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### BOOK CHAPTER

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## LECTURE FOUR

### Winnicott's delinquent

*Ann Horne*

**T**he "Antisocial Tendency", a paper given before the British Psychoanalytic Society in 1956, is neither Winnicott's first nor last word on the subject of delinquency and antisocial behaviour. It could, however, be said to be the Winnicottian "word" most remembered by his readers on the subject. You may recall the child whom he describes in that talk: his first child analytic training patient. Winnicott had thus not only trained in medicine and specialized in paediatrics but had completed his psychoanalytic training and was commencing the further two years of supervised child and adolescent work necessary to become a child analyst at the Institute of Psychoanalysis. One can understand why trainees find this paper both helpful and extremely reassuring: Winnicott describes how the boy broke into his locked car, jump-started it in the driveway of the clinic, bumped it down to the bottom, flooded the clinic basement and, as Winnicott confesses here and in a later paper, bit Winnicott on the buttocks—three times. As a trainee, I often thought, "But why doesn't he sit down?" That is, when I wasn't thinking, "Well, if Winnicott can describe so honestly his struggles with an acting-out lad, the tussles that I am having may just be worth it!" It was many years later before I began to wonder about the clinic—the Institute of Psychoanalysis

itself—that had forbidden Winnicott's continuing with this disruptive lad, whether it had been drawn into a response to delinquency that we find all too often in societal reactions today.

### Context

Let us look at the context in which Winnicott was writing in 1956. The study of criminology had become established late in the previous century, perhaps a due progression from the humanitarian interests of penal reformers, and engaging enquiring minds from law, medicine, philosophy, anthropology, and the nascent discipline of sociology. Early themes included the urgent need for a fair system of justice that applied to all and for a range of penalties and punishment that might "fit the crime". *Plus ça change ...* Cesare Lombroso's (1876) experiments in measuring the facial physiognomy of the adult criminal were not untypical of the Italian anthropological school and, in the next century, were to be followed by examination of the body shape of the population—the famous endomorph, ectomorph, and mesomorph of Sheldon (1940, 1942), who rather naively attempted to link character to somatotype, especially criminal character traits in men. Such pursuits of the physical and biological were, in their origin, part of the surge of scientific experiment of the mid- to late nineteenth century and it is striking that character and personality were being examined in this way. During the same period, Henry Maudsley was exploring the boundary between criminality and insanity. Although this was often polemically stated in his writings, he did reach a sense of what he called "individual or family degeneration", which had crime as one of its manifestations, that is, there was an early recognition of environmental factors. Equally, he wrote, "[n]ow it is only a question of degree and kind of fault how far antisocial feeling, thought and conduct, passing through their divers forms of degeneracy, must go before it becomes madness or crime", and "crime is a sort of outlet in which their unsound tendencies are discharged; they would go mad if they were not criminals, and they do not go mad because they are criminals" (Maudsley, 1867, p. 105). The language may not be what we might use now; however, the theoretical propositions stay of interest and the idea of activity, delinquency, and abusing as a defence against psychosis or breakdown remains an important one in psychoanalysis today.

Freud's arrival on the scene was to engage thinking on crime for several decades as psychoanalysis, the new "scientific thinking", brought its own understanding of the "criminal character". Freud wrote one major paper on the subject of criminality—"Criminals (or 'criminality') from a sense of guilt" (Freud, 1925). The emphasis on the unconscious seeking of punishment as a consequence of unresolved Oedipal longings was central. Thus the focus was on the superego, the conscience, and its development being impelled by the Oedipal resolution and the move into latency. This remained the key part of psychoanalytic understanding of the antisocial tendency for the next few decades.

In the same year, Freud wrote the foreword to August Aichhorn's *Wayward Youth*. Aichhorn is one of the very few people to whom Winnicott actually refers—his own self-confessed "delinquency" perhaps evident in his refusal to acknowledge the thinking of others in his sources, preferring to state, as he does in "Primitive emotional development" that:

I shall not first give a historical survey and show the development of my ideas from the theories of others, because my mind doesn't work that way. What happens is I gather this and that, here and there, settle down to clinical experience, form my own theories, and then, last of all, interest myself to see where I stole what. Perhaps this is as good a way as any.

