

# Family Expressions of Pain in Postmortem Portraiture

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## Abstract

*This essay argues that in postmortem portraits there are visible traces of the pain of mourning and bereavement. Using independent research with Thanatos Archive, I analyze the way in which the pose, style, props and placement of early postmortem photographs reflect the pain of the mourner. These tropes, I argue, relate to Marianne Hirsch's concept of the familial gaze, where the viewer is aware of a photograph being taken for the family and circulated within it. Having formed a basis for reading the family into the postmortem photograph, I then reconsider Nan Goldin's contemporary postmortem portrait, *Cookie in Her Casket* (1989) to offer a reading of the portrait as an expression of Goldin's pain that overwhelms any attempt to present a representational portrait of Cookie.*

**Keywords:** postmortem photography, portraiture, mourning, familial gaze, Nan Goldin

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Portraiture, in its original use, referred to a 'type or likeness': that which typified the subject, accentuating certain traits and relaying an impression of the individual (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2012). Because of this history, considering pain relative to portraiture might easily center on the subject of the portrait and their expressed or repressed pain. Any such discussion stands on the platform of Barthes, Nancy and Owen who all discuss the pose as a submission or rejection of the photographer's gaze (Barthes, 1981, pp. 201–217; Owens, 1992; Nancy, 2005). However, this risks limiting research to an exploration of 'the portraiture of pain'. One way to reopen the subject is to consider portraits where the subject cannot pose. In postmortem portraiture, the subject becomes an object in death, therefore lacking the assertion of subjectivity. What remains in such a portrait is an intersection of gazes upon the subject, including those of the photographer and the viewer, but additionally, the relatives of the deceased. In some cases, the photographer is a family member, but historically, the family has been an additional invisible hand within the image. This paper aims to consider the complexity of what Marianne Hirsch described as the 'familial gaze' in addition to other visible gestures of pain and loss on the postmortem portrait (Hirsch, 1996, p. xi). By reconsidering the postmortem portrait through the pain of the family, I question both the role of the viewer in reading pain in a photograph and the way in which the family controls the image of the deceased.

Drawing on my research into the Thanatos Archive in Washington State, I will consider the familial expressions of pain within postmortem portraiture. Beginning with nineteenth and early twentieth century postmortem photographic portraits from across America, I will first outline the role of postmortem photography and demonstrate how it encourages empathy in viewers to empathies with familial loss. Drawing on Hirsch's concept of the 'family gaze', I will then examine the practice of postmortem portraiture as an opportunity for the family to care for the deceased and, in turn, express their own pain of loss. This will lay the groundwork for an analysis of photographer Nan Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* as an example of how the familial gaze is used in an art context to encourage identification with the pain of the photographer and Mueller's family of friends. Focus in this presentation is limited to American portraiture due to its unique Protestant background.

In early postmortem photographs, such as this daguerreotype of a young boy c.1853 (Figure 1), it was standard to photograph the deceased from the side, laying on a soft surface. This pose was described by anthropologist Ruby as the 'Last Sleep' style (Ruby, 1995, p. 63).

The 'Last Sleep' is a typical Western representation in an historic association of death with sleep. However, it also ties into the Protestant roots of America. In his canonical history of death and dying in Western culture, *The Hour of Our Death*, Airès explained that after the eighteenth century Protestants, whose beliefs did not allow them to

pray for their dead in aid of getting them into heaven, grew frustrated with having to relinquish their loved ones to the unknown (Airès, 1981, p. 462).



Figure 1. Boy with Wreath, Philadelphia, PA, c. 1983, Thanatos archive, Washington, USA.

