

Taylor Annabell

Progress Report – April 2020 – GWNZ Fellowship Award

It is my pleasure to provide an update on my PhD progress during my tenure as a recipient of a GWNZ Fellowship. The award has enabled me to progress in my PhD at King's College London, supported my participation and presentations at several conferences, and has served as an empowering endorsement of my research project, 'Remembering well on social media platforms: Digital memory work and mnemonic literacy in the lives of young women'.

I am at the midway point of my second year, currently immersed in data collection and the early stages of analysis. The purpose of my project is to examine the dynamics of memory and social media platforms through the experiences and perspectives of young women. I explore how digital memory is performed by social media users and by the platform, and how mnemonic literacy may facilitate 'remembering well' (Keightley and Pickering, 2017). My interest is in examining how Facebook and Instagram are spaces in which everyday forms of remembering occur as well as developing with young women a mnemonic literacy toolkit based on strategies and tools for remembering their lives well as they navigate the connective environment. The latter aims to intervene in popular discourses that critique social media usage as superficial, narcissistic and trivial. It intentionally involves participants reflecting on memory and social media in order to develop the concept of mnemonic literacy and generate a resource for educators and young women.

To gain insight into digital memory work and mnemonic literacy, I adopt a qualitative, ethnographic approach grounded in feminist research. Over the past several months, I have carried out 10 of the 16 interviews I will conduct, having transitioned and adapted my methods for video conference calls given the situation with COVID-19. During each semi-structured interview, the participant scrolls back through her Instagram and Facebook and as a co-analyst narrates experiences and emotions associated with her digital traces. I am also engaged in a six-month ethnographic observation of their digital memory work.

My preliminary analysis indicates that the selective performance of digital memory work by the young women in my study is shaped by postfeminist 'feeling rules' and expectations to share and then remember life positively. I am considering how each individual selectively performs digital memory work through their sharing practices on Instagram and Facebook. As well as how their sharing and remembering can be situated in their own and wider cultural contexts and expectations around how Instagram and Facebook should be used. I am beginning to theorise around the multiplicity of ways in which past digital traces are engaged with in the present and layers of 'memory' and temporality at play. Furthermore, I am interested in unpacking what is remembered and what should be remembered, viewing this as an opportunity to examine taken for granted assumptions and the negotiation of (gendered) norms.

I have also begun to consider changes and continuities of what is being shared (and remembered) on, with and through Instagram in the lives of research participants during COVID-19 and lockdown. There is a progression in how COVID-19 and terms associated with how we live during these times (social distancing, isolation, lockdown) are being used and integrated. From light-hearted responses and viewing Coronavirus as disruptive and amusement or social critique of panic buying to engaging with the strangeness of social isolation and absence of people to living in lockdown and the 'new normal' this brings. During the latter period, there has been an increase in sharing about daily exercise, baking, new working or studying arrangements and what it means to be home. There is a tendency to share screenshots and images of laptops with a range of different social network or video conference interfaces, marking a continuation of the significance of friendships and connection albeit with a

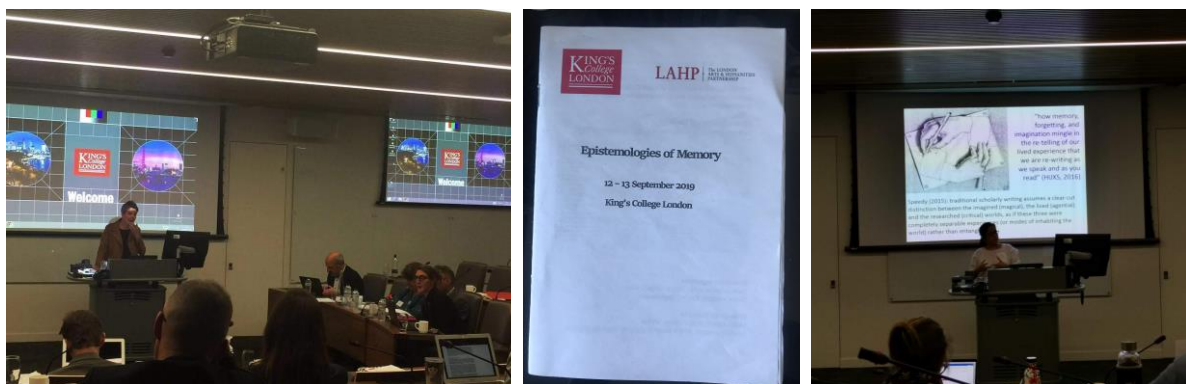
different focus. Throughout this period, memes have been regularly shared and the situation responded with through humour. The need to 'be positive' and share positively also endures, which is interesting given the disruption, inconvenience and indeed, tragedy, fear and scale of the situation. I would encourage anyone who shares through social media platforms to reflect on how they are intentionally and unintentionally documenting their life during this time and laying the groundwork for what they will look back on in the future.

