bright, 2015). Interaction and open-ended exchange between the researcher and participants flow more naturally than structured interviews or the detachment of questionnaires, which can be sterile and formal. Key to this inquiry is giving a voice to the girls participating so, whilst it is inevitable when reporting on research I will speak for the girls, my endeavour is to go beyond

this through my critique, empowering their collective voice to be heard within this report. This project has used mixed methods but in essence is a qualitative ethnographic piece (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3).

Here I 'pause to reflect' on my use of the term ethnography (Ward, 2011:102). Traditionally, ethnography is about the lived experience of the researcher entering and immersing themselves within the context for a significant time for there to be comprehensive, holistic longitudinal study that takes seriously the complexity of those human beings (Ward, 2011:105). As a practical theologian seeking to attend to these girls and give genuine engagement to the complexities of their lives, the DPT has enabled me to move away from my desk and the library, to use ethnographic methods to enter into this phase of girlhood through the shared experience of GBM(E&W), so it is important to distinguish that this study has applied an ethnographic approach but that it is not an ethnography in the formal sense. I am part of a community of researchers and theologians using ethnographic approaches in this way to observe, inform and evaluate.

As an ethnographic piece, this is a naturalistic study of the girls and their leaders in action during group meetings – context-based and focussed. As a small-scale study, it goes deeper in focus. A longer study would have more scope to develop the methodology, so that additional creative methods of data collection could be incorporated. The emergent nature of this small-scale

project allowed the natural course of the group to determine its direction and focus.

Ethnographic study of this kind offers ‘an implicit process of interpretation and evaluation of the researcher’s engagement with reality’ (Ward, 2011:114). The informality of being in the group context as participant-observer (so with no leadership role or responsibility) shapes the form of data collected, which in this instance will include researcher observation, informal conversation and creative expression through my exercises. The analysis of data will produce a narrative interpretation of the human action and organisational practice of GBM(E&W). The findings of this study are to be shared to inform the ministry and mission of those working with girls of this age in the Christian Church.

By entering the social world of GBM(E&W), I embodied the role of being a participant-observer (Dawson, 2013). As an educator and practitioner, I had had some experience of this already, but this had not previously been considered through the lens of PT, which the DPT required. Being a participant-observer enabled me to observe intentionally the dynamics of membership, programme and participation. However, it did not require me to become a member or a leader simply to accompany the group in as neutral a position as possible, recognising that I was too old to be one of the girls and had no leadership role to feel part of the team either. Nevertheless I wanted to experience the group as the participants do; watching their interaction and listening to the exchanges between leaders and members (Dawson, 2013). The purpose of these

observations was, as Cresswell explains, to ‘study the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group’ (2013:90). Accompanying in this manner is an anthropological concept that implies walking in rhythm with the subject to learn and to understand (Fetterman, 2010:15).

In real terms, this meant attending weekly meetings with the group over the course of 12 months. This provided the opportunity to talk informally with group leaders and members without the formalities of interviewing. Isay (in Moschella, 2008) describes this kind of ethnographic listening as a profound ‘act of love’. As the researcher, there was a need to be open-minded and open-ended in my approach. This has been an emergent study, so initial interests and questions were reviewed and refined throughout the process. This challenged the ability to maintain the natural state of the way the group runs (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:7). Although this can be a general issue with empirical study, as it is out in the world and therefore impacted by the world, a responsible ethical researcher is mindful of this throughout the process, working to protect the group’s natural state for more robust results.

2.3 The participants

Chapter One has outlined this phase of girlhood as a messy age of transition. Although the invisibility of these girls has been highlighted alongside this, it should also be noted that this inquiry sees ‘the lives of women and girls as holy ground, a place where we expect to discern the presence and activity of the

divine' (Slee et al. 2013:17). Yet as Phillips (2011:6) highlights, biblical-based reflections and theologies of childhood have mainly been penned by men. Even feminist theology has been ambivalent about these overlooked girls (Slee et al. 2013:77). These girls are active participants within the group and it is their natural engagement with one another, the adult leaders and the programme itself that is my focus of interest. Research methodology today does much more to recognise the participatory principles of an inquiry with children, valuing their experiences and the importance of consulting with them (Christensen and James, 2008:32). Greig et al. (2007:174) contend that it is crucial that the girls are able to give their assent to participating in the study, in addition to the consent of their parents, leaders and helpers, whom one might consider as their gatekeepers (see Appendix 4).

I have chosen to use the term 'social actors' to describe them (Greene and Hogan, 2005). This term is in common within Early Years education when observing children at play. It captures the naturalistic aspect of the observations being made within this ethnographic study, whilst also giving more authority to their voice (Thomas, 1993). I see these girls as 'social actors' and informants in their own right, which is why I argue the need for this inquiry and the importance of hearing what they have to say. Subsequently this adds a new responsibility on the researcher, to enable their participation 'in ways consistent with their understanding, interests and ways of communicating' (Christensen et al. 2008:35). Ethnographic methods allow for this in more creative, eclectic ways, which I shall unpack further when I move on to explain my concrete methods.

A case study characteristically investigates and emphasises the depth of study, focussing on the particular rather than the general (Greig et al. 2007). This study focusses on these girls in this messy phase of girlhood. It seeks to give a holistic view of the relationships and process within their natural setting (Denscombe, 1998:30–32). The girls have chosen to attend GBM(E&W) and have relationships with both their peers and their leaders that influence and shape their lives. My methodology values the ethnographic relational dimension and more discursive approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). By attending the weekly meeting, I sought to observe the relationships within the group to tune in to what the girls were saying, to better understand their world views and understanding of self. Case studies recognise the 'embeddedness' and complexity of reality; the data they produce can be difficult to organise because it is 'strong in reality'. This 'fly on the wall' perspective adds to their interest, readability and comprehension (Cohen and Manion, 1980:150). I anticipated the research process mirroring some of the messiness of this phase of girlhood, because it is when immersed in a particular context and researching live subjects in this naturalistic manner that even the best laid plans are subject to the *in the moment* responses – these are real people living real lives and having to deal with the real stuff of life. My ethnographic approach to this inquiry enabled the in-depth study, with a researcher-participant role being immersed in the setting for an extended period, to develop an understanding of the culture of the group and of people's behaviours within the context of that culture (Bryman,

2001). Immersing myself within a context to know it better and to learn from it is an incarnational approach (Cloke and Pears, 2016:97).

Historically, the concern to understand the views and way of life of actual people in their everyday context and their lived experiences has developed ethnographic research (Crang and Cook, 2007: 21). It is this attention to the lived experience that Scharen and Vigen (2011: pp.xi–xii) argue is the basis for the Christian faith. That incarnational nature of PT and the immersion of the ethnographer in context unite the search for God and meaning in the messiness of everyday life: 'there is no other place to look for God than as mediated through the messy place that is the world' (Scharen and Vigen, 2011: pp.xi–xii). The messy phase of girlhood is just this context. It demonstrates how Christian theology and ethics can be informed by this reality, but also how ethnographic study of this nature can help initiate access to Christian ethics and theology. It is by grappling with messy realities using participant observation we become theological.

These methodological and theological considerations have shaped the concrete methods I have used, that I now will explain.

2.4 Collection of concrete methods[9]

It has been important to me to maintain a naturalistic methodology to this study, so the inquiry was not overly intrusive nor disruptive to the way GBM(E&W) operates and its members function. A naturalistic approach to hearing the voice of children and young people is through less formal, more natural methods like conversation, watching, listening and accompanying. It is this approach that correlates with Mary Magdalene's discipleship and to understanding the experience of these girls as holy ground. I sought to attend to the girls in the way Mary attended to Christ – similar to a fly-on-the-wall account, absorbing everything through being present and immersed in the context, yet not excluding the inevitable exchanges and interactions that Mary would have had with Jesus and the other disciples and which I had with the girls and their leaders. It is as if the camera keeps rolling, rather than narrative that records dialogue. Ward asserts that as theologians, the need for careful attention to the complexities of the lives of people should primarily be considered theologically and, to do so with integrity, this should be evident within the research methods: 'when we enter into the lives we must observe and question and listen as theologians' (Ward, 2011:106). My regular attendance enabled me to participate and do activities drawing on a range of tools, which I shall now explain.

[9] Material in this section is adapted from Hancock, S. (2020) **If you have ears to hear listen: the theological endeavour of listening to the voices of girls aged 7–14**. Presented at Theology Live 2020.

2.4.1 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are the account of the observer – what has been seen and heard. Whilst also identifying what has been perceived and what is being interpreted, they describe experiences encountered in the fieldwork setting. Fieldwork is the term used to encompass the researcher and the research context collectively. In some situations this may be the place of work or community already known and familiar to the researcher, but often it is applied to the context being researched, the time allocated to the study and the 'ethnographic participation' of the researcher 'getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people' (Emmerson et al., 1995:1). Arguably, fieldnotes are an active process of sense-making to highlight what is significant. They include quotations from conversations as well as descriptions of action, giving them a sense of being both witness testimony and transcript. Mine include annotated reflections of, and questions about, how the experience was impacting me. This has been the catalyst for clarity and coding, with notes that indicate the distinctions between reactions that are personal, records of method and substance from the social life and discourse being observed and indicators highlighting areas to be followed up (Emerson et al., 1995:5–12). The process of ethnographic participation is important both prior to writing as well as helping with the writing fieldnotes. It enabled me to immerse myself into this experience and to build meaning that inevitably drew upon my own feelings of the environment, ambience and activity. This allowed time to register first impressions and the sensory experience and then to discern the more indirect perspective of the participants (Emerson et al., 1995:26–28). By acknowledging

the personal and noting the physical, the researcher is more immersed in the process and attuned to observe. In turn her writing becomes richer and more poetic as seen in the use of vignettes from the perspective of Mary Magdalene.

2.4.2 Conversation

Conversation builds naturally on the relationship youth workers establish with the group. It breaks down the formality of a recorded interview, which can seem artificial or officious and often requires stepping out of the lived experience to reflect on it. To keep the young members of the group comfortable in this process and to capture their thoughts, ideas, questions and reflections, the verbatim method of recall was applied – 'Verbatim quotations are extremely useful in presenting a credible report of the research' (Fetterman, 2010:11). This method depended on the memory recall of the researcher and was filtered through her interpretation of what was heard. To support this, field notes recording what was said at the time, or as soon afterwards as possible, proved helpful.

Conversation is an exchange that can build relationship and initiates discussion. Social-learning theorists, like Lev Vygotsky (1962), argue that this social exchange is needed for each participant to move beyond what they already know into places of new understanding. Again, understanding methods theologically, this is mirrored in the call and response within worship, shaped depending on our ecclesiology; a theological resonance that reminds us that God summons to speak, as well as to respond to what has been heard. The

voice calls out, seeking connection with others; those hearing the call respond, acknowledging that they have heard and listened, engaging with what has been said. I see that at play when I reflect on Mary's conversation with Jesus after his resurrection. I know that, for my role as researcher, there is a need to communicate findings and share what I have heard in this process. I have hope for these girls in this process, that sharing their perspectives will enable youth workers, ministers and others to respond to what is shared, so there is transformation in practice, understanding and future opportunities.

Educationalist Paulo Freire advocated for dialogue, arguing that it, 'requires great faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite but the birth right of all)' (2005:90). Freire explains that through conversation there is an exchange of some kind; it is based on a cooperative principle; at its best there is a mutuality of interest, respect and basic politeness. At its worst, Freire cautions, it becomes oppressive, lacking humility and hope. This is why hearing the voice of the girls is important to me and, having already experienced the power of the gatekeepers to silence or omit the girls from participating, I am reminded once again of the need to advocate for this.
It is not just social-pedagogues that 'believe that all people, whatever their age, are valuable and that they convey their understanding in how they communicate and relate to other people' (Petrie, 2011:40). Mercer claims, 'Adults, by listening carefully to girls, can participate in helping them sort out what their perspectives, feelings and experiences mean to them' (2008:9).

2.4.3 Attentive listening

Attentive listening to another is both affirming and respectful at any age but 'listening to children is central to recognizing and respecting their worth as human beings' (Christensen and James 2008:225). In the field of psychology, narrative therapy has established its therapeutic use of personal life story; from this practice we learn the value of encouraging others to tell their story and its significance to affirm and nurture an individual's sense of self-worth that comes from doing so (White and Epston, 1990), making use of open-ended Socratic questions to grow conversation rather than it being closed down (Paul and Elder, 2006). This style of questioning helps to reveal understanding. As children speak, those listening begin to see the world through their eyes: 'storytelling is most centrally an imaginative act of making meaning, a process of making sense of one's world and experiences, of giving significance to certain relationships and experiences while making little of others' (Mercer 2008:2). This, in turn, gives insight and helps build understanding and trust. An empathetic conversation, Batsleer (2008:89) explains, is fundamental to conversation that supports growth into autonomy and freedom. From a Christian perspective, it might be that the voice of the child is indeed prophetic and, once again, the holy ground through which one approaches God (1Tim.4:12). But what does it mean to listen?

A common misperception is that listening is a passive activity, but active listening is far from that! In her book *Adolescence*, Ann Wheal describes active listening as '…a combination of using the ears and eyes to receive messages

and signals, backed up by actions such as nodding and verbal prompting which show the speaker that you are interested and that you are taking notice of what is being said' (1998:72). These are some of the different levels that we are listening to:

- The head, which reflects not just the factual knowledge but also the conceptual understanding and thoughts held by the growing child
- The heart, which expresses the emotions, feelings and mood being experienced
- The feet, which communicate the direction, motivation, intention and will of the speaker
- The body, its posture, facial expression, actions and behaviours, which all portray something of the individual, especially when the words are hard to articulate.

That is a lot to be listening to, but it is not just an action. Listening to others is both meaningful and theological. If I was to operate with the theological integrity I have spoken about in the previous chapter and, latterly, reflect on Paul's words to Timothy, I needed to attend to the voice of these girls and engage with what I heard them say and, through them, what God may be saying.

To listen is a spiritual discipline. It involves waiting, as Mary did when Jesus was hung upon the cross. Watching in the way Mary saw where the soldiers laid Christ's body and knew where to return with the embalming oil and spices. Reflecting back, as she did, running to tell the disciples in hiding that Jesus was

risen and was alive! It may seem counter-cultural in today's fast-moving, ever-changing society, so it is something intentional and a discipline to practise.

Ignatius Loyola, of the Jesuit community, sought ways to help people connect with God in the ordinary every day (Fleming, 2008). Ignatian spirituality is about being present to the other, seeking out the movement of God in everyday events and adapting personal life and character through the use of introspective prompts and in response to the question 'What more does God want of me?' (Fleming, 2008:37). The Ignatian *examen* recognises the importance of hearing, and questions what is missed when we don't listen (Sexton, 2019:46). There has been something of this Ignatian-kind of listening that the girls have been invited into that I will say more about later in the final section.

2.4.4 Accompanying

Accompanying is a method of informal education I'm familiar with in my youth-work practice. The cover of the book *Accompanying*, notes that 'it is not an easy term to define, deriving from the Latin *com* (together with) and the French *panis* (bread). Its original meaning infers a relish eaten with bread; to accompany someone is therefore to act as a relish in their physical, mental or spiritual life' (Green and Christian, 2004). At its simplest, it is a relationship and a gift 'this sort of quality companionship and support is vital for people to establish and maintain their physical, mental and spiritual health and creativity' (Green and Christian, 2004:21).

Speaking theologically, we might consider this discipling in youth-ministry terms. As a metaphor, accompaniment conveys something of the companionship on a journey: ‘Do not try to call them back to where they were and do not call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before’ (Donovan, 1978:xix). I aimed to experience the group as the girls did; actively listening to and observing the activities and exchanges, seeking to understand the group working and the girls’ perception better.

2.4.5 Photographic evidence

Photographic evidence may help back up some observations. Visual media in social research is not uncommon. *The 100 Languages of Children* (Malaguzzi, L., 1998) highlights the symbolic non-verbal expressions used to communicate meaning (see Appendix 1). This is important for young children, who are still acquiring the language to articulate their thoughts, but also for all children for whom colour, imagination and creativity speak more powerfully of what they have in mind than the vernacular does, and for teenagers who are already abbreviating conversations using text-speak and emoticons to express themselves.

> When used alongside other methods, they [photographs and pictures] also permit exploration of particular issues in more depth by encouraging a concentrated focus on the topic; they can also form part of a methodological triangulation through allowing the researcher to assess the extent to which a group of children share a particular attitude or opinion which has been randomly gleaned by the researcher from a casual comment. (Christensen and James, 2008:160)

Unsure of how much creativity there was within the GB curriculum, I thought it would be helpful to capture what the girls have produced, as fieldnotes record the attitudinal approach to the activities and the 'small talk' during the process, any images would help give a further dimension to the event.

2.5 The process

I will now apply Crang and Cooks' (2007:13–19) threefold protocol to explain the initiating of the research process and gaining access to participants and recruiting. There is something of a social etiquette to follow to bring about access that begins with making contacts (casting your net); taking time to meet with the gatekeepers (gaining access); and being sensitive to the power relations (power and knowledge). This is not merely social but integral to my framework of commitments.

2.5.1 Casting your net

Through my work at the Baptist College, I already had contact with a member of the national team for GBM(E&W). Dawson (2013:112) writes about engaging with a known member of a group to introduce you to other members, so it was through an initial conversation with her as a legitimate approach that led to their interest and commitment to this project. By starting with the national figures in the organisation, I believe my net was, in principle, cast wide. However, on interpretation the layers/complexities became more apparent. It could be interpreted that the process is very much a top-down one, which may be more time-consuming, frustrated by the internal challenges of relationship and

communication between a small national team of gatekeepers and the individual units and their teams, who have direct face-to-face responsibility for the girls within their groups. Might it have been quicker or smoother to initiate contact with a local brigade and have them present my proposal and their intent to the national team? Possibly, but the national team expressed interest and commitment to the study. They proved instrumental in identifying a willing group to participate in the project. Although I was not part of the initial approach, I am aware that several groups were considered and invited to engage through the National Mission Co-ordinator. A meeting had been set up with another group based in Gloucestershire who had expressed interest in the project, however due to a pastoral situation they no longer had the capacity to offer a fieldwork placement so had to withdraw from the process. Keen for maximising the experience for both GBM(E&W) and the researcher, an approach was made to this larger group in South Wales who already had established links with the national team and with their agreed interest, an introductory visit was arranged. Although further afield, the fact that the group was hosted by a Baptist church was of interest to me. The relevance of this context for me as a Baptist deepened at the enrolment service when it was apparent that the link with the church was more than just use of the building but belonging to the church. Obviously being in Wales and my own Welsh heritage, I was aware of there being cultural distinctions especially in language, education and church life. This offered a different form of diversity despite most participants being white. These girls would be bi-lingual, some speaking Welsh in their home, and all being taught Welsh at school through the Wales' National Curriculum.

Appendix 2 shows that the collaborative agreement between the researcher and the GBM(E&W), outlining expectations and responsibilities on both parts, was key for formalising this shared work and commitment.

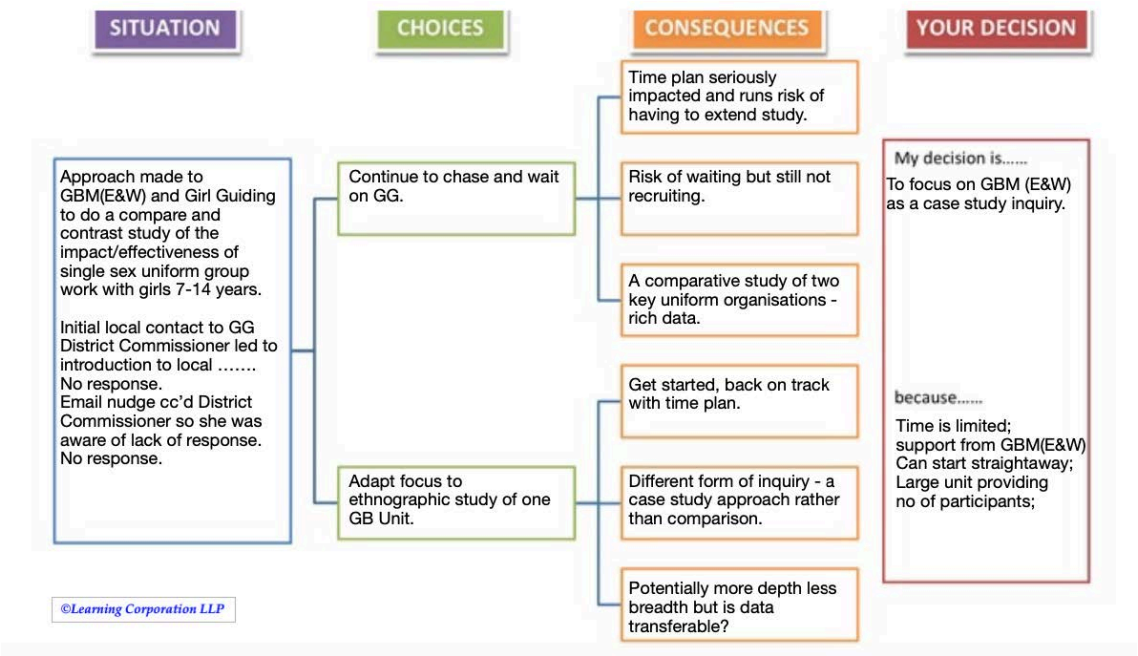
Alongside connecting with GBM(E&W), I sought to connect locally with the Girl Guide Movement to enable wider casting, with a comparative study between the two key uniformed organisations for girls. My initial approach to the GG County Commissioner was left unanswered, despite several attempts through their structures to ignite a conversation. This was disappointing, but the research process is full of these 'forked-road' dilemmas (Dewey, 1910). This lack of response meant a change to the fundamental compare-and-contrast dynamic originally proposed in this project, making it more specific as a case study of a GB group and how its curriculum, structure and experience support girls in their development, understanding who they are, making sense of the world around them and their understanding of God. Now, having cast my net for expressions of interest in this project, I will explore the challenge of gaining access to recruit participants for the inquiry.

2.5.2 Gaining access

The researcher is at the mercy of the gatekeepers in terms of gaining access and recruiting participants to a project; 'initial contact is made in negotiation with gatekeepers who retain the power of access' (Phillips et al., 2018:31). The lack of engagement from GG blocked the wider casting of my net. In addition to the ethical clearance process at the University of Birmingham, GBM(E&W) had their

own requirements to be met and amendments to contextualise documentation for circulation made it more accessible to the potential participants (see Appendices 3 and 4). Whilst this seriously impacted the time plan for this project, it highlights the reality of the research process, whereby choices and decisions are having to be made and negotiated with others throughout the process. I wonder about the thinking of those who are the gatekeepers holding the keys of access. Where does responsibility end and control take over? Is research a threat to the status quo? If so, why? Time is crucial in research. Having a timed action plan keeps the project on schedule and gives it a frame within which to evolve, gain momentum and flourish. Time is precious and constantly under threat, so an action plan is a working document that gets reviewed and updated, as the reality of research and its challenges are encountered. As important as the time management of a research inquiry is, children and young people are a vulnerable group, if only because they are under 18 years, before any other complexities that may impact their ability to engage with the process. Therefore, it is paramount that it is appreciated and recognised 'that children have rights which are specific and which dictate that they should be consulted in matters that affect them' (Greig et al., 2007:169), by going beyond the general theory and exploration of the general ethical principles supporting research on human participants. This is an example of the kind of influences shaping the action plan.

Figure 1 Research proposal decision tree



My experience throughout this process has been that significant choices shaped the direction of the flow of this project. A series of these decisions can be seen above in Figure 1, in the format of a decision tree that was used to consider strategically the options available and their potential outcomes to determine a way forward.

2.5.3 Power and knowledge

In essence, ethnography is a heuristic methodology, by which I mean it is a process of discovery. It accepts the impossibility of being precise, but seeks to find reasonable, appropriate findings. This is often the nature of qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative methods, which are more precise. This study is about letting the girls speak, yet it was a key challenge to hear the girls' voices within the structured mould of the GBM(E&W). 'Children perceive and understand the world in a different way from adults' (Greig et al., 2007:183);

researchers and participating adults may perceive the girls' perspective, but that is not the same as hearing from the girls in their words.

The voice of these girls was not one homogenous voice, as life experiences were different – in addition to age, culture, social class and education, to name but a few distinctions. Having many girls attending in one setting helped increase data gathered, whilst also making it harder to give voice to individuals. This inquiry focussed on the collective voice of the girls, which was complex, as it engaged with and was shaped by individual contributions; I have used examples of activities between each chapter to show flashes of individual girls' responses.

The weekly programme followed a standard pattern (see Appendix 5), and framed the conversations. Within this pattern, it was during 'news time' the girls had freedom to share what is happening in their life. Of course, the girls chatted as they played or completed activities, but it is quite difficult to distinguish and follow individual conversations in this setting. I expected the prayer time might give some insight into what was weighing heavily upon them and, over the course of time, it was evident which girls were keen to lead prayers and which were more reluctant. Although a helpful frame for the inquiry, it should be noted that the programme was planned by adults for the girls to participate. Hart (1992) sets out eight degrees of participation and non-participation as a ladder, ranging from manipulation at the lowest level up to child-initiated shared decisions with adults as the optimum. Holden and Clough observe that 'Hart

contends that genuine participation begins at level 4' (1998:19,20). I would gauge this inquiry at the fifth level, whereby the girls were *consulted and informed* as they were invited to participate before assenting to joining in the project. My hope was that I would be able to *initiate shared decisions with children* (level 6) as the project evolved. This happened in the form of supplementary questions being explored for further clarity and understanding. These are explained further in section 2.8 below.

As participant-observer, I needed to be aware of my own feelings and reactions as I interpreted the experience of being within the groups, as well as at this stage of the process. These observations are important data, so the recording and storage of this was paramount Dawson, 2013). My fieldnotes were written on the same evening and later typed up and coded to be saved securely in my electronic files. Fetterman (2010) reminds us of the importance for ethnographers to have an open mind and open head as the storyteller and scientist. It is the story of the girls' experience that needs to be heard.

2.6 Silent voices – oh no!

After several months of fieldwork, the irony of this inquiry began to unsettle me. I found the girls' voices to be quieter than anticipated. Without the longevity of a more extensive study, it was becoming a challenge to 'hear the voice' of the girls for a number of reasons:

1) I had not anticipated the two age groups meeting simultaneously but had assumed they would run concurrently, so that I could attend both on the

same evening. Whilst there are many benefits for the girls and leaders having all the groups run at the same time, it meant I had to attend one or the other age group. This presented one of my first dilemmas as researcher – do I attend *n:gage* one week and *n:counta* the next, or should I block the number of weeks, focussing on first one group and then the next? I decided to block the weeks to give some consistency, following the theme and badge work for the half term with one age group, before spending the next block with the other group.

2) The structure of the weekly programme allowed for shared experiences in games and activities, a news slot and prayer time, but less time for the attentive listening I had hoped for.
3) Environmental factors also challenged the attentive listening; the sports' hall where the initial games normally take place is, like most halls, very echoey, so it was difficult to distinguish individual voices. The large number of girls in the groups made it harder to hear their conversations unless sitting at the activity table with them or physically being alongside them as they chatted.
4) I could see that, being a participant-observer, I was distinct from the leadership of the groups and obviously was not one of the girls, so subsequently remained the 'outsider' from both the adult team and the social actors. When the project was planned, I had no prior experience of GB and the way the evenings ran, but it seemed to me that these semi-structured conversations would be affected, making them more formal than intended and thus changing the way the girls engaged with the

questions. It felt truer to the ethnographic approach to talk in the group as it ran, rather than setting aside and formalising those times by taking the girls out of the group to talk.

5) Similarly, due to the number of girls attending on an evening (over 90 in total), the dropping off and collection by parents needed to be formalised and so that limited the contact and interaction I had with parents to facilitate those conversations.

In discussion with my supervisor and later with the agreement of the unit leader, I devised some supplementary activities to access the girls' thinking in relation to the research question and to amplify their voice in the project. A further amendment to the direction of this was in regard to disbanding the creative conversations with the girls, parents and leaders, but generating a replacement tool to capture the thoughts of the leaders. Whilst it was surprising to have to review and adapt in this way, suddenly there was an energy and focus again to the inquiry. I felt that I was once again being true to the philosophical rationale for the social actors in this research, keeping a naturalistic approach that allowed the girls to participate in the group as normal and engaging with them as they did. Fundamental to this project has been to let the girls speak for themselves and, to do this with integrity, I needed to adapt my methods so they would be centrally located as the leading ladies.

Earlier I outlined my concrete methods; these remained in place but, in light of the challenge to hear let alone amplify the voice of the girls, I looked for further options which I will now explain.

2.7 Tapestry of Life (ToL)

Tapestry of Life is the title to a visualisation method of mapping out one's life story, 'human beings are "storied" people' (Mercer 2008:2). This was inspired by 'The Unfolding Tapestry of My Life' exercise, devised for faith-development interviews for personal reflection and guided analysis for understanding faith formation (Fowler et al. 2004:16-21,68). This exercise is grounded in the theory of stages that shape the development of faith (Fowler, 1981), which I discussed in Chapter One. Fowler was influenced by Piaget's constructivist understanding of the place of order and structure in meaning-making. The theory Fowler et al. (2004:11) value recognises that faith is not so internalised that it stands apart from the external forces of the lived experience, rather that it weaves meaning for that lived experience and influences human becoming.[10]

The exercise was primarily designed for adults to complete in solitude and then to discuss within a workshop group setting with a facilitator. Mercer (2008:13,135) uses this life exercise in her interviews with older adolescent girls, asking the same questions but adding the option to create a pictorial

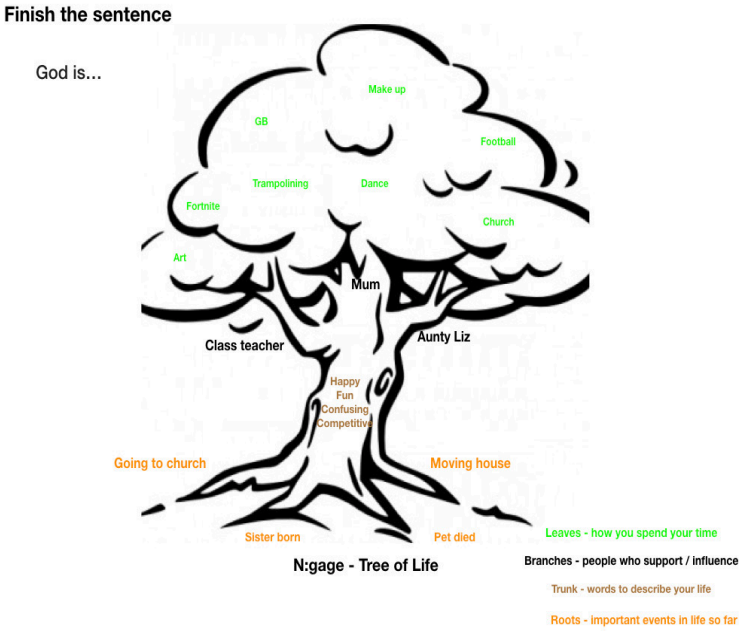
[10] It is the idea of weaving meaning to create a tapestry of life that has inspired the chapter headings within this thesis. Each heading represents a stage of the weaving process and is likened to the stage of the research process the chapter goes on to discuss.

representation of their life (using the metaphor of a river) to help the girls express their significant experiences and to map their encounters/awareness of God in their lives.

I found that some of the questions in the exercise focus on themes relating to my inquiry, but found it very adult in its format and language, so I adapted this to design an exercise that was age-appropriate for the girls and open enough for them to express themselves, not just through written words but also through the pictorial design they create as they complete the exercise. Art therapists recognise the way that ‘children's drawings open windows shedding light on the child's inner mental world’ (Wimmer, 2012). This pictorial response is another of the *100 Languages of the Child* and an outlet that allows these social actors to communicate emotions and feelings they may not be able to articulate fully with words (Mandrapa, 2015). Originally I planned to complete this as a group activity, collectively building up the image with the two focus age groups over the weeks, so that reflection and discussion could happen simultaneously. My hope was that this would enrich the weekly observations. However, the programme structure was unyielding and I was told there was no time to include this and that it would have to wait until the last week of term. This meant further adaptation was needed to complete the activity with both groups on one evening and to design it in such a way that it could be delivered in my absence by the team.