As such, the care of the body was tied up with the soul's continued existence: a peaceful look of rest would reflect a peaceful and beautiful afterlife. While Airès regarded embalming and the tradition of viewing as extreme – which he equated to fear of death in his essay 'The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies' – he acknowledged the religious desire to have a hand in the fate of the dead (Airès, 1974, p. 134–158). Audrey Linkman also acknowledged the power of Protestant religious beliefs in American death portraiture in *Photography and Death*, noting that Americans believed the body and the soul would be reunited on the Day of Judgment (Linkman, 2011, p. 14). The beautification of the body was believed to inform this Last Judgment: if one rose decayed it suited images of damnation rather than eternal peace. With confirmed belief in the unity of body and soul, a postmortem photograph performed two important functions: it showed that the family had properly cared for the deceased, and it confirmed a positive image of the deceased, which the bereft would associate with their loved one's place in heaven.

Even in the creation of a postmortem 'Last Sleep' image it becomes evident how the photograph encourages consideration of the family – it was taken for them and under their instruction. The standardization of a 'Last Sleep' pose might suggest there is little room to express pain, but the demonstration of care encourages viewers, even today, to consider the family's pain in addition to the death of the subject. This is particularly powerful in

images of children, like Figure 1. Thanatos Archive includes an online component with a membership community, which offers insight into viewer response to these postmortem photographs. The membership is a mix of collectors and interested amateurs, but the comments are generally consistent. For this image, there was an amalgam of comments which one could find across the archive: 'I have a hunger to know more about them'; 'such a tragedy'; in addition to comments specifically considering the family, '[it is] like his parents expected him to grow into that jacket' ('Boy With Wreath,' 2011). How is it these photographs elicit such strong sympathy even two-hundred years after the fact? Why is it that some images, like Figure 1, garner many of these comments, where other images have none, or only comment on the subject? I argue that it goes beyond simple human compassion; that viewers are encouraged to sympathize with the pain of the family.

Empathy for the family and their loss is part of what Hirsch identified in the 'familial looking' (Hirsch, 1996, p. xi). While the concept of the familial gaze has existed since the formation of the family unit, as an academic term Hirsch clarified it in her work on family looking (see Lines, 1987 for discussion). The familial gaze is the act of looking by the family, but also applies to the awareness by removed viewers that an image was taken for or viewed by the family. The familial gaze was described by Hirsch in her introduction to *The Familial Gaze* as 'the conventions and ideologies of family through which they [the family unit] see themselves' highlighting the internal relationships of the family and the convergence of public and private identity (Hirsch, 1996, p. xi). Outside of the family, the familial gaze lingers, though it becomes compounded with additional gazes relating to the social, cultural and political contexts in which 'the family' and individual designations within that family (mother, sister) are viewed. Hirsch argued: 'the camera has become the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and self-representation – the primary means by which family memory is perpetuated, by which the family's story is told' (Hirsch, 1996, p. xvi). This suggests that photography can serve as self-definition for the family as well as encourage identification between the viewer and the familial tropes within the photograph. My notion of the familial gaze highlights the attempt to control how the family is perceived through the representation of its individual members. This concern relates to Hirsch's aforementioned

description of family photography as medium 'by which the family's story is told'. I am particularly concerned with how the familial gaze is read by viewers outside of the family.

Examples of the family control over the familial gaze are most obvious in postmortem portraits of children included with their family or a parent. In this 1855 daguerreotype, titled 'Lovely Light' (Figure 2) a mother holds her deceased infant child, a pose that has variations but is still used today (see Linkman, 2011).



Figure 2. *Lovely Light*, location unknown, c.1855, Thanatos archive, Washington, USA.

Holding and looking at her dead child the reading of the image could be likened to paintings of Mary and Christ. Her face turns toward the child, hiding particular facial expressions, but ensuring *her* emotions about the death of her child are considered in the portrait. The child is carefully arranged, demonstrating love and care for her body and the pink ribbon was coloured later, reinforcing a lost mother-daughter connection. These little tropes, cues for the viewer, firmly establish the family story – loving mother and tragically lost daughter – and in doing so encourages compassion for the pain of that loss. The mother is looking at her child in a neutral, though hardly happy expression, meaning that we can only guess as to her emotions, but this ambiguity incites interest. She has lost her child: what must she be going through? As a member of the archive commented 'I cannot fathom holding my dead child [...] I would be hysterical' ("The Lovely Light," 2014).

