

CHAPTER 1

Selves and identities

I first came to the ideas of Gabriel Garcia Márquez in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. There Márquez described the dangers of isolation for a family that cannot (or will not) escape their own self-inflicted misfortunes. In ~~Love~~ *Love and the Time of Cholera*, Márquez revisited the theme of the iterative nature of history, death and rebirth; and pondered the power of relationships in sickness and health. The novel is about the intimacies of a relationship and the consequences of rejection and inequality, but also challenges us to question the facades and personal identities created and recreated by the characters in the novel. It is about the process of ‘continuing to become’.

Much of what follows in this book is also about relationships, how we see ourselves and how we are perceived by others. How we are identified by others and how we identify ourselves are not necessarily congruent but both are integral to the discourses we hold with ourselves and others; they are part of the vernacular and both are yoked to the culture of individuality that is so pervasive in many societies. In ~~W~~westernised societies, we are encouraged in various ways to see ourselves as unique. We talk, for instance, of someone who is ‘uniquely qualified’ for a particular role. We laud the individual who outcompetes the others and wins the prize. This sense of uniqueness and the identities we adopt can, I suggest, blind us to our common humanity. It is this disregard for each other’s humanity that I want to question and investigate as part of my concerns about a societal fulcrum: education and educational processes.

As indicated in the Introduction, my main aim in this book is to raise awareness of psychological factors that may be harmful to education. To do this, I need to pay attention to the context for education and the beliefs of those who, by virtue of their profession, identify themselves, or are identified by others, as ‘educators’ or ‘teachers’. This entails thinking about the nature of professional identity and how that is constructed. In this chapter, however, I examine general notions of ‘self’ and ‘identity’; what are some of the possible consequences of such conceptualisations; and how ‘identities’ may be formed. In doing so, I also examine some of

the illusions (or myths) we have about, first, our notionally distinctive 'selves'; and, second, the relationship between our identity (our sense of individual personhood); and others in social groups that we may (or may not) be perceived to be in; and, last, what we can, morally and ethically do in light of such considerations. This leads me to consider both how identity is both socially constructed and socially formative; and the scope of individual identity and autonomy. This latter involves considering what autonomy and responsibilities we believe we have – that we take for granted – or perhaps, realistically, recognise as being limited. Some of these considerations will be based on philosophical work; some will be conceptually or empirically psychological in nature. I will discuss the nature of teachers' professional identities and some of the factors that shape these in a subsequent chapter. In this chapter, however, I also suggest that identities as our observable or conceptualised characteristics, epiphenomena, can also be misleading or prejudicial.

1.1 General notions of self and identity

For the purposes of what follows, I will attempt to discriminate consistently between 'the self' and 'identity' (following [Person, 2014](#)). The former, almost tautologically entails consideration about what one believes about one's 'self' for one's self's sake (and one's beliefs about related concepts such as self-interests, self-efficacy and self-esteem). But when talking about one's self caution is needed:

-The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak.-

([Lacan & Fink, 2006](#), p. 430)

While 'identity' may be used synonymously with 'self' in much of the relevant literature, here I will mostly use identity to mean how one wishes to appear to others and how one is identified by others. However, since, as far as is known, neither self nor identity consists in any distinctive material, neural, component of the brain. Both self and identity (as simple constructions of our embodied minds) are used variously as philosophical, psychological and sociological devices to help delineate and understand human behaviour and mentalisation as epiphenomena or emergent properties of brain activity. But, while I am convinced by arguments such as those presented by Derek Parfit that both our physical and psychological features depend partly on the states of our brains (see [Parfit, 1984](#), p. 237), I do not subscribe to a crude reductionist views of human behaviour. Further, since we are typically never totally isolated from all external

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physical and social environments (including the environments of ourselves), it is, therefore, (thanks to Simon's ant) ultimately only possible to study these epiphenomena and their purportedly correlated behaviours in the contexts of the environments in which they are situated, constructed and construed (Simon, 1996). Importantly for what follows, I must note that in a series of thought experiments Parfit showed that an individual's identity cannot be fully determined, except arbitrarily. Parfit rejected the plausibility of the argument put forward by some who:

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“... believe that the identity of *everything* must always be determinate. These people accept a strict form of the doctrine *no entity without identity*. This is the claim that we cannot refer to a particular object, or name this object, unless our criterion of identity yields a definite answer in every conceivable case. On this view, we often mistakenly believe we are referring to some object, when, because there is no such criterion of identity, there is no object.”

(Parfit, 1984, p. 240)

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It seems to me that this argument, particularly when applied in the domain of human existence and inter-relationships, is another way of guarding against the essentialisation or objectification of persons that is a critical problem in the current state of education. I discuss some of this (and more of Parfit's work) in the next sections but will return to it in greater detail in a later chapter.

1.1.1 Objections to objectification

Despite reasoned arguments such as Parfit's (above), the construction of both 'self' and 'identity' continue to be objectified by authors and practitioners. Thus, for example, Michael Gerson, seeking to promote a role for neuroscience in complementing psychoanalytic approaches to 'self' and 'identity', appears to have suggested that objectification is at least partially possible:

“Self as a source of knowledge and percept suggests a Jamesian subjective being, whereas self as a narrative and interpreter suggests an objectified reflection . . . The use of language to speak about one's self, especially in comparison to others, forms an objectified frame of reference separate from the “being” of self.”

(Gerson, 2014, p. 215)

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Some of this may be an artefact of the limitations of language (and space) in Journal papers, but exemplifies how easy it can be to slip into the old habits of positivism.

Likewise, in the social and political, psychological environments of education, concepts such as 'identity' and 'self' are, I suggest, easily misused by being objectified. Neither concept is essentially a natural category (or kind) that has distinct, bounded and immutable qualities (in the way that we see 'ant' as distinct from 'diamond', for example). If, for example, I am identified as a 'vegetarian', how distinctly and immutably different am I as far as you are concerned? Nick Haslam and his colleagues have investigated the issue of social categorisation in depth and mapped out the stigmatising effects of essentialist beliefs about social categories. Haslam has also challenged the hegemony of medical classification of mental health. Given the incursions of medicalising children's apparent difficulties (for instance, in terms of behaviour and concentration that is too readily diagnosed as 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder'), it is worth noting here what he has said. Having provided a rigorous critique of notions of psychiatric, mental-health conditions, he concluded that:

the adverse consequences of essentialist thinking about mental disorders among laypeople are another neglected reason to be wary of these ways of conceptualizing psychiatric phenomena. Understandings of mental disorders as natural kinds with biogenetic essences that originate in professional discourse may spread into everyday language and thought, often in a vulgarized form, and there is now considerable evidence that the implications for lay conceptions of mental disorders are troubling.

(Haslam, 2014, p. 23)

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The objectification or essentialising of personhood is ethically objectional and practically risky. Insensate things (for instance, diamonds) may have objective 'identities' that are unchangeable, universally defined and ~~for~~ ~~ever~~ ~~forever~~ recognised. Human beings are not like that. We are not as different from each other as, for instance, gold and ant are, or even as tiger and lion are. We are diverse in our superficial characteristics, our traditions and languages, but we share a common genetic heritage and a common humanity, and can communicate empathically.