Back to the drawing board, I created two models – one for each group.

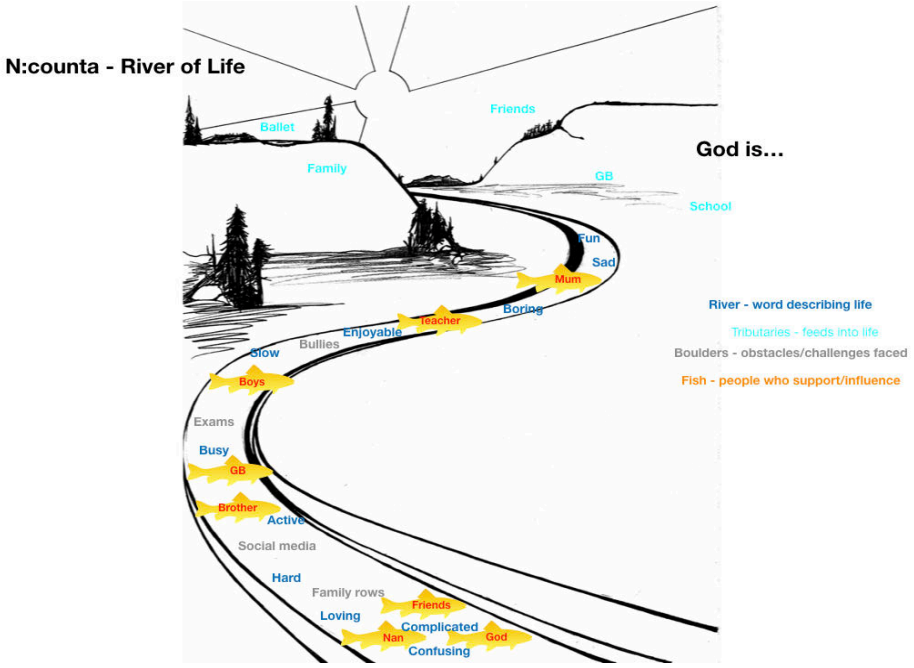
Figure 2 ToL tree example



The younger *n:gage* girls had the simpler form of a tree, inviting them to fill its trunk with words that describe their lives, roots representing the most important things experienced in life so far, the branches labelled with the names of significant people supporting and influencing them and adding leaves stating how they spend their time (hobbies, interests etc). Alongside the tree, the girls were invited to complete the sentence starter 'God is…'. An example was given to the leaders, but not the girls, to illustrate how the exercise might look (Figure 2 above). A copy of the instruction sheet can be found in Appendix 6.

For the older *n:counta* girls, the image of a river was used to represent their lives to date and they were to fill this with words that describe their life.

Figure 3 ToL river example



They were invited to add the tributaries feeding into the river and label them with the things that feed into their lives. Boulders were added to represent the challenges they face in life and fish or flowers labelled with the names of those that support and influence them. Again, the sentence starter ‘God is…’ was alongside for the girls to complete. Here is an example given to the leaders to help them visualise it, which accompanied the instructions which can be found in Appendix 7.

The activity was delivered by the team as a guided reflection group activity on the final meeting before the summer break. More will be said about this in Chapter Three.

2.8 Supplementary questions and pop-up boards

Not being able to facilitate the Tapestry of Life (ToL) activities myself raised further challenges. It meant there was no observation of how the girls responded to the task, nor the way it was presented to them and how much, if any, further guidance was given. It also meant there was no opportunity to pick up on confusions, to probe for meaning or to clarify missing details. However, all data raises questions and this was no exception, so a method was needed to address this, protecting the anonymity of the girls' responses but clarifying details to get perspective. Taking into account the limitations to access focussed time with the girls during their GB session, a succinct accessible approach was needed, with the least amount of disruption. In discussion with my supervisor, the opening gathering time was identified as being an opportune time for this. Again wishing to stay true to my rationale, I wanted an open-ended task that allowed the girls to respond true to themselves.

A portable display board that opened up to stand on a table was used to present a supplementary question and instructions inviting the girls to respond on the appropriate side, depending on their group. There remained an element of visual creativity to this, in line with the original tasks. The board was set up in the room where the girls would gather after registration before the opening worship time. It was a point of interest and, whilst I hovered nearby to assist if needed, it was self-sufficient, offering the girls open access to respond accordingly. I will explain these questions in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, but for now these were the questions asked:

- Who are the people that inspire you?
- What are the three most important qualities you look for in a friend?
- Sizing up the problem – do you consider it to be a big, medium or small issue?

Simultaneously the leaders and helpers were asked to reflect on a set of questions and to email their responses directly to me. Their questions were:

- What words do you think characterise the lives of the girls in your group?
- What do you perceive as the challenges/issues they face?
- What do you think the girls have learned about God?
- What are your hopes for the girls?

A good number of the leaders responded, although not all of them. Originally the unit leader wanted them to return their responses to her to pass on, but after an initial delay and to avoid passing things on, I emailed them a reminder encouraging them to respond directly to me.

2.9 Summary conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined my methodological framework for the inquiry. I have given a philosophical and theological explanation of my use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and ethnographic methods. This is reflected in the focus being on the collective voice of the girls rather than individual voices. The initial stages of the process have highlighted some challenges that required attention and negotiation, ultimately sharpening the focus for a case study. The mixed range of creative methods used to gather

data have been described and the reasons for adapting and adding to this discussed and illustrated by the ToL activities introduced.

Before moving on to look at the findings in Chapter Three, a reflection from Mary's perspective as ethnographer.

MARY REFLECTS…

I have many quest ons
hav ng seen d fferent th ngs
and hear ng from others.
I need to know th s for myse f,
to be there amongst them
watch ng on at a d stance
but sten ng n,
to w tness f rst hand so that
I can te others the way t cou d be.

I'm reminded of that jar again…
the one that conta ned such r ches
the one that caused such outrage
the one that soothed, refreshed and ano nted.
But I can see many jars
each conta n ng r ches to be shared
each w th ts own purpose;
each w th ts own cost, yet
a worthy of engagement and commun on.

Jars nest ng w th n one another,
conta ned and connected,
re ated and dependent.
Yet each suff c ent n the r own r ght
ab e to stand a one and apart –
each d st nct n the r be ng,
each worthy of nteract on,
each ab e to br ng ght and mean ng
shou d we choose to acknow edge them.

She s at the heart of t a
and what g r hood means to her –
how she sees th s wor d and her p ace w th n t.
What has been her exper ence?
Who has been a ongs de her?
Who g ves her strength and nsp rat on?
And there's the group that she's part of
a commun ty n ts own r ght,
what does t mean to be ong to that?

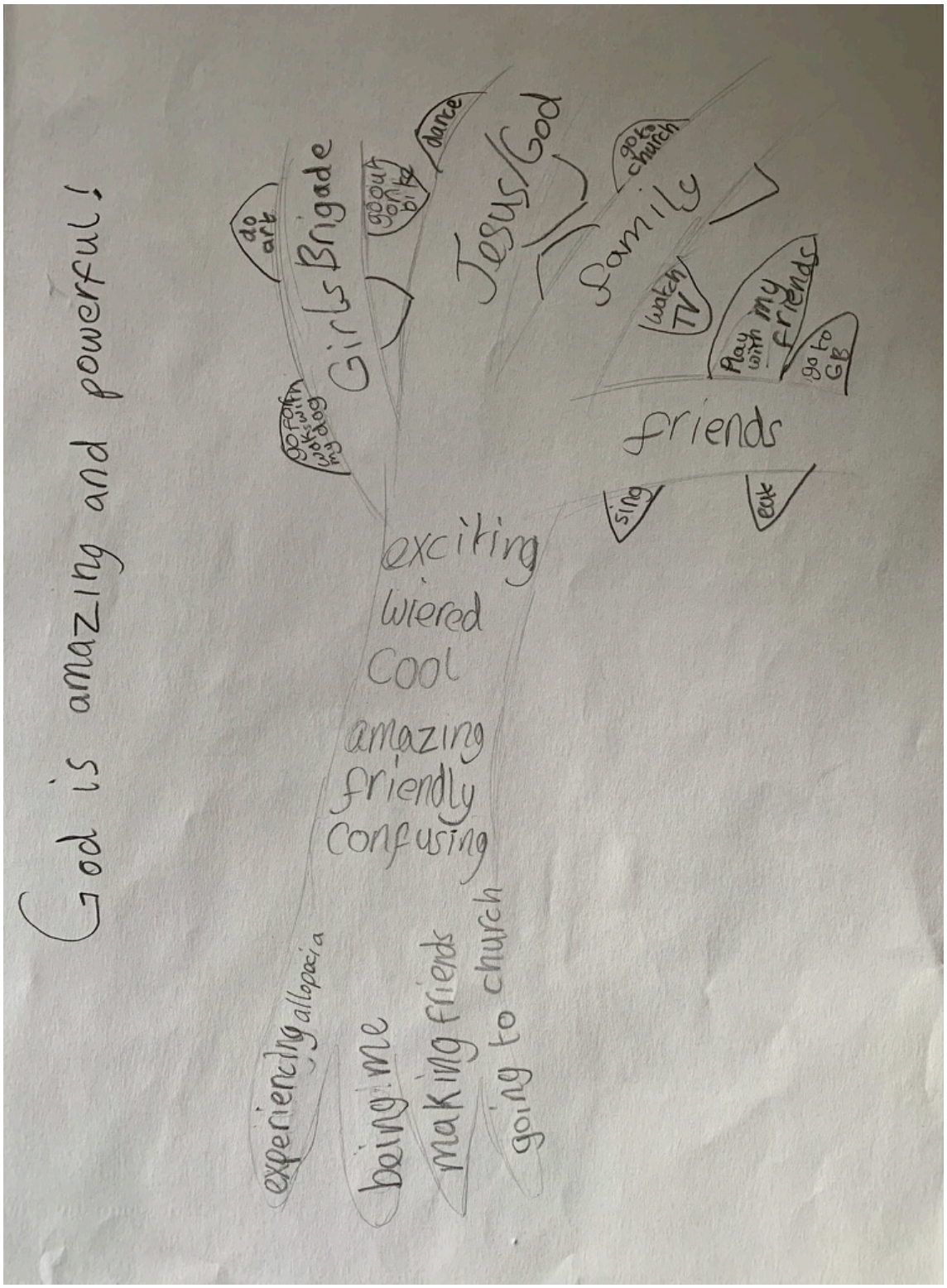
Th s group of g r s, and on y g r s,
what s ts purpose?
How does t ach eve th s?
Who's in and who's out and how do they re ate?
How are they organ sed?
What approaches do they take?
Fa th based and Chr st focussed,
s ng e-sex un formed group;
what k nd of youth work s th s?

To be compan on to th s group,
to enter the r wor d to know more, to earn more.
Accompany ng them over t me as Mary fo owed,
to watch, to sten, to te and report.
I a ready ho d re evant exper ence of
g r hood, youth work, sp r tua ty and research.
What w l see? What w t te me?
What w l earn and how w t change me?
What do I need to fu f th s ro e?

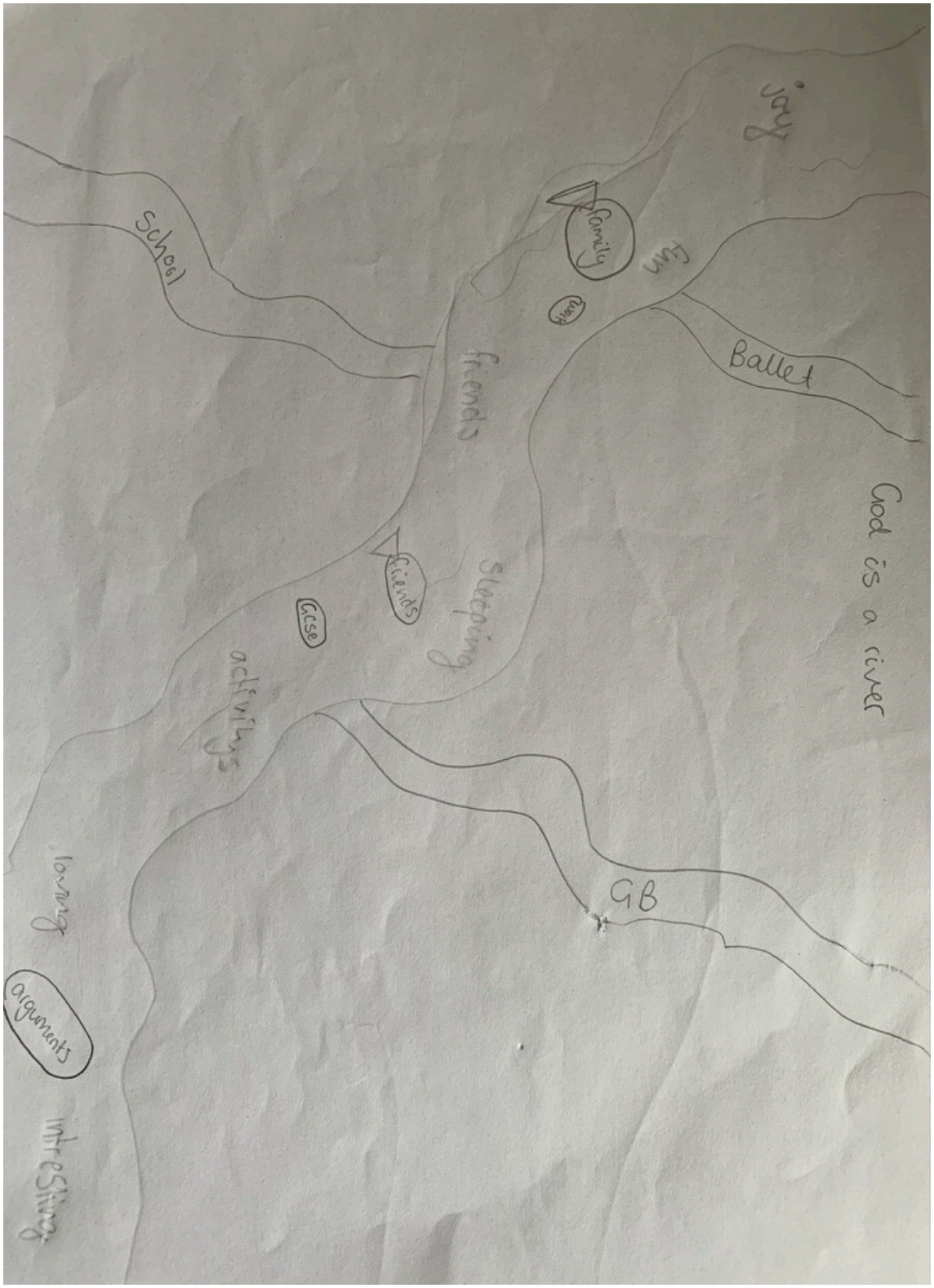
A jar robust enough to ho d th s m ss on –
the research process framed… conta ned.
A jar of too s des gned to co ect the truth I seek,
methods tr ed and tested, adapted and app ed.
A compan onab e presence,
Cur os ty to quest on,
Conversat on that encourages her to speak.
Attent ve sten ng that hears her vo ce
and weaves her story nto the tapestry.

I am Mary the researcher
Mary the one who sees
Mary the one who reports
Mary the one ca ed
Mary the one who s sent.

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 3



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 3



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER THREE – CHOOSING THE WEFT THREADS: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

Red, blue and turquoise threads are selected, varying in thickness according to maturity. Each stands out, whilst collectively they create patterns with light and shade, depth and texture.

The practical theologian began her fieldwork experience with GBM(E&W). It was time to employ the methodological approaches and tools for gathering data. The weekly visits came around quickly and she kept fieldnotes to record her experience and observations. The girls showed some curiosity, but continued to participate unperturbed by this new attendee. The researcher struggled to hear the voice of the girls; so she designed specific exercises to amplify them, to uncover the themes to answer her question about the effectiveness of uniformed group work. This opened up dialogue between the researcher and girls for further reflection.

We now move on from the methodological framework set out in Chapter Two, to present the data gathered in its different forms through the research process. I shall introduce and explain each tool as it was used and summarise how the data it produced has been handled and interpreted. It would be helpful to

consider this, using the image of drilling down, to start with the specific words of the girls and move back from this to the reflections of their leaders. Examples will be shared to help illustrate not just the recording, but how that developed, and also the engagement with the interpretative dynamic of the data. The significance of this chapter is that we can now hear the voice of the girls, so it is right that we begin with what has enabled this.

3.2 Tapestry of Life exercises

These exercises were inspired by the Faith Development Research Project (Fowler et al., 2004), first encountered through the work of practical theologian Joyce Mercer (2008) and, standing on the shoulders of giants, I adapted it for use with the younger age range of girls in my study. I first introduced this activity to GBM(E&W) in June 2018, but was told by the Team Leader, 'not tonight as it's already planned and next week is the walk, then it's Awards so that leaves the final week – that will be a party but there's usually about half an hour before the party starts' (Fieldnotes extract 22.06.18). Unfortunately, the rigidity of the leaders and their planning meant it would not happen until 13 July, when I was due to be at Summer School for the DPT Programme, so I would be unable to deliver it myself, nor see how it was facilitated. Disappointed, I chose to see this removing the artificial context of facilitating as a one-off activity, bearing in mind it had been clearly communicated to the girls I was not a leader nor helper. Greig et al. caution '…you should use your knowledge of child development, and your experiences of working with children, to inform your choices' (2007:184). I was also mindful that it removed a power dynamic that can occur

when doing research with children and young people and their perceived need to provide the responses that 'please' or 'satisfy' the researcher. It is a form of power dynamic that is inevitable between a lesser-known adult and child participant, 'power relationships between researcher and researched that are implicit' (Woodhead and Faulkner, cited in Christensen and James, 2000:11). It could be argued that that dynamic is still present, perhaps more so, with familiar adults, but I think this group was used to being led in activities and not having their responses judged. It did, however, enable me to maintain as neutral a position as possible. It is necessary and practical sometimes; to keep an inquiry progressing the research process has to adapt – it is the reality of empirical research in a real world; 'undertaking research with children requires special tools just as it requires special skills' (Greig et al., 2007:184). Therefore, the exercises were conducted on the final week of the summer term using my pre-prepared directions. The results were passed to me during the summer break, whereby I could begin to look at the responses and begin the interpretative analysis as described in section 2.2.2 above.

3.2.1 The tree

I began scanning the images created by the *n:gage* girls so that I had an electronic set for reference and set to work with a copy, keeping the originals safely stored for back up. I created a simple spread sheet to log the responses under the headings I had linked to the different questions for the initial record of responses.

Figure 4 ToL tree spreadsheet of sample response data

	(Trunk)	Key events (Roots)	Influential people (Branches)	Hobbies/time (Leaves)	God is	Feelings (Clouds)	Thoughts (Clouds)2
	Description of life						
Sample 1	happy	dancing	Emily	texting	hot - God makes us happy	happy	really proud o my love
	crazy	bed	Kain	F - ? ortnite			
	hot	makeup	zzy	seeing			
		phone	Evie	sur ing			
			Jess				
Sample 2	happy	sport	teachers	F - ? ortnite	amazing		makes me eel happy inside
	exciting	makeup	amily	youtube	help ul		
	un	sleeping	riends	dancing	kind		
	joy ul	art	GB	biking			

I found the qualitative data from the ToL exercises overwhelmingly rich, so to help focus that I created further thematic coding tables for each set of responses. Figure 4 shows two sample responses from *n:gage* girls to help to illustrate the organising of the ToL tree data.

From the initial spreadsheet, the collective responses were organised and captured into a thematic coding table, which collated the recurring words and categorised them into common themes. The full coding table can be seen in Appendix 8. The primary codes I used were collective terms that helped sort the words the girls had generated under each of the elements of the image, as a way of gathering the various terms each girl voiced. For example, from the image of the tree trunk, the primary codes were emotions, existential, relational, self-perception and girl talk. The secondary code themes, for example influential people, were categorised as family, friends, teachers and GB. My secondary codes were themes identified by grouping words together from the frequency of their occurrence in the initial spreadsheet, recognising that some had the same meaning although different words were used; for example names of influential people collectively were family, but specifically parents, grandparents or siblings. Breaking the data down in this way helps lift it off the page and makes

it clearer to differentiate between responses. I shall now break down the table into its thematic sections to look at the responses in more detail.

Figure 5 Thematic code extract *i* from ToL tree

Image	Primary Code	Secondary Code	Related codes/text
Trunk - *describing life*	Emotions	Positive	Happy exciting fun joyful nice amazing playful sunny funny good lovely relaxed great cheerful energetic super opportunity filled fun-filled awesome incredible fantastic educational brilliant
		Negative	Not normal confusing tiring scary stressful loud sad clumsy
	Existential (being)		My story competitive full of surprises play creative daring surprising silly messy eco-friendly sporty busy
	Relational		friendly favouritism make friends
	Self perception		Successful intelligent creativity loved strange
	Girl talk		Crazy hot weird cool starfishy fab

The words within the trunk of the tree relate to the way the girls see their lives. These responses reflected both positive and negative emotions, a sense of their being – although often this was more about their doing, relationships, their self-perception and the opaqueness of youth vernacular, which I have called girl talk. From the related text, generally these young girls felt positive about their lives. The existential phrases appear to support this with a sense of adventure and variety of expressions.

Figure 6 Thematic code extract *ii* from ToL tree

Roots - *important life experiences*	Trans t ons		Fam y n hosp ta ; go ng to comp; be ng born; exper enc ng a opoc a; hav ng baby brother; go ng to h gh schoo ; f n sh ng schoo ; gett ng a baby s ster; go ng to schoo ; gett ng out of hosp ta ; hav ng a s ster; n eces & nephews be ng born; mov ng house;
	Re at ona		Fr ends; fr endsh p; fam y; mak ng fr ends; Nancy & Cook e; ov ng my fam y; cous n;
	Persona	Image	Make up; phone; be ng me;
		hea th/we be ng	bed; s eep ng; be ng a ve;
		Respons b ty	pets; gett ng dogs; hav ng a pet; gett ng gu nea p gs; gett ng gu nea p g; my dogs; my cats; ch ckens; R o my dog; rabb t; gett ng a cat
		Ach evement	gett ng through to schoo ta ent show; gett ng through to footba team;
	Act v ty		danc ng; sport; art; scoot ng; footba ; gym; go ng to church; N ntendo sw tch; tent; earn ng to sw m; schoo ;
		Trave	Go ng to Portuga ; go ng to Morfa Bay; 3 day schoo tr p; ho day;
		Events	Leavers' assembly party; parties; my birthday; sports day; schoo d sco; w nn ng sports day;

Figure 6 relates to the significant life experiences the girls identified as the roots to their tree. Looking at these responses, the primary codes that helped classify them included transitional experiences that had impacted them either directly, like moving school, or indirectly through their family, for example a family member hospitalised. Relationships were significant and perhaps reflected the way that, from age seven, children's social networks begin to expand beyond the family through school and clubs, enabling them to choose more diverse friendships. Reflexive references were given the secondary codes of image, health/wellbeing, responsibility and achievement. I separated what I felt related to self-image from health and wellbeing to track this in relation to the Mental Health Foundation (2019) research on poor body image amongst children and young people. These secondary codes highlighted the way an initial significant responsibility was the introduction of pets, but it also took into account the value

of a sense of achievement acquired through being considered acceptable to participate in talent shows and football teams. Differentiating between these responses made the individual responses clearer.

It was through this exercise that I was able to identify limitations to what the data was telling me; predominately, where names had been given, there was no clear way of classifying who those influential people were that the girls listed on the branches of their trees.

Figure 7 Thematic code extract *iii* from ToL tree

Branches - *influential people*	Family	Parents	Mum & Dad Dad Mum Mum & Tad
		Grandparents	Nan Nan & Grandad Both Nans Both Grampies
		Siblings	Brother
			Uncle
	Friends		Named best friends besties
	Teachers	Coaches dance football swimming	Mr Barlow Miss Fletcher
	GB	Leaders	
	Spiritual		Jesus God

I noted this and subsequently used that information to shape the supplementary exercises, which I shall explain in more detail later in section 3.4. In Figure 7 above, it can be seen how much family remains the most influential, along with some specific coaches. No reference was made to the GB leaders here, but reference to Jesus and God may reflect some personal faith. This may easily have been overlooked if there had been differentiation made when breaking down the data. The distinctive codes helped show omissions as well as what was voiced.

Figure 8 Thematic code extract *iv* from ToL tree

Leaves - *how time is spent*	Read ng		Study ng
	Techno ogy	mob es; gam ng; on ne;	Text ng; Fortn te; surf ng web; phone;
		Med a	Youtube; Netf x; watch TV; c nema
	Sport		Danc ng; b k ng; gymnast cs; scooter ng; footba ; trampo ne; rac ng peop e; wa ks w th dog; sw mm ng; feet; dance; netba ; cheer; parad ng;
	Soc a	Re at onsh ps	Mak ng fr ends; pets; fr ends; party; an ma s; c ubs; schoo
	Creat v ty	Art	do art;
		Crafts	act ng;
		Mus c	s ng; cho r; orchestra; v o n essons; keyboard; s ng ng n shows; s ng ng;
		Non product ve	p ay ng; fun;
	Consumer		food; eat; eat ng ch cken; eat ng; shopp ng;
		Trave	
	Sp r tua		ta k ng to God; go to church; GB; God;
		Ex stent a	Gett ng o der; v ng; breath ng; l ove fe;

The final extract (Figure 8) shows how the girls spend their time, which they communicated as the leaves on their trees. This was varied, so there are seven primary codes listed to make clearer the differentiation between the responses when breaking the data down. Technology and creativity are collective primary terms that have several secondary codes that indicate the diversity within each category. It is interesting to see how many express technology, sport and music as key to their weekly activities. It shows how full children's lives can be outside school times and the energy and activity of younger children as they try out new experiences, before settling and committing to specific activities, in which they go on to master and hone skills. This will be something I shall look for as I consider the responses from the older group.

The same methods were used with the more detailed ToL river data collected from the older *n:counta* group, which I will now explain.

3.2.2 The river

The girls' images of the river were scanned for easy electronic reference whilst securely storing the hard copies. In addition to the language used when presenting this exercise, the categories were adjusted to capture something of the challenges faced in early adolescence. This was considering current Good Childhood research by the Children's Society and State of the Nation 2019 Report on Children and Young People's Wellbeing, signalling the struggles and sadness experienced by many and its impact upon their wellbeing.

Figure 9 ToL river spreadsheet of sample response data

	(River)	Tributaries (what feeds into life)	boulders/rocks (challenges)	fish/flowers (influential people)	God is…
Samp e 1	sadness	GB	fam y deaths	teacher	amaz ng because he gave me fr ends, fam y & GB
	joy	schoo	fr end argument	fr ends	
	somet mes just meh	fr ends	soc a med a	fam y	
	s ow	fam y	exams	dad	
	somet mes bor ng		A eve	mum	
	fu of ove		GCSE	my brother	
	somet mes fun			my s ster	
	hard				
	fast				
	happ ness				
	sadness				
	ok				
Samp e 2	exc t ng		doubt	mum	awesome
	t r ng		worr es for future	dad	
	d ff cu t		bu es	God	
	art		dec s on		
	happy		cho ce		
	drama				
	busy				
	mus ca				

Figure 9 shows two sample extracts from the initial spreadsheet headings, capturing the words used by the girls on their images of the river. Qualitative data of this form is rich but needs organising to fully appreciate what is being said. I was keen to keep to the words and phrases used by the girls as much as possible, to ensure it was their voice being heard through this presentation of the data. This did complicate the process due to their youthful turn of phrase, which was open to interpretation, although it could mean the same as another, for example ‘sometimes just meh’ (sample 1, Figure 9) and ‘tiring, difficult’ (sample 2, Figure 9).

In the same way as before, there was a need to clarify some responses as there had been with the younger girls, there was also a sense of wanting/needing to know more to gain perspective on what was being said by the girls; for example, how much of a struggle or challenge were the key boulders they generated? This was another supplementary question to follow up on for clarity. The thematic coding table that organises this initial data into categories under common theme headings can be seen in full in Appendix 9. I shall break it down into the separate thematic sections now to explain the coding system and to begin to examine the data responses.

Figure 10 Thematic code extract *i* from ToL river

Image	Primary Code	Secondary Code	Related codes/text
River - *describing life*	Emot ons	Pos t ve	Joy; somet mes fun; happ ness; exc t ng; happy; enjoyab e; humorous; joyous; thr ng; funny; truthfu ; exh arat ng; good;
		Negat ve	sadness; somet mes bor ng; hard; t r ng; d ff cu t; stup d; SADNESS; stress; sad; stressfu ; worry ng; stressed; exhaust ng; expens ve;
	Ex stent a (be ng)		S ow; fast; ok; busy; s eep ng; act v t es; nterest ng; comp cated; d fferent; d stant; hard work or ded cat on; unusua ; adventure; opportune; short; changeab e; act ve;
	Re at ona		Fu of ove; fr ends; ov ng; fam y; food; fr endsh p; ove; dog over; schoo ; church; mea s; banter; fam y ove; GB; soc a s ng;
	Se f percept on		art; drama; mus ca ; dance; ra ny; s ng ng; shy; dance over; sport; mus c; pr v eged; creat ve; sporty DofE; arty; mus ca y; ots of drama; footba ; ath et cs; TV; DofE karate; mus c/ nstruments; enterta nment;
	G r ta k		Sometimes just 'meh'; crazy; dumb; we rd; w red;

This first extract (Figure 10) captures the words used by the older *n:counta* girls to describe their life. I chose to use the same primary and secondary codes so that comparisons could be made between the different age phases. It was evident that there was more balance between the positive and negative emotions expressed. This time the negative emotions were more specific, with a higher frequency regarding sadness and stress. The references to the existential reflected pace and endurance in comparison to the activity of the younger group. Relational expressions encompassed the extended communities the girls were part of, like church and GB. Self-perception was more detailed, focussing on the specific skills and abilities the girls recognised of themselves. Again, there was girl talk that remained more opaque in its meaning.

Figure 11 Thematic code extract *ii* from ToL river

Tributaries - *what feeds into your life*	Soc a	Fam y	
		Fr ends	Fam y fr ends;
	Sp r tua	GB	God
	Hea th/we be ng		Food; pets;
		Schoo	sports; wr t ng; orchestra;
		Exerc se	trampo n ng; netba ; ba et; danc ng; gym; footba
		Creat v ty	art; hobb es; wr t ng;

The tributaries in Figure 11 relate to the roots section of the *n:gage* ToL tree. It captures key influences upon the lives of the girls. The primary codes are within the younger girls' table, but I found the older group's data was more succinct, capturing what was social, spiritual and health related. This shaped the secondary codes chosen and, I think, reflected the maturing life of the girls 10–14-years old, as well as their developed use of language. An example of this is the appearance of family friends within the social category, God within the spiritual and the specific sports listed under exercise, which shows the focus and commitment required to develop and perform at club standard.

Figure 12 Thematic code extract *iii* from ToL river

Boulders - *obstacles/challenges encountered*	Re at onsh ps	Fam y	Deaths; fam y oss; m ss ng fam y; mov ng house;
		Fr ends	Fr end argument; bu es; fake fr ends; arguments; boys; fr endsh p ssues; m ss ng fr ends; bu y ng; ar; es;
	Schoo		Exams; A eve s; GCSE; Eng sh; games; maths; tests; hard homework; stress w th schoo work; homework; schoo work; opt ons; schoo stress; earn ng;
	Se f percept on		Doubt; worr es for the future; stress; compet t on; ug y; fat; stup d; nerdy; fake tan; sad; truth;
	L fe ssues		Soc a med a; dec s on; cho ce; work; prob ems; money; dr v ng far away; sport c ub; stressfu ; worry ng about future; wor d war;

The boulders in the river were an exclusive section for the older girls. I wanted to hear from them about what they identified as challenges they have had to negotiate. The primary codes generally covered all aspects of life for this age phase, relationship within the family and with friends, school, self-perception and life issues. The family aspect of relationship-challenges links to the transitional events identified by the younger girls on the roots of their tree. Friendship struggles articulate something of the anxiety experienced that impacts trust and ultimately happiness amongst young people. The pressure of schoolwork, expectations and tests featured high and correlates with research about the mental health of young people (Children's Society, 2017; Mind, 2018). 'Life issue' was a more generic term chosen to cover more general worries encountered throughout life; for example, making decisions and managing money.