The desire to see through the mother's eyes, and even identify with such pain would have been more potent at the time, when the daguerreotype would be shown to friends and family who might have known the child and certainly knew the family. Seeing the mother-child relationship also makes

room for the rest of the family. At the time, a portrait such as this would be displayed along with other family daguerreotypes or kept by a family member, where today we are left with questions about the absent family members. Additionally, images of the deceased in jewelry draw focus to the ritual of mourning and the role these images play in expressing the pain of the mourning process. In *Forget Me Not: Photography and Memory*, Geoffrey Batchen comments: 'No longer seen in isolation, the photograph becomes an extension of the wearer' acknowledging how great an effect mourning jewelry had on the wearer as well as the image of the deceased (Batchen, 2004, p. 35). Wearing lockets such as this one are signals of pain that is always present for the wearer, even if they are not actively in mourning. I would also note that the family imposes itself of the image though choices like clothing or style of jewelry whereby the photograph is part of their public expression of mourning. This locket remains part of a narrative of mourning, a demonstration that the pain of losing this child endured.

Moving further into the pain of mourning, the placement of an image in a family album can serve to compound the sense of loss. In this example of Mary Bradley, the misfortune of infant death is made more poignant by the embedded words 'Our Baby's Picture' (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *Our Baby's Picture*, Oelwin, Iowa, 1914, Thanatos archive, Washington, USA

This is the first image in the album of baby pictures, and most likely the only image of that child. The album would include spaces for other moments in the child's life, and of other family moments, all

haunted by the absence of this child. The album preserves the image, offering protection from light and weather, and while this was a common means of maintaining and sharing photographs, the placement of photographs in an album was not purely a matter of record keeping. The album allowed the owner to contextualize and decorate photographs, displayed to their taste and with their own narrative (see Batchen, 2004). In the context of an album the loss is not limited to a single image, instead viewers keep that loss throughout the album, thinking back to the image of the dead child in future family portraits or blank pages. It is an apt metaphor for how the dead linger with the bereaved, making every moment of their life slightly coloured by that loss. Even the inclusion of these photographs in an album invites the viewer to consider how the family, usually the mother, presented their child. Work like that of di Bello and Siegel has discussed the love and care women put into their family albums, but the question of how these details reflect pain, and what that means for our reading of these images today, needs further research (Di Bello & Siegel, 2009; Di Bello, 2007).

Another important addition to the image of Mary Bradley is the inclusion of flower wreaths and bouquets. Moving from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the growing funeral industry in America began to influence postmortem images (Burns, 1990; Habenstein & Lamers, 1955; Linkman, 2011; Pine, 1975; Sapikowski, 2013). As the funeral home took charge of embalming and laying out the body, photographers and families relinquished control of how the body was arranged. The funeral homes generally laid out a coffin surrounded by flowers, though in this case, the child is arranged on a sofa. Research has found that the floral tributes, coordinated by the funeral home and the mourners, gradually became a staple of the postmortem photograph (e.g. Airès, 1975; Harris, 2007; Linkman, 2011; Mitford, 1963; Pine, 1975). Their inclusion was evidence of the skill of the funeral director in laying out the body. Metcalf and Huntington highlighted the subtle differentiation in appropriate mourning paraphernalia noting:

[...] sumptuous flower arrangements surrounding the coffin are a feature of the “viewing”, and it could be argued that the mourners compete to display their affluence in such gifts. However, very nice distinctions of status govern the size of floral tributes (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991, p. 199).