The progress in my PhD fieldwork and theoretical framework is undoubtedly strengthened and developed through participation in the academic community. The opportunity to present pilot research, my approach to digital memory work and early analyses of platform and interview data at a conference and summer school have allowed me to clarify concepts and develop arguments while gaining feedback from peers and experts in the field. Co-organising a conference, presenting a guest lecture and increasing my participation in research networks within and beyond King's College London have allowed me to continue to develop valuable skills and experience as a researcher, building my profile and expanding my network.



Presenting 'Mnemonic Literacy and Remembering Well on Social Media' at Mnemonics Summer School at Utrecht University.

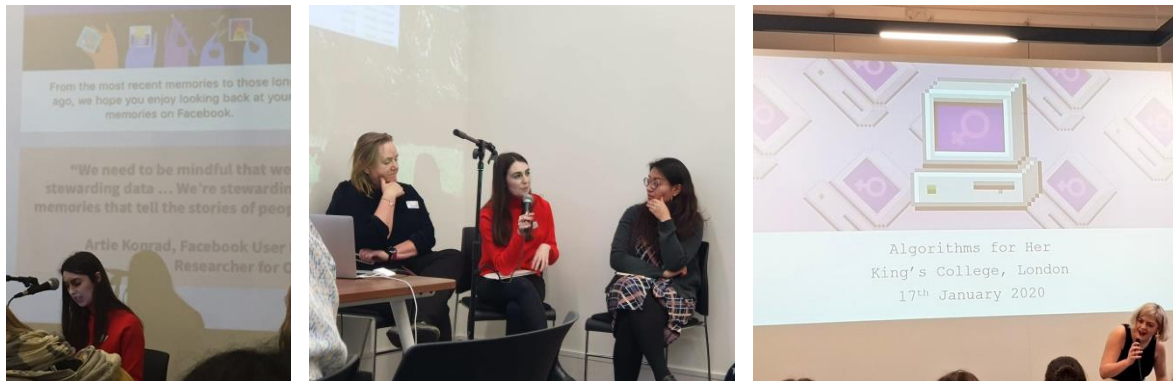
The intensive, interactive forum allows PhD students to receive in-depth, specific feedback from senior memory studies scholars directly relevant to their research. In 2019, the Summer School theme was intersections of memory and activism. For me, this took the form of my feminist approach to digital memory work and connections to feminist work on popular culture and young women, ways of understanding memory and the 'digital', how to utilise the concept of 'remembering well' and avenues for involving participants throughout my PhD project.



Co-organiser of Epistemologies of Memory Conference held at King's College London.

This conference brought together a range of memory studies scholars to reflect and debate the epistemological basis of the field and adaption of existing analytical tools to new phenomena. It emerged from discussions with the King's College London Cultural Memory Group of which I am

the lead student organiser for 2019/20. We organise a range of interactive, interdisciplinary events to explore memory studies in the arts and humanities but unfortunately, our programme for 2020 is on hold with COVID-19.



Presenting 'Exploring how interfaces and algorithms shape the digital memory work of young women on Instagram and Facebook' at the Algorithms for Her? Feminist Approaches to Digital Infrastructures Conference.

This intimate one-day conference offered a unique opportunity to intentionally approach the analysis of algorithms and algorithmic culture through critical feminist work often under-represented or side-lined in academia. My paper explored how algorithms and interfaces shape digital memory work on Instagram and Facebook on behalf of young women and how this reinforces postfeminist feeling rules

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the Fourth Annual Memory Studies Conference scheduled to be held at the University of Virginia in June 2020 was cancelled. However, I am in discussions with other panellists about publication around the themes on the two panels I would have presented on: 'The Platformization of Memory Panel' and 'Memory Narratives: Research Approaches to Meaning Making of the Past in the Present'.

Finally, this week I have learned that I will present at the Communicating Memory Matters: Next Steps in the Study of Media Remembering and Communicative Commemoration Conference in Salzburg in October 2020. This paper will be centred on early analysis of fieldwork specifically tracing the changes and continuities in practices of remembering with and through media products. In particular, I bring mediated memory practices into dialogue with the perspectives of young women, as well as the language of the platform.

For me, the opportunity to participate in discussions around the dynamics of memory and social media platforms, and contribute to the development of theoretical concepts in digital memory studies by bringing in a feminist perspective is exciting and challenging. It has been rewarding so far to see the experiences and perspectives of young women being taken seriously in academic communities in which I have presented my work and to be able to bring through the design my project, post-feminist literature and feminist studies on self-representation into spaces in which it otherwise may not have been considered.

In summary, it has been a productive and stimulating period of engaging fieldwork and increasing my participation in academic communities. I am grateful for the financial support of GWNZ in enabling me to pursue doctoral studies, particularly in such uncertain times like these, and am filled with pride to represent the GWNZ.