Figure 13 Thematic code extract *iv* from ToL river

Fish/flowers - *people who support & influence*	Fam y	Parents	Dad; Mum; mummy & daddy;
		Grandparents	Nanny; Grampy; Nan;
		S b ngs	My brother; my s ster;
	Fr ends		Named;
	Teachers		M ss Mart n; Mr H ;
	GB		
	Sp r tua		God; pets; dog;

Finally, Figure 13 identifies the influential voices that encourage and support the girls in their lives. Some of the questions are similar in both ToL tree and river exercises; some responses can be classified in the same way, for example, influential people continue with family, teachers, GB and with the additional influence of peers, whereby individual friends are named.

Generally, the responses on the ToL river showed a shift from those on the ToL tree that, explained simply, show how life appears to have become less carefree and fun as the girls have matured. I consider this a significant insight to the data between the two age groups. It reflects how not only has the social world of the girls broadened, but has become more significantly influential upon their sense of happiness. Their leisure time and experiences have narrowed as they have begun to specialise. This distinction was helpfully sharpened when word clouds were produced to give a visual map of the words used in the different areas in both exercises and the frequency of these words being represented in their size in relation to the other words.

3.3 Word clouds

Infographics have become more commonly accepted ways of communicating detailed information using graphic methods. As an educator, I have used the method of mind-mapping with children in the learning environment to both help organise what they know about a subject and as a way of recalling important information for revision purposes. In his book *Mind Maps for Kids*, Tony Buzan asserts that brains do not just think in straight lines, 'your brain thinks in colours and pictures' (2003:7). I am aware that I am a visual learner; colour and image help me to connect and engage. I am more likely to recall with detail what I have seen than what I have heard, which is why I take notes when in meetings or on training. The richness of the words the girls had supplied through their completion of the ToL exercises needed to be visually represented and word clouds were an efficient and effective way of doing this. Essentially, I took the

common questions for both groups and input the words generated by the girls using a software app that organised the words as a cloud, making the words used most frequently grow according to their usage, consequently standing out from the others.

Figure 14 Comparative word clouds describing life for girls 7–14 years

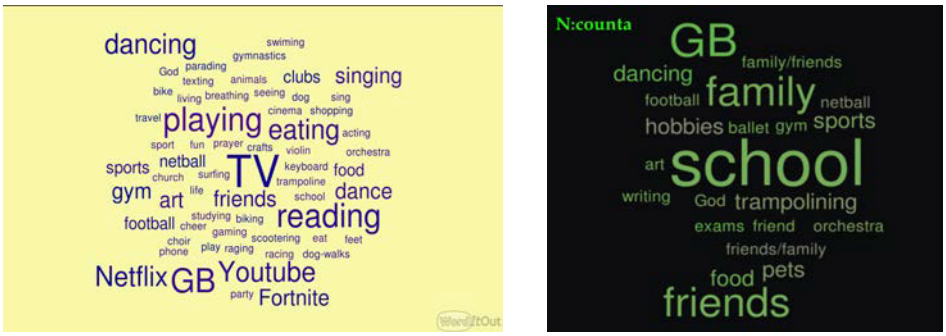
(Left n:gage tree, right is n:counta river and below is from the GB leaders)

As I look at the two word clouds by the girls, I notice that the bold ‘happy’ in the centre of the first cloud by the younger group is no longer the most prominent in the second, where ‘hard’ and ‘boring’ are of comparative size to ‘happy’ and ‘exciting’. There is a positivity about the younger girls’ perspective that, by the time they’re in the older group, is tempered with realism from life experience,

showing how much more complex and mixed it can be. Some of the terms used reflect a lot of emotion, for example ‘changeable’, ‘complicated’, ‘exhausting’ and ‘difficult’. The third word cloud presents the responses from their leaders and helpers to the question: what words do you think characterise the lives of the girls in your group? This affirms that the significant adults around them have some understanding of how life is for the girls at this stage. More will be said about the reflections of the adult team in section 3.5 below.

Figure 15 Comparative word clouds showing how girls spend their time

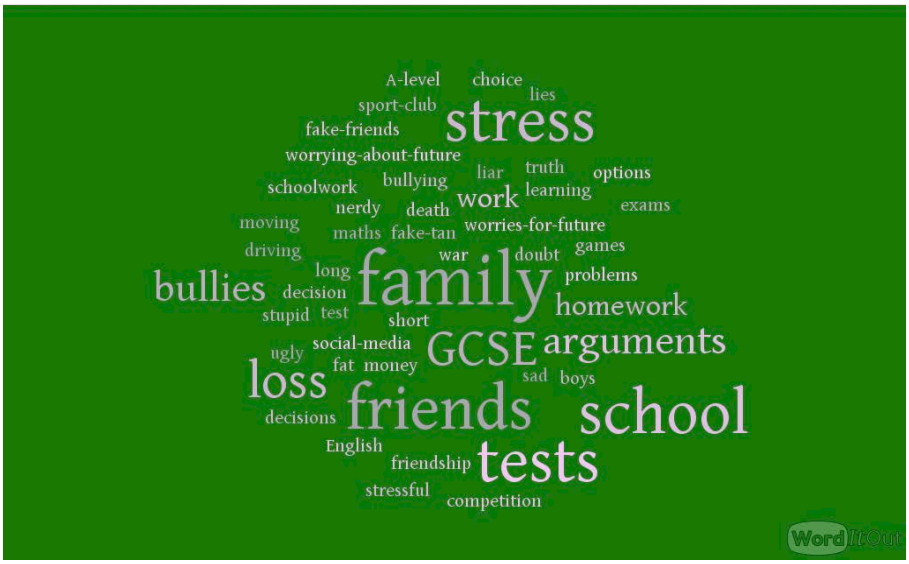
(Left, n:gage tree and right n:counta river)



It is noticeable that the variety of responses offered by the older girls in response to how they spend their time is significantly less than those offered by the younger girls. On reflection, this may show something of the way interests become more specific and young people choose to commit to a particular sport, for example, which means they cannot maintain the other groups they may have previously attended. The second word cloud, by the *n:counta* girls, shows how much school has become a focus and exams also feature. Interestingly, there is no specific mention of technology by these older girls; is that because the novelty of gaming, YouTube, Fortnite and Netflix has normalised or because they have less time for it?

Unique to the *n:counta* group was their identification of challenges and struggles, which can be seen in Figure 16. Adolescence is a prime time for the formation of identity and concerns about self-worth, appearance, meeting expectations of those physically and virtually around you, as well as the search for truth – ironic when 'fake' profiles and statuses are prevalent. Again, their leaders were asked what they perceived as the challenges/issues the girls face. The responses went into more depth, but links were made to family, school/peers, self-image/body confidence, social media and societal expectations that relate to academic achievement, appearance and sexuality.

Figure 16 Challenges and struggles experienced by n:counta girls



Whilst the word cloud reflected the responses from the girls and highlighted the most frequently mentioned struggle, it did not indicate whether the girls saw these as big issues or not. This was another supplementary question requiring further clarification to establish the intensity of these issues. The challenge facing me was how best to ask these questions, bearing in mind how difficult it had been to negotiate an opportunity previously and how limited that time had

been. The data so far only told so much; it was crucial to clarify my understanding of that and to find a way to drill down these areas with the girls.

3.4 Pop-up boards

To keep with the principle of hearing the girls' voice, through discussions with my supervisor, the idea of a 'pop-up' board with a key question each week was decided as a way forward. This would not require any additional time, as it could be accessible to the girls as they gathered after registration and before opening worship. A portable trifold presentation board was purchased. This enabled the question to be presented in the centre and on the left hand side the younger *n:gage* members could place their responses and on the right hand side the older *n:counta* responses. The process was designed in a way that accommodated the leaders' plans and timings, but still enabled action. Planning in this way, I was trying to pre-empt any questions or resistance and assert the need for this to follow on from the ToL exercise with as little disruption as possible. The activities were designed to pick up on the questions that supplemented the data already gathered, to retain some creativity and to be self-managing.

Figure 17 Pop-up board: heroes and heroines

A. Who are the peop e that nsp re you most?
Th nk about the qua t es you see and adm re n them.
Take a o y st ck and on one s de wr te the name of your hero or hero ne.
On the other s de, wr te what t s you adm re about them.

The lolly sticks on the left-hand side of each photograph show the range of people that have inspired the girls. These include family and friends, teachers, and famous historical figures like Rosa Parks, Jesus, Emmeline Pankhurst and Walt Disney. The sticks on the right-hand side of the photos say the qualities that are admired, which include kindness, bravery, care and thoughtfulness. This information was collated into the table seen in Figure 18.

This helped to keep associated qualities with the inspirational person. It gave a clearer sense of the number of responses and the frequency known-relatives were highlighted. It helped to clarify the identity of inspirational figures, many of whom lead in their sport or are positive female leaders.

Figure 18 Pop-up board: influential people and characteristics

	N gage (x26)	Personal qualities	Skills/actions	N counta (x9)	Personal qualities	Skills/actions	N spire (x9)	
Parents	2	Always happy thought ul kind help ul caring					1	Amazing
Mum	5	Kind (x4) amazing encouraging help ul brave loving		1	Kind	ries new things		
Dad	1	kind help ul	eaching me to play ootball	1	Kind strong			
Foster carers	1		hey took me in					
Siblings	1 sister	Fun beauti ul	Friendship				1	Wise & courageous
Wider family	1 cousin	Funny	Actor				1	Mamga did so much or charity
Friends	6	Kind (x2) help ul nice	nspires me to be who am a great riend	3	strong (x2) brave (x2) adopted	ries hard at everything she does	2	she works so hard
Teachers	1		eaches me things				1	Good at maths
Swimming coach							1	rained me to do well
Athletics coach							1	She knows can do well
Jesus	3	Amazing peace ul sharing	Died or us believes in everyone					
Tom Yeats (gymnast)				1		Skil ul gymnast		
Leah Wilkinson				1		Captains Welsh hockey team		
Shona McCallin				1	Never gives up despite holdbacks			
Emeline Pankhurst	1	Help ul polite	Won votes or women					
Rosa Parks	2	Bravery	Fought or Black people's rights					
Malala				1	Brave sel less	Believed in equal rights		
Martin Luther King				1	Brave sel less	Believed in equal rights	1	Bravery determination love
Sam L (Caught Me)	1		Pushed me o a high place					
Book - Nikki Maxwell (Dork Diaries)	1	Witty & darkish						
Walt Disney							1	Bravery determination love

The first thing that struck me with this response was how the younger girls were inspired by those closer to home – family members, friends and Jesus. This of course reflects their social world and developmental stage, whereby they are still very dependent on parents, whilst the older girls are choosing friends,

having more autonomy, so the peer group replaces the influence the family had in their earlier years. This broadly correlates with the data from the ToL exercise.

Of the family members, mums were highlighted in their own right – does this reflect models of family or is this perhaps synonymous with the mother-daughter relationship?

Interestingly, little acknowledgement was given to teachers and yet children spend the majority of their time in school. The older girls were able to see the benefits and respect the support they received from specialists coaching them in their preferred/chosen interests. Does this reflect the importance of choice and the value of interest-focussed groups, as opposed to mandatory education? It is the skills that they acknowledge and appreciate, rather than highlighting specific personal qualities. Those accomplished sports figures are leading the way in their disciplines and stand out for particular reasons, as well as having local connections.

The majority of historical and contemporary figures commended are female. The suffragettes, the black rights movement and equality would be themes addressed in school and in the media. Malala would be relatable as a young woman and may have been brought to their attention in GB – often gender-related exercises are linked to public profiles, so that positive contemporary and historical role models to be highlighted. There are only a couple of characters

from books and films that have been highlighted – considering how much concern is often raised over what children and young people watch/read, this implies that it may not have as much significant influence on them and their behaviour as adults think. As this activity took place outside of the formal programme, I believe the data generated was organic, rather than with any sense of perceived adult expectations. It would be naive to rule out that possibility completely. I did notice that there was no mention of the relationship with the GB leaders from either group, which surprised me as I saw a positive rapport, especially between the older *n:counta* girls and their leaders.

Bravery, kindness and helpfulness stand out as key qualities. Is this because the terms hero/heroine imply somebody extraordinary? Is it sufficient to be outstanding in your discipline/role to be inspirational? How much does relationship – consistency, presence, faithfulness, positivity, encouragement, empowerment and belief in the 'other' inspire? I wonder whether the girls look for the same qualities when they seek friendship? This led me to ask the girls to state their three most important qualities in a friend.

Figure 19 Pop-up board: qualities of a friend

B. What are the 3 most important qualities you look for in a friend? Take a star post it note. Write your top 3 qualities of a good friend. Stick it under the name of your group.

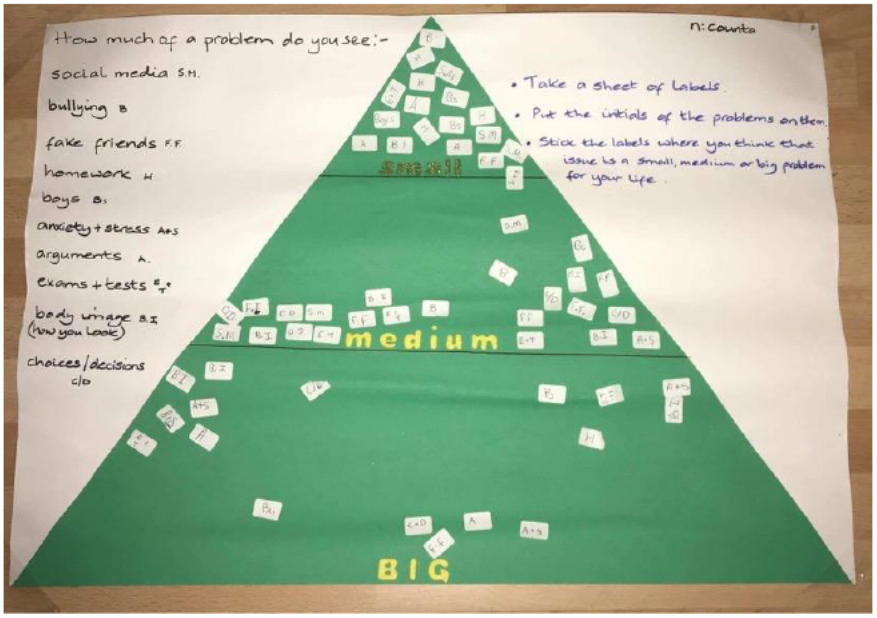
N:gage (x6 responses)	N:counta (x7 responses)
Kind x2	Kind x4
helpful x2	There when you need them x3
loving	
fair	
Cares for you x4	Caring x2
Interesting	
Funny/laughs a lot x3	Funny x6
Truthful	Honest/trust x3
Generous	
	Loyal x4

The girls weren't given specific time to engage with this question which is reflected in the lower number of responses – they were left to do this as they were gathering at the start of the evening (Figure 19 above). This question was posed to unpick some of the underlying struggles in friendship that the *n:counta* girls had identified as boulders in their river. By inviting them to name the qualities they value in a friend, I was hoping it might help to stimulate discussion around what may be missing in those struggling friendships. However, whilst there was no opportunity to develop that discussion, it should be noted that this was distinct from the heroes and heroines question in that it was more about connection and trust than inspirational qualities, although some friends may inspire. It is interesting to compare the words used by the different age groups. Both age groups valued humour/laughter and being funny as key. The younger *n:gage* girls choice of caring and kindness as key qualities could be interpreted as focussing on the type of individual they are attracted to as a friend, in contrast to the older *n:counta* group identifying loyalty, honesty, kindness and helpful/having your back qualities that reflect something of the way a friend relates to them. It also may reflect something of what they experience in their wider relationships, especially with significant adults who feel responsible for them. The *n:gage* responses correlate with their comments relating to the friends who inspire them being kind, helpful and nice (heroes and heroines data). Conversely, when considering the qualities of the friends that inspire them, the *n:counta* girls cited strength, bravery and a shared experience (adoption) as the most important.

Arguably this indicates the social developmental stages of the groups, whereby the younger ones are growing their social network as their social world extends beyond the home and immediate family. The older girls demonstrate how adolescent friendships have more influence upon them and the way the peer group begins to morph into the family the teens have chosen for themselves, as their sense of independence and autonomy has developed. Asking for the nature of these qualities helps to bring some understanding to the names of friends listed in the ToL exercise (‘branches’ of the tree and the ‘fish’ in the river naming those who support/influence them). To clarify something of the intensity of the issues the girls generated in their responses, I gave them the opportunity to classify which of them they considered as small, medium or big problems (see Figure 20).

Figure 20 Pop-up board: sizing up the problem

C. S z ng up the prob em of the 10 most frequent y ment oned cha enges (bou ders n the r ver of fe) the g r s face, part c pants were g ven a set of abe s w th the n t a s as coded on the record sheet and then to p ace them on the pyram d that was sect oned and abe ed sma , med um and b g n accordance w th how much of a prob em they perce ved the ssue to be for them.



	SMALL	MEDIUM	BIG
Social Media	3	3	0
Bullying	1	2	4
Homework	4	1	1
Fake Friends	1	6	0
Boys	3	2	1
Anxiety & Stress	0	2	4
Arguments	3	0	3
Exams & Tests	2	4	2
Body Image (how you look)	1	4	3
Choices/Decisions	0	4	3

In my fieldnotes I acknowledge that this activity did not take the girls long and gave me opportunity to ask them if they were surprised by anything. The following extract captures an exchange between myself and the girls at the table.

Figure 21 Fieldnote Extract 26.10.18

I don't get why boys would be a problem.

That's because you've got a boyfriend.

Somet mes g r s are d stracted or embarrassed by boys be ng about and fee they have to act d fferent y because of th s.

Shrug.

I grew up w th 3 brothers so I've always found it quite easy to get along with lads, sometimes I've found it easier than getting on with girls but that's probably because I've grown up with them being around so I'm used to them but that's not everyone's experience.

I ve w th my aunt and she has 5 sons and there's my Dad!

So if you don't feel they're an issue for you not even a sma one don't put that label on. And that goes for all of you if there's something that you don't see as a problem give me back those abe s.

At the end two g r s had g ven back ha f the r abe s. The g r speak ng above had returned SM, H, Bs, A, ET & C/D. The other g r had returned SM, B, H & A say ng very matter of fact y I had Instagram but I don't anymore so SM isn't a problem. Homework s easy. Arguments don't bother me. I'm not bullied. (F e dnote Extract 26.10.18).

This extract illustrates how one person's experience can help or hinder how life situations are navigated. Some can be more influenced by the unknown or by the expectations of others, whilst others can recognise they may have already found their way through a situation and are no longer fearful of it. Sometimes by talking about these issues in this way can help bring perspective and, similarly, can empower others to confront a situation they had previously been wary of. This may appear to tie in with some of the hope of the group leaders for these girls to have confidence in themselves, although conversely anxiety, which was still defined as a big problem for the girls, could be an umbrella emotion encompassing a raft of other emotions.

3.5 Leaders' reflections

At a planning meeting, I invited the leaders to consider some questions that would help me to understand their perception of the girls. I wanted to see how

relevant and aligned their responses were alongside the girls' own perceptions. They were given four questions and invited to email their responses directly to me. The questions were:

1. What do you think characterises the lives of the girls in your group?
2. What do you perceive as the challenges/issues they face?
3. What do you think the girls have learned about God?
4. What are your hopes for the girls?

I have already explained the first two questions and placed them alongside the girls' own responses as a means of triangulation in sections 3.3 and 3.4 above. Responses to question 3 recognise that this is mostly unknown in real terms, but is set within the aspiration of presenting a living God that 'loves and accepts them for who they are' and that through GB they 'learned a little more than they would have if they didn't come to GB'. It is evident from a number of replies that the leaders see themselves as embodying God's love and acceptance to these girls. These adults have hopes for the girls that tie in with the vision of GBM(E&W) to seek, serve and follow Jesus (see section 2.2.2 above). It is articulated as 'to be a follower of Jesus. To know that God loves them' and being 'brave and courageous young women who are not afraid to tell others about Jesus'. There is also the hope for them to develop the female prowess needed to 'fulfil their potential, achieve their own hopes and dreams' and 'to grow into strong confident fulfilled women…'.

3.6 Summary conclusion

This chapter has given voice to the data gathered from the girls through the ToL exercises and the subsequent pop-up board activities. I have managed to retain the words of the girls to be true to their voice and to remain as neutral as possible in my role. Whilst I am content with holding that position, I am aware that others may struggle with the ambiguity and want to apply meaning that may not be what the girls intended. The data from the exercises gave insight to the girls' perspective of their lives, how their time is spent, the influential voices speaking into their lives and significant events or challenges shaping them. To give further clarification to this, supplementary activities were used to address specific details for better understanding and were presented to the girls on a pop-up board for their participation. The data produces a limited narrative interpretation of human action and organisational practice (see section 2.2.2). It has moved from the words of the girls to the reflections and aspirations of their leaders with relevant links to the vision of GBM(E&W). To complement this further, we turn to my field note observations and reflections on the research process, including its impact upon me as a practical theologian.

FACES IN THE MIRROR

I see you ook ng at me,
watching on…
what are you th nk ng?
What do you make of th s, week n and week out?
Why are you here and then sometimes you're not?
How does this group and what we're doing matter?
What do you see when you at me?
Who am I to you?

I see you. I see each of you and
I see a of you together.
I'm waiting to hear your story, to hear your voice
to know what you're thinking.
I'm watching for your reactions…
the way you enter nto th ngs and
the way sometimes you opt out…
those that you gather around you and
those who stand a one.

Are you one of the eaders?
You don't wear the uniform.
Are you a he per? You support us but
the other he pers organ se games and crafts,
they make and serve refreshments,
they te us to qu eten down and sten.
They ask us to put away our phones.
They ask us to about our week and we may
see them n Church or at the shops.
But you…you watch…you write…you wait for us
to speak to you…you're here, another adult and
yet you seem apart from the others.
What's this all about for you?

I wonder why you're here each week…
what does th s group mean to you
and how does t f t n w th your fe?
How many of these g r s go to your schoo ?
Wh ch of you be ong to th s Church and are here at other t mes?
What's it like being your age? I can't remember.
How do you spend your time when you're not here?
Who supports you and has your back?
What's gone on in your life to shape you to be who I see today?
Do you have hopes for the future?

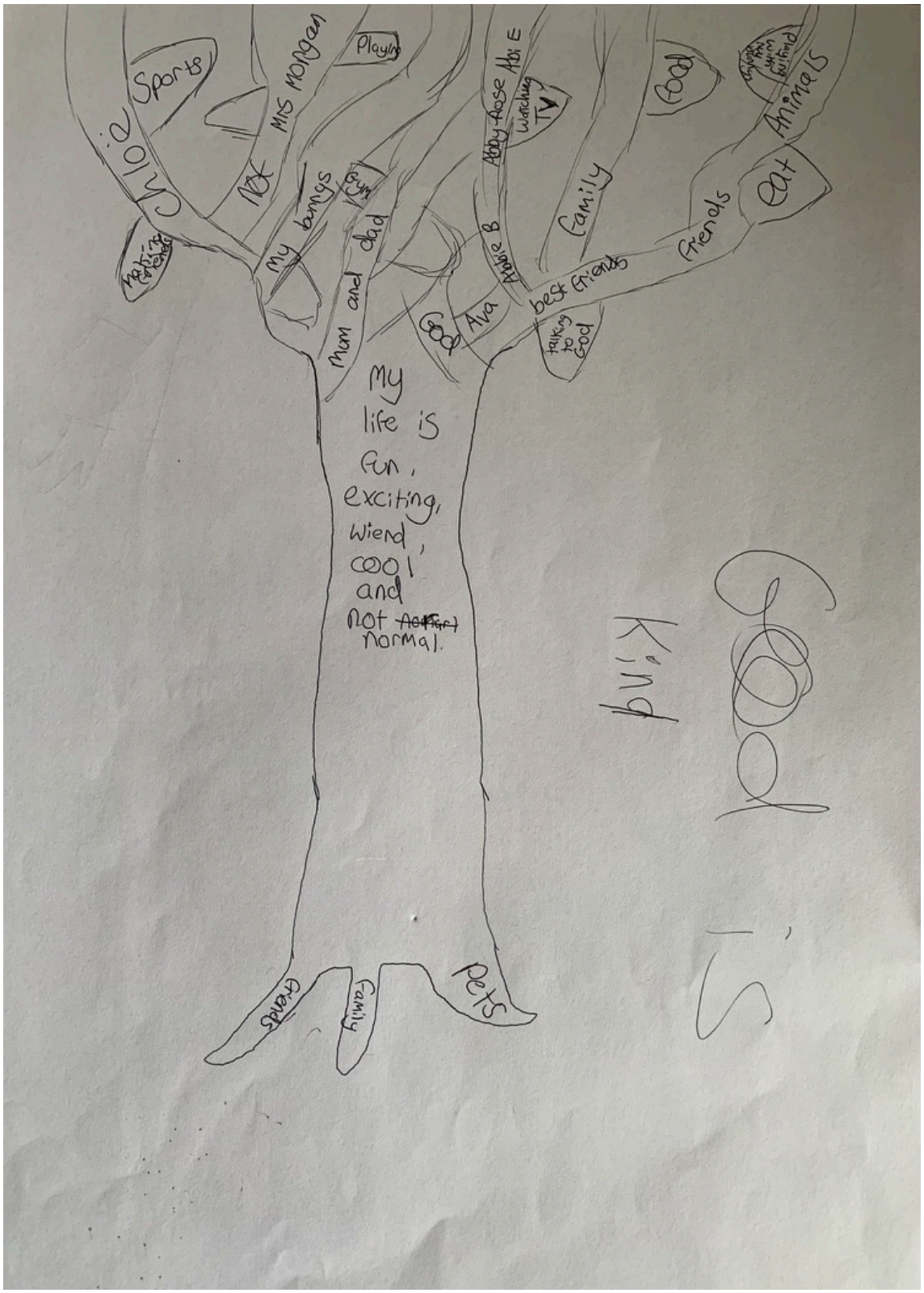
I wonder why you're here this week,
what does th s group mean to you?
Is this your work that you're doing or
are you part of th s Church?
What s your re at onsh p w th our
eaders and he pers?
What do you wr te? Where does t go?
Are we do ng what you need us to do?
How ong w th s be go ng on?
And then what?

I see you looking, watching on…what are you thinking?

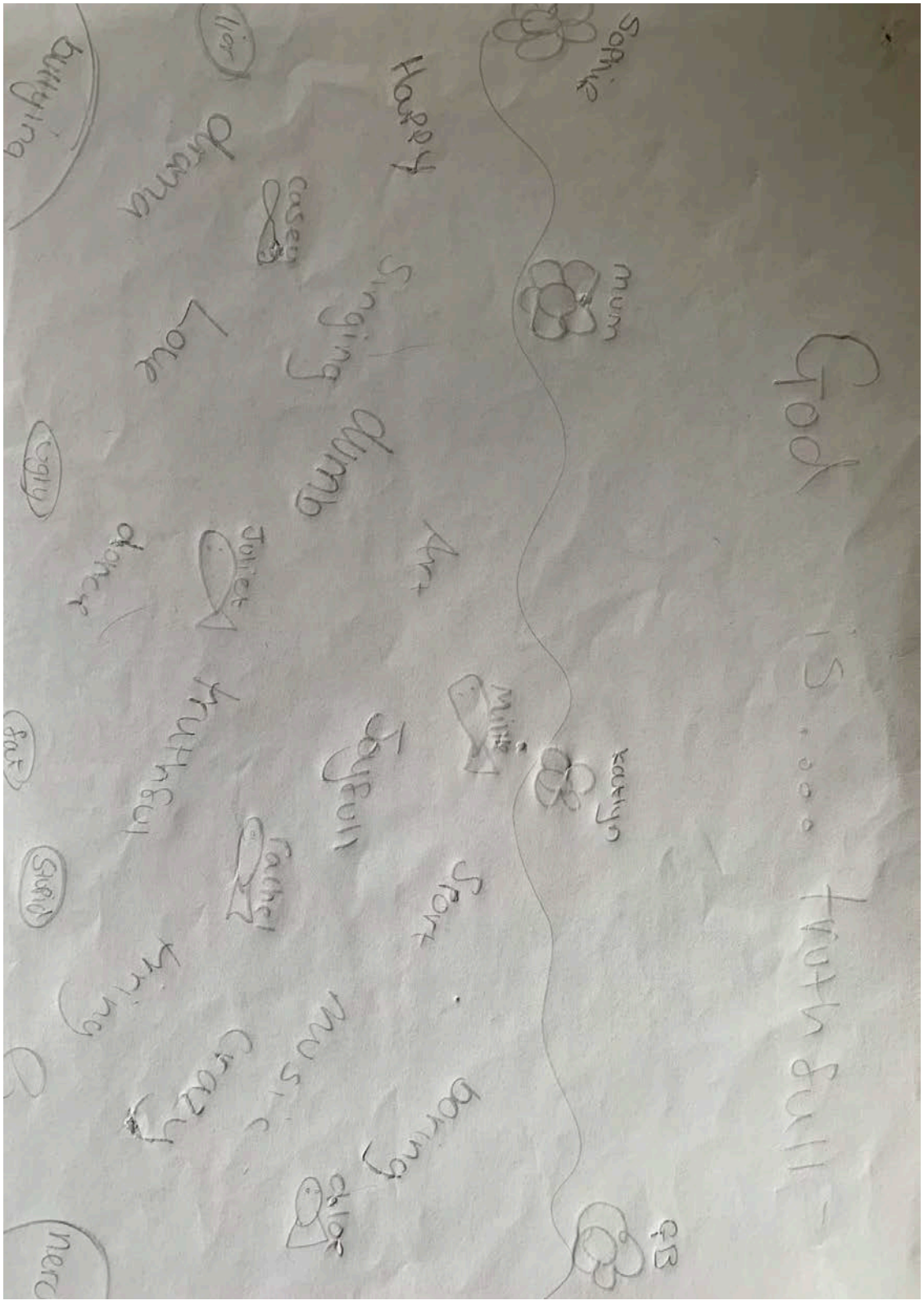
I am Mary the researcher
Mary the one who sees
Mary the one who reports
Mary the one ca ed
Mary the one who s sent.

We are Mary the d sc p e
Mary the one who fo ows
Mary the one who stens
Mary the one who attends
Mary the one through whom God speaks.

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 4



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 4



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER FOUR – WEAVING THE THREADS: FINDINGS AND A REFLEXIVE REVIEW

4.1 Introduction

Over… under... the rhythmic weaving of the weft as it travels across the warp and returns under… over back again. The colours and shades blend as the loom bursts into life and patterns begin to emerge.

The praxis of the practical theologian is to reflect at multiple levels. Reflecting-before-action was a way of preparing herself and identifying focus before entering fieldwork and the subsequent weekly sessions. Reflection-in-action was her intuitive response to the unfolding situation and its impact upon those involved, including herself. Reflection-on-action was enabled by the writing up of fieldnotes, by which she re-lived the session observed as she wrote up her record. This writing up also gave opportunity for reflection-on-inaction, as it highlighted what did not happen, missed opportunities or responses.

I have presented what the girls had to say in response to my questions which is why I am now going to offer some contextual reflections from fieldnotes kept and my reflexive review of the research process. This chapter will outline contribution of fieldnotes made in order to understand the context and the weekly meetings by seeking correlation between them and the hallmarks of GBM(E&W), as outlined in section 1.3 above. It will reflect on the research process as a participant-observer, building on from the description of this in

sections 2.2.3 and 2.5 above. It concludes with a personal reflection drawing on my journal extracts made during this time.

4.2. Fieldnotes

In Chapter Two (section 2.4.1 above) I explained fieldnotes as an integral contribution to the active process of meaning-making for researchers. Emerson et al. acknowledge two key purposes for fieldnotes, 'to get down all activity as quickly as possible and to write as fully and vividly as possible those scenes she [the researcher] intuits as most vital to her research project' (1995:85). I had a notebook in which I would jot down my observations during and immediately after the weekly session before the drive home. These informal jottings would then be typed up within a day or two, to ensure detailed records of the experience, observations and reflections were kept up to date. The timeliness of writing up notes is crucial, 'notes composed several days after observation tend to be summarized and stripped of rich nuanced detail' (Emerson et al., 1995:40).