Their work implies a certain relationship between mourning and family status, but also notes a demonstrable hierarchy of mourning in the presentation of flowers. In the case of this photograph, a single floral arrangement is likely to be that of the parents or immediate family. These floral tokens, no matter how large, are read as evidence of loss and of the pain felt by those left behind. Such visual cues encourage the viewer to see the dead as belonging to a family, and as beloved. The visible affection of the family indicates their wealth and their affection for their lost family member.

As the twentieth century moved forward, the funeral industry blossomed and began to take control, pulling focus away from the face of the dead and toward the funeral arrangements and the scene of the viewing. As you can see in a 1920s funerary photograph (Figure 4), by this point the deceased is barely visible, buried under clothing, casket lining and flowers, and the mourners take focus, either by their physical presence, or the ornate offerings they have left behind.



Figure 4. Funerary Photo of a Young woman age 36, c.1920-25, Thanatos archive, Washington, USA.

In Figure 4, the expression of loss is overwhelming, as floral arrangements fill the room relaying to the viewer the extent of the grief and the amount of people grieving. In addition to the bouquets and floral arrangements, there is evidence of care that the family lavished on the deceased through her beautiful clothing and headdress, the lace canopy and the elaborate satin-lined casket. This casket is particularly extravagant with carved columns on either side of deep-lipped lid. It was unquestionably custom made. This speaks to social status and money of the family, but also how important it was for them to care for their lost loved one. No expense is spared in the comfort of her coffin and the beauty of her viewing. Images such as

these would be sent to family who could not attend the funeral. This not only included them in the funeral process, but also demonstrated that the deceased had been well cared for. Tokens of care, are still very much part of how we, in the West, manage our pain.

Some, like Jessica Mitford, have argued that the funeral industry preys on our desire to express pain through physical tokens. In *The American Way of Death*, Mitford commented that the dressing of the dead, which she views as an unnecessary excess, is supported by the funeral industry, whose terminology she quotes when relaying her experience at a trade fare:

Burial footwear demonstrates “consideration and thoughtfulness for the departed”. The closed portion of the casket is opened for the family, who on looking see that “the ensemble is complete although not showing. You will gain their complete confidence and good will” (Mitford, 1963, p. 25).

Mitford finds these justifications excessive, arguing in her book that the funeral industry is a sycophantic trade that preys on the bereft. While Mitford might consider the comfort of the dead to be a commercial facade by the funerary industry, the act of dressing the deceased often allows the family to feel they are providing for the deceased independently of commerce. In contrast others, such as psychiatrist Vamik Volkan, see it as a valuable way to externalise the pain of loss (Volkan, 2007). In fact, Mitford does not consider that dressing the deceased can reinforce the bonds between family members, as described by Phillis Cunningham and Catherine Lucas in *Costume for Births, Marriages & Deaths*. Cunningham and Lucas relayed an example in Oxford in 1938 of a mother who wanted her daughter buried in a coat “to keep her warm” (Cunningham & Lucas, 1972, p. 125). The authors noted that the mother’s request for a jacket followed a tradition of using clothing to protect and offer comfort to her lost child. The concern for the child being cold shows a motherly concern that she would have had if the child were alive. This example demonstrates how the desire for comfort reinforces a pre-existing relationship between the deceased and the bereft. In this way, one can also see the elaborate funeral dress as a form of affection and a way for the bereft to maintain their relationship with the deceased.

Looking at these images from the past, the question of how these postmortem portraits express the pain of the bereaved demands inquiry. I hope to

have raised interesting possibilities for research along with demonstrating how familial pain is expressed through these images, and how viewers are encouraged to engage with that pain. While a great deal more work can, and should, be done in this area, for the moment I will bring these themes up to date with an analysis of Nan Goldin’s 1989 *Cookie in Her Casket* (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Nan Goldin, *Cookie in Her Casket*, NYC, November 15, 1989. Cibachrome print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm

### Whose Cookie? Reconsidering *Cookie in Her Casket*

Nan Goldin’s *Cookie in Her Casket* is a postmortem portrait complicated by its role as a publicly circulated artwork, and circulated within a fifteen-image portfolio. The image is at once acutely private as a postmortem portrait and directly professional as a chosen work for display and sale. If we consider the work within its historical context, the relationship it shares with traditional postmortem portraits suggests an attempt to express the pain of loss felt not only by Goldin, but also by many other artists, activists and individuals in New York surrounding the AIDS crisis. It would be too complex to untangle the layers of narrative that conflate the issue of public and private, but I will briefly demonstrate that *Cookie in Her Casket* is presented to the viewer in the framework of a personal, quasi-familial relationship.