One of the consequences that I think follows from taking an essentialist and reductionist view of identity (aside from categorisation and stereotyping) is that it suggests there lies an ultimate causal origin behind

the identity. Some sort of homunculus, perhaps. It seems to me that such an approach is both theoretically and practically problematic. Jacques Derrida sought to challenge this by posing the conundrum: ‘*Must not the structure have a genesis, and must not the origin, the point of genesis, be already structured, in order to be the genesis of something?*’ (Bry, 2011, p. 176; emphasis in the original.) The solution, for Derrida (and others drawing from the well of phenomenology first tapped by Heidegger (1977)), was to construct identity in terms of differences. Just as we notice something most quickly when, for instance, a bird that has been camouflaged by the leaves in a hedge flies up, so we distinguish identities by comparison with what they differ from, what they are not. Ultimately, this is a relationship with ‘otherness’ (that-which I address in detail in Chapter 2). Edward Sampson used this deconstruction of essentialism as cornerstone of his relational view of identity. Sampson also drew on Derrida in saying:

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‘The essential reality of a given object can appear only by virtue of the unstated other that is necessary for the object’s identity to appear as such. In short, otherness is the basis for all identity, thereby undoing the essentialist view of identity and requiring that each identity be understood in terms of differences.’

(Sampson, 2008, p. 90)

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As I will show in Chapter 2 with reference to the work of Lacan and Levinas, we are primarily defined by our difference from the Other but refract different differences from each other (including ourselves) that we encounter day by day.

1.1.2 Self-interest

From time to time, some of us are plagued by inter-related questions along the lines of ‘who (or what) am I’, ‘what’s my role (or job)’, ‘what should I do here?’ Derek Parfit posed and examined the key issue more elegantly and precisely by presenting the issue thus: ‘*Many of us want to know what we have most reason to do-*’ (Parfit, 1984, p. 3). For very many teachers working in the educational systems of Western jurisdictions, these questions deserve to become the focus of pertinent and worrying concerns about the role of education and educators’ professional identities.

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Also implicit in these questions is the notion that there is a personal and autonomous self—a phenomenal self that has to be discovered or revealed and play its part in our personal development. In the Western judeo-

christianJude-Christian and greekGreek philosophical traditions of thought, it is commonplace to believe that the self is persistent and unchanging, and that we are, at least partially, but more likely, predominately self-interested, making as sure as possible that we, ourselves, are each ok. (That is to say I will look after myself; you look after yourself. I'll be too busy looking after myself to look after you.) These beliefs are associated with trying to do what we can to make our personal situation as good as it may be (or at least to do what is necessary to personally survive). It is, accordingly, evident in many aspects of Western cultures that we each behave in ways that are motivated by seeking to feel as good as we can about ourselves as individuals. Thus, when things are going well we seek achievements that reinforce a sense of well-being that we have autonomously achieved through our own efforts and agency. (The tautologies here are deliberate to set the agenda for what follows.) Western cultures offer us innumerable material rewards, to give us a sense of physical comfort for apparently minimal effort ('buy now, pay later'). Most of us will also find affirmation of who we are, who we are regarded as being, through membership of groups – at work as well as in social and family settings. As I will discuss later, we tend to choose to join the groups that we can best identify with and best resonate and reinforce our beliefs in our selves.

As I will also show, an answer to the question about 'who we are' is related to not only 'where we are' but more importantly 'who we are with', and perhaps most importantly, 'how we are'. Who we are with, what society we are in, provides many of the constraints and affordances on who we can be, what we can responsibly do, and what role we have in specific circumstances. We are continuously evolving, but it is not possible to prove that we are distinct identities. For, as Parfit suggested:

-Because we ascribe thoughts to thinkers, we can truly claim that thinkers exist. But we cannot deduce, from the content of our experiences, that a thinker is a separately existing entity. And . . . because we are not separately existing entities, we could fully describe our thoughts without claiming that they that they are had by a subject of experiences.-

(Parfit, 1984, p. 225)

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The line of argument that because I perceive there to be psychological continuity for myself (an overlapping chain of memories of what I did the day before and some recall of who I was with and what I did, when I had some memory of who I was with and what I did the day before that, and so on) does not require that the 'I' that recalls this chain is the same thinker who had each of these thoughts all the way back to . . . when? As I hope is

clear, I am suggesting our identities are also an artefact of our being in the (social) world in interaction with others. But our continuing interest in our selves, our apparent need for self-fulfilment, self-satisfaction may not be universal; it may be a distraction from how we exist with others.

In a similar but more abstract form, [Luhmann \(1984\)](#), p. 267, summarising a line of argument by Bernard Williams, showed that it is 'logically impossible for one person to be identical to more than one other person. I cannot be one and the same person as two different people' and concurred with Williams that a sense of psychological continuity does not define identity.

Taking account of cultural differences in beliefs about persons, one's self and identity, we may see that a belief in the primacy of one's self, one's self-interest and identity is just one and, plausibly, only an illusory view. Other philosophical traditions espouse different perspectives. In Buddhism, for instance, the doctrine of 'Anatta' holds that there is no permanent underlying self. According to that view rather than emphasise the independence of individuals, the emphasis is on relatedness and on attending to others ([Berger, 2009](#); [Pillay, 2011](#); [Marino & Kervyn, 1991](#); [Samman, 2018](#)). For Buddhists, the concept of a 'self' (and the notion of self-interest) is considered to be a distraction and an invisible barrier; something that is best, therefore, considered dispensable.

As self-conscious human beings we communicate intra-personally (self-consciously we talk to ourselves and generate our private hypotheses) and inter-personally (consciously talking to others, seeking help and comfort, sharing ideas). We may reflect on an introspective idea or 'sense' of who each of us is, as an individual, as well as gaining perceptions (feedback) about who and what we are thought to be by others. We typically grow up seeking the affirmation of our worth from others. As social animals, we learn how to interact with others (to a greater or lesser extent); and rely on the existence of others in order to survive physically and emotionally. But, in turn, this leads us to discriminate between our own self and other selves. We develop notions about the people that we like, to whom we are kind (I am not you, though I am of your kind); and the characteristics of those that we do or don't like. Like it or not, we probably also find ourselves noting characteristics in those that we meet, comparing these with the characteristics of others that we know; and ascribing a descriptive label for people of one 'kind' or another.

Amongst friends and partners, we will probably also find ourselves agreeing about the characteristics of certain groups or categories of people. These categories will embrace the characteristics of people that we admire, dislike; or see as belonging (clubbing) together in some way. Perhaps they are 'hill walkers'; or 'educationalists'; 'French'; or people who 'are disabled'. Almost as inevitably, we identify individuals and label groups

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or categories of people. Reciprocally, we ourselves will also be identified, categorised and labelled. To be of any value, a label should (like good theory) be both descriptive and explanatory (i.e. how do you relate to *this* person). However, logically, any label that might be applied to an individual can't achieve that criterion, since it will derive from the categorisation of a group, and a group category has to have at least two members. Thus, the label describes an aggregated set of signs. The label is, therefore, non-specific and inherently discriminatory in that it is being applied to one category group with common characteristics in order to distinguish members of that group from another group who don't share all the same characteristics that form the identifiers of the other group (see also [Aronson, 2007](#), p. 75ff). However, if we believe in distinctive individuality, it is also not logical to apply a label to an individual, since although she or he may have many of the characteristics ascribed to a group category she or he will have other, unique qualities that distinguish her/him from others in the same group.

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I will return to this issue in a later chapter. For now let us note that the preceding lines also spell out that I do not think we can conceive ourselves to be isolated, entirely self-sufficient beings (autarchs). We exist in interaction with others (*pace* Margaret Thatcher, society does exist), and, in turn, others cumulatively contribute to our view of ourselves. Others affirm that we exist. Whether or not it is necessary to label each other as members of a particular social group (or tribe) is another matter. Whether or not we choose to accept our given labels is also a matter for discussion (elsewhere).

In addition to the alternative perspective provided by non-Western philosophical traditions, our certainty and reliance on notions of a permanent individual 'self' are challenged both philosophically and materially. Parfit's work provides a major philosophical challenge. Parfit showed that self-interest was ultimately self-defeating, and partly, but not solely, because the notion of a self as a distinctive entity is illusory. He argued that our sense of sameness over time is illusory and, ultimately, limiting ([Parfit, 1984](#), p. 281). Materially, objectively, it is also apparent that neuroscience has so far failed to identify neural mechanisms that can be unambiguously identified as the locus of a 'self' ([Leerson, 2014](#); [Phillips et al., 2014](#); [Ruby & LeGrand, 2007](#)). (Psychologically speaking, of course, any attempt to locate a material/neurological basis for the 'self' is, in any case, best regarded as a distraction.)