Being new to GBM(E&W) meant the flow of the weekly meetings was a new experience for me, but it helpfully gave a structure to my record-keeping as I could identify a clear pattern of **gathering** the girls as they arrived, **welcome** (including a 'thought for the evening' for the 5-17-year-olds), **group work** (games, activities, badge work and news time in age-appropriate groups) and **prayers** (including birthday tributes and 'best girl' awards) to close the evening all together again.

In addition to this chronological structuring of my notes (see Appendix 10), I identified some colour-coded thematic areas to home in on for a number of reasons, but essentially to give clarity and to help build connections. These links were highlighted by the colour making them stand out. I wanted to see in action the GBM(E&W) hallmarks of being relevant, relational and responsive as highlighted in Section 1.3 above and on the Girls' Brigade website:

> Each GB Team is united in vision and purpose. Joining in with God's mission of restoration to see lives transformed and enriched as generations seek, serve and follow Jesus. All share three hallmarks that we believe follow Jesus' example and restore life into God's image!

This would help me to understand the uniformed group better, to attend to how its curriculum was shaped by these hallmarks and to consider the impact of the national vision and purpose on the local group context. 'A theme that allows the researcher to make linkages to other issues noted in the data is particularly promising' (Emerson et al., 1995:158). In this case I introduced the stated set of categories and looked for them in the data, testing whether they were evident in practice while also looking for other connecting themes across the data.

4.2.1 Themes and hallmarks

From my research question I took the umbrella theme of girlhood to pick up on the world of girls, the issues they encounter, interests they have and any life experiences they share. This linked with the hallmarks described in Chapter One (section 1.3 above) of being relational (looking at the relationship between the girls across the ages, as well as their relationship with the leaders and amongst the leaders and helpers) and being relevant to the girls' culture and

context. Group work methodology was another theme and focussed on the management and organisation of the groups, the group dynamics, small group work activities and the roles or behaviours observed within them to assess effectiveness as a single-sex organisation. The theme of discipleship, by which I mean signposting to God and encouraging Christlikeness in self (behaviour and understanding), was used to identify any approaches used to disciple the girls and noted any insight into the girls' perception of God, their spirituality and faith. It may be argued that discipleship is a form of group work with a specific purpose, but in this study I was keen to make it distinct to highlight spiritual evidence within this Christian faith-based uniformed group. This linked back to the GBM(E&W), hallmarks of being relational within the group and being responsive to transformation. Finally, as a result of my fieldwork, I included the theme of leadership role models to identify the impact the adults (leaders and helpers) had upon the girls, as well as their relationships and their ways of working as a team.

Figure 22 Fieldnote Extract 18.05.18

> *The Leaders stand chatting, catching up on their news - one returning to full time work after 7 years home with children. I discover that two of them are cousins…* F e dnote extract 18.05.18.

Early on in my fieldwork (February 2018) I had become aware of their familial relationships and friendships. Their shared experience of GBM(E&W), some having grown up in the same units.

Figure 23 Fieldnote Extract 04.02.18

> *Standing alongside two young leaders I overheard one say to the other, "I'm looking at them and seeing us." They looked at each other and smile. -*
> F e dnote extract 04.02.18.

Essentially these categories were a useful starting place and, as they were helpful, I retained them as I sought to hear the voice of the girls.

I mapped my early fieldwork experiences against the hallmarks of the Girls' Brigade to highlight how they could be seen in action.

Figure 24 Mapping GB hallmarks to fieldwork experience

	Relational *Community, people, others*	**Relevant** *Culture & context*	**Responsive** *Meeting needs, transformative love*
19 January n gage	Preparation for Enrolment Service with church next month Working together Birthdays News Bake sale plans	Theme – all about types of love – things/possessions family & friends romance sacrificial Music – Beatles Flintstones	Free prayer – adult initiated child/YP led Awards star girls in each group – Fudge (toy) shield chocolate
4 Feb	GB relationship with ministry team Church welcome to the families Girls leading the service GB leaders remember their own enrolment service (many having been in that group together)	Clear explanation of the 4 types of love Appropriate use of participation for the different ages Promises made	Rededication of the relationship between church and group Recommission of leaders & helpers Promises appropriate to age/stage
9 Feb n counta	Cooking together in kitchen Team game Cards for others	Linked to Shrove Tuesday & Valentine Day Shops game - girls generate high street shop names	Time for talk activity and exercise

Figure 24 (above) outlines an early orientation exercise into GBM(E&W). This was an initial piece of IPA, outlined in section 2.2.2 above, reflecting how the hallmarks may look in practice for my own understanding and as a way of building connection between the espoused values and the operant practice of GBM(E&W).

Over time, as the meetings became more familiar, I learnt to include more of my reactions and questions from my jottings into the typed fieldnotes, developing more reflective records. I colour-coded the notes as I typed to remind me where my observations connected with these themes in the data. This helped to increase my own familiarity with the themes, as well as directing my focus to my key question of the extent single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhances their growth and development.

4.3 Participant-observer

The following series of encounters will help to illustrate the build-up of my sense of awkwardness as participant-observer. The words in italics are my reflections on the situation at the time. These show something of the questioning I was doing as I reflected in action, as well as giving a sense of my feelings and frustrations in situ.

Observing the younger *n:gage* group play icebreaker games in the sports hall, I was interested by the use of language. The game of Splatt gave insight into the key trends the girls enjoyed and their ability to communicate associative words for their chosen word to be guessed. It struck me how some games are timeless whilst others may continue over time but fail to reflect societal changes. The final game on this evening illustrated this, with its portrayal of the family.

Figure 25 Fieldnote Extract 09.03.18

I went w th n:gage nto the sports ha for ha f an hour of games.
Started w th scarecrow – run around unt caught then stand ke a scarecrow unt someone e se re eases you back nto the game.
Sp att – key word un corn so c ues g ven were un on jack, pants, un on, un corn.
Mums, dads and bab es – *[can't remember rules need to check but seemed a bit stereotypical at the time]*.
(F e dnote extract 09.03.18).

I am used to being in youth-work contexts, but normally as one of the leaders running the games and activities. I found it uncomfortable to be observing from the side lines in the way I was as neither leader, helper nor as one of the group.

4.3.1 Communication

I was often conscious of my internal dialogue and self-doubt whilst active in fieldwork. Snatches of conversation like the one that follows left me feeling my communication was not being shared with the wider team.

Figure 26 Fieldnote Extract 09.03.18a

As Leader A and Helper A led the games, Leader J asked me if I'd started speaking with the girls yet? I explained that I'd be doing more listening than speaking and had been focussing on mapping the landscape as I got to know the team, girls and the way the brigade operates. I was reminded of the expectations of participants and the need to consider what they want to see? Do I need to start formal conversations yet? I don't feel I have sufficient to prime the conversations. I'm conscious that this has taken longer to get into because of the groups happening simultaneously rather than being able to observe two groups on one longer evening. I do need to think about how I will transition from orientation stage to focus group conversations for myself and the participants.
(F e dnote extract 09.03.18).

Effective communication is a two-way exchange and I soon became aware that I was not being kept in the loop. I know the challenges of running a team of volunteers and keeping those people up to date with developments and changes. That is why I have always valued the team regularly gathering together, to communicate face to face and to follow that up with an email

minuting the key points for reference and especially for those who had not been able to attend.

Figure 27 Fieldnote Extract 09.03.18b

> As I left Leader E said "you should be coming too it would be good for your research." *I agreed but since I had not been told about it or invited along I couldn't go. I had enquired about it a couple of weeks ago but TLR hadn't suggested I could or should join them. Perhaps I should have been more direct and ask outright? It again leaves me wondering what is open to me and what isn't and why? It's difficult dancing on the edge sometimes feeling included, informed and welcome and at other times knowing I'm the outsider, having to prise the information (how do I know what I don't know and how do I know what I need to know?) and left unsure of whether my involvement is wanted.*
> *(Fieldnote extract 09.03.18)*

I had not been invited to attend a team meeting nor had I been given a programme or calendar of events. It was disappointing to learn of the training weekend for leaders and helpers, which would not only have served to give me more understanding about the role of the adults within the Brigade, but would also have helped build relationships and perhaps improve communications.

My observation of the management and communication within the unit and between leaders developed. Over time, I could see the way that, sometimes, managing all the groups at the same time can fracture the focus when messages are communicated during group activities. This could be interpreted devaluing the work in progress.

Figure 28 Fieldnote Extract 22.06.18

> Last week ooked at d sab ty – what examp es of th s can you th nk of? Blindness, deafness, can't walk – cerebra pa sy, d abet c, ep ept c. LA ta ked of Jesus t me when d sab ed peop e ved on the fr nge of v ages. L nked to Hope badge – what can we do to make a d fference to the ves of these peop e? Sm e, he p, nc ude them n what we do TLR arr ved w th nom nat on forms to be comp eted for Best G r award. Exp a ned need to th nk carefu y about everyone n the group not just best fr ends.
> *The group take these interruptions in their stride, but it seems to me that it breaks the flow and could have easily been communicated at the beginning of the evening when all the girls are together.*
> (F e dwork Extract 22.06.18).

Figure 28 comes from an observation made during badgework with the younger *n:gage* group, as the leader recapped from last week before moving on to the next bit.

4.3.2 Management

There is a popular saying that goes, 'If you want a job doing, ask a busy person'. Working full time and completing DPT studies and fieldwork has meant I have needed to manage my time effectively, be organised and plan ahead. Instead of perhaps helping me to understand the pressures others may be encountering, I think this focus has sometimes made me less tolerant of the way other people may work to a deadline.

Figure 29 Fieldnote Extract 06.07.18

Arr ved ear y to f nd TLR at the pc eat ng a sandw ch. Greeted with "hello Sian, I've forgotten to answer your email! It's been mad today. I'm only just eating my lunch." Fo owed w th no further conversat on to nd cate whether or not ton ght I may be ab e to do my act v ty or next week. I asked f there was anything I could do to help but wasn't taken up on the offer. At the tab es other eaders were wr t ng names on cert f cates and gett ng them nto the r ght order for presentat on.
I struggle with the lack of communication about what's happening. It's hard to help without some direction and I am frustrated by being ignored. There seems an awful lot to do that has been left until the last minute. The sense of panic is tangible.
(F e dwork Extract 06.07.18)

Managing a large team requires being able to work with people and knowing your team is key to ensuring the right person is doing the right job at any time, both for efficient practice and a personal sense of fulfilment by team members. Once again effective communication is at the heart of this. The most effective teams I have been part of have been those whereby there is a sense that where one is weak in a particular area, another member is strong; that way people complement the skills and contributions of one another. The encounter in Figure

30 builds on from what had already been exchanged, showing the way a fellow leader was pragmatic and able to focus order by delegating tasks to ensure that what was needed was accomplished efficiently.

Figure 30 Fieldnote Extract 06.07.18a

At th s po nt g r s are start ng to arr ve so TLR asks two eaders to take the programmes and greet peop e at the door nv t ng them to go nto the church.
TLR to other eaders - "Oh no I've forgotten to write out the reasons for their nominations"
Leader E – Don't panic that's why you have a team around you. Come on, g ve us the sheets f we share them between us we can p ck out the reasons qu ck y.
E then organ ses two others to s ft through the nom nat on forms to dent fy the reasons g r s had been nom nated as Best G r . Other eaders set out the awards and cert f cates on the tab e n the church wh e TLR f n shes off the powerpo nt of photos.
(F e dwork Extract 06.07.18).

Some of my frustrations about communication were shared within the team.

Figure 31 Fieldnote Extract 06.07.18b

Leader A arr ves and s s m ar y gnored so she s ts w th me when she sees me.
I say – it's a bit stressful tonight as there's a lot to get ready
A – we nobody has asked me to do anyth ng
I know, I offered too but I guess t takes too ong to exp a n to be of he p
A – poor commun cat on aga n. Th ngs need to be proper y commun cated so we can a he p.
It's reassuring to hear one of the team say this. It makes me feel like it's not me as an outsider but there seems to be concentric circles of who's in the know.
(F e dwork Extract 06.07.18)

This exchange highlighted for me that my feeling of outsider syndrome was not necessarily related to my researcher role; it was also the impact of being part of the team yet not fully integrated within it. Volunteers can feel like they do not belong or are not valued for anything other than their being there to make up the numbers, as this regular helper inferred as the team gathered before the session began.

Recording fieldnotes and building connections in them helped me to make sense of GBM(E&W) and its youth-work practice. This ongoing development in the researcher's engagement with the notes is explained, 'as creator of the notes in the first place, the ethnographer has been creating and discovering meaning of and in the notes all along' (Emerson et al.1995:159). Engaging with the fieldnotes and questioning observations signals a drilling down for better understanding and, in doing so, influences the meaning that is being made by the researcher through the process. My internal dialogue, reflective questions and expression of personal feelings are integral to the fieldwork experience and my role as participant-observer researcher. It reminds us of the heuristic nature of this form of study. It demonstrates the disposition of the problematising reflexivity of the practical theologian.

4.4 Coding

Maintaining the interpretative phenomenological analysis outlined in section 2.2.2 above, I manually created a fieldwork thematic coding spreadsheet table by taking the primary codes of the afore mentioned themes (GB hallmarks, leadership, girlhood, group work and discipleship) and identifying secondary codes from the observations (including friendship, communication, games etc) within the fieldnotes and finally extracts of related text to give the specific reference (see Appendix 11). Using specific colours for the different themes really helped to lift them off the page so that, at a glance, relevant links could be seen whilst more detailed analysis could follow as the themes were mapped across the fieldnotes over the months. It also served to highlight any other

major themes arising from the data, the key one being about the leaders' own experience of GBM(E&W) as they grew up and the subsequent bonding between those who had known one another since that time. It shows how the data produces a narrative interpretation of the action and practice of this GB unit.

The fieldnotes with their colour-coding helped to highlight the omissions of the missing voice of the girls and the lack of creative activities, which I had hoped would say more about the girls and their thoughts. Mostly it was the lack of space being available in the programme beyond the planned activities to use for my research focus. A way around this and a manageable method to communicate to and be accepted by the leaders was the catalyst for my design of the ToL exercises, as noted above. Those exercises helped access the voice of the girls and generated data to analyse in respect of my key research question, as previously explained in section 3.2 above.

4.5 Data summary

In summary, to conclude this section, I will outline the key themes emerging. Primarily, the voice of the girls and how that goes unheard, sometimes because it is silent but mostly due to the lack of attentiveness to it. The second theme is this stage of girlhood, including the girls' view of self, the world and God. The final theme is the significance of relationships between the girls collectively as a group and one to one, the relationships between the adult leaders, and between the girls and their leaders. Integral to these key themes is that of belonging,

which I believe links to some of the more anxious/negative aspects within the data. I shall keep this as a golden thread running throughout my discussion of the findings in Chapter Five, where I will go on to explore the theological meaning and significance of these results. First, some reflections on the process as practical theologian, researcher and youth worker.

4.6 Reflections of the research process

Pilgrim's Journey

Footsore at times
Constantly moving
Journeying on
Step by step.

Stumbling at times
Not sure footed
Not attentive to the path
Ill-prepared and ill-equipped.

Head down at times
Pressing onwards
Facing the elements
Pushing through the storm.

Losing my way at times
Disorientated by the unfamiliar
Distracted by other things
Confused by the direction of travel.

Nimble and quick at times
Energised by the journey
Eager to make progress
Excited by the emerging horizon.

Confidently stepping out
Knowing the direction to move
Clear understanding of the landscape
Mapping progress and skills.

Head up focussing on the skyline

Absorbing the changing skies
Drinking in the passing scenery
Focussed on the journey ahead.

Alert and attentive as a pilgrim
Being surprised and blessed along the way
Sharing the road and learning from others
Listening to the navigator and following their compass.

As I reflect on the process of my research inquiry with GBM(E&W), I am reminded of this poem. I wrote *Pilgrim's Journey* at Summer School in 2015. I included it in my third-year module submission reflecting on the DPT programme at that time. Rereading it at the end of the research process, it seems as applicable now for this further stage the DPT programme has taken me on.

A dictionary definition of 'pilgrim is 'a person who makes a journey, often a long and difficult one, to a special place for religious reasons'. This resonates with me, as a student undertaking academic study and as a researcher engaged in empirical study. As a practical theologian, I am keen to engage with God in this process of problematising, hearing the voice of these girls as they are situated in this all-girl group setting and what they might tell us about God and areas of theological interest. The reflective process throughout the research journey has revealed both joys and sorrows, with its struggles and surprises along the way. I shall use the key phrases from the poem to reflect on this process.

4.6.1 Footsore at times

A full proposal for a research enquiry was submitted and approved in 2016, but due to challenging situations in my workplace, that proposal was replaced with

this one involving young people. The research question emerged from my curiosity about trainee youth workers who, contrary to my own experience, elect to work with one gender. As I prepared a comparative study between GG and GBM, the ethical clearance procedure understandably became more intense and time-consuming, as this new proposal carried the responsibility of protecting from harm its underage participants. I found the process fixed in its understanding of research with children. After a lengthy submission process, which requiring further clarification took the best part of an academic year, the university gave clearance for the research to start.

The next step for me was to recruit to the project. This was a two-pronged approach. I had contacts within GBM(E&W) who were keen to participate, but required the documentation for participants to be adapted to reflect them. My link person, who was in a national role, liaised between the Director and myself, whilst also beginning to consider which local group might be a suitable context. I felt very much in their hands for this part of the process. In the process, the fragility of the relationship between the national team and local groups became apparent. Those in paid roles wanted to protect and not overload the volunteers running the groups. I questioned whether or not it might have been more fruitful to approach local groups personally myself instead, but the process had started and, once the national team were involved, I felt it would be more problematic to by-pass them and make cold calls to the local groups.

Alongside this I found it hugely frustrating to get no response from the GG District Commissioners. The time taken to fulfil the ethical clearance process and to start the recruitment process made me feel anxious. DPT peers were already engrossed in their fieldwork. Through supervision, I learned to value this time as one of decision-making and letting go of some of my expectations. It was a time of preparation, adjusting the comparative study to a case study. I needed to recognise this project was edging forward step by step.

4.6.2 Stumbling at times

I was excited to start my fieldwork, but found it alien to me to be 'watching on', as I was used to being the youth worker leading a group. My social awkwardness when meeting new people seemed exaggerated by my stumbling embrace of my role as participant-observer in a context that was new to me. Holding that liminal space of being with the group but not part of the group was uncomfortable footing for me. In hindsight I think I could have prepared myself better for that by spending more time in conversation with the unit leader, to understand the flow of the sessions and the outworking of the group. It would have been helpful to build more of a relationship with her, as she was the gatekeeper to timings and content of the programme as well as access to the girls. It was during this time I became aware that my plan to hold creative conversations with the girls and focus groups with the parents was not going to easily work nor bring the data I had hoped. That method did not fit with the structure and working of the groups as they were, and I did not think would be fruitful or worthwhile.

4.6.3 Head down at times

My work situation had not improved, but continued to be difficult and was impacting my anxiety levels. Friday evenings came around quickly and the long drive became a challenge. It felt to me that I was moving from one hostile situation into another, albeit for different reasons. I was conscious of having to put my head down and press onwards, pushing through the personal pain to fulfil what I had committed to. Motivated to make it work, I dug deep within myself to persevere and review what might be needed to help make this work. The challenge of my work situation and ending the week with fieldwork may help to explain why I found it difficult to inhabit that context. It is possible that it also distracted my attention.

An unexpected issue I had encountered was the GB unit having all age groups meeting at the same time and knowing which group to focus on. I decided to follow one group for half a term and then switch. This enabled me to follow the development of their badge work with some consistency and to understand the workings of the groups better, building more rapport with the adult team as well as continuity with the girls. I reorganised my workdays to focus and prepare for the weekly visit. These small changes were significant at helping a sustainable rhythm to emerge, despite feeling in the midst of a personal storm.

4.6.4 Losing my way at times

Several months into accompanying the group, I expressed my concern in supervision that I was not hearing the voice of the girls. Aside from the practical

reasons for this, like the large number making individual voices less audible and the sports' hall being echoey and distorting all voices, my key observation was that there was little space in the programme to hear from the girls. My inability to be included in the team planning meetings contributed to my sense of disorientation each week, not knowing what was planned. I felt confused by the mixed responses I was getting. Reflecting on this with my supervisor, it became apparent some intervention was needed. My reading introduced me the study of the faith of young adult Christian women (Mercer 2008) and the 'Unfolding Tapestry of My Life' exercise (Fowler et al., 2004). It was useful to connect with the similar work by another practical theologian. It inspired me to visualise an open-ended activity that would specifically give voice to the girls and their world view, whilst sufficiently time-limited to fit within the group's timetable.

4.6.5 Nimble and quick at times

It took time to re-design the exercises to suit these girls and the end of term was fast approaching, so I had to act quickly. I was pleased with what I had planned and could see this developing over the weeks and really opening up the dialogue with the girls. However, those hopes were soon dashed as there was no space in the planned programme for this to happen. I was keen to make this work and adapted the exercise to be a guided visualisation exercise. I was unable to deliver this in person and disappointed not to have the insight of the process, but I could see how this left the leaders, in their familiar relationship with the girls, better placed to administer it by my written directions. This felt a significant turning point. Knowing the exercise boosted my confidence. It gave

me access to the voice of the girls, their contributions shaping the future progress of this dialogue. It became clear what needed to be clarified and ways in which to do that opened up. I felt on more familiar territory working with the data gathered, knowing what was needed moving forward.

4.6.6 Alert and attentive as a pilgrim

Throughout the fieldwork stage, there was a need to be alert and attentive to participants, variations within the context and the data. I was struck by the fascinating responses given by the girls. By sitting with this data, it also struck me how sad some responses were and it was uncomfortable reflecting on why this might be their experience. To help clarify some of the data, I needed to design further 'pop-up' activities that enabled the girls to engage without impacting the programme and time. These activities worked well and were helpful for unpacking the data. Throughout this research I have tried to stay true to my underlying ethos of letting the girls speak, by keeping my activities open-ended and including some creative element to make them more accessible. I have engaged with their responses and, alongside that, tried to hear and learn from the adult team around them. It has been challenging but a lot has been learned about these girls, GBM(E&W), research and myself. Once space had been created for them to engage in a more creative, open-ended way, it was simple to hear from the girls. The challenge was more about the adults letting go of the programme-driven activities to enable this to happen.

Figure 32 Fieldnote Extract 14.09.18

A compass he ps w th d rect on and or entat on. In th s research process I wou d argue severa compasses have been nstrumenta . Key to th s has been the nner compass of the g r s part c pat ng. Through the r presence (and absence), the r part c pat on, responses and s ence I have been ab e to fo ow the r exper ence and earn a ongs de them. Perhaps a ess obv ous but more nf uent a compass has been that of the programme and curr cu um determ ned by the adu t team around the g r s. The r compass has determ ned the d rect on of the week y meet ngs and term y themes. In some nstances the r compass has a gned w th that of the g r s and p ans have been adapted to su t re evant nterests and t me y events, for nstance when n:counta organ sed the Qu z N ght fundra ser they had p anned as part of the r badgework. There were severa new g r s to the group mov ng up from n:vest gate but a so one who had been at the church over the summer and was new to GB. The cha rs were a ready set out n a c rc e, a though more were needed. *She looked unsure and as the evening progressed there were several times she opted out of the games saying she didn't want to join in. There were several distinguishing features that set her apart from the others - fluffy open back & toe slippers - didn't make running or jumping very easy; her Vietnamese heritage meant she didn't give many facial cues so appeared very serious; and bigger build which was not an issue but combined with other two factors, made her stand out from the rest.*
(Fieldnote Extract 14.09.18, also noted on Fieldnote Extract 21.09.18).

Times when their voices went unheard might include when girls opted out, either by non-attendance (although this is difficult to confirm) or sitting out activities, for example when a new member declined joining in the games for the first five weeks of attendance (Figure 32).

Another example of this misalignment was when the church minister introduced the Awards Ceremony with a 'guess who' quiz featuring all male celebrities and many too old for the group to identify.

Figure 33 Fieldnote Extract 06.07.18c

Games are norma y a good way to ntegrate and m x up the g r s but th s g r was c ear y overwhe med by the numbers and re uctant to jo n n opt ng to stand w th the eaders and watch on. Gett ng the ba ance between vo untary participation and encouraging a 'can do' attitude is difficult when leading groups. Rev re terates we come and ta ks about the t me of year – who's had sports day? What about end of schoo reports? He then uses h s phone to read out some comments from the schoo reports of famous peop e for the g r s to guess – needs to focus on subjects and ess on football as that won't get h m anywhere - Gary L neker; A bert E nste n; Church ; ke y to be e ther a huge success or at r sk of gett ng nto deep troub e - R chard Branson and John Lennon.
Whilst I was thinking how these names were too old for the girls to easily guess, the helper next to me observed with annoyance how they were all male examples – not a single woman! The Rev is probably in his mid 50s. Reading off his phone was probably a 'nod' to youth culture but I'm shocked at his lack of awareness of the audience gathered.
Rev prayed for everyone and then presented the new y qua f ed eaders w th the r cert f cates before hand ng back to TLR.
In light of the opening activity, I can't help but feel the prayers are patriarchal permission and approval for the work that has been done – is this needed? Very different to the Enrolment Service led by the female minister at the beginning of the year which was more in service to the groups.
(F e dnote Extract 06.07.18)

My reflections acknowledge that this was an attempt to build rapport with the girls, but it was not a relevant starting place and using all male examples for a female audience suggests at the least a lack of thought and at its worst a patriarchal approach.

My personal compass guided me practically as a researcher through the process, synthesising my experience with GBM(E&W) with my extensive youth-work practice. There was also my PT compass at work in the reflective practice of this fieldwork experience, questioning and seeking as I pulled together the threads that help to answer my research question.

A metaphorical compass is useful in research to give the direction and focus to keep it objective and purposeful. Navigating fieldwork challenges will involve making decisions and sometimes adapting the plan; that is the nature of real-

world research. The resilience of a pilgrim researcher is required to take the process, step by step, from design to sharing findings, to push on through the challenges and to bring the project home again with integrity and belief in the value of the pilgrimage. Its journey may take a detour from what was planned and the researcher will always be changed by the experience. As practical theologians, we research to bring about transformation and that change begins with us. Through this experience, I have learned about my vulnerabilities and limitations alongside my strengths and motivation. It has highlighted my ability to problem-solve and be decisive, letting go of some of what was planned, making adaptations to enhance the data gathering process and moving swiftly with change to maximise time. It has helped me to assess my own professional practice. In addition to this, I have discovered my resilience that sustained and kept me working with and trusting the process.

4.7 Summary conclusion

This chapter has given presented the data captured in the field notes. It has evaluated the GBM (E&W) programme to consider the practical outworking of the GBM hallmarks of being relational, relevant and responsive (see section 1.3 above), evaluating them against the themes of girlhood, group work and single-sex grouping from my research question. The researcher's role of participant-observer has been reflected upon. Deepening this further with 'the Pilgrim's Journey' from the researcher's journal, the research process has been reflected upon and its impact upon the ongoing development of the practical theologian noted. Following this, we return to the golden thread of listening to the voice of

girls, as outlined in section 2.4.3 above, that has been integral to this project. We move on to apply an interpretative analysis of these findings, enriched by engagement with key thinkers about the development of girls and young women identified in section 1.2.3 above.

WEEPING MARY

Grow ng ke sap ngs,
fe s fu and fun -
exc t ng opportun t es to try;
a wor d of fr endsh p grow ng
open ng up through c ubs and networks.

Our ves ebb and f ow ke a r ver,
Exper ences wash over us.
As ong as we have those who care a ongs de –
oya fr ends show ng k ndness and speak ng truth,
we can get by.

Th s fe nvo ves others – fam y and fr ends
we each affect one another through our words and act ons.
Arguments happen, bu y ng hurts,
stress esca ates and anx ety sets n,
sadness enshr nes us, c oud ng our v s on.

Schoo f s so much of our t me;
carry ng the we ght of expectat ons,
str v ng to ach eve but overwhe med.
The tests, homework, exams he ghten
so many cho ces, too many dec s ons.

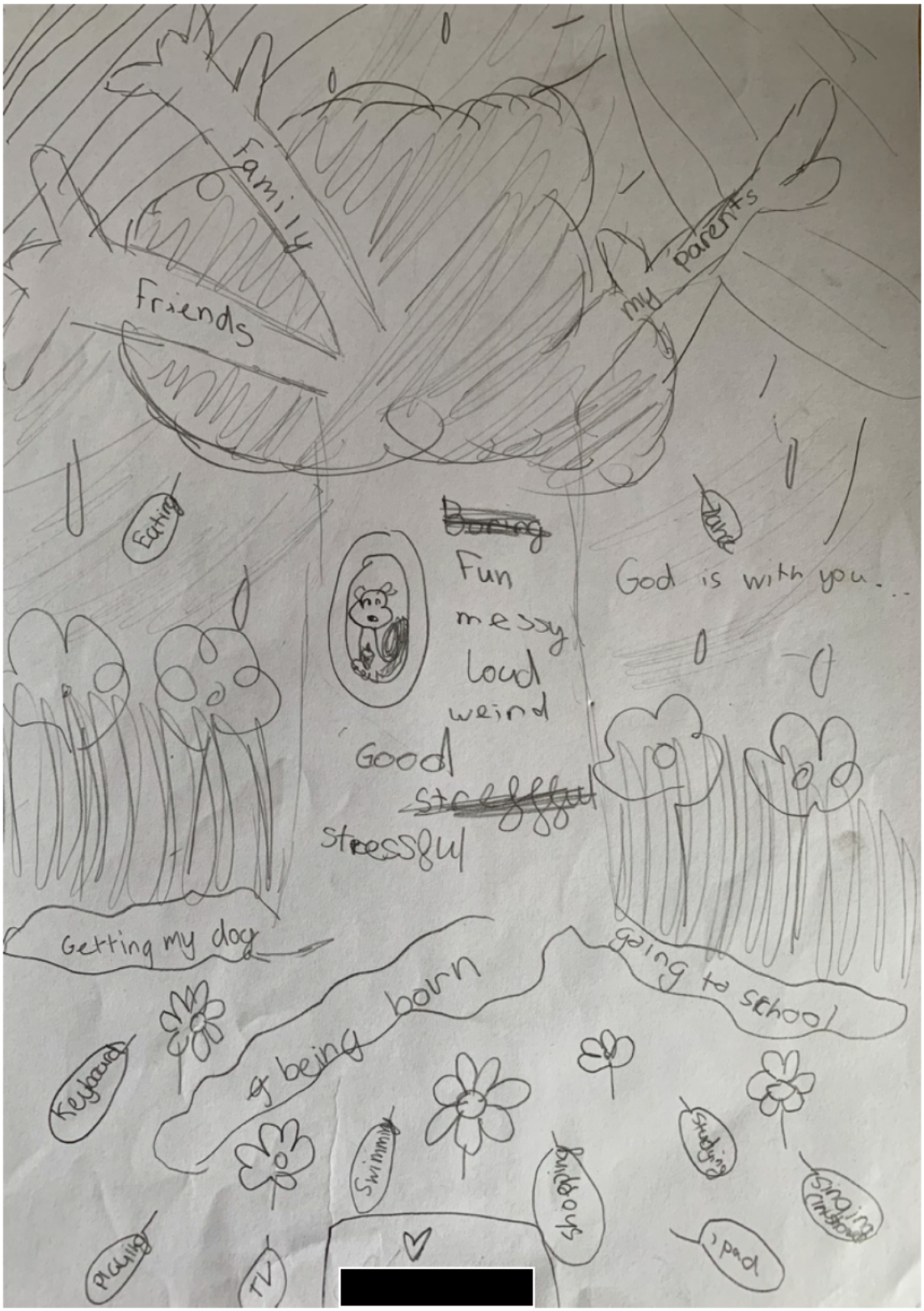
Who am I? We ask ourse ves as we compare and despa r –
our ooks and ach evement are never good enough,
we te ourse ves we shou d, and we must.
What s th s fe? Who s God?
Everyth ng – amaz ng, wonderfu and k nd!

We are Mary the d sc p e
Mary the one who fo ows
Mary the one who stens
Mary the one who attends
Mary the one through whom God speaks.