The portfolio begins by establishing a familial framework for the images by the inclusion of a eulogistic letter, written by the artist, explaining how she met Cookie and how much Goldin cared about her. The eulogy is hand written as though to demonstrate more directly that these are Goldin’s raw emotions, and in it, Goldin calls Cookie ‘my best friend and my sister’ (Goldin, 1996, p. 256). It also explains that Goldin was shattered when Cookie contracted AIDS, and admitted that the photographs

of Cookie in the portfolio only 'show [Goldin] how much I have lost' (Goldin, 1996, p. 256). This letter frames how the viewer will read the portfolio: we are prepared from the onset for Cookie's death, and made aware of how close the photographer was with the subject. In this letter Goldin relays that Cookie will die, but also that Goldin admired Cookie, and thought of her as a sister.

*Cookie in Her Casket* is part of a fifteen-piece portfolio in which we see images of Mueller at some of her most private moments, including club toilets. The intimacy demonstrated in these images compounds with each photograph, and the friendship between Goldin and Cookie is solidified. For example, in *Cookie and Millie in the Girl's Room at the Mudd Club* (Figure 6), Goldin captures a wild and vibrant Cookie with her self-designed outfit, unruly hair and trademark heavy cats eye makeup. She was considered by Goldin to be 'the queen of the downtown scene' (Goldin, 2001).



Figure 6. Nan Goldin, *Cookie and Millie in the Girls' room at the Mudd Club*, 1979. Cibachrome print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm

Images such as these not only demonstrate intimacy, they encourage us to feel an intimacy with the subject – Cookie's guard is down she is laughing and inviting, happy to have us be part of her world. This is a common reading of Goldin as a photographer, taking photographs from inside a friend group, Goldin opens a personal relationship to the public for consideration and identification. Goldin captured Cookie in clubs, in the intimacy of bathrooms, at her wedding, and even as she struggled with AIDS.

The closeness of the portfolio included Cookie at her most vulnerable, such as *Cookie being x-rayed* (Figure 7).

This is the sole image is Goldin's entire opus where Cookie was not wearing rings or bangles – as her long-time lover and friend Sharon recounted, Cookie tried desperately to avoid taking off her jewelry and makeup for hospital visits (Coulthart,

1995). She seems disconnected, with her eyes closed, surrounded by the shadows of the x-ray, which recall the void of death. This is not the vibrant young woman of *Cookie and Millie*, but an exhausted woman being intimately probed by a machine in a completely impersonal environment. Even through the viewer is connected to Cookie through Goldin's camera, there is a clear distance as evidenced by the shadows from the machine which cross along Cookie's face. She is separating from us; from the world. Through the narrative of *The Cookie Portfolio*, we have seen Cookie become good friends with Goldin, allowing her into increasingly more private moments, and felt a similar intimacy develop for ourselves. To see her in this vulnerable position, nearing death, with the void of blackness surrounding her, the sense of pain begins; she could almost be dead.