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As will become more apparent later, relating to someone as a having a fixed self and, therefore, a fixed personal identity, is problematic. Conversely, we very often choose to ignore the problems that ensue from not adhering to the notion of a fixed, invariant self and/or identity. For example when students take an exam, we assume that when the results are announced these are attributed to each individual as if each is the same

person who sat the exam. We also assume (most times fairly safely but not infallibly) that it is the same person who sat the exam and several years later presents the results as qualifications for a job. However, once when I was interviewing a candidate for a research post, we learned that before applying for the post the candidate had suffered a minor stroke that had affected recall. Although perfectly able to construct a very good written application, this was 'no longer the same person' (Farrin, 1984, p. 201) that had gained a first-class honours degree. (It is perhaps interesting to note that in the UK, checks are made to learn whether or not applicants for certain occupations have a criminal record that would bar them from contact with certain groups of people. Other than checking references that attest to the personal attributes of an applicant, we rarely undertake any other checks to establish that this is the same person as the one she or he claims to have been. (What does it mean 'to be the same person?') This thought raises another question about how we might check that.^[9]

Notwithstanding the widely held (but logically invalid) assumptions about the persistence and consistency of distinct, unique and identifiable 'personhood', in reality, an infinite number of changes in us will take place throughout our lifetime, moment by moment. These changes may be microscopic (at the level of individual cell death and regrowth), physical (for instance changes in visual acuity) or personal (getting married, divorced, having twins, for instance). Thus, as DiGiovanna noted: '*across time, because some parts of a person change while others [may] remain the same, personal identity becomes indeterminate.*' (DiGiovanna, 2018, p. 389). Very often, we and others may barely notice these changes in ourselves being, as they are, slow and continuous, like ageing. But some changes (getting married, retiring from work, suffering a head injury) may be regarded as discontinuous step-changes – and life (person) changing (Brison-Campbell, Shaw, O'Brien, Holmes, & Magalhães, 2013; Kenny & O'Leary-Kelly, 2011; Thomas, Levet, & Taylor, 2014). Thus, like the self, one's identity (whether private, personal, public or occupational) cannot safely be regarded as fixed or immutable.

Suppose someone commits a crime: murder, for instance. Immediately following the murder but before arrest and trial (the evidence is incontrovertible), the murderer is involved in an accident and suffers a major head injury. This injury damages the parts of his brain that are responsible for his long-term memory. In 'recovery', he cannot recall anything that happened prior to regaining consciousness in hospital and being told he had been in an accident. He does not know his name – or who he is. Can he now be regarded as the same person who had killed someone? Can he now be held responsible for that crime?

In meditating on the notion of a personal 'identity', we could also draw on geo-political analogies. The identity of a nation (in fact, the very notion of a 'nation') is held to consist in a number of continuities (boundaries,

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currency, cultural, linguistic) that at any one moment in time are perceived as fixed and static. The inhabitants of that nation are (too) often considered to have corresponding fixed 'national' characteristics. These are not idle speculations. They are a central concern of cosmopolitan philosophy, that argues for acceptance of the shared humanity of all, and that local/national partisan interests in their 'rights' only matter if the human rights of 'foreign' humans matter equally. This is, of course, crucial to conceptualising social inclusion and inclusive education.

Of course, we can easily see that the idea of a homogenous state or a homogenous culture is a myth. So what happens when a country become fragmented – as, for instance, happened with Yugoslavia in the 1980s? What happened to the beliefs and identities of those who were born in Yugoslavia after 1946 (when the People's Republic of Yugoslavia was established), who had hitherto regarded themselves as Yugoslavian and identified with President Marshall Tito? (We know some of the answers resulted in internecine bloodshed.) The notion of invariance and continuity implicit in these analogies carries over to some degree in vernacular notions of the identity of an individual as the same person now as was in the past and will be (at least while still alive) in the future.

A radically different envisioning of the self ('I'), continuity and identity can be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas recognised the tension between identity (sameness); and the re-discovery and re-creation that follows interaction with others:

“To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification.”²

(Levinas, 1969, p. 36)

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Levinas's philosophical perspective (that drew on phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories) is not wholly irreconcilable with the earlier views I found in Parfit's work. However, Levinas's very different perspectives on humanity provides a view of the experience of identity development and survival in the face of threat and change. It is also important in the way it provides for a much deeper understanding of inter-relationships (in terms of 'intersubjectivity') with others. Levinas provided a language and concepts that enable us to interrogate the power dynamics within our beliefs about, and corresponding existential encounters and interactions with, others. I will return to the ideas of Levinas (and his counterpart, Jacques Lacan) and theories about the effects of the relationship with

others and in particular their notions of ¹the other in Chapter 2, but note here that Levinas provided us with a theoretical view of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, that shows how developmentally we distinguish our selves from others, while being bound by an the abiding, over-riding ethical responsibility for others:

²The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me to be . . . not in synthesis, but in the face to face of humans, in sociality, in its moral signification. But it must be understood that morality comes not as a secondary layer, above an abstract reflection . . . morality has an independent and preliminary range. First philosophy is an ethics.²

(Levinas, 1985, p. 77)

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Levinas's ideas about intersubjectivity were later taken up by developmental psychologists such as John and Elizabeth Newson (Newson, 1979; Newson & Newson, 1975) and Colwyn Trevarthen (Trevarthen, 1979, 1998), who studied the development of parent-child communication and the development and nature of self-consciousness in infancy. While the developmental perspective of that research has proven helpful in a number of ways, it is also helps in reminding us that the perception of one's self is part of and due to relationships with others. It has its origins in the mother-baby face-to-face relationship (Kogut, de Koeber, Bellagamba, & Bell, 2002; Vandenberg, 1998) and ongoing dialogue (Buber, 1987; Gergen, 1991; Levinas, 1969). As Kenneth Gergen said:

²It is not individual ¹"I's" who create relationships, but relationships that create the sense of ²"I" . . . ¹"I" am just an I by virtue of playing a particular part in a relationship.²

(Gergen, 1991, p. 157)

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Thus, Gergen's view was that an inner 'self' was a mythical creation, that the sense of 'I-ness' was simply an artefact of the experience of relationships

[In a later chapter, I will consider the work of Hubert Hermans, but for now just note that Hermans suggested an alternative, dialogic, construction of self, granting the notional self greater autonomy in being able to adopt a multiplicity of positions:

²The self is not only ¹"here" but also ¹"there" and because of the power of imagination the person can act as if he or she were

the other . . . If one insists that an individual creates an imaginal other, it can equally be maintained that an individual experiences the imaginal other as creating himself of herself.²

(Levinas et al., 1992, p. 29)]

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One of the important implications of Levinas's work is the emphasis he placed on the unique existential experience available to our selves in each and every encounter with an other. However, if, rather than treat each encounter as unique, we perceive the other as threatening and, in order to protect our selves we categorise this other as a 'something-or-other' (as we can all too easily be seduced to do), we deny the significance and value of both our own self's and an other's face-to-face experience of the encounter by reducing each other to mere objects. By acting thus, by dehumanising the nature of experience, we place our selves in a profoundly unethical position. Alternatively, we can engage uniquely and ethically with each other and recognise that each other is radically different from every other other. We may, if we allow it, be simultaneously curious, mystified, and anxious about an encounter with an other and the responsibility that comes with the encounter. Levinas said, '*The relationship with the other is a relationship with mystery*.' (Levinas, 1987, p. 75). Of course, the ultimate encounter with an other is the encounter with death. While that is beyond the scope and remit of this book, Levinas provided words that help us calibrate our more 'every day' encounters (if this is not heretical):