(Winnicott, 1945, p. 145)

In *Wayward Youth*, Aichhorn follows Freud as to superego development but most interestingly outlines what he terms two "faulty developments" in the child's mental structure (Aichhorn, 1925, pp. 199–224):

- There has been no move from the pleasure principle to the reality principle (one might think here of the Kleinian depressive position or Winnicott's process of disillusionment). The consequence is that the child remains—and has to do so—ego-centric and omnipotent in his functioning, there being no process in conjunction with the environment that allows him to be gently let down from this at a pace with which he can cope. This, Aichhorn writes, has resulted from either too indulgent or too severe treatment. In this we may be forgiven if

we hear the voice of Winnicott and the later genesis of the concept of the good-enough mother. Emphatically, Aichhorn recognized the importance of environment: one can see how he engages with this in his talks to lay people, especially where he explicates the technique of child guidance and work with parents (see Aichhorn, 1964—a posthumous collection).

- Aichhorn's second major point is one that, I think, we need to attend to today. In stating that there has been a malformation of the ego ideal and hence the superego, he is locating the insult to the developing child at an earlier stage than Freud, although he keeps faith with the master in asserting that this failure or misdirection of the ego ideal impacts on superego development. The ego ideal is one of these really useful psychoanalytic concepts. It is that sense you can see in the growing toddler of "Who am I? Who do I want to be?" and critically "How do I want the world to view me?" Thus we internalize the expectations and attributes of key objects—adults—in our lives and develop a sense of person, of the self, whom we are satisfied to be. The role of available adults for identification matters here, and the role of shame is crucial—the sense of shame appears when one feels that one has fallen short of this ego ideal. This is important when we have in mind the current concern about adolescents, knife crime, and the role of fathers. For the past few years headlines have asserted "No role models, breakdown of discipline and a culture of violence"—that particular article being written by a black youth worker in London, a research fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies (Bailey, 2007).

In comparing two groups of asocial children, Aichhorn found one to have developed ego ideals but in identification with antisocial parents, hence inevitably coming into conflict not with family but with society. The other group had life experiences characterized by lack of attachments and meaningful identifications; the ego ideal either did not develop or was weak, with the consequence that it could not be a force for achievement or self-regulation in life.

It is also worth noting Aichhorn's comments about those who work with "wayward" young people. At first—and remember that he was a teacher by trade, running a residential establishment for delinquent youth on the outskirts of Vienna, before he trained as a psychoanalyst—he affirms that the work requires people of firm moral stance, able to sustain this in the face of considerable challenge. Later—as evidenced in

his letters, noted by Young-Bruehl (1989, pp. 301–302) in her biography of Anna Freud—he comments that the therapist who works best with such young people should be in touch with his own delinquency. Perhaps Winnicott's delinquency, then, is a useful attribute?

Finally in these first years, Melanie Klein wrote in 1927 of "Criminal tendencies in normal children". Although she followed Freud in centring on the development of the superego, the growth of the conscience, she proposed that the superego in delinquency worked in a different direction, rejecting "the desires belonging to the oedipus complex" (Klein, 1927, p. 184). Today, we may consider that there can be two superegos at work, one antisocial, directed to the external world, externalized onto society, and the other internal, conflicted, more depressive, linked to the ego ideal.

The interest of psychoanalysts in delinquency grew. Analysts, in particular Edward Glover, were prominent in the formation of the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency—later the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD)—in 1932 and its clinical wing, the Portman Clinic, in 1933. In the archives, we find record cards indicating that Bowlby spent time working with clinic patients, as did Bion. Glover, of course, was director, and another analyst, Kate Friedlander, an involved colleague. The main writings bow to Freud in emphasizing superego formation and Oedipal resolution (Friedlander, 1947; Glover, 1949). However, Glover interestingly proposed that not all antisocial young people needed psychoanalysis and in 1950 made clear his distinction between *functional stress* (which we might connect to the normal developmental processes of puberty and adolescence and which he termed "transitory") and defensive symptomatic reactions to Oedipal conflict where therapy is indicated (Glover, 1950, p. 110).

In the period just before the 1939–1945 war, Bowlby was engaged on the early stages of what became his life work on attachment. His study *Forty-four Juvenile Thieves*, unsurprisingly to us today, places maternal deprivation and separation at the centre of risk factors in the development of an antisocial stance (Bowlby, 1944). His "affectionless children", a category descriptive of the bulk of persistent offenders in his survey, suffer from deficit rather than conflict, an absence of mothering in the first six months (Bowlby, 1944, p. 113).