Then, in *Cookie in Her Casket*, she is; and the pain of loss, which has been slowly anticipated over the course of the portfolio, sets in. After seeing a vibrant young woman become diminished by a disease, the image of *Cookie in Her Casket* shows the power of the 'Last Sleep' tradition. Throughout the series Cookie has a very expressive face, and certain trademarks that we saw in the image of *Cookie and Millie*: her hair is a wild untamed bundle of curls, her clothes are all handmade and she always had on heavy eye-makeup. In *Cookie in Her Casket* the placid exterior of a well groomed Cookie is jarring. The image is peaceful, and unusually traditional. This disjuncture is compounded by Goldin's composition: the low-lighting results in a markedly plain image for Goldin, with the shades of orange and black recalling early black and white photography. For these reasons, critic Andy Grundberg highlights *Cookie in Her Casket* as 'a difficult emotional experience' (Grundberg, 1990, p. C23).



Figure 7. Nan Goldin, *Cookie being x-rayed*, NYC, October, 1989. Cibachrome print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm

The familiarity of postmortem imagery, the inclusion of a personal eulogy and the intimate moments shared in *The Cookie Portfolio* all offer the viewer way to step into Goldin's shoes. We are asked to see Cookie as Goldin sees her – as a friend, a mother, and Goldin's 'queen of the downtown scene', making the pain of Cookie's loss all the more accessible (Goldin, 2001). We are encouraged by the portfolio to acknowledge the family gaze by which Goldin views Cookie, and that we too are pulled in to empathies and identify with the subjects if not the photographer. In extending her familial gaze, Goldin was mindful of her presentation of the deceased. In order to invite others to take on the gaze, it makes sense that *Cookie in Her Casket* would not clash with existing conceptions of imaging death. But to what end does Goldin encourage us to empathise with her pain? I contend that Goldin was responding to a crisis in her time.

In the eighties and early nineties, HIV positive patients were largely overlooked by the healthcare system, as hospitals and hospices often refused patients care, uncertain how the disease spread (UNAIDS, 2006). Those lucky enough to get treatment in a facility would find themselves in hospitals rather than hospices, facing what Susan Sontag and medical historian John Tercier described as a cold, musicalised death (Sontag, 1990; Tercier, 2005). In *The Contemporary Deathbed*, Tercier outlined the medical death as one of machines – he used the term 'hi-tech death' – where the dying had minimal human contact in a sterile environment (Tercier, 2005, p. 10). Tercier married the violent probing of machines with Philippe Airès' notion of the 'invisible' death by noting that while death in a hospital might be loud with the noise of machines, death had become so institutionalised in the hospital that it was socially invisible (Airès, 1981, p. 590; Tercier, 2005). So, death was not only impersonal and mechanical, but it was socially ignored. Sontag's work highlighted the social ignorance of death and the social ostracising of AIDS and cancer patients (Sontag, 1990). A medical death was socially detached and clinically distant.

Cookie spoke out against her own isolation and that of fellow HIV positive individuals in rallies and her health column 'Ask Dr. Cookie' for the *East Village Eye*. In one instance, Cookie insisted that her readers not approach the American Medical Association (A.M.A.) if they contracted AIDS because: 'Like some bizarre sci-fi C.I.A. plot the A.M.A. seems to be trying, albeit unwittingly to obliterate the following groups: queers, voodooers, drug fiends,

hemophiliacs who need transfusions often, and straights who share Sabrette hotdogs with gays' (Mueller, 1997, p. 235). The anger Cookie expressed at the A.M.A. was shared by ACT UP, who targeted the A.M.A. for their lack of accountability (Morgan, 1988; Russell, 1989; Stockdill, 2003). Wojnarowicz's 'Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell' echoed the pervading sentiment of distrust and disgust. Wojnarowicz acknowledged that although 'my life at times has a nightmarish quality about it because of the society in which I live and that society's almost total inability to deal with this disease' it would be worse to be on the street, faced with the threat of rape, death and 'the overwhelmed clinics and sometimes indifferent clinic doctors' (Wojnarowicz, 1991, p. 118). The extent to which the medical community fostered clinical and inhumane treatment of AIDS patients was further exposed by Sontag in *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Sontag, 1990). This compounded with the political lack of response to AIDS and its social exclusion to make an AIDS death feel like a sin.