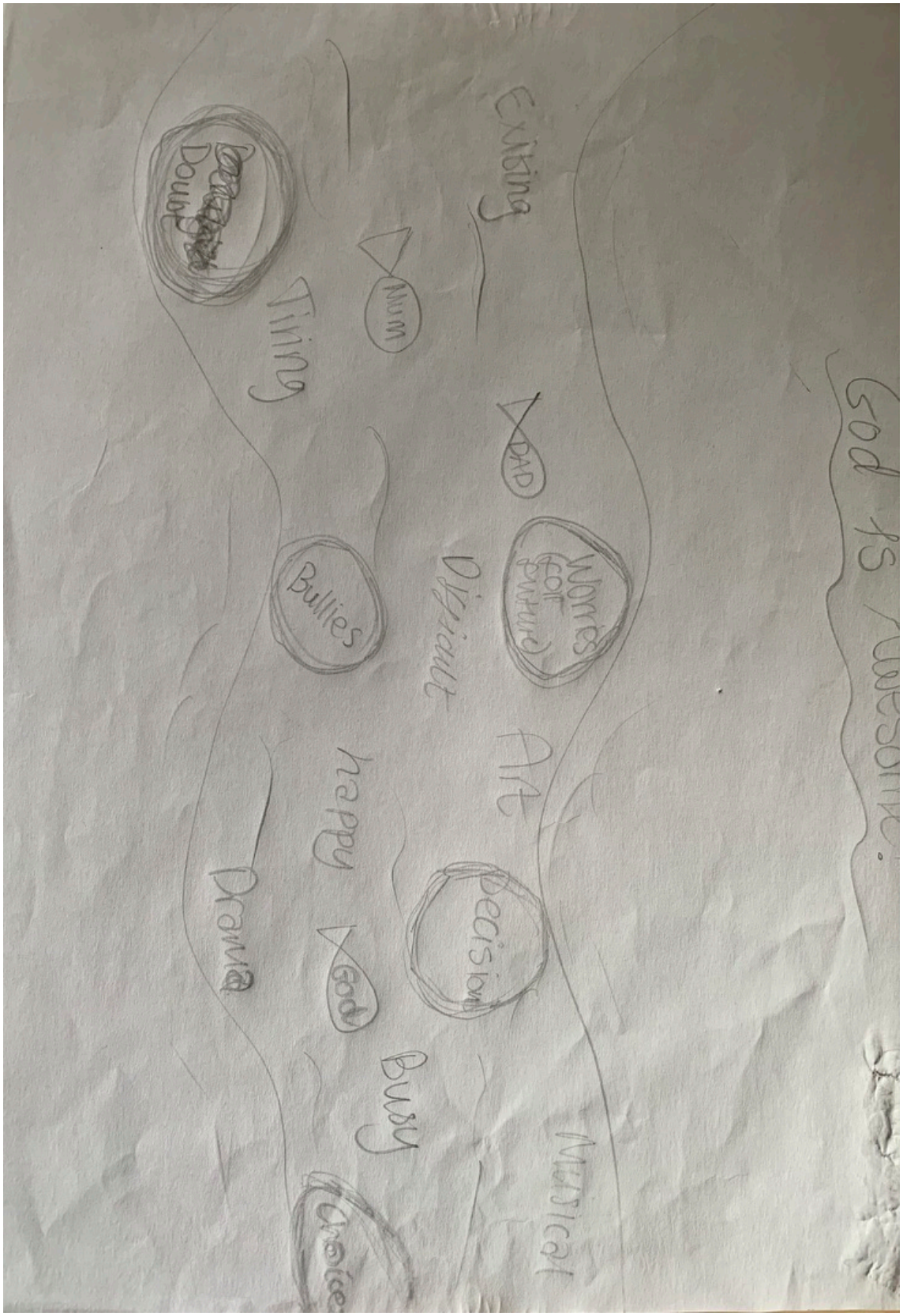
I hear you
I see the see-saw of your fe
teeter ng between the happy and the hard t mes,
I fee your strugg e.
I share your story.

I am Mary the researcher
Mary the one who sees
Mary the one who reports
Mary the one ca ed
Mary the one who s sent.

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 5



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 5



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER FIVE – BEATING THE THREADS: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

To shape the emerging patterns and to create texture within the tapestry, the threads need consolidating, with the beater pushing them down.

The practical theologian completed her fieldwork and left the girls at GBM(E&W). Having analysed what they voiced through their participation in this project, she went on to attend to what had been expressed and to identify the significance of their words and key points to be evaluated in light of other research, before communicating to a wider audience.

This chapter will deepen attention to the findings from the data gathered. Listening to the girls is implicit throughout this chapter and is integrative to the discussion of the findings, which are organised under three key analytical areas. Firstly, the voice of the girls. This will include the need for their amplification. It will explore and clarify the vernacular used by the girls. The need to make time to talk with these girls and for attentive listening to what is both spoken and unspoken in that time is highlighted. The second area to discuss will be girlhood as a messy age of transition. This is a time of meaning-making for the girls, and the significance of this will be explored. The girls' expressed perceptions of self, girlhood and life will be considered in light of this and their spirituality. The final

area discussed will be relationships. This will begin with the role of accompaniers, before looking at other significant adults speaking into the lives of the girls. It will evaluate the role models and aspirations the girls set for themselves, before concluding with the characteristics and value of a nurturing space to 'hold' the girls as they navigate through this phase.

Throughout the chapter, I will engage with some significant thinkers who are writing about girls and young women, whom I introduced earlier in the multidisciplinary sections 1.2.3, 1.3, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 above. The discussion in this chapter will seek to relate the findings in this project with other research, to consider the theological implications of this and how it may continue to contribute to our understanding of the development of girls and young women. I will now introduce my key theological conversation partners within this chapter and a short rationale for this specific engagement.

Practical theologian Joyce Ann Mercer writes from a feminist perspective and has contributed to the bank of growing literature on children's spirituality. Her PT of childhood inspired me to pursue the messy-age phase of this study and, through her own research with teenage girls featured in *Girltalk Godtalk*, I discovered the 'Unfolding Tapestry of My Life' exercise (Mercer, 2008, 2005). Mercer's longitudinal study of the faith and understanding of teenage girls aged 16–18 years in America clearly has cultural distinctions, as the participants are older and from the American Bible-belt constituency. However, it is a significant text, in that it explores the way girls construct their understanding and live out

their faith, based on structured interviews, and has themes of faith, gender, relationships and God. In summary, Mercer's key findings that I shall be relating my analysis to were:

- girls want adults as conversation partners
- parents matter as they shape their daughter's spiritual life
- girls are active meaning-makers of their everyday experiences in relation to faith.

Baptist minister and theological educator Anne Phillips (2011) has focussed on the spirituality of adolescent girls and their transition to adulthood in her research study of ten years longevity. Being aged between 11 and 13 years old, these participants are closer in age to a sample from my own study. They are UK-based so, culturally, their experience is perhaps more relatable. Phillips' study has the themes of self, God, Church and world interwoven as it focusses on this transitional experience and its impact upon spirituality. Phillips has also named and discussed the silence in theology around girls and the silence of their voice, which I also refer to in section 1.2.2 above. My study builds on and updates this work of listening to the voice of girls in light of the changes that have undoubtedly occurred in the last decade since Phillips' research. It builds on Phillips' work, with a broader age span to reflect the earlier beginning to the transition from girl to adolescent. Whilst my participants belong to a uniformed youth group that is Christian in its mission and occurs within a church setting, that does not mean all its participants have faith, so there is an open-endedness in my methods to accommodate this. My methodology shares Phillips' value of listening to the voice of the girls, but due to the limitations of my shorter study,

this is a collective voice rather than the distinct individual stories Phillips shares. I shall also relate my analysis to Phillips' key findings that girls:

- need a 'holding' nurturing space as they negotiate the social/gender restrictions in puberty
- need to be validated for who they are now, not what they will become
- on the threshold of womanhood, need to know what it means to be female from female voices.

My own practice with children and young people has been greatly influenced by the ethos and principles of Godly Play (GP), a spiritual accompaniment programme for which I am a guide and trainer. Godly Play was founded by theological educator and Episcopalian priest Jerome Berryman (1995). I presented Berryman as a practical theologian in my first year on the DPT. Whilst serving as Canon Educator in Houston's Christ Church Cathedral, Berryman was trained in the discipleship practice of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and studied Montessori pedagogy, both of which model accompanying children and young people to discover and learn for themselves. The significance of this is that it changes the role of the adult from being directive in their educating to using more informal methods and facilitating the learning (Berryman, 2013:96). His theology of practice and experience as priest and educator were informed by an approach to religious education using Montessori methods that he developed, called Godly Play (Berryman, 2009). This approach systematically follows the liturgical year as its curriculum and it allows for the human experience, through Socratic wondering, to inform

theological reflection. GP helps to frame the biblical narrative to be engaged with and for participants to be liberated by its framework. Its person-centred approach through accompaniment has underpinned my methods in this study. GP attends equally to the non-verbal symbolic language as it does to the spoken word. Its open-endedness is reflected in the openness of the exercises implemented in this study, encouraging and allowing space for the girls to express themselves as disciples (Chapter One section 1.2.1). Similarly, its focus on healthy spiritual development resonates with my research question, 'to what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?'[11]

In addition to theological conversation partners, I referred to a government report in sections 1.2.3 and 3.2.2 above, which has also proved significant for this discussion. The British Government introduced an annual State of the Nation Report in 2018 to bring together the research of organisations, academia and charities on the state of children and young people's wellbeing. Its purpose was, firstly, to report the statistics on wellbeing. Data was collated from the National Health Service, Office of National Statistics, Department of Education and the Children's Society Good Childhood Report. Secondly, it sought to draw on a wider set of indicators on the lives of children and young people to capture

[11] Whilst it has a curriculum, Godly Play is more 'hands off' presenting the biblical story, allowing space for reflecting upon that and, to assist the processing and attention to this, materials are available for creative expression rather than presentation. There is no 'show and tell' in GP and therefore no chance of getting it wrong or struggling for the right words to convey meaning that may transcend words.

relationships, self-reported health and feelings and experiences. Finally, it offers an analysis of the psychological wellbeing in teenage girls, on account of them being especially at risk of poor wellbeing. Although primarily focussed on data gathered in England, the report asserts that the statistical factors are common across the four nations. Concern regarding the decline in psychological health for teenage girls is highlighted. I shall consider this further in the discussion of my findings now.

5.2 The findings

From these existing works, I shall continue to discuss my findings in light of the commonality of themes regarding this under-researched group, their struggles and what is needed to support helpfully the flourishing of their spiritual life and faith journey. There are three main themes emerging from the data gathered. Firstly, there is the voice of the girls (see section 2.6 above). The missing voice of these girls became the catalyst for adapting my methods (see section 2.7 above). This mirrors the missing voice of this age range of girls in literature and theology, discussed in section 1.2.2 above. This omission raises the question for me: how can their prophetic voice be heard if no one is attentive to them? It links back to the questions I set out in section 1.2.3. Equally relevant, what does this mean in my ecclesial Baptist contexts, when upholding the value of being a priesthood of all believers? Furthermore, for the girls, what does it mean to them to be made in the image of God? Secondly, the theme of girlhood reflects back what the girls say about how they see their lives at their age and stage. It highlights the challenges and interests they face as they perceive them. There

will be some further analysis of what correlates between the two age groups, as well as what might be distinctive at particular ages, to highlight how world views change with experience and age. This will support some comparison with the understandings of their adult leaders on the messiness of this age range. Finally, the theme of relationship considers the sisterhood of the all-female group versus peer pressure experienced in one-to-one interactions. Evidence of the influence of positive role models and significant accompaniers on the girls' growth and development will be discussed. The importance of a safe, nurturing space for listening will be explored in terms of the relational, physical and emotional. I will use these three themes as subheadings to focus on each individually. Within the subsections there will be interwoven the golden thread of the idea of belonging, which features in each of these themes and is evidenced in a variety of ways in the data. The thread of belonging will be explored more fully through existential questions like those first mentioned in section 1.2.3 above, in relation to the development of self-identity. These questions have arisen from each of the themes and will be explored as I unpack the theological significance of what the data is saying. I shall begin by discussing what my data has revealed before turning to the practice and theology of my conversation partners to expand on these findings and to explore their theological significance.

5.2.1 Voice of the girls

5.2.1.1 Amplification of voices

Attentive listening to the girls was a key method for collecting data in this study as outlined in section 2.4.3 above. However, early into the fieldwork I discovered their voice was quieter than anticipated. As discussed in section 2.6 above, there were several factors silencing them. The physical environment and acoustics of the sports hall where games were played made it difficult to distinguish individual voices and comments. The size of the group meant that within the programme there was limited time for free talk beyond conversation around the tables whilst doing activities, which meant I could only really engage with the small group I was sitting with. The programme had allocated news time whilst having refreshments sitting in a circle; each girl had a brief chance to share something of her week, but there was little time for engagement with contributions. This did not seem to reflect the mutual exchange of meaningful conversation that nurtures relationship and understanding in the way Mercer describes: 'They wanted to push – and have someone respectfully push back. They wanted to be able to ask "big questions" and search for meaning in the company of adults as well as in the company of their peers' (2008:127). The challenge of how to hear the girls was the catalyst for me to review my methods to find a way to amplify their voice. The ToL exercises effectively did this and, in doing so, highlighted how their language was often opaque – a further challenge to understand, whilst sharpening my question of how girls' voices are treated in groups of this kind more widely.

The fieldnote records of the weekly programme show it provided little time for unstructured free talk. The majority of this took place as the girls gathered together each week, waiting with their friends as others arrived and registered. The older girls sat on chairs lining the walls, regularly checking their phones as they chatted and waited. The younger girls mostly sat on the floor, sometimes starting a game amongst themselves, like Chinese Whispers; an interesting choice of game whereby hushed voices pass on a message only to be spoken aloud at the end! Once everyone gathered, one of the adults would introduce a short thought for the evening before breaking up into their different groups. This time helped to bookend the evening as a unit altogether. At the end of the evening the unit gathered back together again for Best Girl awards, prayers and notices. Prayers would often be offered by the younger girls, but *n:counta* girls were more reluctant to volunteer, except for one member who would offer or whose name would be suggested by the group to represent them. The silent female voice is not a new observation, but to find this within a female group is disconcerting.

The uncovering of the absence of the girls' voice in section 2.6 above was the catalyst for adding the ToL exercises to my research. This corroborates with Mercer's findings too and, I believe, gives scope for the programme to be reviewed in GBM(E&W) to make more auditory space for the girls to be heard and for conversational exchanges to be deepened. McRobbie (1991) first questions how we make sense of the invisibility of girls and their hiddenness in studies. Adult women get heard through feminist study; young girls feature in

the gender discussions in early years study, but less is acknowledged of this specific age range of girls, perhaps because they are considered to be less of a concern than young lads of the same age whose behaviour may seem more challenging. Mercer intentionally elects to employ in her research a more relational practice, 'in which encounter elicits insights' (2008:3) – her method of interviewing participants to allow for more personal snapshots of her participants. This approach enables Mercer to share the voice of the girls directly. This resonates with my change of method and introduction of the ToL exercises as a catalyst for hearing from the girls themselves and amplifying their voice. Phillips acknowledges their missing voice as 'grossly under-researched'(2011:7,15). She argues for them not to be called children but to override the legal term, as they are over 13, have mostly completed pubertal change and, when classed as children, 'the word is used discursively to diminish them and suggest they and their voice are of less worth than those of older people' (Phillips, 2011:27). Using the term 'girls' avoids any clumsy grouping together and makes distinct the gender focus in its own right – an important first step to amplifying the voice of girls. The voice is easily missed when the environment is programme driven and, when noted, can be an indicator that change is needed. Phillips (2011:170) reflects upon this when observing the difference of depth of expression in the language of those who had regular more relational interaction with adults who encouraged them to explore their ideas and issues, in comparison to those who were less expressive in a more didactic or teacherly setting. The evidence of poorer psychological health in teenage girls than boys of the same age may indicate an

awareness of the messiness of their stage of life and, as the State of the Nation Report (2019:10) recommends, is best engaged with constructively through listening to their experiences to develop understanding. How is this to be enabled if the voice of girls continues to go unheard?

5.2.1.2 Clarifying and exploring the vernacular

When we are attentive to the voice of these girls, their vernacular can be opaque in meaning. The *n:gage* girls used words like 'crazy, hot, weird and starfishy' to describe their life. Whilst an educated guess might suffice for understanding 'crazy' and 'weird' as varied, busy and perhaps strange, I continue to wonder what it means to live a 'starfishy' life? The older *n:counta* girls similarly used opaque terms, including 'crazy' and 'weird', along with 'dumb', 'wired' (possibly a mis-spelling of weird?) and 'meh'. The nothingness of 'meh' could reflect the way, during adolescence, young people feel they are going through the motions having to do what is mandatory, like going to school, rather than what they voluntarily would choose to do. 'Dumb' may imply pointlessness, or perhaps it does acknowledge a sense of life being unheard and silent. Both terms imply a deficit. Language matters. It has the potential to include or exclude. It is more than the spoken word.

Facial cues, body language, symbolic non-verbal gestures or objects may enrich meaning but equally stand alone and, as the saying goes, a picture paints a thousand words – but that image needs attending to for its meaning to be understood. One of the constraints of qualitative data is that the context

within which it was collected is not always visible. In this project, I was unable to facilitate the ToL exercises in person and so not present to the nuances of body language or the attitude of the girls expressing these words. Berryman writes about connotation as ‘deep body knowing’ (2001:11). He recognises the move between the non-verbal and acquisition of language. It develops from the physical gesture to a creative substitution, before becoming stable in its true meaning. Could these opaque terms be the girls’ creative substitute for what they are as yet unable to define and articulate? We cannot know for sure within the limitations of this small-scale study but, set alongside the full data, it is possible it reflects the mood of the individual speaker. However, this study is focussed on the collective voice of these girls, so the fact that the term is used by more than one girl probably tells us more about this age group.
Connected with this development stage of language usage is the culture of a group, the readiness and opportunity given to children and young people to express themselves and the response they receive to their expressions. Phillips like myself, talks of ‘giving voice to girls’ (2011:68), and there is an element of advocacy to this. This is relevant not only to the immediate context, in this case the GBM(E&W) unit, but to parents, other youth-work providers, educators and churches, if these girls are to be truly heard.

Berryman (2013:145) explains this perspective-taking as beyond feelings and empathy, but how one perceives oneself. This develops from being unaware of the self that others see to what self and others (solely and collectively) know of an individual. ‘Perspective taking cautions us to listen well to the ways that

people express their sense of world coherence' (Berryman 2013:145), whilst opaque to my adult mind, these terms are what the girls have chosen to describe their life at this point. They may be substitutions, but the opaque terms need to be received, held and considered more fully than I have been able to do within the constraints of this study. However, when considering the work of the perspective-taking from the point of the listener, it not only reminds us of the importance of attentive listening but signals the need for time, so that conversations can develop and deepen.

5.2.1.3 Time for talk

Attending to the voice of the girls gives insight to their world and their understanding of it. Reflecting in their tree exercise, the *n:gage* girls made more positive than negative comments on their life, which might signify a sense of pleasure and acceptance. The older *n:counta* girls, in the river exercise, were more balanced in their comments, showing an equal number of negative and positive comments. This could be a result of having experienced the transition of moving from primary to secondary education and, in doing so, their educational world becoming more structured. The *n:gage* participants demonstrated an awareness of 'story' as they described their life, including the functions of eating and breathing and the transitions of moving schools and hospitalisation, along with play and creativity. They showed a positive awareness of self and others.

Mercer highlights how we are ‘storied people’ (2008:2) and the importance of this for understanding who we are. The older girls show a more developed sense of self, which included more critique of limitations as well as qualities with less narrative. This correlates with Phillips’ findings where girls ‘saw their own qualities and the wider range of choices…’ (2011:75). Both sets of girls showed their developing relational networks. The *n:gage* girls’ network was mainly their micro and extended family and friends. The *n:counta* girls had a more extended network, with subgroups emerging from their after school activities. This would be in alignment with the way developmental theorists describe the growing social work of the child as they go out to school and begin to mix in their communities beyond their parents. From this exercise, we can see how busy and active life is for these girls. We see them growing from the micro world of their household into the macro world of school and recreational clubs and sports, as ‘Adolescents’ renegotiation of their relationships with the people around them (parents, authorities, friends)…’ (Mercer 2008:29). How do we listen attentively to their varied experiences?

5.2.1.4 Attentive listening

Contemplative spirituality, like Ignatian, relies on listening. Listening to God, listening to the world around and listening to self. The effectiveness of listening in this way depends on the attention given to it. This kind of attentive listening is a spiritual discipline in itself. One of the issues of a programme-driven curriculum is that it can focus more on the doing and the productivity rather than the being and becoming. When time is taken to listen, presence is experienced,

learning can happen and meaning be found. Mercer (2008:9) goes as far as to liken listening to a contemplative spirituality of parenting. Giving space and listening carefully to stories and experiences retold, when working with a young person, can help them to make sense of their feelings and perspectives. This is accompanying in practice. It is based in relationship and seeks to enable and support the wellbeing and flourishing of another. Within GBM(E&W), this was more apparent in the mentoring of the helpers and older girls in positions of leadership. Amongst the *n:counta* group, I observed elements of this as leaders empowered and helped facilitate fundraising events like the quiz, or preparing for the Enrolment and Awards services supporting the girls in their preparations for and actual presentations at these events.

In Godly Play the role of the spiritual guide is key to this and an understanding of this could enrich the role of adults at GBM(E&W). Berryman explains the need for those adults facilitating Godly Play as mentors to 'grow through contemplation' (2009:129) to mature and establish themselves, as they spiritually accompany participants. He explains how contemplation involves the whole person and will not always be a silent process but, when it is, contemplative silence is intangible, non-verbal and intensely personal (Berryman, 2009:53,125). It is our pastoral responsibility to support children and young people as they encounter this.

Within GB there is training for adult leaders and helpers, which is partly helping prepare the volunteers for their role. There is the practice of leading worship

and contributing to prayers, which the team are encouraged to participate in, but that is not the same and can again be a dutiful expectation. This then leaves the adults to grow spiritually through their church engagement, which may or may not be good. It is a spiritual discipline to accompany and to listen; the reflections from Mary Magdalene throughout this thesis are an attempt to model this and remind us of this and affirm how Jesus valued that discipline.

5.2.2 Talking theologically – who is going to listen to me, am I worth it?

Described simply by Ballard and Pritchard as 'a theology of practice' (1996:16), PT is pragmatic as it seeks to transform individuals, communities and ways of working. Reflecting upon lived experiences in critical dialogue with other professional wisdom is characteristic of the interdisciplinary nature of PT. Such is the nature of PT, that further questions emerging is inevitable and it is these critical questions that enrich the reflective process and give focus to the trajectory of change, re-purposing and proclamation.

Relating to this section on the voice of the girls, I propose that these girls and many young people are asking an underlying existential question: who is going to listen to me, am I worth it? I see this question being asked when the *n:counta* girls label the boulders in their river (see Figure 12) and in the problems identified in sizing up the problem (see Figure 20). Often questions put to them require recalling information to show knowledge or understanding, like 'who was Jesus talking to in the story?' These are low-level skills of memory and recall, which imply that child has 'banked information' (Freire, 2005:83) and tries to

respond with the words they perceive are wanted by the waiting questioner. Higher-level thinking questions, for example, ‘what did Jesus mean when he said...?’ require more openness, and time to demonstrate their application, analysis and evaluation skills (Fisher, 1995:18). Subsequently, the inference the young person picks up is that there is little interest in their ideas or rationale, which is an insult to their intelligence. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this is a huge loss to those adults around them, who are missing out on seeing the world through their eyes. Jesus favoured Socratic questions in his conversations with others. When faced with a question, he would often respond with a question and, when the listener needed more, Jesus would use parables to explore the subject further but leave the listener with a question for further thought, subverting the didactic way of teaching to encourage dialogue, exploration and discovery. Another reason for closed questions can be that, when open questions are used, the questioner is no longer fully in control of where the respondent may take them in their answer. It carries a risk, not least because it requires the questioner to make themselves vulnerable to where the response may take them. This might mean thinking on their feet, managing any emotions evoked by the question or becoming more personally involved than they are comfortable with.

Turning the girls’ question on its head redirects the focus back to the adults around the girls in GB and the church to raise the question: how are we listening? Earlier I highlighted this concern about how their prophetic voice can be heard if no one is attentive to them; what does this mean in Baptist contexts

when upholding the value of being a priesthood of all believers? Accountability to the denominational principle should keep the door open for the prophetic voice, but if no one is listening that will remain unheard. The programme has indicated that the voice of the girls is often unheard. Beyond the conversational banter between the girls, there is little talking time within the programme that is not adult-led. The programme schedule has little scope at present for informal dialogue that is of a nature that goes deeper into the stuff of life that helps build the purposeful relationships, which Mercer describes as 'adult faith mentors'(2008:128). For this to happen, there is a need for what Phillips describes as 'midwife/accompanists' who 'capture the mutuality and experiential knowing' (2011:170) of how to build or *birth* the relationship and are willing to be companions to deal with the messiness of life and to celebrate the clear sparkle moments when they are heard. These mentors are primarily listeners 'to hear the faltering words of the speaker, encouraging her to speak her heart, to mirror back when the mentor has heard and to share in reflections, maybe drawing on her own experience' according to Baker (2005, cited in Phillips, 2011:168).

When given even limited space through the ToL exercises, the girls shared a lot of their view of life at this stage. Maybe it is the lack of practice talking about it, perhaps it is cautionary shyness or just the way it was facilitated, but some of their language was perplexing and opaque, but interesting nevertheless. How do adults keep up to date with the latest youth terms if they do not spend time talking with them? I am reminded of the sadness and frustration of Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and found the disciples asleep instead of

keeping watch (Mark 14:32–43). No wonder some of these girls have given up speaking up and sharing when no one is attending to them. Apart from that sense of loss of significance they will feel from being unheard, there is so much to be learned from them, if time was given to attend. For instance, a pastoral concern for the young woman who felt her sense of sadness more than the fun, family and food in her life (see Image 1 below). Of course, the prophets of old were accustomed to this kind of response. Speaking from the margins, people unsure how to respond are so often unresponsive, not understanding the significance of what has been said. When attending to the voice of the child is done well, the power differential between them and adults is reduced to a responsible and respectful balance (Berryman 2009:65). In Godly Play, this is referred to as a 'mutual blessing' (Berryman 1995:130). Surely constructive respectful conversations, where there is a fair balance of listening and speaking and contributions are thoughtfully received and respectfully responded to, should all be a mutual blessing.

Throughout the Bible the instruction to 'hear' or 'listen' often precedes important teaching (Gooder, 2020). It is prevalent in the Jewish Shema 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God…' (Deut. 6:4–5). It appears before the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Jesus, in his parabolic teaching, would often start with the words 'listen' or 'hear' and sometimes conclude with them, to emphasise the importance of what had been said and to instruct the listeners to engage with his words, rather than passively let the imagery wash over them. If a priesthood of all believers is valued, then there needs to be recognition that

this includes these young girls too; who is going to listen to them and show they are worth it? Furthermore, as we learn from Jesus as he attended to children and from Mary Magdalene who attended to Jesus, we need to make time to listen, so that we hear what God is saying to us through these young voices. The spiritual practice of attending to another has been advocated predominately by female theologians and writers: from the disciplined focus on God being the catalyst for loving one's neighbour (Weil, 1942), to the gaze lovingly directed upon an individual's reality (Murdoch, 1970) and on to the embodiment that puts other first (Soskice, 2007). In respect of this project and attending to these girls, Soskice highlights that the object of attention is changeable, 'a moving target' (2007:71) and, with regards to my young participants, 'children are creatures of change and chance, and an attentive gaze on the real in their case is a gaze on a changing reality' which is why it is important that time is made to attend to them. Soskice reminds us that 'those who attend in love – undergo changes as well' (2007:70), exemplified by Mary Magdalene and not uncommon to researchers either.

5.2.3 Girlhood

5.2.3.1 Messy age of transition

I have used the term 'girlhood' to encompass the messy phase of being aged 7–14 years old. I am acknowledging its messiness, as I explained in section 1.2.1 above, because it is an age of transition, whereupon young pre-pubescent girls navigate puberty as they enter adolescence and become young women. It is messy because it is not linear and there is not one size that fits all so that

makes it difficult to neatly classify. This age range does not tidily match the traditional school transitions. It is the lived transition the girls experience of the messy emotional and hormonal turbulence that occurs at this developmental stage. The data collected confirms something of this messiness, as the girls convey their understanding of their lives as they grapple with their search for identity. Conversely, this age range also shows the development of thinking skills from concrete to abstract, logical to divergent problem-solving. This is revealed through the change in the way they spend their time and their perceptions on the challenges they face in life, which is seen in the data. It also shows language giving meaning to maturing spirituality and the emergence of faith for some. This can be seen within the opaque terms they use within the data and in their perceived understanding of God, shaped by significant influencers who help them navigate this liminal space. This is a messy spread of ages, within which significant transitions occur, so what is learned by looking at the two groups of girls and what changes can be noted as they move from the younger into the older group at GBM(E&W)?

The transitions that these girls encounter during this messy phase was distinctive in the ToL exercises. The *n:gage* girls recorded these as significant events on the roots of their tree. Generally, they related to familial transitions like moving house, births, deaths, usual change of school and periods of ill health. Phillips suggests the term ‘threshold’ for these types of transitions (Phillips, 20011:92). This term helps to elicit the sense of liminality that the girls are having to cross over. Berryman writes ‘a threshold is a place for entering

and leaving' (2009:27) in the way of passing through a doorway or climbing over a fence. Expanding on this further, Berryman acknowledges how thresholds not only show the way in (or out) but how they can be distinct to enter a deeper reality of knowing, that would include the knowing of self.

The *n:counta* girls' responses as challenge 'boulders' in their river showed more tensions within relationships; they reflected an awareness and, in some cases, overwhelming awareness of expectations on them and they portrayed what was anxiety-inducing to their understanding of self. These are more implicit transitions that do not always have clear beginnings and endings, nor a sense of moving through, in the same way as crossing a threshold. Instead this tends to grow over time until reaching a tipping point, whereby they overwhelm and become unmanageable. Overall, the responses showed the complexity of experience the girls felt as they sought to navigate their way around these challenges. Slee (2017) develops Ford's metaphor of overwhelming, whereby a sense of enormity, existential dread, awe or wonder can shape life positively and negatively. Slee explains how these 'multiple overwhelmings' affect personal habitual responses and affect spirituality (2017:25).

This complexity adds to the messiness of this girlhood stage. The 'sizing up the problem' data revealed to what extent bullying, arguments and stress-related anxiety seem to be the bigger issues than what may have been expected with schoolwork, body image and social media. This correlates with findings by the State of the Nation Report: the 'increasing incidence of emotional problems as

they move through adolescence' are important for the psychological health of teenage girls. Although they are not linked in isolation to the decline of their psychological health, the report highlights the need for further research to understand better the interplay of risk and protective factors to account for this decline (DfE,19:10). It concludes by categorising a range of explanatory factors into three groups (DfE,19:55). Firstly, there are relationships with family and friends and experiences including bullying, school and satisfaction with attendance and attainment. This was evident in the data for both age groups. Secondly, behaviours they exercise, like social media usage, risky behaviour and fitness activities. The older *n:counta* girls reflected this (see 3.4 above). Thirdly, the positivity of attitude and outlook, feeling hopeful for the future and having a sense of purpose. This was more noticeable from the younger *n:gage* group but still apparent from some of the older girls.

Alongside these factors, the report examines the associated risk factors and the protective measures in place. Friendship, arguably, is seen to be a protective measure when the frequency of seeing friends is high. A sense of safety in the local community and getting sufficient sleep are the other outstanding protective factors (DfE,19:45). It is messy and it is complex, but too often the opinion given in the press is divisive and binary. For example, the impact of social media is heavily regarded to be a detrimental factor on the mental health of young people. Yet its direct influence is much smaller than might be expected, according to the report, which groups it with other behaviours like exercise, sleep and risky behaviours. This mirrors how the girls in my project viewed

social media amongst the challenges in their life when ‘sizing up the problem’, whereby half scaled it as a medium-sized issue whilst the other half scaled it just a small problem, based on their competence for managing their social media accounts and blocking unwanted followers or haters. Unfortunately, the limitations of this study did not allow for more in-depth questioning about this, but some girls knew how to reduce its negative impact, whilst others were affected by it. Social media was regarded as a contributing factor, due to the amount of time spent online and its negative impact upon the quality of sleep subsequently encountered, alongside the heightened risk factor of cyber bullying experienced through online interaction (DFE,19:45). It should be noted that, whilst this was not the case for my participants, for a young person experiencing cyberbullying or online harassment, social media can significantly impact their psychological health, bringing about dramatic changes of behaviour, sometimes with fatal results.