Finally, mention should be made of the festschrift for Aichhorn, edited by Eissler in 1949. I would like to allude to only two of the many contributors to this but both important when thinking of the antisocial

child. Anna Freud's (1949) paper "Certain types and stages of social maladjustment" is a classic. She emphasizes "early disturbance of object-love" consequent on absent, neglectful, ambivalent, or unstable mothering, or multiple impersonal carers, meaning the child cannot invest emotionally in parent figures, so retreats to the self, the body and its needs, which "retain a greater importance than normal" (Freud, 1949, p. 194). This absence of "good-enough mothering" is also problematic in relation to aggression, agency, and potency, which are not met with understanding and containment, and may manifest themselves on a spectrum ranging from "overemphasized aggressiveness" to "wanton destructiveness". Thus the onset, or otherwise, of what is perceived as, or becomes, antisocial behaviour, depends on whether or not there is sufficient maternal attunement and whether or not there is a carer present who can understand the child's gesture, offer containment, and modulate the response.

Jeanne Lampl-De Groot is not frequently quoted when delinquency is discussed, yet her paper "Neurotics, delinquents and ideal formation" is, I think, essential reading (Lampl-de Groot, 1949). She returns us to Aichhorn's preoccupation with the ego ideal, concluding that the prerequisites are a capacity for identification and objects (key adults or siblings) with whom to identify. Again, with recent news stories in mind, we are directed to the issue of role models and the availability of identifications. Her comments on the capacity of a strong ego and ego ideal to make use of aggression and gain a sense of agency reminds us of Winnicott's writing on muscularity and the need of the infant for a mother who meets and survives the ruthlessness of the infant (Winnicott, 1963c).

### *Winnicott and the antisocial child*

Such was the theoretical world when Winnicott wrote about his first training case. Although, as I stated at the start of this chapter, the major paper one remembers is "The Antisocial Tendency", it is worth recalling that Winnicott also wrote about delinquency prior to 1956. He was one of that important triumvirate of John Bowlby, Emanuel Miller, and Donald Winnicott who famously wrote to the *British Medical Journal* in December 1939, concerned about the proposals for the evacuation of children from London in the face of the outbreak of World War II. Quoting Bowlby's work, they stress that

it "showed that one important external factor in the causation of persistent delinquency is a small child's separation from his mother", concluding: "If these opinions are correct it follows that evacuation of small children without their mothers can lead to very serious and widespread psychological disorder. For instance, it can lead to a big increase in juvenile delinquency in the next decade" (Bowlby, Miller & Winnicott, 1939, pp. 13-14).

Indeed, the wartime Beveridge Report led to the establishment in 1948 of the Welfare State which tackled issues of health, deprivation, education, poverty, and housing. Onlookers were appalled to note that the rate of juvenile delinquency did not decrease subsequently but grew. This is not a perverse accusation that evacuees caused this wave of antisocial behaviour; rather, it indicates that we should also be thinking of the absence and loss of *fathers* consequent on war—and the absence of role models.

Prior to this, Winnicott had read to the British Psychoanalytic Society a paper on "The manic defence" in which he gave two asocial children as examples. The terms used were heavily based on the formulations of Melanie Klein and the emphasis here, in 1935, was on strengthening "good internal objects", internalizing a good object to countermand the anxieties that lead to activity as a defence. Again, we are in the arena of what key adults are available to the child, how the sense of self can develop and be strengthened by the internalization of good experiences; and again we might think of present concerns about violent youth. Finally, in a paper dated simply "1940s" we find him pondering: "I cannot get away from my clinical experience of the relation of not being wanted at the start of life to the subsequent antisocial tendency" (Winnicott, 1940, pp. 52-53).

This seems to be a matter of primary privation and is in contrast to his thoughts in "The Antisocial Tendency".

In "The Antisocial Tendency" Winnicott's young training patient is sent to Approved School. It is often thought that Winnicott is here proposing that psychoanalysis is not a treatment of choice for delinquency—indeed, he distinguished between the antisocial tendency (which is also part of development) and the more formed delinquent structure. However:

It can easily be seen that treatment for this boy should have been not psychoanalysis but placement. Psychoanalysis only made sense

if added after placement. Since this time I have watched analysts of all kinds fail in the psychoanalysis of antisocial children.