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²It is not with the nothingness of death, of which we precisely know nothing, that the analysis must begin, but with the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears. Absolutely unknowable means foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible, but where we ourselves are seized.²

(Levinas, 1987, p. 71)

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Thus, we may recognise the opportunity in each and every encounter with an other to respect the encounter as bestowed with meaning, responsibility for care, and creativity. Levinas, therefore, held that morality and justice derived from the ethical requirements of individual interactions – and the mediation of these in the context of the host of competing interactions in which we each engage throughout life:

²How is that there is justice? I can answer that it is the fact of the presence of someone else next to the Other, from whence comes justice. Justice, exercised through institutions, which are

inevitable, must always be held in check by the initial interpersonal relation.²

(Levinas, 1983, pp. 89–90; emphasis added)

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1.2 Personal identity, autonomy and boundaries

Notions of personal (individual) identity and autonomy exemplify the tension between self and society as indicated above in the work of Levinas but also discussed more recently by Kwame Anthony Appiah (Appiah, 2001, 2007) in relation to what Appiah called the ‘unsociability of individualism’.

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In the current political climate in which I am writing (March 2017) this might also become the ‘xenophobia of individualism’ on the basis of what is being said on the streets of New York and Washington (President Donald Trump), London (Brexit) and Amsterdam (Geert Wilders): ‘we need to reinforce our border to protect our (national) identity’. Given these trends of isolationism and inter-cultural suspicion and hostility, it becomes incumbent on us to seek to understand the nature of these difficulties (that are not ‘little local difficulties’) and ways that through education we can learn to be human and democratic.

One of the potential problems with a self-constructed ‘identity’ that Appiah detected, is that it can be too rigid, too fixed and become outdated. In arriving at his conclusion, Appiah suggested that an agentic ‘self’ that constructs identity operates within the constraints and possibilities of the society at that time and in that place. (Just as Foucault (2002) argued that we can only truly understand the behaviour and mores of an historical society in terms of the tools of enquiry that were to hand at that time, not with the supposedly more ‘sophisticated’ tools and knowledge of our present civilisation.) As I will discuss in considering the extent of our personal autonomy, the notion of a ‘causal self’ that is free to reflect on the past in order to organise the future, is open to challenge (Barclay & Chartrand, 1999, p. 463).³ I think the evidence shows that within education, the professional autonomy of teachers is at risk of becoming seriously, fatally, compromised (see Bellah, 1997 for a warning that has not expired). Notwithstanding that caveat, if it is to be of value, the identity that we each have agency over and within must help us make sense of our life in the culture in which we find ourselves at a particular moment in time as well as accepting the validity of the cultural values and traditions held by others.

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Appiah (2007) illustrated his thesis with the example of Mr Stevens, the butler in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel, *The Remains of the Day*. It is helpful to reflect on this here, too. In the novel, Stevens is portrayed as a challenge

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to the notion that one is the architect of one's identity. Ishiguro seemed here to be suggesting that the lack of any sense of autonomy (to be self-creative, to continue to become) is ultimately socially fatal, if not lethal.

Taking a critical-realist perspective, the sociologist Margaret Archer (2000) formulated identity rather differently. Her formulation involves a reciprocal relationship between personal identity and social structures in which existing structures provide constraints and affordances for personal agency which in turn challenges and transforms the pre-existing structures. (In essence, that is where Stevens fails: he is born into a tradition and existence of servitude that he does not challenge or attempt to change. His passive acceptance ultimately, suffocating his attempts to join with another, the housekeeper, Miss Kenton, in a social, intimate, life together.) In her work, Archer argued, as have Gergen, Levinas and others, that personal identity emerges from an ongoing iterative intra-personal conversation (dialogue) that matches the cyclical creative interactions between one's individuality and social contexts. (Stevens, the hide-bound butler, illustrates the failure that follows from being either unable to break out of the uncritical, self-serving and, therefore, solipsistic nature of his intra-personal dialogues, or him-self alone being unable to envisage other possible ways of being, nor enter into a responsible and authentic dialogue with an other.)

This also illustrates a fundamental moral challenge for members of a liberal democratic society: how do we treat others that we may not agree with? How do we treat others who have been identified and labelled (or identify and label themselves) as 'different' or challenging in some way? To what extent do we collude with a generalised pattern of behaviours that may be socially connoted by the label?

It is clear that accommodating diversity is not in all ways easy. But we can at times, and in some places, find it very hard to see the reciprocal nature of our relationships (and behaviours) with others and our beliefs in our selves and our supposed identities. We may feel unique, but who is it that reinforces that belief – and more poignantly, why, and what do we gain from such self-centredness? A more formal, sociological, statement of a similar model of agentic identity may be found in Lois McNay's work, in which she suggested, '[If] the idea of agency refers, in some sense, to the individual's capacity for self-reflection and self-evaluation then it needs to be examined from some kind of hermeneutic perspective' (McNay, 2000, p. 178). (Our interactions with others are, of course, inherently a form of interpersonal communication, although they are not always recognised as such.) Thus, the interpretation of enacted identity needs to be considered as being both experienced and objectified. Problematically, how do we survive with others; how much autonomy do we have in relation to others?

In the light of such questions, it is possible to recognise how personal aims, plans or enacted identities may not be wholly viable, understood or

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even, in certain circumstances – or cultures – unpunished. For example, it remains the case that identifying oneself (or being *identified*) as a member of certain specific religious groups in some cultures is dangerous to the point of being fatal. A current example **being-is** the genocidal campaign against Shia Muslims in Iraq. Accounts of the experience of being perceived and vilified as a member of a ‘minority’ group (black and female, for instance) in a certain time and place tell us vividly how hard it can be to retain belief in the validity of one’s self, agency and identity. In such circumstances it becomes hard (even impossible) to retain integrity and belief in one’s self, existentially avoiding ‘bad faith’ (Sartre, 1953), while simultaneously recognising that one does not, in reality, have total autonomy, free to choose to act in any way one can conceive of acting.

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In different ways, such examples indicate threats to individual identity and agency and reveal

how agency and identity are constituted relationally as social, cultural, and material phenomena. [Revealing t]his is necessary if we wish to understand the resources and constraints of agency and to scrutinize the historical processes that, through discourse and subject positions, produce their experiences.

(Ikäluoma, Valjasantama, Jokka & Paloniemi, 2013, p. 53)

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Thus, we can see how societies (or groups within groups) are prone to dictate, proscribe and discriminate. Alternatively, as emphasised by Gergen, Levinas and Appiah, we can accept responsibility as individuals for ourselves and others as co-equal partners and ensure that our mutual selves are not annihilated before our physical death.

1.2.1 Degrees of autonomy?

Just as the notion of a ‘self’ is best regarded as an epiphenomenon of consciousness, so too is much of what we retrospectively may regard as autonomous choice. In fact, a large proportion of our everyday lives is conducted with little or no consciously deliberate choice (Baron & Chartrand, 1999; Kahneman, 2011). That’s a psychological reality (as much as anything is psychologically ‘real’) in that what determines our actual response to very many social situations – including our response to perceived stereotypes – are unthinking, automatic responses. It is, therefore, probable that aspects of our presentation to others (our public or occupational ‘identity’) are not formulated by a consciously agentic ‘self’ but mostly consist in automatic or habituated responses. (And *that* has been confirmed by neuroscientists (see, for instance, Schultz, 2011).) However, while it may also be clear to some of us that we believe in our

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capability to make deliberated ethical and moral choices – and we may also call this sense of being able to choose our ‘autonomy’; – to what extent is it possible for some in our society (given their particular circumstances) to even conceive of alternative actions, to feel the degree of autonomy that others might deem that we have in principle? What choices do we really have? For example, to what extent is it possible for unemployed parents in socio-economically deprived communities to exercise agentic choice over which school their children attend? What ethical and practical choices are readily available to the more 25% of all children in the UK who grow up in poverty (Parker 2016)? To believe that we all have equity of choice, of autonomy, is, I think, to succumb to or to collude with the hegemony of neoliberalism. Inevitably, it is hard, if not impossible, for others in different circumstances to understand the fact and experience of living in poverty (for instance) and the consequent available opportunities. While the circumstances and dispositions will be shared by others in a similar socio-economic environment, they cannot be experienced with similar effects by others in very different environments. It is the shared experience and culture that provide the socialising environment, the habitus (Bourdieu 1999) that shapes expectations of agency.