At a time of division, Goldin's photographs invite comparisons between the viewer and the subject. In particular, it encourages empathy on behalf of the viewer. This is not unusual for postmortem photographs in general. Postmortem photographs of children, for example, seem to invite the viewer to take on the familial gaze, even momentarily. Thanatos archive's online member comments demonstrate sympathy for the bereft family. In the case of the postcard of a young boy in a casket, for example, members remarked on the intensity of the grief they might feel if it were their grandson ("Frankie," 2014). The desire to emotionally connect through photography was explored by anthropologist Gillian Rose in relation to media photographs, and though these images were of the living, she found that Anthropologist Gillian Rose found that even the style of a family snap, an image taken by a family member to capture a moment, encourages a connection when circulated in the media, and in a traumatic instance, create an easy route for personal identification (Rose, 2010). *The Cookie Portfolio* in its entirety encourages viewers to step into Goldin's shoes. Sarah Ruddy argued with respect to Goldin's earlier work, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, that Goldin's photographs are part of an 'affective documentary' where all of Goldin's images encourage the viewer to see through Goldin's eyes (Ruddy, 2009, p. 349). Ruddy notes that 'Rather than vainly attempting to negate loss by producing a representation of the lost object, Goldin's images

deny this negation by enacting loss' and in enacting loss they reproduce the sense of loss in the viewer (Ruddy, 2009, p. 352). As the viewer takes on the familial gaze, they are encouraged to consider Goldin's mind-set. *The Cookie Portfolio* is presented as a memorial to Cookie and Goldin's friendship, with text about their relationship accompanying the images. Additional interviews also relayed Goldin's realisation of loss when creating the portfolio (Goldin, 2001). Knowing that Goldin realised the finality of loss through the portfolio engages the viewer in Goldin's experience of the images.

Using the familial gaze among other techniques, Goldin was able to express the personal sense of loss at Cookie's death. Expressing this pain through portraiture – not just *Cookie in Her Casket*, but the entire portrait portfolio – also encouraged the compassion in the viewer. By seeking to connect through pain, Goldin cut through the coldness that surrounded AIDS. *Cookie in Her Casket* encourages viewers to see Cookie, and by extension other AIDS victims, as part of a normal family cycle of loss. Chris Townsend has similarly viewed Goldin's image of Cookie as part of a move to present death as normal part of life (Townsend, 2008, p. 70).

While I would not go this far – Goldin clearly beautifies death rather than presenting it unmediated – she does offer a place for AIDS deaths to be seen as beautiful and somewhat normalised. The photograph presents Cookie as a commemorated and beloved individual part of a social group, like any other lost loved one. Through pain, Goldin also validates the sense of loss for the entire community who found their friends or

themselves dying from AIDS but received no care or acceptance from the government. Goldin used pain as a tool: to promote compassion, and to reinstate the right of grieving to a community, which was socially and politically ostracised.

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This brief analysis has demonstrated the presence of familial pain through specific readings of postmortem images, and relayed the power of this familial pain to draw in the viewer through compassion or identification with the bereaved, rather than the subject of the portrait. Goldin's *Cookie in Her Casket* is an example of artistic use of this pain, specifically in creating a sense of the familial within *The Cookie Portfolio*. By way of conclusion, I will return to the idea that began this essay: the portrait as that which typifies the subject. Considering postmortem portraits, where the subject is deceased and therefore cannot assert themselves, it becomes apparent how much influence the photographer and other external forces have over the single portrait. In this context, a portrait may be said to typify and individual, but typify them *for whom?* The image of the dead, my research suggests, is always in the hands of the living, resulting in a reading of the dead through their eyes. In the context of pain, death is seen, then, through the mourner. At the very least, this work has raised some key questions about how and why pain is presented in portraiture. Pain is more than an expression to be caught by the camera, it is a powerful tool for both artists and art historians.

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