By contrast the following story brings out the fact that an antisocial tendency may sometimes be treated very easily if the treatment be adjunctive to specialised environmental care.

(Winnicott, 1956, p. 307)

One might expect the story that follows to describe residential care; in fact, the boy, who suffers a compulsion to steal in it, is "treated" by his mother's interventions, guided by Winnicott's advice. "Specialized environmental care" can mean family. We might like to reflect on the intensity of intervention necessary, what is good enough to get a child back on a developmental track and what is supportive of this.

Winnicott emphasizes that the antisocial tendency both stems from deprivation and contains a sense of hope. He is therefore describing a very different child from Bowlby's "affectionless child" who has never had an experience of something good, who has suffered an absence of early emotional attunement. The Winnicottian child seeks that which he once had, making a demand and claim on the environment for what is his right, for what he once had that has been lost.

The paper continues to develop the dual axis of stealing (plus lying) and destructiveness, the former clearly linked to object-seeking. The "nuisance value" is a vital part—that the environment is made to pay attention. The "cure" for Winnicott lies in the finding of object love, the capacity to engage with an attuned adult, and the capacity to feel despair as well as hope, to mourn. He alters his stance on psychoanalysis as the paper develops, insisting by the end that management (e.g., in residential care) is the intervention of choice and not therapy, while still commenting in the final sentence on what the analyst must expect both in and out of the therapy room. Having it both ways is not uncommon in Winnicott!

For an analyst wedded to the concept of five-times-a-week analysis, this was quite a step backwards—or forwards. For present-day practitioners, more accustomed to the benefits of once or twice weekly work and to engaging robustly and creatively with networks around a child, it feels a little false to be polarizing either analysis or management. How one copes with *both* is our issue today.

I would posit that Winnicott's delinquent with a sense of hope is less commonly found in our clinics today; rather the child traumatized early, often at a stage before speech can begin to make sense of life, and suffering primary privation, who causes concern through his activity-based defences, is more likely to be referred. However, I make a brief diversion.

#### *A note on the interesting times that followed*

At the time Winnicott wrote "The Antisocial Tendency" (1956), criminology had begun its move away from psychoanalytic theories of criminal behaviour. Durkheim's work of the previous century on anomie, exclusion, the division of labour, and the normality of crime had been translated into English (Durkheim, 1893, 1895) and social critique became the growing focus; Terence Morris was about to publish his work on criminal families and, particularly, the criminal area; later researchers would focus on poverty and social deprivation. In the Child Guidance Clinics, the influence of a more systemic family approach to understanding and helping struggling children was beginning to be felt. The development of family therapy, albeit arising from the work of psychoanalytically informed practitioners, in many places struck a considerable blow against psychoanalysis and its particular understanding.

One could make three points here:

- The concept of the criminal family and criminal area is not in contradiction to psychoanalytic theory; rather, it supports those who would see the development of the ego ideal as crucial in the child's taking up an antisocial position as the only possible one. Identification is with criminal relatives and peers—an issue that has been sadly in the news recently in relation to the use of knives amongst young adolescents and their identifications with violent role models. I shall return to the sense of shame and humiliation that is part of the ego ideal constellation and is such a part of the psychological structure of violent young people.
- There was in the 1960s the start of an unhelpful polarizing of therapies available to those who worked with distressed children and adolescents. It is perhaps a part of the establishment of any new theoretical approach that its proselytizers denigrate others, idealize their own approach, and institutionalize the results. This certainly

happened to psychoanalysis as an intervention and it did *not* rise with any potency to the challenge. Perhaps now we are better at holding together the value in a range of approaches, and we certainly need this in relation to the complex cases we see today. At the time, it felt as if the baby was being thrown out with the bath water, that the value of a psychoanalytic understanding was lost in the debate as to who pursued the better therapeutic method. The same happened in criminological theory as it seemingly set off on a course in search of the equivalent of the philosopher's stone, the one true theory of crime. Life is more complex, as criminologists now realize. Indeed, such a tendency to polarize into "either—or", one might point out, is in itself typical of adolescent processes, typical of the dilemmas in which adolescents find themselves and of the imperatives they project onto adults.