The influence of friendships amongst the older girls seemed a big step up from the familial transitions that the younger girls had recorded. These relate more to their maturing self-knowledge and understanding, which is perhaps why friendship may feel more challenging than school and social media because, fundamentally, they are integral to these worlds the girls inhabit (physically and virtually). Social media platforms can be left and users blocked, but perpetrators may remain active on the platform. School is mandatory, so there is no escape from what may be intimidating, unhealthy relationships there. The daily interaction may be exacerbated by the ongoing hidden discourse. These issues

are unsettling at a time and stage when these girls are already questioning who they are and seeking affirmation from those around them. Perhaps this is evidence of the transition from girlhood to womanhood that gives a changing view on the world and, as Phillips acknowledges, 'recognises other losses, and feeling an existential sadness' that may be hard to articulate but is there nevertheless (2011:79). Subsequently there could be a grieving process at work here that mourns the loss of childhood and its freedoms. It is a hidden loss that goes unnamed but is one that connects and forms a sisterhood of shared experience.

5.2.3.2 Making meaning

Here we return to the theme of storytelling, for it is by telling their story the girls are making meaning, 'a process of making sense of one's world and experiences' (Mercer 2008:2). The ToL exercises enabled the girls to make choices of what to include and what to leave out. In doing so, they chose to narrate what was significant to them in terms of events, relationships and emotions. From this they constructed the story they wanted to tell of their lives at a particular time. As Mercer goes on to point out, this type of exercise also gives opportunity to 'restory' life at any time. I would suggest that this naturally occurs in the passing of time as distance is put between an experience and the memory of it. It could be that, by retelling their story this way, the girls cross another liminal threshold, moving on into their next story. The State of the Nation Report highlights the concern for the increasing incidence of emotional problems as girls move through adolescence. It acknowledges the complexity or

messiness at play here and concludes that there is much to be gained by looking at the interplay between the constellation of factors that continue to trouble and unsettle them (DfE,19:57).

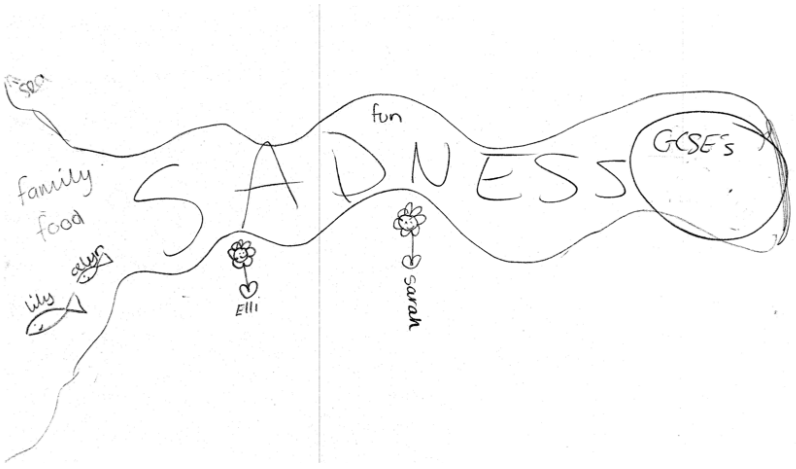
The messiness of girlhood for these two groups of girls is best seen in Figure 15, with the comparative word clouds. These word clouds highlight the variety of activities and pastimes both groups of girls engage in. They helpfully give a visual image of the sense of trying out a range of activities from the *n:gage* group, which seems to narrow down and become more focussed for the *n:counta* girls. There may be a number of reasons for this restriction between the two groups, including the time available to the older girls who will have more homework responsibilities to fulfil. It may also be that, for those involved in sport, as they move up in club, sports training becomes more intense and match fixtures more regular. Similarly, when learning a musical instrument, lessons become more intense and more time invested in practice is expected. Any of these reasons may require participants to make difficult choices between those purposeful activities that will look impressive on a CV and the more playful activities. The spin-off to making these choices may also be a loss of the fun experienced in earlier times of engagement; perhaps with focus comes higher expectations of achievement from coaches, teachers, parents and/or team members. This disparity implies the need for more directed development to refine skills and focus with purpose, but for whole-person development there is a need to be less productive, to play for play's sake rather than play being left behind in childhood. This is where youth groups like GB can step in to facilitate

what is being squeezed out to nurture the wellbeing of the girls, as fun is one of GB values.

5.2.3.3 Perceptions of self, girlhood and life

This possible lack of satisfaction with leisure activities was highlighted by the DfE (19:35) as they reported young people being happier with family, friends and school than in their leisure pursuits. In her study, Phillips names this as a sense of loss and sadness. She recalls for her participants 'this sense of loss, consistent with what they had already revealed, was for their childhood's carefree enjoyment of life and friendships' (2011:77). This reflects the decline in wellbeing as children get older that is significantly lower in girls aged 14 and above than boys of the same age (DfE19:8, 21).

Figure 34 ToL river image



This decline was not only evident in the word clouds, but also in pictorial images of the river of life. One of these images stood out because of its starkness and had the word 'sadness' written in capitals following the shape of the river with

the word fun written much smaller above it. Erased, but still visible on a boulder (so representing a challenge), is the word ‘family’ (Figure 34).

Arguably, the decline in wellbeing is more than a state of mind, as Phillips notes ‘this is a spiritual condition’ (2011:77). Connection is significant within spirituality: connection with self, with others, with the world and with something greater like God or another deity. These connections are described by Bradford as ‘a healthy attitude towards and a positive pattern of engagement with self and family, God and involvement in the wider world’ (1995:35). He goes on to explain ‘spirituality is about “becoming” in the sense of being “in process”: open to growth, open to response, open to renewal and open to hope’ (Bradford, 1995:39).

5.2.4 Talking theologically – who am I?

One question that emerges during girlhood and continues to nudge throughout life is that of identity – who am I and what does it mean to be me? From birth, infants are discovering what they can do and using their senses to make meaning of their experiences. The pre-schooler learns, through play, repetition and trial and error, their physical abilities and limitations, including those set by their care providers. School children continue to refine and master these skills alongside developing their cognitive ability, moving from concrete to abstract and divergent thinking. I see this question being asked by the girls, having identified those who have supported them or been influential in their lives (see Figures 7 and 13) and when it has been identified as characteristic of their

heroes and heroines (see Figure 17). I have already spoken in section 1.2.1 of how girls' social world expands as their life experience moves beyond their home and out into community groups. These girls, through their social connections, learning, life experiences and innermost thoughts, are discovering who they are and what it means to be a girl. As they navigate the challenges in their lives, they learn their limitations as well as their potential, and resilience grows. We can see as they mature, their perspective of life changes. The carefree younger childhood becomes more structured and pressured and the girls acknowledge this. They recognise that life has its challenges and for some that is a harder struggle than for others, shaping self-perception and mental health. They are seeking to find themselves in the midst of the world they find themselves in and its turbulence can be isolating and alienating.

The messiness of this age of transition may reflect something of the chaos alongside the order of creation, as boundaries were set in place for there to be fullness of life. Notice that I am not using the term 'chaos' to describe this girlhood phase, but intentionally using 'messy' and 'messiness' instead. Whilst women are experienced at living with the unpredictability of chaos, there is a tension between that experience and the patriarchal dismissal of women as being 'hysterical' or 'chaotic'. Historically, the limited connotations of language have distorted the reading and understanding of women. This rhetoric has left women 'silenced and shamed for not being complete' (Isherwood, 2003:142).

I am drawn to the second day when the watery abyss is separated by the sky or firmament to keep the oceans apart from the waters above (Gen. 1:6–8). Could the threat of this breaking down mirror something of the significant transition that occurs during this phase of girlhood, the onset of menstruation? A break in the known order creating chaos and change… similar to the impact of a tsunami. Whilst it may not be as dramatic as that, its onset is beyond control; coupled with the physical and emotional changes that precede and accompany menstruation, it is indeed a mess of feelings underlined by its symbolic signal of entering womanhood. And yet it is 'the flow of our blood as women represents our life and passion for humanity', Althaus-Reid (1995:152) argues that menstruation is distinctively a female experience that needs to be named to be separated out from the patriarchal encounter with this phase of life. It contributes to the ontological understanding these girls are forming about being female and what it means to be a girl. It de-mystifies what they have previously only read or been told about. It opens them up to the popular cultural trends that may depict certain images of perceived appearance, presentation and behaviour in this girlhood phase. They enter a new consumer arena that may influence their opinions of their own physique and cultivate a trail of 'compare and despair' thinking when they look at their peers. Does an all-female setting like GBM(E&W) enable constructive discussion around these matters? The fieldnote data from 20 April 2018 would suggest so, with the older girls considering positive body image. They were given a set of before and after images to identify whether or not the transformation was true. The internet images showed young women taking selfies in front of a mirror in different

states of undress to highlight tummy bulges and muscle definition before and after diet, exercise or being airbrushed out (a photographic technique to alter an image). Later in the session, the girls revisited the images to add their prayers (see Figure 35). Clearly, the group leaders were able to be open and honest with the girls. Introducing the prayer activity one leader talked about her embarrassment of her stretch marks, which one day her young son noticed and called her tiger stripes, reminding her of what had caused them and changing her perspective on them! This honesty helps to broaden out the sense that this way of thinking about physical appearance is not just a phase, but is part of our lifelong search for understanding ourselves.

Figure 35 Positive body image activity and prayer

Is a single-sex group able to help girls see themselves made in the image of God more positively? Perhaps – when language is inclusive and the feminine

attributes of God are celebrated. When patriarchal systems are redressed to affirm women in leadership and ministry, these girls can begin to find their place in God's kingdom. Before this, though, there needs to be a sense of otherness, an awareness of something greater than them and the world they find themselves in, a God encounter that nudges them to consider being made in God's image. Mercer argues that 'to know girls one has to understand the orienting worldview through which they make sense of their reality' (2009:125). For the girls in my project, their worldview is shaped by the sociological lens outlined in section 1.2.2, where there is a growing movement challenging the sexualisation, silencing and exclusion of women versus the media drip-feed of how girls should look. Mercer continues to explain how spirituality emerges out of the need to make sense of the ordinary every day and to experience transcendence. It is this search for meaning that can draw a person closer to God, whilst those *kairos* moments of awe and wonder make the familiar fade momentarily as the creator, giver of life, breaks into our everyday. This dimension of spirituality looks within and beyond self. In a Christian uniformed youth group and very much part of GBM(E&W), the vision is to nurture an understanding and relationship with God. When asked in the ToL exercises to complete the sentence starter 'God is…' the younger *n:gage* girls focussed more on God's characteristics as if describing a good friend, for example: kind, helpful, amazing, wonderful, inspiring. Only one response referred to '**He** brings us good life' and another to God's omnipotence: 'my belief and protector', whilst one responded with 'a friend' and someone else 'I love you', indicating being in relationship with God. There were a couple of comments that referred to the

omnipresence of God, for example, '…with you' that showed awareness of the otherness of God and confirmed knowledge of God as would be expected within this group.

More than half of the older *n:counta* girls omitted to complete the sentence starter. This may have been for a number of reasons, including not seeing it, not wanting to or not knowing how to articulate what they feel or believe in this way. Those that did respond mainly referred to God's omniscience, declaring God is '…everything in life'. One response likened God to a river (it should be noted that this group were completing the river exercise, so perhaps this was another way of saying God is everything). One respondent named God 'Father', whilst another explained '…someone I turn to'. These would indicate that they had a relationship with God. The rest highlighted God's omnipotence as 'amazing, awesome and truthful'.

I am mindful that words are only part of our language system, so as I have sat with this data, I have sought to hear the silent unwritten responses; I observed the body language during the prayer time at the end of the evening; I have seen the facial expressions and felt the awkward discomfort when girls have felt unable to express their thoughts beyond recalling biblical facts from scripture. In my contemplative reflection, I am reminded of the times Jesus attended to the children in his aphorisms (Berryman 2017:27). Jesus shows us that the child can communicate silently by being (Mark 9:33–37) and, if we are attentive and curious to the non-verbal body language cues, this can be as effective as

words. Children and young people do also need help creating meaning from what they experience of God. Berryman calls this ‘the art of speaking Christian’ (2017:82) and creating safe talking space to do so is vital.

5.2.5 Relationships

In my methods I have used ‘accompanying’ to describe something of my presence with the girls week by week as participant-observer. I also highlighted it as an approach used in youth-work practice (see 2.4.4 above) and likened it to discipling. My interest was in the exchanges between the leaders and members, but also amongst the adult team and similarly between the girls themselves. Read theologically these interactions may be a mirror of the *imago dei*, the relational God. Alongside this, I was keen to hear from the girls about positive role models and who they recognised as having influence speaking into their lives. Who does the data tell us are these significant others and what is it that they engender in the girls? What do we learn from the data highlighting some of the tensions between the positivity of being part of the sisterhood of the group and the conflicts arising in closer friendship encounters? Furthermore, the data brings us back to the spiritual discipline of listening and helps to highlight what fosters a safe listening space for these girls and what happens when that is in place.

5.2.5.1 Accompaniers

An early observation recorded in the fieldnotes was that of the positive relationships between the adults, some of whom had grown up together in

GBM(E&W), others who had experienced it for themselves and sought the same positive experience for their daughters and others, who were family relatives. In my own youth-work practice, I have noticed that if those leading enjoy the group nights, that filters down to the young people themselves. I believe this was a contributing factor to the success of this GB unit. There was little sense of the adults being there because it was their 'turn on the rota', but more because they wanted to be there. These relationships between the adults gave a robust frame to the unit as a whole. However, not all the adults were part of that. It was clear that some of the volunteers were more on the edge of the group than others. Too often youth-work activities would not be able to happen without the support of volunteers, but on occasion volunteers get taken for granted and struggle to find their way into the group. During the course of my fieldwork there was a change of policy with GBM(E&W) that meant those helping as volunteers had to undergo a residential training weekend in March 2018 to register as helpers. There was a positive push for this within this unit and I believe most attended. Following on from that, the adults got to wear uniform sweatshirts to help them stand out and fit in. The uniform is another element that helps foster belonging amongst the group. It bears the emblem of GBM(E&W), a visual reminder of the values and purpose of the organisation. At a glance it shows who is a member of the group, adults and girls wearing sweatshirts and those who are not members not wearing the uniform.

5.2.5.2 Significant adults

Relationships between the leaders and the girls were noticeably different between the two groups. *N:gage* was more structured in its delivery of the programme and felt more didactic-information sharing than the older *n:counta* group, whose team were more relational in their delivery and fostered a more participatory approach with the girls. There was a younger team leading the older girls, which helped nurture relationships and rapport. Research conducted by Powell and Clark (2011), on behalf of the Fuller Institute, found that intergenerational relationships are beneficial to young people and to the nurture of their faith. It asserts a 5:1 ratio for young people to have at least five significant, interested and invested adults supporting them and speaking into their life. The approach is encouraged in other areas of life, including in the practice of accompanying in youth work.

In Godly Play, the mentor and guide help each child cross thresholds whilst maintaining and interpreting the threshold to them (Berryman, 2009:29). They seek to *model* how to wonder, they *show* children how to create meaning, they *invite* children to participate, they *support* the group, they help *clarify* what is unknown and they *hold the space* to *protect* the work of the children (Berryman, 2013:22). Elements of this could be seen at GBM(E&W) in terms of being positive role models for all, inviting the girls to participate in the weekly activities and, through the curriculum, support their learning and facilitate ways for them to make a meaningful response, in particular the younger *n:gage* girls. As with Phillips' participants '…the girls often did need adult help bringing their plans or

ideas to fruition' (Phillips, 2011:161), in particular when that was outward-facing engagement, like the fundraising quiz they facilitated for the parents or when the younger girls went carolling at the local elderly peoples home.

A key tension I identified within the group was the lack of freedom. The programme gave little space for the girls to express themselves beyond responding to questions and instructions. Opportunity for free expression verbally, in terms of talk time, was limited due to more time prioritising action and activity than being. There was little free creative expression, especially with the younger group having to reproduce crafts that the leader had already prepared in the style of children's television programme Blue Peter, where viewers are shown a completed version before going through step-by-step instructions to reproduce one in the same style (see Figure 36). This limited freedom is not unusual in Christian youth work. In her research Phillips observes that, where a more didactic educational approach was used, her participants showed less originality in their expression but when significant space was created to hear from the young women in a less formal more relational approach, ideas were played with and issues discussed at more depth (Phillips, 2011:170). When relationships are deepened in this way and space is given for girls to express themselves more freely, they can surprise us with their ideas, creativity and skill. This in turn makes more natural the validation of the girls for who they are, rather than what they will become.

Games were key in *n:gage* to getting the girls mixing and working together as well as being active and having fun. Time in the group circle occasionally showed girls who were at school together or friendships that met outside of *n:gage* as the girls would interact with each other's contributions at news time.

Figure 36 Image of origami disciples and Jesus in the boat

N:counta was a smaller group, so doing adult-directed crafts around the tables enabled the girls to mix more freely; often the small group work they engaged in had a competitive element to it that helped them to work together to succeed effectively. Berryman cautions that adolescents '…are greatly in need of playfulness to resolve their adolescent identity crisis' (2017:61). Play is a good vehicle for bringing people together across the ages. It is pleasurable, voluntary and can involve deep concentration. It can be a social leveller bridging the classes or levels of knowledge. We can learn a lot about others when we play together and observe the different characteristics displayed. Watching the girls

play these games, I could see those who played to win (some at whatever cost), whilst others used it to get alongside another and catch up on news. Those who liked to organise and lead, along with those who were happy to be told what to do and wanted to please. Some were able to introduce a new game and give clear instructions for the group to learn together, whilst others were spatially challenged and often last to be chosen for team games.

Not all children enjoy organised games like this and there is nowhere to hide when that is what the programme dictates, as we can see in the fieldnote observation of the new member who chose to opt out. Phillips highlights the way that girls may choose to opt out of the organised games to 'play' in their own way instead and offers examples of talking in groups, which I observed more with the older girls (2011: 153). Another example offered by Phillips was regarding physical contact like handholding and preening one another; this was more noticeable with the younger girls, sometimes whilst playing the organised game, but often when waiting their turn. When this non-conforming behaviour interrupts the flow of play, frustrations can surface and the game becomes more divisive than unifying and the language of blame and shame can emerge. This was not evident in my observations nor the leaders' responses, but it was clear which girls were more popular than others by the way their lack of focus or failure to achieve was excused and they were congratulated for their efforts and those who just received an awkward silent response from both adults and girls.

5.2.5.3 Role models and aspirations

The heroes and heroines' data (see Figure 17) highlighted the influential voices speaking into the girls' lives. The younger *n:gage* girls admired family members, friends, teachers, GB leaders and Jesus. The link with family is mirrored in the record that children are happiest when with their family, data that has remained stable over the past decade (DfE,19:9). The older *n:counta* girls also included historical and contemporary figures, perhaps reflecting some of their learning and awareness of world events. Mercer also noted that 'parents certainly are not without a significant role in their daughters' adolescence' and she goes on to say how 'talk about family remains integral to girl talk on faith' (2008:43). For some, the protective environment of the home is where they acquire their sense of safety and confidence to explore who they are. Using the imagery of the three dimensions of being in the womb, Phillips (2011:147) highlights the protective membrane from which the girls are nourished and kept within, as they grow within their family home environment. This may not be every girl's experience; I was aware of there being some looked-after children within the wider group, so clearly their experience was different. The inclusion of pets from the older girls is interesting, I wonder if it is the unthreatening companionship of a pet that is found to be inspiring. It may be having a sense of responsibility and care for another that helps them to realise their potential and to exercise the qualities they most admire.

Role models are needed for development of selfhood. For these girls, it helps them to understand their gender which, as Mercer (2008:51) acknowledges, is a

complex process often intensified by the bombardment of cultural perspectives, both positive and negative, that influence and at times confuse their understanding. This came to light in the aforementioned session with the older *n:counta* girls when one of the leaders spoke personally (see Figure 35). 'To belong is to be attached but in a relationship of mutuality' (Phillips, 2011:158); having leaders share personally and prayerfully in this way models that for mutuality to exist both parties need to be willing to show vulnerability.

Within GB there is a web of relationships that the girls are attached to by belonging to the group. The qualities these girls admired, that their positive role models engender, were kindness, care, loyalty, humour and integrity. This aligns with the method of accompanying and how 'it arises out of the sense of being' (Green and Christian, 1999:60). I remember being told in my initial teacher training the value of telling a child when I didn't know the answer and to use that as an opportunity to demonstrate how to find out. This has been my experience when working with young people and I believe they feel respected when treated with that kind of honesty. This kind of integrity permits them to admit when they do not know or are not sure about something. It is foundational to positive relationships. It goes alongside the care that they receive in that relationship. Children and young people know when those adults are with them out of care rather than duty, as reflected in my assessment of the dynamics of the volunteers at this group. This knowing is a primal instinct that helps protect. It is foundational to this study; attending to the girls shows they matter, they belong and they are respected.

5.2.5.4 Nurturing space

'Entering the world of children is like visiting a strange and wonderful new culture...' (Berryman 2009:130). Making sense of their relationships and interactions requires immersion and learning to 'speak like a native-speaker', as Berryman continues. This was apparent in some of the games played and the ideas generated by the girls, in particular for one favourite called 'Splatt!', a game of elimination that concludes with a head-to-head guess of the word chosen by the girl 'on it' and reflects something of their interests or current trends. Similarly, we can see the tensions of peer pressure emerging as this age range learns the art of holding differing opinions without alienating one another. This became apparent in the responses to sizing up the problem data (see Figure 20), where relationships with lads was an issue for some and not for others, who found it easier to engage with them without the added complications of attraction (Figure 21). This is where we see the need for a safe nurturing environment as the girls work through these ideas and differences to find meaning and to encounter other perspectives, like when the adults sometimes share.

Phillips argues that it is 'the quality of relationships within or around the space, not the space alone, which brings the protection' (2011:150). This reminds me of the sacred space within a Godly Play room, whereby the physical layout of the room is valued but acknowledgement is given to other non-verbal yet symbolic attributes (Berryman, 1995:150). There is the auditory listening space, where all voices are attended to, seen as significant and valued. Coupled with

the emotional space whereby participants feel safe to be and have a tangible sense of affirmation, care and respect, 'these relationships also have an integrating, healing effect when other spaces, which should offer safety, fail to do so' (Phillips, 2011:150). However, it is hard to establish this with larger groups like this GB unit. The practicalities of fitting in the room seated any other way than in rows would be challenging, giving time to each voice when there are over 50 present difficult. Giving more time in the individual groups where there is less programme and more relational time may help to establish this more.

5.2.6 Talking theologically – where do I fit in?

A single-sex uniformed group might seem like a nurturing space for girls. It provides a female environment, showing the progression from being the playful seeking girl we might find in *n:gage* to the dynamic discerning young women in *n:counta* and on to the competent confident leaders giving back to the organisation that they grew up in. This question of 'where do I fit in' is seen where the girls identify their heroines and heroes (see Figure 17) and as they consider the qualities of a friend (see Figure 19), as they seek affirmation and connection identifying with both those around them and those that they learn about.

Mercer highlights that a significant way the Church can support girls is for them to see women holding leadership roles and where they 'see themselves in stories and models of faithful living' (2009:72). She also talks of the importance

of gender norms being critically reflected upon to support girls as they determine '"outside the box" of socially prescribed gender identity'. Positive role models to aspire to are not just for the girls within the group, but also for the church hosting a uniformed group. Too often these groups remain on the fringe of the church community and yet represent the majority of their engagement with children and young people. How might the relationship move beyond host and group booking to one where there is a greater sense of belonging to one another? The bond and respect I witnessed at the Enrolment Service, where promises are made to one another, suggest that this too is an aspiration, but that it may need help moving beyond the adult paradigms to more purposeful engagement, to help build understanding and commitment to one another. The promise the *n:gage* girls make relates to doing their best to come to GB regularly, to join in and to listen to the leaders and helpers so that they can learn more about Jesus and helping others. Whilst these young girls are dependent on their parent/carers to bring them to the group, the promise to do their best infers this, whilst the second part of the promise is about their responsibility to participate and engage. The *n:counta* girls promise to do their best to be loyal to the Girls' Brigade, to listen to the officers and seek to learn more about Jesus Christ. This seems age-appropriate, recognising the Gen-Z tension between their reluctance to commit and the variety of opportunities they have to opt in or out (Figure 23). This data focusses on belonging to the group (community) and personal participation rather than the specifics of peer relationships or the characteristics valued in friends.

If that sense of belonging is missing at an organisational level, it makes the group, as a whole, seemingly function in its own bubble. This would not just be true in this context and is a common issue for Messy Church communities, when there have been key milestones like baptisms, dedications, weddings and the need to justify that to happen within the Messy Church environment instead of the mother church. It can be divisive and that can affect the group itself. I picked up on some of the tensions for this unit when unclear communication caused diary clashes, impacting on the space available and resulting in plans needing to be rearranged. It may be inevitable that this occurs on occasion and, when it does, it can have the negative effect of reminding a group that they are guests in the church rather than partners with or even part of it. This, in turn, filters down to individuals and can impact relationships.

For the girls themselves within the unit, they are seeking to find their place within that context and, as we have seen, for some this is harder than for others. Participation can foster belonging – especially when that is voluntarily instigated, as Phillips observes in her study (2011:160). Voluntary participation is a principle that makes youth work distinctive from formal education and a participative group from a childcare service. Coupled with responsibility, participation can take a young person beyond attending a group to becoming a member and finding their place within the community of the group to seeking to serve amongst that community. When their ideas are given space to grow and their plans enabled with constructive support, a sense of ownership of the group is nurtured – a dynamic within belonging flourishes. ‘A holding environment is

only as strong as its members' (Phillips 2011:160) and when members are affirmed, not just for being present but for what they contribute to the group through their participation, a deeper sense of belonging can be experienced.

As I contemplate the relationship between the GB unit, the Church and the girls I am reminded of the trinitarian dance between God the creator, God the redeemer and God the enabler (Fiddes, 2000). There is connection and interdependency between the three and they each take turns to lead the dance, whilst the others follow. Whilst the tempo and direction change, the mystical encircling and interweaving of their relationships continue. At times the rhythm is inwardly moving, the interiority of an inner and private life, which may include prayer and devotion. At other times, outwardly engaging with interpersonal and communal relationships at its core as belonging is at the core of spirituality. This relational consciousness links with attachment and, as Kegan (1994) highlights, is crucial for the development of spirituality as it strengthens a sense of self-identity and personal ideology. Hay and Nye describe relational consciousness as 'spiritual sensitivity' (1996:59) and highlight three features to this. Firstly, awareness-sensing, which relates to being present and attending to the here and now. It links with Kegan's understanding of 'self-authoring', recognises these self-focussed feelings and acknowledges the growing social connections pre-adolescents and adolescents experience. This can be seen as the girls connect with their leaders but are also inspired by those historical and contemporary role models they learn about. Secondly for Hay and Nye is value-sensing, whereby an individual sort their beliefs and values, holding on to and

letting go of some that will have been inherited from their family and also acquiring others through their growing engagement with others and the wider world. It is seen when the girls articulate the values they seek within friendship (see Figure 19). As these girls have learned of the achievements of those they aspire to follow, they determine what they need to cultivate within themselves as well as seeing their opportunities more fully rather than being limited by gender stereotypes. Finally, Hay and Nye recognise mystery-sensing, for which Kegan uses the term 'self-transforming' to explain the search for meaning and deepening of understanding. Accompanying young people helps them to process and sort for themselves what is important and what ignites their interest to explore further and seek new insight. It is important they have a safe space in which to ask their questions, articulate their thoughts without fear of judgement and where they are supported in their searching. This is the mutuality Phillips (2011:158) was emphasising, the place where each is transformed by the other, the Godly Play mutual blessing. Key to this transformation for these girls is their shared belonging to GB.

Where are the biblical accompaniers on this holy ground of the lives of these girls? Too often women in the Bible are neglected and their stories left untold. Only a few are even given their names, even though they play significant roles as witnesses to God's actions in their lives and sometimes for their whole community and even nationally, like the Woman of Samaria, who risks so much for someone already ostracised to tell of her meeting with Jesus at a well in the midday heat (John 4:29). She at least is located through place, rather than the

anonymous presence of so many women in the biblical texts, like the bleeding woman who is healed because she boldly touches Jesus and has faith. As we have seen through the reflections on Mary Magdalene, the apostle of the apostles following closely and watching on, waits faithfully. Mary the truth-seeker and witness. Mary to whom Jesus listened and willingly received from, to the embarrassment and annoyance of the other disciples. The voice of women is of equal importance and value. Through their voice we hear emotion as well as intellectual intelligence; we attend to the non-verbal, the silence, as well as that which is proclaimed; we see them unmasking corruption and abuses of power, so often holding up a mirror to injustice both inside and outside the family of faith; we feel and we learn to wait with them (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1984:38). How will girls learn of their place in God's kingdom unless they journey with the matriarchs? For instance, Rachel and Leah and the prophetesses Miriam and Huldah, as they negotiate family jealousies and destructive relationships, demonstrate pastoral care and leadership of their people through wilderness years or reveal the holiness in things beyond them. They need biblical accompaniers, like midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who subverted the power of the Pharaoh choosing life rather than death. Deborah the warrior and leader of her people in wisdom and battle. Queen Esther who uses her cunning from a place of powerlessness and threat to save her people. Ruth, whose faithfulness, love and courage enabled her to go with Naomi into the unknown, becoming part of Jesus genealogy. Mary, who in her teens was called by God to extraordinary commitment and acceptance of being caught up in things beyond her imagining. These and so many women are integral to the

story of God and girls being empowered to claim their power, visibility and voice. As Slee (2016:23) writes, this is part of the process of claiming their place in the public arena and demanding their voices be heard. For the prophetic voice of these girls to be heard, they need to see those who have gone before them, as well as those contemporary role models to know they have something of value to say and for those who have ears to hear to listen. When these girls engage with the Bible and the life of the Church, they need to see 'women visible as active participants and leaders' (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1996:10). They need to understand 'women's contributions and suffering throughout church history' to protect their own autonomy and to empower them to be themselves and to know freedom from the struggle to fulfil that which has been dictated by a male-dominated society (Schüssler-Fiorenza,1996:10).

5.3 Summary conclusion

In this chapter I have taken from the data the key themes of voice, girlhood and relationships and, within each, have identified relevant factors impacting upon them. Through voice we have seen a need for amplification, a clarification of girl talk, the lack of opportunity to talk freely and the importance of attentive listening. Theologically reflecting on the question 'am I worth it?', underlying the broader question of 'who is going to listen to me?', we are reminded of the biblical instruction 'to hear and listen'. When this spiritual discipline is enacted, there can be a mutual blessing inter-generationally. This enables the prophetic voice of the girls to be heard whilst affirming them for who they are now, rather

than who they will become. To feel they belong, these girls need to know that there are those interested in what they have to say and ready to listen.

The theme of girlhood has highlighted the messiness of this age of transition, as the girls are making meaning of life and their perceptions of self and girlhood. These girls need a safe space that nurtures them as they grow in their understanding of selfhood and learn the art of speaking Christian. The search for identity in adolescence is key to understanding the question 'who am I?'. This not only applies to their sense of self but also their understanding of God, as we have reflected on the value of highlighting the feminine attributes of God to enrich the *imago dei*. Alongside this is the need for inclusive language to be applied.

Relationships identify the influence of accompaniers, the need for significant adults, the positive role models the girls aspire to and the value of a nurturing space. To help find their place in the group and in God's kingdom, these girls need dynamic accompaniers who inspire and encourage them. Theologically, we reflected upon the question 'where do I fit in?', in response to the Baptist principle of a priesthood of all believers. Consideration has been given to the biblical accompaniers these girls need to encounter, as well as the physical accompaniers they share life with; and the value of a safe nurturing space for the girls to gather whilst they navigate their place literally in church life and metaphorically in the Bible.

Ostensibly, the questions ‘who is listening to me?’, ‘who am I?’, ‘where do I fit in?’ (sections 5.2.2, 5.2.4 and 5.2.6 above) are about knowing oneself, knowing what it means to be a girl aged 7–14, knowing what it means to belong to a sisterhood of peers. Some of the tipping points along this messy phase have also been highlighted. Where the transition from child into womanhood shifts the perceived sense of freedom from the creative imaginative playfulness of childhood into a rational factual reality, time becomes more focussed and the expectations of others are realised.

