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Otto Dix (1891-1961), *Frau mit Kind*. See page 717.

COMBINED EFFECT OF MOTHERS' AND FATHERS'
MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS ON CHILDREN'S
BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

NEW USERS OF ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS
AMONG CHILDREN ENROLLED IN TENNCARE

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Otto Dix (1891-1969)

Frau mit Kind (1921)

It is one of the oldest themes in Western art: a mother and child, posed formally, facing the viewer. In many such paintings, the mother is the Virgin Mary and the child is the baby Jesus. But even in religious treatments of the subject, artists had no way of knowing what Mary and Jesus really looked like, so they commonly drew on the appearance of women and children of their own time and place.

What Otto Dix saw around him in 1921 was a bleak Germany in the aftermath of World War I. Dix himself had



fought as an artilleryman and had been gassed and wounded in the ghastly trench warfare that claimed millions of young men. He survived, but the memories haunted him for the rest of his life. On his return to Dresden, he found that countless victims of the war were noncombatants; women and children struggled to get by in the face of poverty, food shortages, fractured families, and moral decay.

Frau mit Kind is not a pretty picture. The mother is no idealized Madonna; she is a gaunt figure with stooped shoulders and large, heavy-lidded eyes gazing absently down past the baby in her arms. The rouge on her cheeks only calls attention to her sallow complexion. The world outside the window is dark; inside, the marble of the building is cracked and crumbling.

The child who looks out at us neither smiles nor cries. Its face is gray, the shape of its head oddly squared-off. Up close, one can see a vein on the child's right forehead shaped just like the vein in the marble block beside it. Dix has drawn an unmistakable visual parallel between the child's head and a block of stone.

Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, spent much of the next World War working in British war nurseries. Afterward, she wrote:



It has already been generally recognised . . . that the lack of essential foods, vitamins, etc, in early childhood will cause lasting bodily malformation in later years, even if harmful consequences are not immediately apparent. It is not generally recognised that the same is true for the mental development of the child. Whenever certain essential needs are not fulfilled, lasting psychological malformations will be the consequence. These essential elements are: the need for personal attachment, for emotional stability, and for permanency of educational influence.^{1(p11)}

Much of Dix's work from that era is difficult to look at because it so powerfully evokes the horror of war and its effects on humankind. But within a few years, the style and subjects of his paintings began to lighten and to take on a new humanity, at times even humor. Two factors contributed to the change. One was the exorcism he gained from expressing in his art the images and bitterness left behind by his wartime experiences. The other was a child. With the birth of his daughter, Nelly, Dix found in himself a strong capacity for fatherly love and in her a new source of wonder and hope.

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1. Freud A, Burlingham DT. *War and Children*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press; 1943.