- Third, this movement frequently involved quite a gross misrepresentation of psychoanalytic thinking by its critics, presenting psychoanalysis as an approach that blamed the individual and, in offering "treatment", focused on individual "illness" and not on societal responsibility. The medical model—"illness" rather than psychological processes—became an issue. Again, there was a tendency to polarize—*either* a focus on individual psychopathology *or* on family, social policy, and environment. It seemed impossible to hold both together, to understand that recognizing processes at work in the individual did not mean ignoring or denying the importance of the environment.

### *The theoretical toolkit today*

In an excellent chapter in Judith Issroff's book on Winnicott and Bowlby, Christopher Reeves finds Winnicott's "delinquent with a sense of hope" an insufficient concept when one is faced with young people in trouble today (Reeves, 2006, p. 96). I agree with this. It is rare to encounter the Winnicottian delinquent today—more common to find the privation that he noted in his earlier writing. Reeves helpfully directs his readers to the work of Barbara Dockar-Drysdale (1968, 1973, 1990) (greatly influenced in her work in residential therapeutic care by her relationship with Winnicott) and her concept of the "frozen child" (Dockar-Drysdale, 1990, p. 180), akin to Bowlby's affectionless child. She writes:

These need to reach depression (usually very deep). This is the most delinquent group. The depression is followed by dependence on one person. In communication with this person he will need to learn the nature of delinquency and its cause, his severe early deprivation. He will also need to learn that delinquency is a form of addiction, which could be described as self-provision accompanied by intense excitement; it is to this excitement that the boy becomes addicted, and the depression which he reaches through dependence has much in common with withdrawal symptoms.

(Dockar-Drysdale, 1990, pp. 180–181)

Clinical experience would agree with this, as with her formulation of "archipelago children" (Dockar-Drysdale, 1990, p. 179) who have what I have called "atoll-like egos", requiring long-term developmental therapy on the lines that Anne Hurry has described in the Anna Freud Centre (Hurry, 1998). Feeling states are overwhelming to the child with the immature sense of self and must be externalized. Work thus often involves slowly naming such states, leading to the capacity to recognize, anticipate, and tolerate them.

The addiction described by Dockar-Drysdale can be found in the activity-seeking delinquent who often seeks experiences of fearfulness and high anxiety. The case I will describe later illustrates such processes. This activity involves replay of the body experiences emanating from early trauma—just as adolescents who self-harm by cutting can become addicted to the release of the body's natural morphine when they do this, so the young person whose defences are centred on the body and activity can repeat sensations of fear and adrenaline rush. The latter can become physically compelling; the former leads to a repetition of the fear in the hope of this time gaining mastery. It is a repetition-compulsion.

It is apparent that, following Winnicott, the work of Khan (1963) on cumulative trauma has to be a further part of our intellectual toolkit. Pre-verbal trauma, especially through an experience of severe physical and/or sexual abuse, would appear to be a feature of those young people referred to us today. In the absence of any attentive object—and the presence of corrupt objects—the child has only recourse to the primary body-ego, which remains a solution and recourse when anxiety later appears. As Khan reminds us, later traumata may appear minor

but to the child traumatized early, there has been no development of a protective function that reduces the impact of these. Again, developmental psychotherapy is necessary.

Briefly, one also has the work of Glasser (1996) on the core complex, the problems of the vicious circle—the search for an idealized intimacy, a growing sense of engulfment, and the need for violence in order to regain a sense of integrity of the self. The consequent feelings of isolation and abandonment result in a resumption of the search for the perfect close relationship. His concept of self-preservative violence is also important, especially in relation to those young offenders who seem to explode unpredictably into violence (Glasser, 1998).

I'd like to say a few further words about the ego ideal and the sense of shame. Don Campbell's concept of "the shame shield" as a protective function, one that he found to have been constantly breached in the sexually abusing adolescents of whom he wrote (Campbell, 1994), is helpful. The development of the ego ideal is bound up with the sense of shame which emerges when we feel we have fallen short of our ideal. Shame takes us out of the limelight—we cover our faces, retreat—and it gives us space to recover from the humiliation. Children treated with violence and abuse have often been exposed to constant and recurring humiliation—the shame shield ceases to function and, as in Khan's cumulative trauma, small slights can then be experienced as massive insults, calling up the memory of the trauma. The obverse of shame is perhaps respect. In this, two things come to mind:

- the recent Labour government's "respect agenda" for young people which seemed to focus on the respect due by the adolescent to adults and society rather than that due to the young person; and
- the importance of humiliation in the genesis of violence. This is as true of delinquent violence as it is of terrorism. The phrase "He dissed me"—that is, he disrespected me—is an important one in youth culture.