Next we shall consider what the findings from this study mean for future practice. The concluding chapter shall offer practical guidance and recommendations for those working with girls in local groups, those in national roles overseeing groups and for local churches. It will explain the relevance of its conclusions for those in church leadership.

MARY PROCLAIMS…

We are Mary the disciple
sometimes lost in our number
sometimes betrayed by our age
but despite the messiness
we are making meaning
as we consider our world, our life and ourselves.

We are Mary the one who follows
quietly committed and present each week.
Connected by this group,
having fun whilst
watching how it's done and
waiting for our turn.

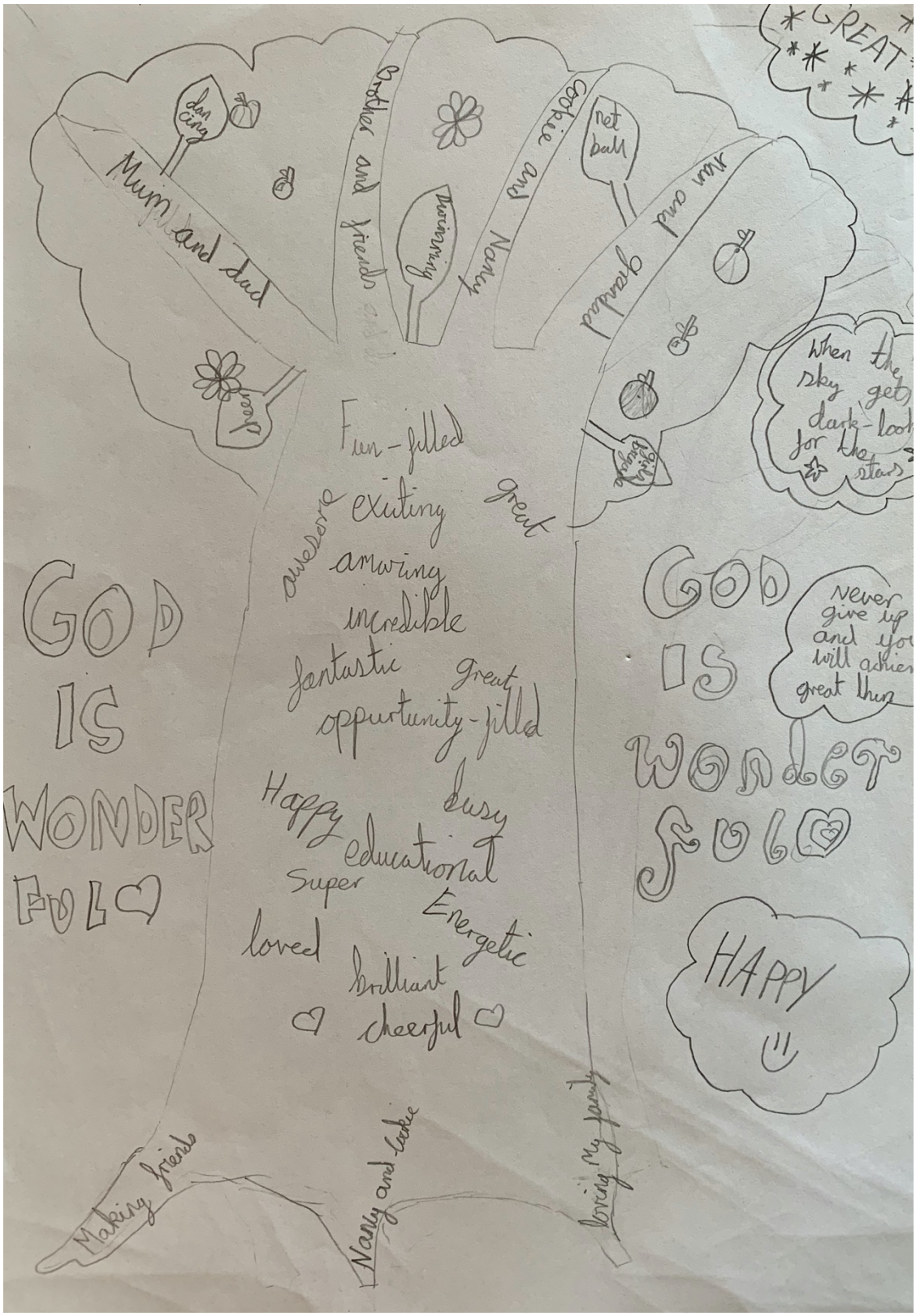
We are Mary the one who listens
but seldom is invited to speak.
So much remains within us,
who is going to listen?
So much we'd love to share
are we not worth asking?

We are Mary the one who attends
aspiring to take our place.
Truth seekers and truth speakers
waiting to fulfil our potential.
But who are we?
Where do we fit in?

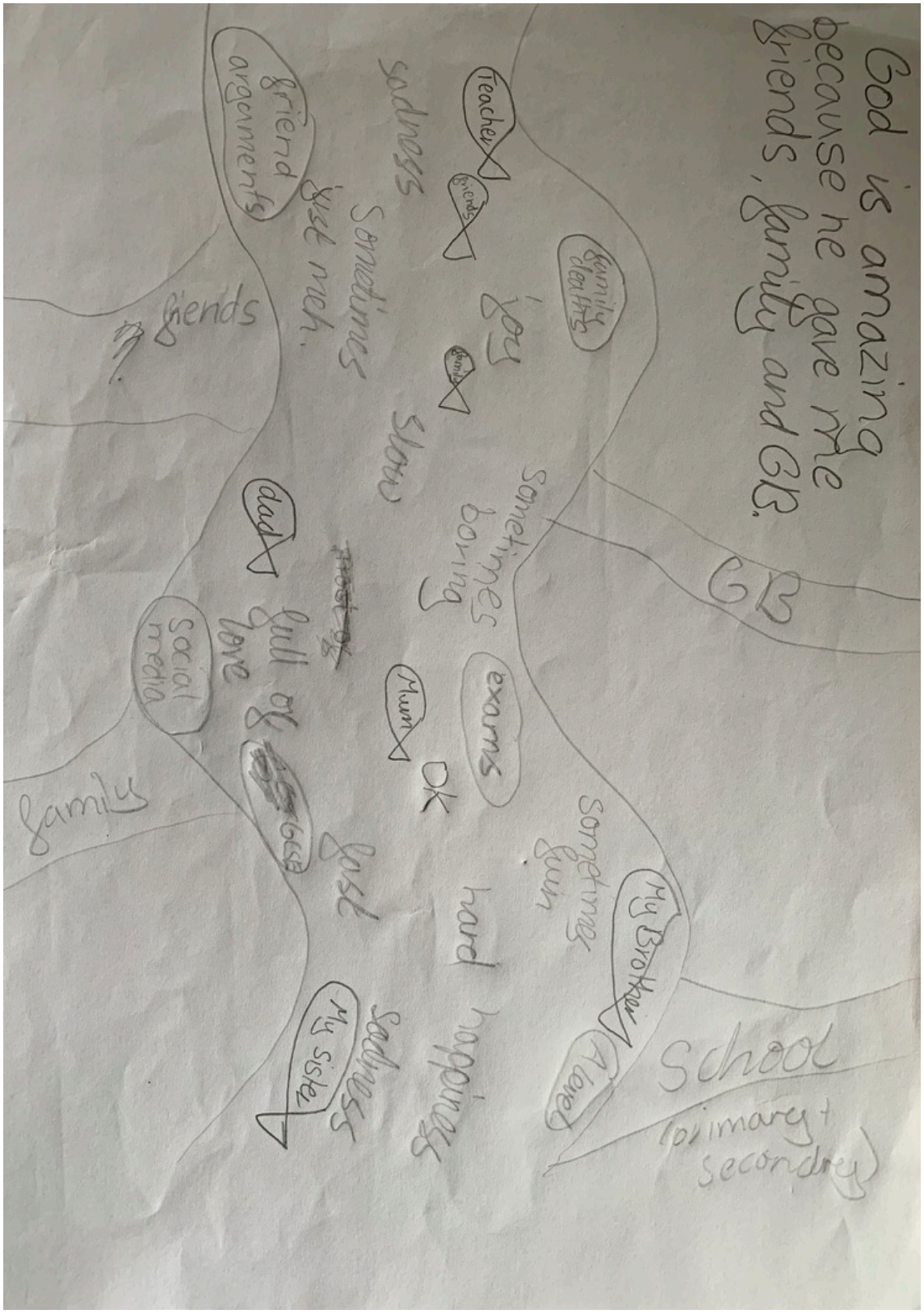
We are Mary the one through whom God speaks
so, turn up the volume,
amplify our unique voice.
Make time to listen,
create space to talk,
to question and imagine.

We are Mary!

TREE OF LIFE – SAMPLE 6



RIVER OF LIFE – SAMPLE 6



If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

CHAPTER SIX – CUTTING AND TYING THE WARP THREADS: RESPONDING IN PRACTICE

6.1. Introduction

Finishing the tapestry requires cutting the warp threads and tying them at both ends one by one. Attention to detail here will preserve the tapestry and its final image. A juxtaposition where one side is ordered whilst the other remains messy.

The practical theologian completes her reflection and analysis of the data. She has discussed the findings and their theological significance. It is time for her to look up from the specifics and to consider the wider landscape of work with girls aged 7–14. She must consider the implications for girls' growth and development.

She makes her recommendations for the youth-work practitioners as well as for other uniformed groups, local churches and the Baptist denomination. It is time to let the girls speak.

This final chapter will look at the interconnection between the themes of voice, girlhood and relationships, using IPA to construct the interpretative narrative of the themes to consider their impact upon girls. There will inevitably be questions to carry with me as a reflective practitioner, whose praxis is to question, and as

a practical theologian, who cuts through the presenting facts to ask 'the most important question in PT "So what?" Thinking, analysis, understanding and faith must be correlated with concrete ways of acting, or this kind of theology is not actually practical' (Pattinson, 2013:4).

I will relate these findings to practice, to identify aspects to celebrate as well as to tweak or to implement for girls aged 7–14. I will use theological tools to frame this and an audit tool to measure effectiveness for nurturing spirituality. The chapter will conclude with recommendations offered to support and enrich ways of working and reflective exercises with which to engage and consider existing practice. These recommendations will be addressed firstly to those leading the local group, secondly those in the national team that links the local group to the wider organisation and finally to the local church leadership hosting a local group.

6.2 Reflecting theologically

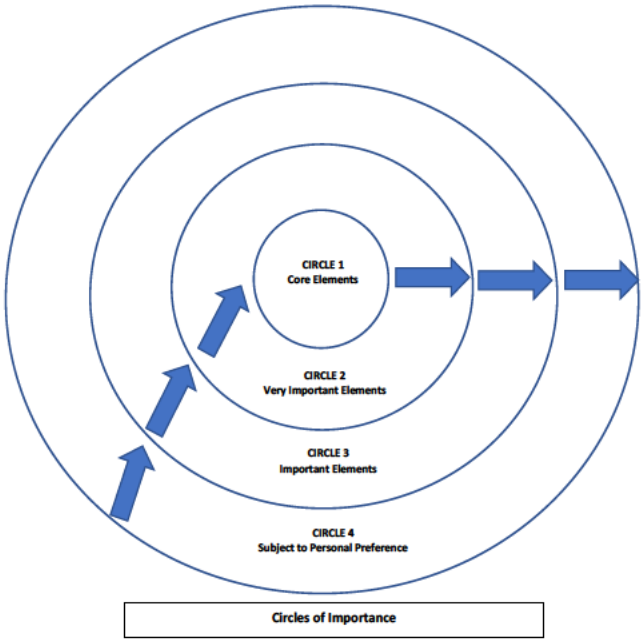
I am using a set of concentric circles to reflect on the thematic features and principles, including resources and activities from the data with my recommendations. Tillich contends that 'every understanding of spiritual things is circular' (Tillich (1951) cited in Gill, 1968:479).[12] For the purposes of organising and communicating information, circles have been used in several

[12] Tillich describes the pattern of inquiry and social context being determined by an acceptance by the theologian or philosopher of the mystical nature of what passes between subject and object. This he called the 'theological circle'.

ways including pie charts and Venn diagrams. Boyd (2013:170–172) designed his model of Circles of Importance originally for the purposes of theological debate. The circles indicate the various issues and importance of topics being discussed to engender measured and respectful exchanges, even when there are differences of opinion. I use this model to start at the centre, with that which is most important, given the discussion of findings, and the surrounding circles indicate that which is still important but of lesser priority, sometimes due to the broadening variants and sometimes because of the subjectivity of preference. Fundamentally, the completed mapping is worthy of sharing with stakeholders, inviting them to similarly map their understanding of these. Although each would be subjective to the individual's perspective, it could be a useful tool for building understanding within a community or across a service.

I will build up my model in two stages to illustrate my reflective process, before going on to explain my recommendations in more detail. For clarity, the circles move out from circle 1 at the centre containing the core; circle 2, still very important; circle 3, important but with variants and circle 4, subjective issues that often reveal personal preferences. I find the visual image of this circle tool helpful to organise my thinking. I like the connectedness of the concentric circles. They remind me of the ripples that flow out when a stone is dropped in water.

Figure 37 Flow of impact across the circles



It is as if, as researcher and practical theologian, I have dropped here a figurative stone representing my engagement with GBM(E&W) and my core findings into circle 1. Rippling out from that are circles 2, 3 and 4. I believe that when the core is attended to, other principles flow in its outworking. It could also be said that the contents of circles 2, 3 and 4 ripple back to uphold and enrich the core in circle 1. This tool has helped me to consider the value of my findings, some of which relate specifically to the context; others are inferences and some recommendations, as we shall now explore.

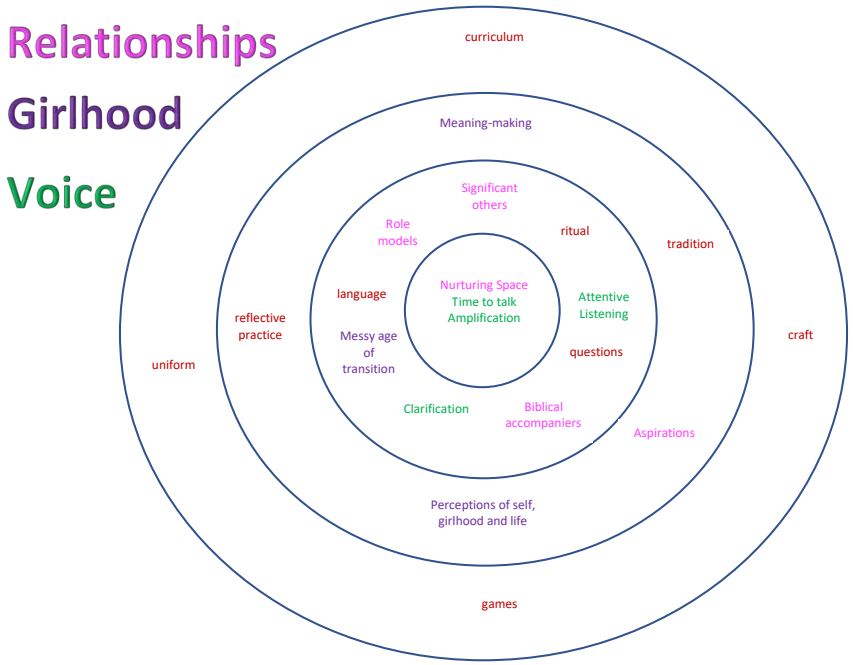
In Stage One, I shall map my most important themes relating to relationships, girlhood and voice, as discussed in Chapter Five. This will include specific features from the context of my field note observations added to those themes.

Stage Two will integrate theological concepts (to utilise the Christian language that is not so commonly used in youth-work practice) to help view the data findings through a theological lens. I will apply an audit tool, designed by Rebecca Nye, to evaluate how the spiritual development of those in this girlhood phase is supported by the elements discovered and set out in Stage One. The purpose of this model is to consider the implications of the findings upon the spiritual nurture of the girls, using a familiar tool in the way I have before for my own youth-work practice.

6.2.1 Stage one

The additional features from my observational field notes are colour-coded brown.

Figure 38 Stage one: Circles of importance



Circle 1, at the centre, contains those things that are a clear goal to prioritise. If nothing else, a nurturing space, as discussed from the literature in the previous chapter, should be created, with sufficient time to talk being prioritised so that the voice of the girls is nurtured and amplified. This addresses the observed absence of the girls' voice (see section 1.2.2 above) even within dedicated youth-work groups.

Circle 2 shows it is very important to listen attentively for which significant others are needed as accompaniers and positive role models for the girls. Here we begin to see how some of the findings relate to skills being activated, like attentive listening, and how some relate to what is needed to be in place to support the girls, like the adults around the girls. Furthermore, careful consideration should be given to the nuanced needs, like biblical accompaniers, which can also inspire the girls and empower them in their faith journey. Language is very important. Firstly, to clarify what the girls are saying when they express themselves their way. Secondly, to ensure inclusive language is used so these girls recognise they are welcome and belong.

The place of ritual is shown here because it has the potential to be responsive to various features of the findings:

- Its familiarity is reassuring.
- It helps build a sense of belonging.
- Participation helps the group to bond.

- It provides a framework to a gathering contributing to the nurturing space.

The GB sessions were framed by the ritual of gathering together for opening worship and ending the evening together with prayers. I observed ritualistic play in the games with the younger girls; when given the choice, they select to play the same game over and over. Phillips (2011:120,151) also observed the practice of ritual amongst her participants.

It was the open-ended questions that enabled the girls' voice to be heard and provided insight into their perception of life at this messy age. Questions are important. A nurturing space could encourage questions to be raised and discussed as part of making meaning, as well as building relationship.

Circle 3 reflects how having the inner circles in place can support the outer circles. In this instance, having significant accompaniers around them in a nurturing space, the girls are supported in making meaning of their lives. Their perception of themselves, girlhood and life are shaped by these positive role models inspiring and reflecting back to them. This builds on and scaffolds their internal sense of self, giving it a structure that is more robust and resilient if the earlier circles are in place. The outcome of this will influence their aspirations.

Reflective practice is mapped here as being important for the adult team to make meaning and develop understanding both of the practice and of the girls.

Unless time is given for reflection, change is slow and opportunity for transformation is missed.

Tradition in this circle relates to knowing the history of the group, the way things are is important but should not be constraining.

Circle 4 at the outside is subjective, as its elements relate to personal preferences which are variable. The crafts, curriculum, games and uniform will be liked by some and not by others. These are the elements I observed the girls showing their preference, by opting in or out of them accordingly. Each of these elements have value: games help build relationships; a uniform shows membership and belonging; crafts offer a creative expression; and curriculum gives direction and purpose to the group sessions. However, they can also divide a group, frustrate members and be tokenistic rather than child-initiated and directed (Hart (1992) in Holden and Clough, 1998:19).

6.2.2 Stage two

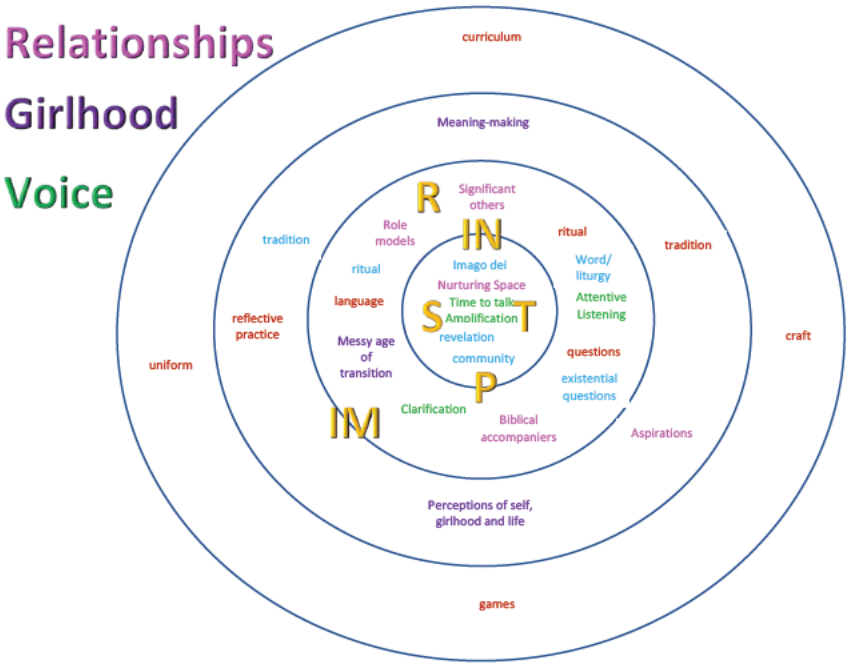
Thinking theologically about these themes, I sought to consider where key theological concepts were present and have colour-coded these blue to highlight that, whilst most of the content can be understood theologically already, it may not be considered as important. This theological language is to bridge the gap between those in ministry and those involved in youth work, to show that despite language differences, practice is often similar and of equal value.

Reflecting on my research question considering the extent the girls' development and growth was enhanced in an all-girl setting, I was reminded of the acronym SPIRIT for the elements that nurture children's spirituality (Nye, 2009:41). It is one of the practical outcomes from Hay and Nye (1998) research as discussed in sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.3. The elements are of equal value and the acronym serves to help remember them all. To briefly summarise Nye's elements, they are:

- *space* that is threefold, supporting children's physical, emotional and auditory needs
- *process* to reflect the ongoing work of the spiritual life, as opposed to productivity that infers endpoints
- *imagination* to go deeper, to embody and to play out the mysteries of story, faith tradition and ecclesiology
- *relationship* with those gathered together as community and across the generations for mutual blessing
- *intimacy* through the practice of prayer and worship that nurtures coming closer, going deeper, taking risks and pursuing passions
- *trust* that is comfortable with both the knowing and not knowing; trust that is fundamental for safe nurture.

I used the letters of the acronym to indicate where each element is featured on the different circles in relation to the themes and observations already mapped.

Figure 39 Stage two: Circles of importance



Circle 1: key to the heart of this study arising from my earlier reading has been the importance of the *imago dei* and how the girls understand themselves in relation to God. If a nurturing physical and emotional space is a priority, then so is the community that will gather within it. Those that gather are more likely to stay if being present is nurturing. Dialogue and the amplification of the prophetic voice of the girls could be catalyst to new revelation. This is where the emotional, auditory and physical space is at the centre of the nurturing space.

Trust will also be key to this being a safe nurturing space. Trust is needed when moving from a didactic to more relational approach. It requires the adults to make themselves vulnerable by lightening their control of the session giving the girls more opportunity to direct the flow of it.

Process is straddling the wall of this circle because if the direction of a session is held more lightly, it makes it more free-flowing, rather than completing a fixed set of tasks like games and crafts. A free-flowing process allows the girls to be attended to in a way that a more programme-driven approach constricts.

Intimacy is also straddling circle 1 and 2, based on time to talk and attentive listening. Dialogue builds relationship because, as we talk, we learn more about one another, likes and dislikes, shared values and interests as well as distinctions. By listening attentively, we gain insight into the heart and head of another. As well as deepening what we know of another, it may also reveal the intimacy of a living faith and relationship with God.

Circle 2 shows the Word of God is very important, especially in a Baptist context, and that includes using inclusive translations. It also highlights the need for these girls to hear of the significant women within scripture. Similarly, liturgy is the promise made at enrolment and the ritual of annually rededicating to keep this covenant. The existential questions discussed in sections 5.2.2, 5.2.4 and 5.2.6 above fit here, as they help inform personhood for these girls.

Relationship is core to spirituality (see Chapter 1), so it goes alongside the accompaniers and significant others. These are trusted relationships that speak into the lives of girls as they journey with them. We might consider them as cheerleaders, as they support and affirm the girls encouraging them to fulfil their potential.

Imagination appears from circles 2 to 3, as hearing the story of the female biblical accompaniers, as well as some contemporary role models, will inspire the girls to imagine themselves bearing similar characteristics and accomplishing significant feats. But it is also part of making meaning, as they glimpse something of themselves in these models. Furthermore, the imagination is ignited as they express themselves non-verbally through the arts, found in circle 3.

Circle 3 shows another element of tradition. In stage one (section 6.2.1 above), tradition related to the traditions of the group. Here it relates biblically to the instruction to pass on what is known of God to the next generation (Deut. 6:1–9). This links with the missional vision of GBM(E&W) as a Christian group: 'Lives and communities transformed and enriched as generations seek, serve and follow Jesus Christ' (GBM, https://www.girlsbrigadeministries.org.uk/about-girls-brigade-ministries/).

Concluding this reflective process, I am drawn back to the centre circle. When Boyd explains using this tool for theological debate, he places Jesus at the centre – a reminder of salvation through Christ. I have used this model to place the girls at the centre of our thoughts, to attend to them as Mary Magdalene attended to Christ, as discussed in the Introduction and sections 5.2.1.4, 5.2.2 and 5.2.6 above. Following this overview of my reflective process, I will now set out my recommendations with some practical suggestions to respond to the

themes and priorities explored, while navigating the realities of national uniformed organisations. I will present these in blue for the practitioners who facilitate groups and engage with girls in this girlhood phase, starting with local youth groups before consideration for national teams and concluding with local churches.

6.3 Advice for local groups

Creating a nurturing space is of utmost importance for these girls but will not be without its challenges.

6.3.1 Physical space

Often groups meet in multi-purpose rooms, so are unable to personalise it to reflect back to the girls their claim on it, beyond having a display noticeboard on one wall. In addition to the physical space needing to be clean, warm and comfortable, it needs to be a safe space for the girls, if they are to feel 'held' within it. Although unsubstantiated, the Poet Maya Angelo has been attributed as saying, 'People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel'; reminding us that the physical space needs to be welcoming. Those that cross the threshold to enter will feel they are expected and welcome because the room is set up and resourced for the session.

Consider how you prepare the space to reflect the identity of the group and to welcome them on arrival. What helps to 'claim' the space?

6.3.2 Emotional space

Using first names when greeting one another indicates that an individual has been seen and is known, this affirms their sense of significance and begins to establish the emotional space of connection and relationship. Often, because of numbers, the group may be addressed by specific criteria, for instance ‘girls’ or by the sub group ‘n:counta’, which causes a loss of individuality. If relationships are to flourish and conversation is to deepen, there is a need to convey that this is a safe space and that begins with meaningful connection, respect for one another that helps trust to grow.

Consider how often first names are used in your group and notice what happens when they are used. How does the use of names help build relationships in the group?

6.3.3 Auditory space for attentive listening

Akin to the emotional space is the need for auditory space, a chance to be heard and to know they have been listened to. Conversation is key for building relationship and informal education. A relational approach is more often used with young people rather than with children. Sadly, this can mean the ideas, questions and understanding of children are missed simply because conversations are closed down by the narrow questions that are put to them, requiring them just to recall what they have heard rather than to explore their thinking, which will give insight into what they already know.

Meaningful conversation remembers what has been shared and seeks to engage with the wider life of the young person, recognising that the time within the group is only a fraction of their week. Taking an interest in how that has been for them since the last meeting indicates that they matter. Leaving space for them to express themselves can sometimes mean waiting longer; holding the silence and resisting the urge to fill it will help, but that is attentive listening. Attending to what has been said confirms they have been heard. Make time for talk, so that it can happen without being squeezed because the programme needs to move on or activities need to be completed.

Consider what opportunities are given for meaningful conversation during a session. Be playful with the way you facilitate this in different group dynamics, designing activities that are more open ended and reflective.

6.3.4 Ritual

A nurturing space within which girls can flourish is helped by the place of ritual. Ritual can unite and frame time spent together. Whether spoken or non-verbal, ritual expresses shared value and belief. It can act as covenantal commitment one to another. Ritual helps cross liminal spaces or messy thresholds to journey on. Ritual can act as a symbolic marker of time, status and tradition. Shared rituals nurture a sense of belonging and, when creating them together, they can be personal and distinct to a group. When girls get to lead the ritual, they experience what it means to embody the ritual, which deepens a sense of belonging and develops their role in leading others.

As a whole group, talk about what opening or closing rituals might be helpful to frame your time together. Consider whether there are words of greeting or a symbolic non-verbal act, like lighting a candle, to be adopted as part of this.

6.3.5 Relationships

Girls benefit from having around them significant adults as positive role models and attentive listeners (Mercer, 2008:127; Phillips, 2011:168). These trusted relationships provide continuity and consistency to what can be a relational chaotic time in girlhood. They help mirror back to the girls their thoughts and ideas. They provide a safe space to question and voice doubts, enabling girls to explore their knowledge and understanding and empowering them to find solutions within themselves, albeit maybe temporary ones. Having a team who relate well, supporting and framing the group, helps establish that safe emotional space. Seeing the team enjoy what they do and having fun too can be infectious amongst the girls. Knowing that their adults have experienced and valued a similar environment when they were younger can enrich the present shared experience. Relating well across the generations through accompanying group work helps build community and deepen trust. This can be a mutual blessing for both girl and adult as they learn from one another amplifies the girls' voice.

Consider what accompanying might look like within your group and what your team might need to equip them for understanding and developing this dimension of their volunteering role. As a team, discuss what helps volunteers feel part of the group and not just fulfilling a duty rota.

6.4 Advice for national teams

6.4.1 Relationships

Local teams flourish when there is good communication and positive connection with the national team and the wider network of other local groups. This fosters their sense of belonging to the organisation as a whole and helps the national team to stay informed with what is faced by the local team. Groups are dependent upon the service and good will of volunteers. This can be an additional pressure upon the local team, but also on national structure, as it knowingly seeks to develop the organisation. Being realistic in demands, relevant in terms of vision and strategy and relational across the organisation will support its continued development.

Consult with local teams to identify ways the national structures can support them better. Consider ways those in national posts might keep in contact with the dynamics and needs of grass-roots group.

6.4.2 Time for talk

Programmes give helpful structure to how a group runs but, when the programme drives the group, it can override the relational investment to the needs of the individuals present in the local setting. Making space for conversation will help keep the group relevant, as the adults stay aware of the current trends and interests. Conversation develops community, deepening connection with their own group identity, allowing time for response to the key figures in the girls' lives and local issues. This should be encouraged and may need permission given from those in the national structures to do so. Alongside

this is the value of the national team making time to talk with local groups, to maintain positive relationships as discussed above. This will also serve to encourage positive communication across the organisation, to minimise top-down management of groups and to foster a mutuality of exchange between those in paid roles and the volunteer teams.

Encourage your groups to invest in a relational approach, even when it may mean lower numbers or less badgework or a review of the place of badgework. Sharing local stories about the impact of journeying together can inspire others.

6.5 Advice for the local church

6.5.1 Spiritual nurture

For the spirituality of girls to flourish, there needs to be a nurturing environment. Therefore the local church must identify spaces where girls are no longer the forgotten or silent. Instead they must be welcomed and encouraged. A positive culture that invites their participation across all activities of the church with leadership that models this to members and group leaders with resources to enable the advice given for the local groups above. This includes attention to the physical space provided so that safe emotional space enables the gathered community to grow purposeful relationships. It must practically recognise those physically accompanying girls and value them. Through positive contemporary role models and through hearing the stories of women in the Bible provide aspirations to belong that shatter any glass ceilings. Having committed, trusted, positive role models journeying with them is as much about discipleship as it is about sisterhood. Hearing from those that have gone before them will inspire

girls, help them to recognise their own gifts and to imagine themselves doing likewise, building on this with meaningful opportunities to lead for themselves. Review the activities in your church and consider the gender dynamics. Ensure female spiritual role models past and present are part of their nurturing. Create opportunities for active participation in communal prayer.

6.5.2 Language

During this girlhood phase, where identity is already being explored, how the *imago dei* is presented is key to how these girls recognise themselves and their personhood and femininity in God. The use of inclusive language in scripture and liturgy is crucial. Language that addresses them as girls, welcomes them as they are not what they will become, and celebrates the distinctively female characteristics and gifts that they bring. The *imago dei* will be affirmed by the visibility of women at all levels of leadership. Positive strong female leadership will inspire the girls to adjust how they see themselves and their abilities beyond self-limited perceptions, empowering them to take up their place within their gathered community. Established in their belonging and participating, girls will find ways to participate and add their voice. Intentionally recognised within the priesthood of all believers, girls can serve and be served, nurture and be nurtured, speak and be listened to.