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The extent, limitations and sensitivities that may be held to be associated with autonomy, therefore, raise ethical and moral questions about the possibilities of ‘self-realisation’ and identity formation. In view of the prevailing educational environment in which education is commercialised, these questions have specific and urgent salience for the professionals involved, including, most specifically for present purposes, teachers (see, for instance, Bink 1997; Bishop, Priestley, & Robinson 2013; Taylor 2011). What autonomy do they have; to what extent are they able to be active and responsive creators of educational opportunities; to what extent are they able to realise and enter into dialogue about their enterprise with themselves and others, including those (pupils) for whose future purposes the capacity for interpersonal and intercultural dialogue is crucial? My contention is that teachers’ ethical autonomy, creativity and dialogic responsiveness have all been severely compromised by the prevailing neoliberal economic and political policies.

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In the past, it was probably true that in many Western societies’ educational curricula, there was a more or less explicit aim to promote autonomy of thought and action. There has also been (at least until quite recently), in principle, a policy to promote increasingly inclusive education. Inclusion implies greater acceptance of diversity in education. In accord with this policy, teachers were encouraged to include and teach a greater range of abilities and aptitudes. These two principles (of developing autonomy and of increasing inclusion) have led to some tricky questions. Thus, if autonomy is to be encouraged (how) should inclusive

teachers include those children who don't (or can't) be autonomous or those who in their behaviour seek to demonstrate total autonomy by, for instance, not attending or regularly disrupting lessons? In a democratic society what degrees of autonomy are to be allowed or encouraged? Or, as Appiah asked, to what extent are diversity and individuality 'plaited together', and does the language of autonomy reflect an 'arrogant insularity' (Appiah, 2007, p. 40ff)? To rephrase Russell's paradox (again, but more clearly), in a liberal democracy, is it tolerable to set limits to autonomy?

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1.2.2 Ethical autonomy

Knowing what we do know about the unavoidable biasing effects of groups (Bartel, 1981, 2010) that I will return to in Chapter 5, hierarchies of power, and the communication of societal values that is integral to education, we might consider how (or, indeed, if), we can, for instance, be both moral and teachers of individual autonomy (or self-authorship). Meanwhile, while questions about how realistic our sense of freedom to choose may seem to be both academically – philosophically and politically – interesting, the more important questions in the present context are about what the pragmatic and psychological limits are to autonomy in social and educational settings? To what extent are we able to help 'plait together' relatedness and individuality? A complementary general moral question posed by Parfit (1984, p. 3), also about autonomy and self-interest, is: how does someone best achieve 'the outcomes that would be best for himself, and that would make his life go, for him, as well as possible'?

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Parfit proposed that

‘Even if I never do what, of the acts that are possible for me, will be worse for me, it may be worse for me if I am purely self-interested. It may be better for me if I have some other disposition.’

(Parfit, 1984, p. 5)

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Parfit argued that pursuing a purely selfish aim is, ultimately, self-defeating and suggested that therefore, 'it may not be irrational to act, knowingly, against one's own self-interest' (Parfit, 1984, p. 317). The logic here is that autonomous acts can be better if other directed. So, Parfit concluded,

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-It is rational to do what one knows will best achieve what, after ideal deliberation, one most wants or values, even when one knows this is against one's own self-interest.²

(Parfit, 1993, p. 461)

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But, as Kahneman and others have shown us, we do not always think (or react) rationally, particularly under pressure (Kahneman, 2011). Thus 'ideal deliberation' may not truly reflect everyday reality. But, we like to believe, we are not automatons merely reacting to external stimuli that, aside from physical phenomena (such as gravity, the weather etc.), come from a host of other people who are, likewise, not 'automatons'. And, because we can articulate these beliefs (because we say so) and convince ourselves this is true, we have, as Appiah paraphrased Kant, 'to act as if freedom is possible even though we can't provide any theoretical justification for it.' (Appiah, 2007, p. 56). But the sense of autonomy, of freedom to act intentionally toward others, also carries with it responsibilities (provided we also recognise morality) including, the view, as Parfit wrote, that '[a]utonomy does not include the right to impose upon oneself, for no good reason, great harm.' (Parfit, 2007, p. 321). As Sartre also said (echoing Marx (1803)), 'man being condemned to be free carries the whole weight of the world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being.' (Sartre, 1953, p. 553). Part of that responsibility, I suggest, is to ratify and sustain the belief that we are autonomous individuals and not selfless automatons. But, as Cigdem Kagıtcıbası said, 'Autonomy and agency are not antithetical to relatedness.' (Kagıtcıbası, 2018, p. 404). In Kagıtcıbası's modelling of self in relation to society, she proposed that by understanding autonomy as comprising two dimensions of meaning we can avoid positing dichotomising relatedness and autonomy. One of the dimensions she called the 'interpersonal distance' to represent the extent to which self is distanced from others or connected to others. The second dimension, termed 'agency', ranges from autonomy to heteronomy. These two dimensions together, Kagıtcıbası suggested, 'reflect basic human needs of relatedness and autonomy.' While it might be in someone's own personal self-interest to regard others as automatons or puppets (in order to achieve some ideal outcome such as world domination), it is ultimately 'better to have some other disposition' to not diminish the humanity and creativity of others, but to regard others with respect as fellow beings who also have beliefs in their autonomy. Thus:

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-The standpoint of agency is connected, in the most direct possible way, to our concern to live intelligible lives in community with other people . . . This practical interest requires

us to be able to articulate our own behaviour in relation to theirs, and this we do through our understanding of them as having beliefs and intentions – in short, as reasoning – and also having passions and prejudices: in short, as always potentially unreasonable.²

(Appiah, 2007, p. 58)

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There is, however, a risk in what Appiah said here. The risk is partly semantic but also provides a boundary to our casual shorthand use of language. The shorthand aggregation of individuals in a group risks breaching the democratic rights, autonomy and diversity of others. The primary risk lies in the blurring of individuality and groups – as in ‘our understanding of them as having beliefs and intentions’. The implied construction of ‘them’ as a uniform ‘other’ is the problem here. Should we, can we not insist that we does not oppose ‘them’? I feel certain that Appiah would not have intended a slur on the individuality of others, and his words are an illustration of the limits of language. ‘We’ implies the in-group and within the in-group we know more about and are more sensitive to the diverse nature of aptitudes, dispositions and needs of individuals. Categorisation in any event obscures the infinite variations between individuals within the category (Kosson & Rothbert, 2011, 2013; Rothbert, Davis, Smith, & Hill, 1994). Locating others as an ~~outgroup~~ **out-group** also entails the homogenisation of diversity and the unethical disregard for the uniqueness of each individual. ‘Essentialising’ the nature of individuals socially categorised in this way can, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, also limit teachers’ beliefs in their self-efficacy with respect to such (Gibbs & Elliott, 2015).