Finally, when we think developmentally we also have to think of the normality of an antisocial stance in adolescence. It is, after all, part of separation and individuation and we must learn—like Glover—to take a light but containing approach to those whose delinquency is transient. Most delinquents, after all, grow out of it, mainly by developing relationships in early adulthood. The "ASBO culture" is interesting

in relation to this. Developed as an intervention intended to deal with nuisance in society, the Anti-Social Behaviour Order was meant to be a way of coping with antisocial neighbours and other adults; that it has come to be used so frequently with children is of interest and at times concern—particularly as breaching an ASBO takes one from civil to criminal jurisdiction and may result in a criminal conviction. I think it is worth thinking about the possibilities of containment in the ASBO—an environment that can respond and hold steady—and the risks of a criminal record. The current imbalance is worth discussing. Winnicott would have seen the robust containment that he required of the environment; he would also, one feels, have been concerned about the lack of flexibility and the danger of criminalizing the young inherent in the legislation. Several counties have been taken to task by central government for not issuing many ASBOs. Not many of us realized that there was yet another hidden government target here! It is impressive that these councils had actually grasped the problem and increased their Youth Service provision, numbers of youth workers, and facilities for young people—known factors in counteracting delinquent and antisocial activity and in engaging with adolescents. The horror is that this was not recognized—that their creativity had, in Winnicottian terms, moved to meet the creativity of the young—and was punished. We need awareness of the polarization of responses to the child or young person who *acts*—the absence of thought infuses our responses, and our reactions can be as knee-jerk as the adolescent's. This is particularly true of policy: our policymakers remain at high risk of advocating reactive, knee-jerk, and simplistically populist legislation.

#### *One young delinquent—Matthew*

I thought it might be helpful to give a flavour of a session with a young antisocial lad. I hope you will be able to see the issues of intimacy and distance, of activity and thought, of excitement and sadness, of seeking to repeat sensations, and the problems inherent in hope. In accordance with Winnicott, we ensured that there was a resilient environment, placement, and support before therapy began.

Matthew was referred at age 14 for sexually interfering with the 6 year-old sister of a friend. This friend often had intercourse with his girlfriend in the presence of other adolescents (both exciting and offensive to Matthew). The abusive incident occurred when all had been



watching a particularly humiliating exit from the World Cup by the England football team.

Briefly Matthew's history was of parental warfare and paternal depression: his father being ejected by his mother when Matthew was two years old; an abusive boyfriend (Sean) immediately moving in; his mother's death (query suicide) when he was five; time spent with the stepgrandfather who had sexually abused Matthew's mother when her mother died; a long struggle for custody by his father and paternal grandmother as his mother's Will had directed him to stay with Sean. He finally moved to live with his father and stepmother and was immediately in trouble in school aged seven. Finally a good school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties took him in.

This session occurred early in December, almost nine months into once-weekly therapy. Matthew at this point is fifteen and is living with his grandmother during the week to sustain his schooling as his father and stepmother have moved some distance away. He has a stepsister—daughter of his stepmother—and a half-brother, child of his father's second marriage.

Matthew arrived early for his session, wearing a new, padded, warm jacket. (He had come the previous week in a sweatshirt and with an awful cold.) Although his cold was still bad, he said that he was OK, that he had taken lots of soup. This comment came with a smile—in our last session he had told me that his grandmother was very good at making soup. (Paternal grandmother has transference implications—at one point Matthew briefly wondered if I, too, listened to Capital Gold.) He hadn't been allowed to take a day off school, however. I wondered if he could have been able to bear that—not being active and just sitting with his thoughts. He agreed he could not; he would rather be in school. I reflected inwardly on this unusually intimate start and wondered when reaction would set in. (When Matthew attends, he always takes and needs time to re-discover his object: he seems, indeed, to expect a corrupt object.)

There was a sustained pause. He looked very sad. I wondered if he were thoughtful now or just fed up? Fed up. His father had said that the moped was too much for his Christmas gift and he probably wouldn't get it. He expanded on how it would have cost £200. His father was giving his brother Alex a computer worth £200; Matthew would get a new mobile phone worth £100; and his sister, Emma, a present worth £75. There was a pause, half sad, half angry. I wondered rather weakly if that

seemed unfair? Yes—Alex gets everything. (Alex, indulged at age five, contrasts with Matthew, abused and abandoned.)

