Research Objectives

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do identifications with literary and other fictions influence the personal and cultural stories people remember and report about their experiences of consciousness?
2. What happens to personal remembered experiences when normalized stories of personal and cultural identity are re-presented through literary fictional forms?
3. Can changing one’s fictional identifications change one’s remembered history and, if so, how do these changes influence one’s sense of presently-lived identity?

Theoretical framework

The paper considers the relationship between literature and self-perception (Butler, 2001; Cvetkovich, 2003; Denzin, 2000; Donald, 2001; Emanuel, 1992; Felman & Laub, 1992; Lodge, 2002; Sumara, 2002; Zunshine, 2006). Building on Gallop (2000) we consider how practices of close reading and close writing helped our research participants deconstruct ‘lovely knowledge’ and replace it with ‘difficult knowledge’ in order to “encounter the self” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 735) and examine and ‘unfix’ their life narratives.

Methodology

Two of the authors (2002 ; Sumara, Davis, Filax, & Walsh, 2006) and Author 3 (2004; Luce-Kapler, Catlin, & Kocher, 2008) have written extensively about the usefulness of reading in identity work. Curious to see what would happen if a new dimension, which they call ‘close writing’ (in imitation of Gallop’s 2000 ‘close reading’) was added to the mix, they invited the third author, a published memoirist and writing teacher, to join them in establishing a second group that would work with both reading and writing. Author 2 and Author 1 shared the facilitation of the newly established research group, with Author 2 leading the reading component and Author 1 the writing. The strategies and methods used reflect Pinar’s (1994) process of *currere*: Close, focused reading of core texts, Close Writing, Introduction of theory, Reflection, Individual interviews, Discussion, Reflexive pedagogy.

Data

This paper offers an illustrative example of this work. Specifically, it traces the ‘memoir’ of “White Handle Knives” - a piece of writing produced by one participant - in order to explore the complex, recursive pedagogy we believe to be essential to this enterprise.