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1.2.3 Relative autonomy

There are many examples of the effects of the prior expectations and consequent treatment of groups affecting not only the beliefs and actions of individuals within the group, but also the intentions and actions of those who ‘other’ that group. In the most extreme situations, this latter has resulted in the attempt of one group to annihilate all individuals thought to represent another group. The effects of active ‘othering’ were illustrated in a classroom ‘experiment’ (that would now almost certainly be considered unethical).

Appalled by the assassination of Martin Luther King and a reporter’s use of language, Jane Elliott, a primary school teacher in Randall, Iowa, devised an exercise that was intended to allow the children in her class to

experience the effects of racial stereotyping. Her intention was to show what segregation might feel like. Elliott told her class of children that, like her, blue-eyed people were smarter. She then gave the blue-eyed children brown ribbons and told them to drape these round the necks of the brown-eyed children so that it would be easy to see the less smart children in the class. The blue-eyed children were then seated at the front of class, and reminded that they were the smart children. They were given extra privileges – such as second helpings at lunch and additional playtime. Blue-eyed and brown-eyed children were not allowed to drink from the same water fountain. The blue-eyed children were told not to interact with the brown-eyes who, they were reminded were not so smart. Over the next few days, Elliott noticed that the demeanour of the two groups changed. The blue-eyed children became arrogant and bossy, while their brown-eyed classmates became timid and subservient. Elliott also found that the performance of brown-eyed children in tests deteriorated, even in areas in which beforehand, they had done well.

Notice this last point: the performance of individuals was affected by the labelling and treatment of the group.

As I will discuss in a later chapter, social experiences and perceptions inside or outwith social or cultural groups have powerful effects on how we act with and toward others. As we will see, power and agency have been critical factors in some models of teachers' identity.

Groucho Marx's famous quip '*I don't care to belong to any club that will have me as a member*' has more than a grain of sense. John Gray said something similar: '*One cannot be, at one and the same time, a fully autonomous individual and a dutifully obedient member of a traditional community*' (Gray, 2000, p. 56). As we have seen, being a member of a group generates alliances and confers allegiances (albeit some quite unconscious) that will curb autonomy. There are also socio-political tensions within the assumed rights to autonomy of groups and the extent to which a group respects the rights to autonomy of its members. Within educational settings, particularly those that can still espouse the development of autonomy, there will, inevitably, therefore, be questions and debates about the extent to which they accept diversity. While part of the democratic enterprise of education, according to Gert Biesta (2012), has to be to accept the existence of the need for such debate and to allow progress in the ensuing dialogue, it seems to me that this should not be an unprincipled or infrequently convened *ad hoc* debate. As is evident, accounts of the very principled educational initiative to restructure the Finnish school system in the 1970s have revealed radically different, sustained and arguably more democratic and egalitarian outcomes than could be found in the UK or the USA at any time in the past 150 years (Sahlström, 2011).

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In summary, although we may find ourselves compared to others (and ourselves do the same to/with others), it seems that the extent to which we author our own identity and, thereby, our sense of agency, is best considered ipsatively relative. The potential strength of our sense of individual personal autonomy comes from a synergy of beliefs born of unique experiences that we can do what is necessary in order to do what we want to achieve – our sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), dispositions (Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ (see Lizardo, 2004; McNay, 2004)), and the extent to which we feel personally enabled or limited by (and responsible for) our circumstances, capacity, and the rules and conventions that we follow (Wittgenstein, 1977, Remark 219). However, as I have implied above, beliefs in our personal identity and autonomy are, necessarily, artefacts of the interaction of our physical and psychological ‘selves’ with others in our social contexts. In that sense, our identities are socially constructed, but in another sense simply mythical, and like many myths can have powerful, compelling, effects on the imagination that make us believe they are real. In the former conceptualisation, we are, as Appiah has reminded us, morally and ethically bounded by our social identities and responsibilities. It is to examine the nature of our social identities from philosophical and psychological perspectives that I now turn.

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1.3 Socially constructed identity, social identity, moral and ethical responsibility

Part of my intention in writing this book is to expose and examine ways in which the potential autonomy and efficacy, the creative influence of teachers is thwarted. To do this properly, requires, as Kevin Carriere suggested, a much better understanding of the psychological frameworks, systems and tensions (enabling as well as inhibitory). Carriere wrote:

“The heroic potential of a citizen . . . can only be understood through an analysis of the system that surrounds and guides the person, while also recognizing and examining how the individual uses that system for his or her best comprehended interests. Yet, even then, there lies the existence of power dynamics that are used by both system and person. The triadic interactions of power, values, and person emerge not just from the study of one, but from the examination of the borders between and across the systems at play.”

(Carriere, 2010, p. 162)

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Inherent in these frameworks are the power dynamics of educational systems and interpersonal interactions between educational personnel and with their pupils and students. As I've already suggested, I don't think it is clear what the real purpose or potential for education might be, nor, therefore, what it is that teachers should be expected to do for the best.

As I have already noted, Parfit posed the question that motivated his enquiries as *'Many of us want to know what we have most reason to do'*. He went on to say, *'Several theories answer this question. Some of these are moral questions; others are theories about rationality. When applied to some of our decisions, different theories give us different answers'* (Parfit, 1984, p. 3). Thus, I suggest we must remain alert to, and critical of, our theoretical orientations.

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Further, if we are to fully consider the limits and responsibilities of individuals (who are mostly members of at least one society), we need to consider the terms used to dissect this problem. Appiah distinguished between ethical and moral questions. The former, he suggested, are about *'which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead'*. The moral questions are about the *'principles about how a person should treat other people'* (Appiah, 2007, p. xiii). In this section, I present some of the evidence that underpins the moral issue about how we treat each other and how that affects who we are, what choices we make, and what we can do. Ultimately, this relates strongly to how our identities are forged in society. Making particular use of Appiah's work I shall discuss first some of the philosophical and psychological ideas about *'socially constructed identity'*. I will then turn to the work of Henri Tajfel, John Turner, Rupert Brown and others who were responsible for the development of *'Social Identity Theory'* for a subtly different and important perspective on the nature of identity and its effects.

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Marilyn Brewer noted that

'Social identities are categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that depersonalize the self concept, where I becomes we.'

(Brewer, 1991, p. 476)

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That *'depersonalize'* does not mean *'dehumanise'*. Our identities as members of social groups, Appiah argued, are how we are perceived, *'identified'*, by others. Appiah provided examples of how racial and cultural groups have been identified (in the sense of being given an identification, a label to distinguish one *'group'* from another identifiable *'group'*) by others. In that way, it is possible to see how individuals might consider themselves to be constructed by the perceptions (and, therefore,

the actions (verbal, physical or both) of others toward them). As we have seen in Jane Elliott's exercise (let alone the genocides we have witnessed), stereotypical and prejudicial identification of others can all too easily lead to inhuman, degrading and lethal behaviour. Significantly, in the case of Elliott's exercise there was no choice, no agency granted to the 'inferior' groups. In genocide, the intention is to annihilate the identity, personhood and humanity of others. Denial of agency and control has powerful effects as studies of the phenomenon of 'learned helplessness' have demonstrated.

In more ordinary, 'every day', situations individuals are more likely to experience some sense of their own agency and, consequently, feel able to exercise choice (but see earlier comments, above, about the reality of choice and the effects of habitus). For a range of reasons, we may each choose to join any number of groups. In some of these we may have a greater sense of 'belonging', a sense that we and others in the group are members of the same social category. (At this point, we need to recognise the difference between social categories and categories that are of an essentially distinct and natural kind.) Thus, I *could* (in principle) choose to be a Catholic; but I cannot choose to be a tiger – or an ant (Mellan, 1977; Quinn, 1978; Rumbaut et al., 1997). Marilynn Brewer suggested that while individuals might recognise that they belong to several groups, they may not necessarily choose to identify with any of these. She suggested that social identities are chosen by individuals in the act of needing validation and positive affirmation of themselves as being similar to others (i.e. not alone), while also seeking to establish their uniqueness. (Hirsch, 1991, p. 477). Under certain circumstances (in particularly large organisations, for instance) the tension inherent in striving for the balance between inclusion and uniqueness may be resolved by identifying with a distinctive subgroup (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p. 131). (This, it seems to me, is exactly what may be happening when children do not feel they belong (they recognise they are not being positively included) in a particular class, subject or ability group. What often happens as a result is that they begin to identify with another group – perhaps a group whose different patterns of behaviour provide models of behaviour with which they can identify and give them affirmation of 'belonging'.)

