Miscarriage and the emotional life

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To use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore women’s perception of miscarriage decades after the event
What is IPA?

IPA is a qualitative approach developed specifically within psychology – now widely used by health, clinical and sociological psychologists.

Attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s perception or account of an object or event.

The researcher is concerned with trying to understand how participants make sense of their experience.

Acknowledges that access is always dependent on the researcher’s own interpretation of another’s world (Smith et al, 2009).
Miscarriage is defined as the natural termination of a pregnancy before the foetus is considered viable, that is generally up to 16 weeks.

Approximately 15% - 20% of pregnancies end in miscarriage.

Very little is written about the emotional impact on women in counselling and psychotherapy literature.
My participants

- Five women: Janet, Dee, Lucy, Susan and Tess
- Aged between 50-65 years old
- All had miscarriages 10 – 25 years ago
- They have had 9 miscarriages between them
- They were all recruited as a result of my own contacts or through self-referral
The data was collected, over the past two years, using unstructured interviews lasting just over an hour. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Analysed using IPA (Smith et al, 2009).
Emphasis on the ideographic in IPA

- IPA generally requires a small, homogenous and purposive sample
- Samples are selected in order to offer insight into a particular experience
- Commitment to in-depth analysis
- Good IPA focuses on the uniqueness in individual accounts as well as looking across transcripts

Getting at the essence or Husserl’s “eidetic reduction”

How do I illustrate the essence of the emotional experience of miscarriage expressed by my participants in less than 25 minutes?
“Relatively rare utterance that is especially resonant” (p.6)
- Stands out and adds value to the whole analysis
- Demands attention
- Shines a light on the whole phenomenon being researched
Ocean’s gem the purest of nature’s works!
What days of weary journeyings, what sleepless nights, what toils on land and sea
Are born by men to gain thee!
A spectrum of gems

- **Shining**
  - Already clearly apparent
  - Don’t need to peer

- **Suggestive**
  - Something needs attention
  - Need to peer to find it

- **Secret**
  - Chink is manifest
  - Lots of peering to uncover it
And that’s the space I think I was trapped in for a long time. That metaphorical toilet. (Lucy)

One minute you were pregnant and the next minute you weren’t. (Tess)
Shining Gems

I suppose the connection must be that I think I’ve killed it or something. (Susan)

It’s changed who I am and it’s changed my life. (Tess)
Suggestive Gems

You’d have shown me more understanding if I had lost my handbag. (Lucy)

I had got the idea that it wasn’t going to happen so I was pregnant but I wasn’t going to have a baby. (Janet)
Suggestive Gems 2

I kind of I suppose covered a lot of this stuff in my head seeing babies in what’s there name dishes...Being left in the sluice. (Susan)

I can’t give myself permission to see it as a bereavement at all because...I want to pretend it didn’t happen anyway. (Janet)
I think I ignore what it has given me as much as what I have lost, which sounds weird but it is true. (Tess)

Which is where we go back from the beginning. I don’t acknowledge those two. (Janet)
We look at the context of each gem in-order to make sense of it

Each powerful extract illuminates the individual and personal experience of miscarriage

This in turn sheds light on the experience and meaning of miscarriage for all the participants

“The whole helps the part and the part helps the whole” (Smith, 2011, p.9)
Sometimes I feel that there is a gem in every line of my transcripts that shines a light on the emotional impact for women of miscarriage.

It can be very hard to distinguish the suggestive gems from the secret gems and I am not sure I have quite got this right yet.

This metaphor of the pearl has added a new dimension to my research that I will continue to pursue.
The Shell

But my grief has worn away my heart.
They are talking to a shell,
An empty oyster
That has lost its pearl.
References