After a further pause Matthew wondered if his father would give him the money and he could put it towards a bike himself. Then he deflated, recalling that his father preferred to pay things up week-by-week. I said that it seemed impossible for the adults to get things right for him. We reflected in silence.

"Do you know a Pa.. Po.. something like that—it's a bike." It emerged as a Piaggio. "They're *very* nice! I really like them. I was out last night on one!" I felt anxiety begin to rise and wondered inside about this need to make the adult anxious, and why. There followed a story of Matthew and five or six friends. Dave had brought the bike and all had tried it out in the local park. Steve did a "wheelie" and drove into a tree. Matthew also tried it—"It was really good!" He described sharp turns, sudden acceleration, mud flying, and excitement. As he was in full flow, his mobile phone rang. He looked apologetic, muttered, "Sorry," said the answering service would pick it up, and could not resist checking the screen. It was Dave leaving a message: "He already phoned twice when I was on the train coming here! It's about meeting tonight." The phone was switched off and put away. He continued with the bike tale—taking it out on the road out of town, a vivid description of Dave nearly coming off the back of the bike as Matthew accelerated—"It can do 45 miles an hour!"—and finally the return to town.

I thought about the sense of life and energy in the midst of this extremely dangerous behaviour. "You know, you really like being 'on the edge', don't you!" Matthew looked questioning. I said that on the bike he liked being in control himself (he didn't like being on the back) but it could tip over—Steve had managed to hit a tree. I suggested he was also "on the edge" with the police, should he be found, and with the court, as the judge had told him that his return to court on any count would mean a custodial sentence. And he had told me before (in an earlier session) that being on a bike could be scary and he didn't like that. "Yes, that's why I won't let Steve drive."

There was a pause. I interpreted then that it was interesting that this "on the edge" excitement had actually followed a very painful description of him and Emma feeling "on the edge" in the family. He gave me a very direct look. I offered that one way he had learned of being in control of these very difficult, sad feelings was through the excited "on the edge" feelings, but they were risky. I wondered, too,

can't stop you. Sometimes it feels better to do that than for you to hope that it might be different."

The following pause felt more thoughtful. "I'll only go tonight if Steve has a crash helmet for me. I know he's got one. It is scary—but exciting scary." ("Crash helmet" has become equated with me, an interesting parallel when one thinks about heads and minds.) I added that that was why he insists on driving, being in control: "It's like not taking the risk that the adults won't protect you again, but it's also the same 'on the edge' excitement of waiting for something to happen that was awful and too much for you when you were little." Matthew nodded slowly.

It was almost time to stop. Matthew checked the clock and put on his jacket. He told me that he *was* careful as sometimes it could get too scary. Moreover, tonight they wouldn't be on the road but in a farmer's field. I said that he was taking on some of the adult bits about protecting himself but still being "on the edge". He was leaving me with something to worry about—perhaps he needed to do that. He gave a quiet smile and "See you next week!" I thought it was a promise to stay alive.

### Conclusion

While we may only rarely encounter Winnicott's delinquent with a sense of hope, who seeks justice for the deprivation he unconsciously feels, our work today with young people cannot proceed without his injunction of "placement first". The containment of the antisocial child may be in a family or an institution but needs to be flexible, resilient, and securely holding. We also need to be in constant communication with one another in our roles in the network surrounding such young people, as the temptation is to polarize, to identify with victim or offender parts of the child, and so to cease meaningful communication. Integration is key—for child and for network. Having it both ways, I have said, is a common phenomenon in Winnicott's writings. Perhaps if we think "and—and" rather than "either—or", we can see that he had a point!

Winnicott, like Bowlby, engaged with policymakers over issues that he found unacceptable. We, too, need to do this. The resignation of Professor Rod Morgan, first chair of the Youth Justice Board, he said, was related to his insistence that he be allowed to be critical of policy when he felt it to be inappropriate or damaging. Lord Ramsbotham,

equally, was outspoken about his shock at conditions for Young Offenders—and was not reappointed as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons. What a loss of experience and integrity these departures represent! Like Winnicott, we need to find ways to be heard.