The formal development of social identity theory followed from Henri Tajfel's psychological theorising and experimentation in the 1970s. Tajfel, both appalled and motivated by his experiences as a Jew in WWII (as being violently 'othered'), conducted a series of studies that illustrated how perceiving oneself to be a member of a group evoked differential behaviours that favoured those believed to be members of one's own group (the 'in-group') and derogated those in an 'outgroup-out-group'. From this early work, Tajfel and his colleagues built a substantial body of research

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that systematically examined intergroup behaviour (much of it set out in [Tajfel, 1981, 2010](#)).

The experience of being socially constructed carries with it, not just semantically, a sense of being construed as a passive object, liable to being victimised, as were Jews, communists and homosexuals in the concentration and extermination camps of WWII; as have been Shia Muslims in Iraq; as are children who 'fail' the 11+.

Social identity theory as developed by Tajfel and his successors differs from notions of *socially constructed* identities in the emphasis social identity theory gives to a sense of autonomy and agency. Social identity theory underlines that one does, in principle, choose which groups provide the more positive affirmation of aspects of one's own self or identity. Social identity theory also provides understanding of social intergroup behaviour. Social identity theory starts from the premise that one's social identity derives from group membership and '*proposes that people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity (thus boosting their self-esteem), and that positive identity derives largely from favourable comparisons that can be made between the ingroups and relevant outgroups*:' ([Turner, 2010](#), p. 747).

John Turner (one of Tajfel's co-workers) summarised 'Social identity' as being

... a subsystem of the self-concept ... Social identity seems to be 'switched on' by certain situations in ways that we do not as yet fully understand. Once functioning, social identity monitors and construes social stimuli and provides a basis for regulating behaviour. Its cognitive output seems to be uniquely implicated in intra- and intergroup behaviour. In other words ... social identity is the cognitive mechanism which makes group behaviour possible.²

([Turner, 2010](#), p. 21)

If we accept this formulation of social identity, we must also agree that human social activity can only be understood in its social (and political) context. (I suspect the second half of that sentence is true in any event (as Herb Simon illustrated) but is independent of any notion of 'identity'.)

More recent work in this field has provided a more nuanced perspective on the relationships between individuals and their respective in- and out-groups. This suggests that not only do individuals seek membership of groups that affirm personal identities and purposes but in doing so reduce uncertainty about personal identity:

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-Group identification through self-categorization reduces uncertainty because it causes people to internalize a prototype that describes their identity; prescribes their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors; and makes the behavior of others predictable. It also furnishes consensual validation of one's identity and identity-related attributes.²

(Hogg, Abrams & Brewer, 2011, p. 5)

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This suggests that in conditions where personal factors (identity and purpose) are challenged or are uncertain, group allegiances and membership may become yet more salient and group identity protective. The nature and characteristics of groups then becomes more important. Groups that are well structured and bounded ('entitative' groups) in which there are shared aspirations and high levels of positive interaction between in-group members are most effective at reducing 'self-categorisation-induced self-uncertainty' (Hogg, 2014, p. 339).

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I will return to these issues in Chapter 6, but meanwhile, in the next chapter I give further consideration to notions of the 'Other', processes of othering, the effects of being 'othered' and the relevance of this to education.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the more theoretical and admittedly abstract ideas that are relevant foreground and context for due consideration of how teachers are currently affected by educational, political and economic circumstances of education in the UK in the early 21st century.

Drawing on the work of Derek Parfit, Emmanuel Levinas, Kwame Anthony Appiah and others, I have offered an outline of the distinction between personal beliefs about one's self and the sense of identity with which others will interact. I have hedged my bets a bit as far as my understanding of the underlying nature of the 'self' and identity. On the one hand I accept and agree with Parfit that these constructs are emergent properties, epiphenomena, of individual brains. But, these brains themselves are susceptible to environmental influences, particularly those due to interactions with others and, reflexively, with oneself. It is these resultant psychological phenomena that are for my thinking most important. It is these that in everyday life we have to manage and live with. The underlying neurology is in everyday terms irrelevant. I am, therefore, also siding with phenomenologists such as Derrida, the philosophical work

of Appiah and Levinas, and the humanist psychologies of Gergen. While in relation to our relationships with others we are, in our selves and our public identities, meta-epiphenomena, the synergy of our unique neurology and our interactions and dialogues with others, we do not directly experience our neurology. We do experience each other and ourselves. It is these experiences and our interpersonal responsibilities to these that we experience. I am, accordingly, suggesting that it is unethical to disrespect both our unique available autonomy and our unique functional identities. It is, therefore, immoral at any interpersonal level to aggregate categories or groups of people under a label since that is to dehumanise unique experiences.

Our interactions with ourselves and others and our underlying beliefs about others call into question moral and ethical issues about the scope and responsibility of personal autonomy and agency. Particularly within education (where notions of 'teaching and learning' may be debated), but in any event in general, the interactions we have with others and that others have with us are integral part of socialising and the construction of each 'identity' but also of the groups in which we each best fit.

With these rather abstract ideas in the background, in the next chapter, I turn to look at the philosophical and psychological grounding for 'the other' in the abstract and in the reality of its psychological implications.

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As [Ruby and Tsemes \(2007\)](#) indicated, there is no singular neurological correlate of ‘the self’. However, I suggest this may be a similar problem to that of trying to differentiate between ‘mind’ and ‘brain’. See [Phillips, Bevilacqua, and Whinnaker \(2014\)](#) for an account and attempt at a resolution of *that* problem. See also the work of Nick Haslam ([Haslam, 2011](#)), who, *in* warning of the reductionist ‘seductive allure’ of neuroscience and ‘neuroessentialism’, notes that we should be very sceptical of work that suggests identities are determined by the brain and associated ‘abnormalities’, particularly with respect to the treatment of mental ill-health.

See also [Haslam \(1998, 2011\)](#); [Haslam, Rodhechilde, and Freston \(2004\)](#). See also [Festa \(2014\)](#) for a detailed and accessible gloss on Hegel’s work. Roy Baumeister and colleagues have also evidenced the importance of a meaningful life (see, for example [Baumeister, Ainsworth, & Vohs, 2014](#); [MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2014](#); [Park & Baumeister, 2017](#)). Thus, we may speculate about the feelings of teachers who find themselves in a role that is not congruent with their original moral motivations.

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8 The globalisation of individualism has led many psychological researchers to take this as axiomatic of 'human nature', whereas from an evolutionary perspective, as Kasarihana (2004) reminded us, human kind has depended on cooperation and relatedness for survival.

See, for instance, Sachs (2011); Resdy (2003); Rochet (2007)

What we have shown with regard to the label 'dyslexia', for instance, is that it tells one virtually *nothing* about what a specific child's particular experiences are nor what to do by way of intervention (Lifton & Gibbs, 2008; Lifton & Grogorenko, 2011; Gibbs & Lifton, 2012)

9 Margaret Thatcher: "And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours." – in an interview in *Women's Own* in 1987.

