

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

[Book Review] Navigating miscarriage: social, medical and conceptual perspectives edited by Susie Kilshaw and Katie Berg

Journal Item

How to cite:

Michael-Fox, Bethan (2022). [Book Review] Navigating miscarriage: social, medical and conceptual perspectives edited by Susie Kilshaw and Katie Berg. *Mortality*, 27(1) pp. 126–127.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2021 Bethan Michael-Fox



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/13576275.2021.1966615>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

Navigating Miscarriage: Social, Medical and Conceptual Perspectives

edited by Susie Kilshaw and Katie Berg, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Book, 2020, 252 pp., £110 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1-78920-663-0

Kilshaw and Berg's edited collection emerged from a seminar series at the Fertility and Reproduction Study Group at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Oxford University, aimed at questioning the language and categorisation of miscarriage and interrogating its implications. As such the collection has a clear anthropological focus and functions to make use of 'miscarriage as a lens' (p.232), or as a way of exploring central anthropological issues about personhood, the boundaries of life and death and the thresholds of what it is to be human, as well as ideas about women, gender and motherhood. Many of these themes and ideas will prove of interest to *Mortality* readers, as will the text's engagement with complex understandings about categories, definitions, and boundaries in terms of pregnancy loss.

The introduction offers a thorough and useful overview of miscarriage research and of the text's key themes (boundaries, definitions and metaphors, technology, rituals after death, motherhood) and includes a fascinating discussion of different terminology adopted in relation to miscarriage and pregnancy loss in different countries and contexts, exploring the linguistic connotations of various terms. Throughout the text there is nuanced positioning of definitions of personhood and pregnancy loss in terms of their multiplicity, flexibility and fluidity. There is also consideration given throughout the collection to the different ways in which miscarriage might be framed both normatively and at times pragmatically as, for example, a significant loss, a personal 'failure', or a demonstration of fertility, and how these various framings might be either resisted or endorsed by those experiencing pregnancy loss, by professionals or carers, or in different discourses or contexts. These discussions offer

insight into both miscarriage and the many factors that inform experiences of loss more broadly.

The book includes an introduction, eight chapters exploring a range of contexts and, usefully, a brief conclusion. Its key strengths are evident in two main areas. First, its nuanced and critical emphasis on the complexity of miscarriage and pregnancy loss, enabled by presenting a variety of different historical and cultural contexts not limited to Euro-America (there are chapters focused, for example, on Pakistani Punjab, Qatar, India, Cameroon, and Romania as well as Britain). By emphasising the multiplicity of different ways in which pregnancy loss can be both framed and experienced, the text is able to highlight how both silence and the reiteration of dominant discourses about miscarriage as a significant loss might ‘result in some experiences being muted, ignored or, worse still, pathologized’ (p.235). Second, the collection’s focus across several chapters on how new advances in technologies might be shifting experiences of miscarriage. Exploring the impacts of biotech from assistive reproductive technologies to inexpensive and highly sensitive home pregnancy tests, ultrasounds and foetal dopplers and doing so from pre-conception to memorialization of pregnancy loss, the book offers fresh perspectives and gives the reader much to consider. Overall, this sensitively written, accessible and diverse collection offers a breath of rewarding anthropological insight into miscarriage and will prove useful for practitioners, academics, and all of those interested in or affected by pregnancy loss.

Bethan Michael-Fox, The Open University