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about the excitement keeping *me* "on the edge", unsure of his safety, and wondered if he was good at making the adults and me feel this. He smiled gently.

There was quite a long pause. Matthew launched into a story of his friend, Joseph, a very small fourteen year-old. Joseph's passion was cars—with a particular emphasis on taking and driving them away. I noted to myself the connection between my interpretation of the pain in the family and his further recourse to excitement and danger, moving from bikes to cars, but did not interrupt. Matthew gave great detail of how Joseph would break into the black boxes behind the steering wheel panel, where to locate these in a Rover Metro, and diverted into a variety of ways to break into a car. Joseph had been doing this since he was seven years-old. The police knew him well—had been to see him the other day as he is the first port of call when cars go missing. "He has been cautioned and the police know him. Pathetic!" "Pathetic—who?" I asked. "Joe. He knows they'll come to see him first. When he takes a car he drives with the headlights on full beam so that he can't be seen himself. He just gets very excited by cars. Once when I was with him he saw a Jaguar. I said, 'NO!' but Joe kept talking about what it would be like to drive it when we were walking away." I wondered if Joe had the same sense of excitement in relation to cars that Matthew had talked of with bikes. He looked surprised: "No, he's pathetic." I commented that sometimes things are both pathetic and exciting, reminding him of the 36" television set he said his father had bought that in one way seemed pathetic to him but in another seemed full of excitement and potential. This had been in an earlier session. He grinned—"That's true!" I continued, "So you know some things that are both pathetic-daft-dangerous and pathetic-exciting-'on the edge'?" He nodded thoughtfully.

The story of Joe continued. He had "torched" a car. This felt suddenly very unsafe, as if the juxtaposition of "pathetic" and "excitement" had to be avoided. He had tried to break into a car in Tesco's car park (the known area where local youth find and dump cars and bikes) but couldn't get at the black box. Realizing that he had left his fingerprints all over the vehicle, he had found a cloth and jerrycan of petrol in the boot and poured it over the front seats, leaving the can in the car before striking a match. He had singed his hair. "He's totally pathetic! He could have burned himself badly. He had the rag from the boot—he could have wiped off his fingerprints. He ran off and it went

'Whump!' exploding. The Fire Brigade was called. He could have hurt people!" Matthew sounded very upset. I said gently that I thought he had witnessed this, been there with Joe. He nodded. I added that it was frightening that the excitement and "on the edge" bits could tip right over into danger and wondered if he scared himself. He nodded, saying, "He could have been harmed!" Yes. After a pause I added that it was interesting that such a memory of danger had followed my saying to him that he wanted me to feel "on the edge" sometimes—that he was letting me know how dreadfully dangerous things sometimes felt for him and that it was right that we were both concerned.

He recalled a teacher at school, in car mechanics class, whom Matthew had asked something that implied how to hot-wire cars. The teacher had given him the information and not asked why he wanted to know. I said I thought he was letting me know about two things. First, grown-ups may not be straight but may collude with exciting, illegal things, like the teacher giving him the information. (I was thinking of corrupt objects again.) How, then, could he possibly know to trust me and my concern? Second, perhaps he was warning me that he could be tricky—tricking the teacher and perhaps other grown-ups, like me. He gave me a very direct, straight look.

There was a further pause. Matthew said, "The bike engine's still running." The bike, of course, had been stolen and hot-wired. His friends were "second time thieves", having come across it stolen and abandoned. They had by-passed the ignition and could not turn off the engine. They would have to cover the exhaust pipe, cutting off the air supply. (All endings, I thought, are traumatic—even for the bike.) "Someone stole it last night." I must have looked astonished. "Yeah, when we'd gone home Dave had left it at his back gate and phoned to say it had been taken. We found Steve had taken it and had it at his place. It would have been pathetic if a nicked bike had been nicked—I mean we couldn't report it to the police, could we?" I said that I thought that was really interesting: that, when something has gone wrong in the past, the grown-ups will simply not take a young person seriously. Perhaps in some ways this was a little like Matthew—it is impossible for him to hope that the adults will be concerned *now* for his safety when they made such a bad job of it in the past. "You mean Sean," said Matthew, referring to his mother's abusive boyfriend. "Yes, and everything that happened then. Now, as a result of that, you are making me into another of these grown-ups who hears very dangerous things but

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