As I will explore in Chapter 2, this dichotomy is avoided in Hermans's idea of the 'dialogic' self (see Hermans, 2013; Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992)

10 Parfit (1984) discussed a number of variants of this problem with reference to the sorities paradox (when does a heap of sand demolished grain by grain cease to be a heap?). He addressed the issue of physical as well as psychological connectedness along which small changes may be considered to effect no observable change in the identity or self. It is also the case that these small changes are taking place every moment of our lives, and each of us as individuals normally has a sense of psychological connectedness in the sense of a connected series of memories of our self going right back to our first recallable memories. This is, introspectively, part of what gives us our personal history and identity. Parfit (p 236) suggested that at the near end of this combined spectrum of identity 'is the normal case in which a future person would be fully continuous with me as I am now, both physically and psychologically. This person would be me in just the way that, in my actual life, it will be me who wakes up tomorrow. At

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the far end of this spectrum [perhaps as the result of an operation] the resulting person would have no continuity with me as I am now . . .

¹¹ As set out by [Ariani \(1997\)](#) and [Hayden \(2017\)](#), and critically interrogated by [Igarashi and Saito \(2014\)](#)

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¹² But there is little evidence of a persistent material reality to a continuous ‘self’. Whilst brain injury may radically affect who a person things she is or is perceived to be, and ~~that~~ it seems intuitive to think that this may be related to aspects of autobiographical memory, there is little uncontested evidence to show how these concepts may be related ([Frebble, Addis, & Toppet, 2014](#)).

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¹³ I return to the consideration of ‘others’ and the process of ‘othering’ in [Chapter 3](#) but here note that as [Avidin Cugures \(2014\)](#), p. 245) has said, “‘Othering’ is an un/conscious and primarily projective disidentification with an attempt to organise all of the disowned, or non-self experience, and history under an equally illusory unified or cohesive category.”

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¹⁴ Harold Macmillan, January 1958, on the resignation of the entire Treasury team.

¹⁵ ([Barth & Chartrand, 1998](#), p. 463). [Ariani \(2007\)](#), p. 42) also draws attention to the problem for advocates of a strong model individual autonomy of the need for the existence a ‘true self’.

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¹⁶ In an earlier draft of this chapter, I had conflated dialogue (and dialogics); and dialectics until my colleague Wilma Barrow pointed out the radical difference between these two terms. [Wagner \(2008\)](#), p. 359) summarises the difference clearly: ‘*dialogic presupposes that meaning arises only in the context of difference, whereas dialectic presupposes that differences are contradictions leading to a movement of overcoming.*’ While I recognise the historical use of dialectics as a notion, here, and in terms of human interactions and development, dialogue and dialogics are much more appropriate. It seems to me that dialect connotes the struggle for a material objective difference (and, of course, it was used very persuasively as such by Marx). However, perhaps with Moscovici ([Moscovici & Duveen, 2000](#), pp. 49–54), who held that psychologically, the objectification, the ‘*materialization of an abstraction is one of the most mysterious features of thought and*

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speech. Political and intellectual authorities, of every kind, exploit it to subdue the masses' (ibid p 49). This demystification is also reductive and dehumanising (albeit in ways that we can understand but not necessarily accept as 'reality'). Thus, as Moscovici also said (ibid p. 52), 'Don't we objectify precisely so as to forget that a creation, a material construct is the product of our own activity, that something is also someone?'

17 MP Diane Abbott's account of her treatment in public and in private is an example of the hatred, degradation and vilification of her person, identity and representation. In an article in the *Guardian*, [Abbott \(2017\)](#) provides examples the abuse she has received, and goes on to say, 'The point of this article is not, however, how I am treated as an individual. In 30 years in politics I have never complained about that. But I went into politics to create space for women and other groups who have historically been treated unfairly. Once, the pushback was against the actual arguments for equality and social justice. Now the pushback is the politics of personal destruction. This is doubly effective for opponents of social progress. Not only does it tend to marginalise the female "offender", but other women look at how those of us in the public space are treated and think twice about speaking up publicly, let alone getting involved in political activity'. This makes it very clear that the hegemony of white males is very much alive and kicking.

Field Code Changed

18 Any definable collection of objects can be labelled as 'the set of those objects'. There is then a set, R, that is the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. But, if R is not a member of itself then, by definition it should contain itself. In that case it contradicts itself by not being the set of all sets that are not members of itself. More briefly – and simply – this was rephrased (by Russell) as follows: 'There is a barber who shaves all those, and only those, who do not shave themselves. The question then is, does this barber shave himself?'

19 Amongst the more horrific examples are the treatment of women and children in 'concentration camps' in South Africa during the Boer Wars, the genocide of Jews, Gypsies, Communists and others in Nazi Germany, the Cambodian genocide during the Khmer Rouge regime

in the 1970s, the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, the killing of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in 1995, the mass slaughter of civilians in Syria in 2014–5; and, in 2017, the violence against Muslims in Rohingya, Myanmar. One has to ask: why does history keep repeating itself so cruelly?

²⁰ The reporter apparently asked a member of Martin Luther King’s congregation “When *our* leader (John F Kennedy) was killed . . . his widow held us together. Who’s going to control *your* people?”

²¹ www.janeelliott.com/ retrieved 2/3/2017; There is also a sizeable research literature confirming that teachers’ positive (Pygmalion) or negative (Golem) expectations may have significant effects on children’s performance (see, for instance [Jussim & Harber, 2005](#); [Mason, Jussim, & Fezles, 1997](#); [Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006](#)). Of concern is that there is evidence to indicate that negative expectations are more liable to be evoked in teachers by certain groups, especially children from ethnic minorities and those with some forms of additional special needs.

²² Basing her thinking on prayer used by Sioux people (“Oh great spirit, keep me from ever judging a man until I have walked in his moccasins²²”), Jane wanted her 3rd grade, all white children *to have* an experience of walking in the moccasins of people of colour for a day.

²³ This is conceptually and developmentally important. As [John Macmurray \(2011\)](#), pp. 666–667) said about the development of humanity, phylogenetically and ontogenetically, and in relation to what he saw as the business of education: *‘A child is born human; but this humanity consists in being without instincts, totally dependent, in an environment which is not natural, but the product of human artifice. He can survive only by being cared for. He can do nothing – just nothing – to help himself. He has to learn everything – to see, to move about, to walk, to speak: and while he is learning these basic elements of humanity, his human life consists in his relation to those who care for him – who feel for him, think and plan for him, act for him. This dependence on others is his life – yet to be human he must reach beyond it, not to independence, but to an interdependence in which he can give as well as receive.*

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'Thus his humanity consists in learning to be human: and since it can take place only within his relation to others who care for him, the learning is also a "being taught": To this we must add that the process of his education, like all human activities, is not matter of fact but of intention, and not determinate but problematical. Both he and his teachers must intend each step in the process. It will not happen of itself.'

²⁴ Learned helplessness was first studied by Martin Seligman in the 1960s. In his experiments (initially involving dogs but later with human participants), Seligman showed that participants who learned that it was not possible to 'turn off' an unpleasant sensation (electric shocks for the dogs, loud noise for humans) became depressed and listless, and did not try to escape; whereas others who discovered that they could exercise control (turn off the electricity or noise) were unaffected by their experiences. See [Maier and Seligman \(1976\)](#) for accounts of the first experiments and resultant theory.

²⁵ [Brewer, 1991](#), p. 477). Paolini et al. have also suggested that there is a basic human motivation to 'expand the self in order to increase one's general self-efficacy.' ([Paolini, Wright, Dye-Steenbergen, & Pasara, 2014](#), p. 451). While I disagree with their conceptualisation of self-efficacy, and am not entirely convinced that this constitutes a fundamental motivation for humankind, I am nonetheless intrigued by their hypothesis that an intrapersonal level this might be a cause of seeking adventurous and challenging experience; and that at an interpersonal level, this could cause one to form close interpersonal relationships with others, with a premium placed on seeking close relationships with *dissimilar* others- (ibid p. 452).

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