Consider the roles of women within your worshipping community and encourage those women in leadership roles. Use inclusive translations of the Bible and ensure care is taken with the language used in prayer, liturgy and songs to avoid exclusivity.

6.5.3 Amplify the voice of girls

By attending to the voice of girls we all get to be, in their words, ‘daring’ again. We are reminded to be ‘playful’ and to have ‘fun’. It may well be ‘messy’ and full of ‘drama’ if we go looking for how to be more ‘starfishy’, but it may also be ‘joyous’ and ‘exhilarating’. Now is the time for Church to move from being seen to be ‘meh’ to a vibrant ‘creative’ community and to make the necessary changes to be more ‘eco-friendly’, because time is running out and this is what the girls are saying to us!

When girls are spiritually nurtured within an encouraging environment and time is given to attend to their voice and revelations, this has the potential to open up a world of discovery for the girls and the Church. Only by attentive listening is their world view revealed and girlhood understood. Only then can the Church really know how well traditions have been passed on and embodied. Whilst the spirituality of adults is seldom questioned, the spirituality of childhood is less valued and accepted, but until the voice of girls is attended to, their spiritual nurturing and footsteps into faith remain overlooked. Increasing the opportunities for girls to participate, serve and lead will enable the wider Church (beyond the group team) not only to observe their becoming, but to learn from them too. The amplification of their voice is not to be feared, but to be engaged with as part of the priesthood of believers and for mutual blessing across the generations.

Consider ways to enable the voice of girls in your setting to be consulted and amplified.

6.6 Summary conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the findings of the study and communicates them to key stakeholders. It has reflected, in two stages, using a tool of four concentric circles to order the key principles, activities and resources, reading from the centre as being high priority outwards to those less important and more varied elements. The first stage mapped the overarching themes of girlhood, voice and relationships, with additional fieldwork observations relating to the research question and GB in practice. This included activities like games and craft, as well as the application of curriculum, ritual and tradition. Stage two applied a theological lens to consider the findings in the Christian language of the Church. An audit tool was applied to locate the key elements that support children's spirituality – space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy and trust (SPIRIT). The circles prioritised the findings and SPIRIT helped organise them. This information has been conveyed in the form of recommendations for those involved with local girls' groups, those in paid national or denominational roles and for church leadership (ministers, worship leaders and youth workers). I will now conclude with reference to the existential questions from the data in Chapter Five and the integrated theme of belonging that runs concurrently across all themes.

The existential questions inferred from the girls' self-reflection are ones that stay with us throughout life and, at various points, are revisited, as I first explained in Chapter One. They are key to our understanding of self and life. Girlhood is a time of seeking identity: as individual adolescent girls, within their family unit as

part of a peer group, within the groups they belong to – including church. Jesus recognised that, in childhood, significant factors were forming. Jesus used the child symbolically in his teaching, as he placed the child at the centre (Matt.18:1–5). Jesus' example helps and continues to challenge us today to revisit these existential questions and to consider what those that have ears to hear should listen to when girls are placed at the centre.

Who is going to listen to me, am I worth it? Jesus taught his followers that when they do something for the least in society, it is as if it has been done for him (Matt.25:40). It can be the most basic thing, like welcoming the stranger or listening to the girls. By doing so, we see Christ in the stranger and the girls, previously marginalised and now centred, become Christic.

Who am I? Jesus was not afraid to ask his disciples and followers this question (Matt.16:13–16; Mark 8:27,29; Luke 9:18–20; John 18:33–38). Identity is often shaped and affirmed by those around us. It is one of the ways we learn about ourselves. Girls need positive affirmation from the Church because on one hand the opinion on social media, in magazines and from film and tv is often critical, causing them to be dissatisfied with themselves. On the other hand, they are being told they have a right to speak up and be heard and are encouraged to explore their aspirations and challenge gender prejudice. The Church is lagging behind with a perceived glass ceiling that many girls are not willing to put themselves under. They need the words of Psalm 139:14 reinforced by those around them, not just verbally praising but utilising their abilities and respectfully

amplifying their voice. GB does this, but its structured ways may miss opportunities to attend to what the girls are experiencing and offering back to the Church.

Where do I fit in? Jesus told the disciples (his gatekeepers) that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children and they should not be stopped in their approach to him (Matt.19:14). Their belonging is there already, not something they have to aspire to. But they are watching on and learning, in some settings, that there is no place or opportunity for them – so they vote with their feet.

When girls know they are worthy of being listened to and that there are those around them attending to their voice, they are affirmed for who they are now and not for what they will become; it shows them that they are significant. It can reinforce their participation or membership of a group and their place within it. Having around them a supportive network of trusted adults and peers helps girls to understand themselves as they grow and mature. Belonging is about being connected. Understanding self helps boost self-esteem and confidence. As identity is celebrated and supported by the deepening relationships with others, girls flourish. Self-worth and self-knowledge are nurtured by an awareness that they are understood and have a place in the bigger picture of the group that they are part of. Then we shall see these girls as Mary in the garden, encountering and speaking of their revelations so the Church hears their prophetic voice and our tapestry of life is enriched by them.

If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

FINAL REFLECTIONS

To what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls aged 7–14 years effectively enhance their growth and development?

I have presented the significance of this question in relation to the lived girlhood experience of its participants. It was intentionally a messy developmental phase, to reflect the messiness of all that is happening for them in body, mind and spirit. The sociological backdrop to the project highlighted the way girls' voices often go unheard, whilst acknowledging the contemporary growing momentum to subvert this, I assert that it is a theological endeavour to listen to the collective voice of these girls, attentively listening and accompanying them to support and nurture their sense of self, significance and belonging. I have argued the theological relevance of this inquiry in light of the Baptist principle of a 'priesthood of all believers', seeing and valuing these girls for who they are now, rather than waiting for them to be older.

This case study has used ethnographic methods and applied the interpretative dynamics of phenomenological analysis to hear the collective voice of girls aged 7–14 years. The philosophical commitments shaping it were outlined to highlight the importance of hearing from the girls and the need to open up discussion, rather than narrowing and closing it down, as often happens, especially in empirical studies of this kind. The collection of concrete methods being used

were described and the fieldwork process was set out to show how data was to be gathered.

However, the absence of the girls' voice was soon detected and the process needed to be adapted to address this, as often occurs in empirical research. I have described this as an 'aha' moment, as it led to the introduction of the ToL exercises, which enabled their voice to be heard more purposefully. This was a significant learning experience for me as a researcher, working within the constraints of a small-scale heuristic project, and as a DPT student drawing on the experience and support structure of supervision to work through this challenge.

The full story of the research process in its different stages explained how the voice of the girls was captured through the ToL exercises and the vibrancy and diversity of their experiences emerge. Some clarification of what the girls said was sought through follow-up approaches, making use of a pop-up board of activities to ask further questions to ensure better understanding. Alongside the data from the girls, the expectations and hopes that their leaders had for them revealed that they have some understanding of the lived experiences of the girls, including the pressures they face at school and in friendships. It highlighted that the leaders' expectations align to the GB vision for the girls growing in their relationship with God. It showed that, whilst they had these spiritual expectations, they acknowledged having little evidence of it being a lived reality beyond the group meetings.

The field notes and observational data was discussed with the initial findings and methods used to classify rich qualitative data.

My reflexive piece, *Pilgrim's Journey*, reviewed the research process and my experience as researcher and practical theologian. The pilgrim metaphor reflected the impact of the process upon me personally and professionally. It offers a parallel to some volunteer experiences.

Three emergent themes of voice, girlhood and relationships highlight the key findings. Each theme has contributing factors that are discussed and theologically reflected upon using significant existential questions, 'who am I?', 'who will listen to me – am I worth it?' and 'where do I fit?'.

1. **Voice** – amplification so the voice of girls is heard.

Ensure the words used by girls are understood as they mean them to be. Make time for talking with the girls especially in programme driven groups. Listen attentively to enable conversations to deepen and provide opportunities for the girls' voice to be heard.

2. **Girlhood** – recognised as a messy age of transition.

Making meaning is something the girls are doing to make sense of themselves and their lives. Perceptions of self, girlhood and life are distinct between the younger and older girls.

3. **Relationships** – accompanying was valued and beneficial for the nurture and support of the girls. Significant others have an important role speaking into the lives of the girls and reflecting back to them as they deepen their sense of self. Role models have a positive influence on the aspirations of girls. A nurturing space features all of these factors and, when in place, holds and protects these factors to the benefit of the girls.

Reflection upon these themes and their interconnectedness was aided by a set of concentric circles, within which they were organised. Nye's audit tool was applied to identify the elements that nurture spiritual development, to measure the findings considering my research question. I conclude with the following practical advice.

For local groups, recognise the importance of creating a nurturing space. To do this, attend to the physical space so it reflects the group's identity and welcomes the girls. Make use of personal names and programme more time for meaningful talk, attentive listening and to establish a safe emotional space where girls are affirmed and nurtured for who they are. Establish, with the girls, rituals within the programme to bring the group together and deepen belonging. Utilise an accompanying approach to support the girls and to develop positive role models they can aspire to.

National leadership teams should nurture relationships with local groups by ensuring good communications are in place and regular consultation is made, to

stay informed when making national decisions about curriculum and training. Review national programmes and curriculum to encourage local groups to make time for a relational approach with girls and to develop local programmes that reflect the interests and needs of their members.

Local churches hosting groups, as well as having girls within their gathered community, should consider how to make church a more nurturing space for the spirituality of girls. Ensure the language used is inclusive in liturgy, song and bible translation. Create opportunities for meaningful participation, so the voice of girls is heard. Make visible female role models: biblical, historical and contemporary, representative of the girls and that they can aspire to. Attend to these girls, amplify their voice, discover what insight they bring, learn and grow together as a priesthood of all believers.

If you have ears to hear, listen; let the girls speak!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:
Poem – 100 Languages (Loris Malaguzzi)

100 LANGUAGES

NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi (translated by Lella Gandini)

https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/100-linguaggi-en/
[accessed 26 September 2020]

APPENDIX 2: Collaborative agreement

COPY OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN RESEARCHER and GBM

Collaborative agreement:

We agree to work together, in relation to 'Let the Girls Speak: an ethnographic study of girls aged 7-14 years' a doctoral research study at the University of Birmingham.

This aspect of the study is a project investigating 'To what extent does single sex uniformed group work with girls effectively enhance their growth and development?'

Sian agrees to

- Focus this study on participants aged 7-14 years attending the ***n:gage*** and ***n:counta*** at [redacted]
- Ensure that all information and forms reflect the language used by children/parents/ teams within GBEW and GBM
- Conduct the research project with integrity and in accordance with the practice and guidelines outlined by GB and as authorised by the Ethics Committee at The University of Birmingham
- register with GB as a Helper before starting the research
- provide GB with a copy of her Enhanced DBS certificate number 0015772525850
- Identify dates at the start of the project for 15 formal observations across the year and to communicate these with all participants
- update GB at least three times a year via phone/Skype on the progress of the research
- to provide GBEW a written report summarising the findings of the research to share the learning with the GBM family after the study
- to give GBM an electronic copy of her final thesis.

Signed:[redacted] Date: 5-12-17

Sian Hancock, Researcher

GBEW agree to

- approach [redacted] to negotiate access and support for the research
- introduce Sian to the Group Leader of [redacted] to explain the project
- help support Sian with some of her travel costs to [redacted]
- provide Sian with a copy of the Life to the Full document and samples of the n:fluence leadership training materials and programme materials
- the findings of the research being reported and to the potential publications (printed and online) that may share the learning from the project

Signed on behalf of The Girls' Brigade England and Wales (part of GB Ministries)

[redacted] Date: 21/12/17

Name (print) Julie Mulroy Role:

APPENDIX 3: Sample information sheets for participants

Bristol Baptist College
The Promenade
Clifton Down
Bristol
BS8 3NJ
Tel: 01179 469 210
Email: s.hancock@bristol-baptist.ac.uk

Child and Young Person's Information Sheet

'To what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls effectively enhance their growth and development?'

I would like to ask you to take part in a research study. I am looking at what extent uniformed group work with girls helps those girls to grow and develop as young women.
Before you decide if you want to join in, it is important to read this leaflet about why this study is being done and what it involves.

What is the study about?
I want to find out more about group work with girls. Uniformed groups are a good example of working with just girls so what difference does this make to the programme?
I wonder how it feels to be part of a girls' group and why some girls prefer this to being in a mixed group.
I hope that by finding out more about the experience of being in these groups I will be able to evaluate how they contribute to the growth and development of girls.

Who can take part?
Girls who are aged 7–14 years old and attend The Girls' Brigade England and Wales' (part of GB Ministries) ***n:gage*** and / or ***n:counta*** groups at REDACTED.

What will I have to do?
You will continue to attend the group as normal and be yourself.
There will be 5 formal observations of the group per term. The dates for these will be made known in advance. During the activities you will be part of a focus group that will be observed and accompanied by Siân, the researcher. It is how the group works together and responds to the activities that Siân is looking at not you personally.
During the other weekly sessions Siân will be an extra pair of hands in the group, not there as a leader but as a helper.
There will be the usual conversations and Siân may ask you some questions about the group, activities and your thoughts on being part of the group. She wants to hear from you and by listening to your story will be using it with the stories of others to later tell the story of the group.
Sometimes your work (written comments, pieces of art/craft etc) may be photographed as part of the research. No people will be photographed. You will not need to be photographed.

Confidentiality
Others in your group will be taking part so you won't be on your own.
Normal safeguarding procedures will be followed. This means if you disclose information that indicates that you are at risk or have experienced harm, Siân has a duty of care to report that to the Designated Safeguarding Person.
This is a study of the group, so although your thoughts are being asked for and the information you give will be included in the final report, no names will be used.
The information you give may be shared with the Girls' Brigade Leaders of your group, the national Girls' Brigade team (GB Ministries) and Siân's University supervisor will see things about you in the study but you will remain anonymous, which means your name will not appear.
Your views will not be shared with your parent/carer. The views of parents and local group leaders will also be collected separately.

Do I have to take part?
No you do not have to take part. If you decide to participate now and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Will joining in help me?
The results of a study like this will help inform others about the needs of children and young people. The aim is to ensure groups that make a positive difference to the lives of girls continue and that others learn from their approach.

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What happens at the end of the study?
At the end of the study there will be a report written to share its findings. You will receive a summary of this. Learning from the project may also be used in other publications including e.g. printed journals and online, and in order to support the wider work of GB Ministries.

Contacts
REDACTED your group leader is the link person to the study. If you have any questions or would like more information about the study please contact REDACTED and she will be able to help you.
If you would like to take part in the study please let REDACTED know by 8 December 2017. Your parent carer will be able to help you, they will have received this information and need to agree to your taking part.
Researcher: Siân Hancock, Co-ordinator – Children, Youth & Family Ministry at Bristol Baptist College – s.hancock@bristol-baptist.ac.uk

APPENDIX 4: Sample assent forms

Bristol Baptist College
The Promenade
Clifton Down
Bristol
BS8 3NJ
Tel: 01179 469 210
Email: s.hancock@bristol-baptist.ac.uk

'To what extent does single-sex uniformed group work with girls effectively enhance their growth and development?'

Please tick the boxes of the statements below that you agree with:

I have read the information sheet ☐

All my questions have been answered ☐

Other people involved in research in GB Ministries and the University of Birmingham can see things about me in the study, but it won't have my name on it ☐

Information from this research will be used in a report and articles but no names will be used ☐

To be completed by the researcher:
I have shown and explained the study
Enter code name allocated to this participant
……..

I was able to ask questions about the research ☐

I was told what I wanted to know about the research ☐

I know I can stop doing the study anytime and I can still attend the sessions ☐

By signing below I am agreeing to:

- ✓ notes being taken of conversations
- ✓ photographs of my work (written, art and craft)
- ✓ take part in the research
- ✓ the findings/learning being shared with GB Ministries

Signed by the participant:
……
……
Date:……
Your name in block capitals:
……

APPENDIX 5: Overview of weekly GB meeting

WEEKLY GB MEETING

5.50–6.10pm Gathering – arrival, signing in, all groups gather together

6.10–6.30pm Worship – leader-led welcome and thought for the night before dispersing into age-specific groups around the building

6.30–7.00pm Ice-breaker – normally games in sports' hall or outside in church garden or on common

7.00–7.15pm Refreshments/news time

7.15–7.30pm Story or introduction to theme

7.30–7.50pm Craft – linked to theme

7.50–8.00pm Prayers – all groups gather together to award Best Girl awards, notices for the week ahead (church and GB), birthdays celebrated, and prayers led by girls from each group and leaders

APPENDIX 6: Instructions for Tapestry of Life activity – n:gage tree

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TREE OF LIFE EXERCISE

Instructions for Tapestry of Life Activity – N:gage tree

Each girl will need a sheet of A4 paper and pencil.

This is an open ended activity. I am keen for the voices of the girls to be heard through it.

1. Ask the girls to draw the outline of a tree with roots, a trunk and branches that can be written in.
2. Invite them to fill the trunk with words that describe their life.
3. Along the roots, ask them to write the most important things that have happened in their life so far.
4. On the branches, write the people (not just names but relationship ie: teacher Mrs Jones, best friend Lisa etc) who support and influence them.
5. Now ask them to draw some leaves and to write on them the interests and hobbies/things that they do in their spare time.
6. Finally, alongside the tree ask them to write and finish the sentence, 'God is….

Alongside this it would be helpful for leaders to reflect on the following questions and let me have their thoughts too - this could be done collectively by the leaders together or individually but please indicate.

What words do you think characterise the lives of the girls in your group? What do you perceive as the challenges/issues they face?
What do you think the girls have learned about God?
What are your hopes for the girls?

APPENDIX 7: Instructions for Tapestry of Life activity – n:counta river

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RIVER OF LIFE EXERCISE

Instructions for the Tapestry of Life Activity – N:counta river

Each girl *will need a sheet of A4 paper and a pencil.*

This is an open ended activity. I am keen for the voices of the girls to be heard through it.

1. Ask the girls to draw the outline of a river flowing.
2. Tell them to fill the river with words that describe their life.
3. Add tributaries (streams feeding into it), and write in these what feeds into their life (eg: school, GB - interests & groups etc...).
4. Now invite them to draw some boulders/rocks in the river and to write on these the obstacles, difficulties and challenges they encounter in life.
5. Draw some fish in the river or flowers alongside and write on them the names of people who support and influence you.
6. Finally, above the river, ask them to write and finish the sentence 'God is….'

Alongside this it would be helpful for leaders to reflect on the following questions and let me have their thoughts too - this could be done collectively by the leaders together or individually but please indicate.

What words do you think characterise the lives of the girls in your group?

What do you perceive as the challenges/issues they face?

What do you think the girls have learned about God?

What are your hopes for the girls?

APPENDIX 8: Table of thematic codes (ToL tree)

THEMATIC CODES TABLE (TREE OF LIFE)

Image	Primary Code	Secondary Code	Related codes/text
Trunk - *describing life*	Emotions	Positive	Happy; exciting; fun; joyful; nice; amazing; playful; sunny; funny; good; lovely; relaxed; great; cheerful; energetic; super; opportunity filled; fun-filled; awesome; incredible; fantastic; educational; brilliant
		Negative	Not normal; confusing; tiring; scary; stressful; loud; sad; clumsy
	Existential (being)		My story; competitive; full of surprises; play; creative; daring; surprising; silly; messy; eco-friendly; sporty; busy
	Relational		Friendly; favouritism; make friends
	Self perception		Successful; intelligent; creativity; loved; strange
	Girl talk		Crazy; hot; weird; cool; starfishy; fab
Roots - *important life experiences*	Transitions		Family in hospital; going to comp; being born; experiencing alopecia; having baby brother; going to high school; finishing school; getting a baby sister; going to school; getting out of hospital; having a sister;

			nieces & nephews being born; moving house
	Relational		Friends; friendship; family; making friends; Nancy & Cookie; loving my family; cousin;
	Personal	Image	Make-up; phone; being me;
		health/wellbeing	bed; sleeping; being alive;
		Responsibility	pets; getting dogs; having a pet; getting guinea pigs; getting guinea pig; my dogs; my cats; chickens; Rio my dog; rabbit; getting a cat
		Achievement	getting through to school talent show; getting through to football team;
	Activity		dancing; sport; art; scooting; football; gym; going to church; Nintendo switch; tent; learning to swim; school;
		Travel	Going to Portugal; going to Morfa Bay; 3 day school trip; holiday;
		Events	Leavers' assembly party; parties; my birthday; sports day; school disco; winning sports day;
Branches - *influential people*	Family	Parents	Mum & Dad; Dad; Mum; Mum & Tad

		Grandparents	Nan; Nan & Grandad; Both Nans; Both Grampies
		Siblings	Brother
			Uncle
	Friends		Named; best friends; besties
	Teachers	Coaches - dance, football, swimming	Mr Barlow, Miss Fletcher
	GB	Leaders	
	Spiritual		Jesus; God
Leaves - *how time is spent*	Reading		Studying
	Technology	mobiles; gaming; online;	Texting; Fortnite; surfing web; phone
		Media	YouTube; Netflix; watch TV; cinema
	Sport		Dancing; biking; gymnastics; scootering; football; trampoline; racing people; walks with dog; swimming; feet; dance; netball; cheer; parading
	Social	Relationships	Making friends; pets; friends; party; animals; clubs; school
	Creativity	Art	do art;
		Crafts	acting;

		Music	sing; choir; orchestra; violin lessons; keyboard; singing in shows; singing
		Non productive	playing; fun
	Consumer		food; eat; eating chicken; eating; shopping
		Travel	
	Spiritual		talking to God; go to church; GB; God
		Existential	Getting older; living; breathing; I love life

APPENDIX 9: Table of thematic codes (ToL river)

THEMATIC CODES TABLE (RIVER OF LIFE)

Image	Primary Code	Secondary Code	Related codes/text
River - *describing life*	Emotions	Positive	Joy; sometimes fun; happiness; exciting; happy; enjoyable; humorous; joyous; thrilling; funny; truthful; exhilarating; good;
		Negative	sadness; sometimes boring; hard; tiring; difficult; stupid; SADNESS; stress; sad; stressful; worrying; stressed; exhausting; expensive;
	Existential (being)		Slow; fast; ok; busy; sleeping; activities; interesting; complicated; different; distant; hard work or dedication; unusual; adventure; opportune; short; changeable; active;
	Relational		Full of love; friends; loving; family; food; friendship; love; dog

			lover; school; church; meals; banter; family love; GB; socialising;
	Self perception		art; drama; musical; dance; rainy; singing; shy; dance lover; sport; music; privileged; creative; sporty DofE; arty; musically; lots of drama; football; athletics; TV; DofE karate; music/instruments; entertainment;
	Girl talk		Sometimes just 'meh'; crazy; dumb; weird; wired;
Tributaries - *what feeds into your life*	Social	Family	
		Friends	Family friends;
	Spiritual	GB	God
	Health/wellbeing		Food; pets;
		School	sports; writing; orchestra;
		Exercise	trampolining; netball; ballet; dancing; gym; football
		Creativity	art; hobbies; writing;

Boulders - *obstacles/challenges encountered*	Relationships	Family	Deaths; family loss; missing family; moving house;
		Friends	Friend argument; bullies; fake friends; arguments; boys; friendship issues; missing friends; bullying; liar; lies;
	School		Exams; A levels; GCSE; English; games; maths; tests; hard homework; stress with school work; homework; school work; options; school stress; learning;
	Self perception		Doubt; worries for the future; stress; competition; ugly; fat; stupid; nerdy; fake tan; sad; truth;
	Life issues		Social media; decision; choice; work; problems; money; driving far away; sport club; stressful; worrying about future; world war;

Fish/flowers - *people who support & influence*	Family	Parents	Dad; Mum; mummy & daddy;
		Grandparents	Nanny; Grampy; Nan;
		Siblings	My brother; my sister;
	Friends		Named;
	Teachers		Miss Martin; Mr Hill;
	GB		
	Spiritual		God; pets; dog;

APPENDIX 10: Fieldnotes template

February 9th 2018

Gathering:

This week I stayed with the n:counta / n:spire group. There were 3 leaders and 21 girls present.

The group split into 3 for different activities – pancakes, making valentine cards and playing a game. I stayed with one group of 7.

Valentine cards:

Sugar paper, ribbons, stickers, scissors, glue, pencils and coloured pens were set out on the tables. The girls could design their own cards using the resources available.

On my table one girl looked up on her phone an image for an animated cat whilst another used her phone to source a heart, arrow and ribbon design.

Hearts were a common feature as expected. One had a heart mirror saying 'love you'. Another was a shower of raining (falling) hearts. Someone else made a bejewelled heart. As they sat making their cards the Leader S asked the girls who their card was for:

"my pet cat."

"one for my mum."

"for the bin, not myself."

"I'm a feminist I don't even do valentines."

The girls didn't chat much but were focussed on their designs.

It seemed to me to be an odd activity – the resources weren't particularly enticing and there was no introduction to St Valentine or priming beforehand how the occasion might be used as an expression of gratitude or care for someone they appreciate rather than the predicable romantic motivation.

Pancakes:

The girls went into the kitchen to mix the batter and fry their pancakes. Offered the choice to flip them two lacked confidence to have a go! Once cooked they brought them back into the hall where at the table they could give

them toppings – lemon, syrup, Nutella, sugar, squeezy cream and marshmallows.

I noticed one girl suck the lemon piece until she couldn't stand it any longer. Another hid their pancake under the excess of Nutella and marshmallows they had added.

"Do you want a pancake with your chocolate spread?" a leader remarked.

Game - shops:

Sitting in pairs with legs outstretched (like ladders) the girls chose the shop they would like to be – Asda, Tesco, New Look and Next. Then the Leader H told a story about shopping for a birthday present for her aunty and looking for the right gift in each of the shops. As their shop was mentioned they had to jump up and race their partner, stepping over the other pairs of legs round the pillar and back over the other legs to return to their space. The first back scores a point.

It was interesting to hear the shops the girls chose for themselves. Why grocery supermarkets? They were competitive and enjoyed the racing.

Prayers:

Went upstairs to join with n:vestigate and n:gage.

Awards were given for best girls of the evening:

N:vestigate have Fudge a cuddly rabbit that comes in a drawstring back pack to go home with nominee for the week

N:gage have a shield – but it's needing to be repaired.

N:counta/n:spire can choose chocolate from the box in the cupboard.

Team Leader R gave out notices and reminded the girls about the bake sale next week.

Prayers said by a girl from each group with TLR summing up at the end.

APPENDIX 11: Thematic coding table

HALLMARKS AND THEME CODES

Primary code	Secondary code	Related codes/text
Relevant	Enrolment Service	GB recommissioning. International Woman's Day marked. Not afraid to move away from suggested resources to 'make it fun and relevant to the girls otherwise they're not interested'.
		Contemporary stories used to contextualise themes.
		Bakesale; quiz; singing at old peoples home;
Relational	Welcome	Leaders' conversations with parents as well as greeting girls as they sign in.
		All groups meeting at same time starting and ending together.
	News & refreshments	Girls voices heard. Sitting in circle. Notices about church events too - Messy Church, film clubs.
	Birthdays	Adult and girls celebrated, sung too and stickers given.
		N:gage promise at enrolment - to come regularly, to join in & to listen to learn more and help others.

Responsive		Celebrating, in God's presence, the work of GB in the church. Badge work. Move away from plastic cups. Love.
		N;counta promise at enrolment - to be loyal to GB, to listen and seek to learn more about Jesus.
Girlhood - *the world of girls, issues encountered, interests & experiences*	Technology	Older girls looking at phones - being reminded to put away/get off mobiles. My favourite possession is… 'my iPad because it has lots of games on it.' 'My computer because we watch films.' Use of google to research 'love' for enrolment service. Creating video of making cakes. Use of phone to source images for card design. Facebook truth vs myth about self-image. Photo slideshow of the year's activities. Individual research about the origins of Halloween. "I had instagram but I don't anymore so social media isn't a problem" (sizing up the problem).
	Favourite foods	Pancakes,
	Interests	Horse ridden at the stables; naughtiest horse at the stable; shopping - choice of shops for 'ladders' game. Gymnastic awards. Fashion - design outfit/catwalk.

		Tennis. Football. Dance - modern and ballet. Swimming. Rugby.
	Pets	My favourite possession is… 'my hamster Snowdrop because it was a birthday present.' 'My cat called Muffin because she's there every time I go downstairs.' Making Valentines card for 'my pet cat'. Death of cat.
	Relationships	Valentine card for mum. "I'm a feminist I don't even do valentines." Exploring the themes of gossip; self-worth - struggling to feel good about self, what helps & what hinders. "I don't get why boys would be a problem" (sizing up the problem), "That's because you've got a boyfriend". "Arguments don't bother me. I'm not bullied".
	School	Sharing news about trips. Using phone in class. Learning - angles, counting in halves. Sports day. Using vegware crockery instead of plastic cups/plates. "Homework is easy" (sizing up the problem).
		Unicorns. Birthdays. Instruments - violin.
Discipleship - *methods used &*	Thought/devotions	Introduction to Lent; explanation of 'sin'; who's the best? Mercy ships.

insights into girls perception of God, their spirituality & faith		Creation vs environmental pollution. Halloween.
		Aim of GB to help girls to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Badge work offers opportunity to respond to exploration of themes. Best girl award often highlighted service to others in the group.
	Prayers	Said by a girl from each of the groups. Leaders writing own prayers alongside the girls. Thanks. For others - homeless, hungry, families, royal wedding, church, oceans. Told to put hands together, close eyes.
	Bible stories	Joseph; woman at the well; Zacchaeus; Jesus walking on water; image of God. Creation of a GB library - Christian fiction and bibles.
		Made in the image of God. God's unconditional love. Temptation - Jesus in the desert. Trust. Disability/equality. Masks we hide behind.

Group work methods - ***management of the groups & group dynamics; small group work & roles/behaviours identified***	Games	Quiz about famous couples incl. Harry & Meghan… Leader E & her hubby (newly weds). Girls negotiating which game to play and sometimes having to explain the rules if new to the leaders. Duck duck goose; Chinese whispers; splat; traffic lights; scarecrows; bench ball; dodgeball; ping pong; big fish; mums, dads & babies; follow the leader; changers; river and bank; islands; fox & chickens; charades. Free play. Use of drama games to build group trust and integrate new members.
	Activities	Icebreakers. Use of stations to rotate around - craft/art, cooking, origami. Acrostic poems. Outside - sports (rounders), tag, stuck in the mud, hide & seek, treasure hunt,
		In pairs - working together; supportive. In 3's. Small groups - collaborative. In teams - competitive, cliques when girls allowed to choose; Revising rules to ease or challenge, sometimes with the girls input. Leaders at different stations/tables/activities to support. Hand in air for quiet. Reminders about manners when not listening to

		others; shouting over voices. Use of the whistle to manage the group.
	Storytelling	Active listening techniques to focus attention & participate. Interactive stories. Use of drama.
	Best girl award	Each week from each group - Smudge, shield, chocolate. Nominations from girls and leaders for annual service - focussing on personal qualities, participation, relational and caring.
		Residential - Hebron Hall, Morfa Park. Brigades Got Talent. Quiz night - supporting the girls as they facilitate the fundraiser. Taff Trail;
Leadership role models - *ways of working, adult impact upon the girls, relationships across the team*		Leaders modelling how to pray.
	Leaders growing up through GB	"I remember enrolment, I was always chosen to carry the flag as I was the tallest. I loved enrolment." GBM had been so important to her growing up she wanted her daughter to experience it.

	Leaders having been at GB together	“I’m looking at them and seeing us.” They look at each other and smile.
		Challenging stereotypes - celebrating the qualities of being women. Being honest about own struggles with self image. Giving a ‘survival kit’ to leaving young leader off to uni.
		Leaders participating in the enrolment service modelling ‘performance’ (singing); leadership’ (introducing elements and recommissioning); faith (mission trip fundraising); helpers doing leadership training (commitment to learning); being team (supporting one another); serving others (cake sales, refreshments at services).
	Friendship	Chatting with one another, catching up on their news. Family relationships - cousins.
		Church ministers relating to the girls - female affirming, relevant and appreciative; male out of date, irrelevant and patriarchal permission giving - later criticised for not communicating event dates resulting in N:spire quiz being rearranged.

	Communication	Not all helpers getting messages; doubling up on devotions; frustrations

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