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Rafaely, Daniella

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ABSTRACT

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This research provides an ethnomethodologically-informed, conversation-analytic study of the social organisation of experience in talk about incidents involving deaths of children. Child mortality is widely used as an indicator of population health and development. However, studies have demonstrated that childhood is a relatively recent historical construct. Child mortality was thus only differentiated as a unique social and moral concern within the previous two centuries, as an outcome of modern conceptualisations of childhood. Taking this as a point of departure, I examine experiences of child death as interactionally produced and negotiated phenomena. Drawing on a data set consisting of recorded interactions from radio call-in shows, I examine a collection of 23 stretches of interaction that include explicit claims of emotional responses to events involving child death. I demonstrate how these actions, through the details of their composition and positioning, tacitly display and negotiate speakers' relative entitlement to emotional experiences of the child's death. Specifically, I examine three components of these claims of emotion, namely a subject component (indexing the speaker as the subject of the claim), an affect component (formulating the nature of the emotional response the speaker is claiming), and an object component (referring to details of child who died, the family of the child, and/or the incident in which the death occurred). In analysing the range of variations in each of these components, and the overall action of claims of emotion to which they contribute, I demonstrate how speakers orient to, and thereby reproduce, taken-for-granted hierarchies of entitlement to experiences of the child deaths. I conclude by discussing the implications of

the findings for understandings of the social organisation of experience in interaction, and the (re)production of the privileged developmental category of the child in modern societies.