



Thinking Gender 2008

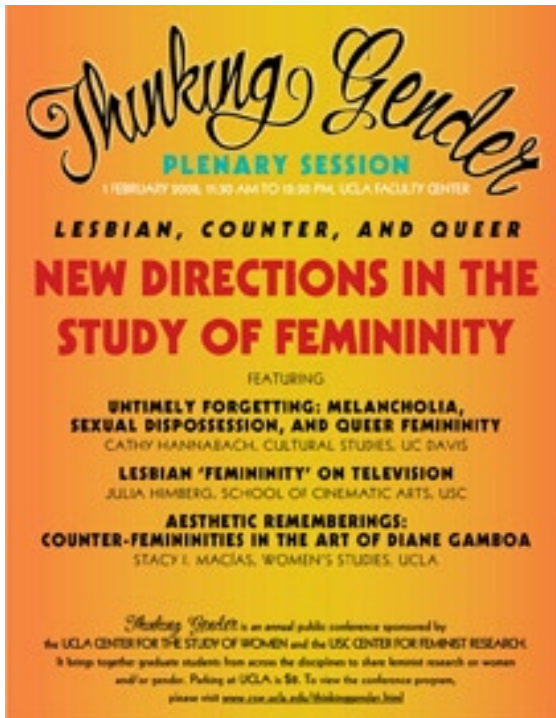


On February 1, 2008, the UCLA Center for the Study of Women and the USC Center for Feminist Research were proud to host *Thinking Gender*, the 18th annual graduate student research conference. Held at the UCLA Faculty Center, it highlights feminist research on gender, sexuality, and women across all disciplines and historical periods. With over eighty graduate student presenters, this year's conference offered an eclectic array of panels covering critical topics such as media representations, public health issues, transnational violence, and racialized embodiment. I was delighted to act as this year's conference coordinator and to experience the range of thrills that organizing such a conference can provide.

Upon reflection, many of the delights of my role as coordinator preceded the actual day of the conference. In advance of *Thinking Gender 2008*, I met with Professor Kathleen McHugh, Director of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women (CSW); Professor Lisa Bitel, Director of

the USC Center for Feminist Research; and Ericka Swensson, a graduate student at USC. As a group, we read and evaluated abstracts in order to put together the set of panels. I value tremendously both the cooperative process and the opportunity to meet USC faculty and students who share intellectual commitments to feminist research. Throughout the selection process, I was reminded of the sheer amount of advanced scholarly attention that gender and sexuality generate in universities across the United States and internationally—an affirming reminder for this graduate student in women's studies.

By and large, *Thinking Gender* was an incredible success because of the collaborative spirit of all the staff and volunteers involved in its organization. As the conference coordinator, I had a wonderful opportunity to work closely with all the staff members at CSW. I especially recall with pleasure working alongside April de Stefano, Assistant Director of CSW, and Jessie Babiarz, Administrative



Specialist at CSW. Their expertise and insight made the conference operate smoothly and prepared me well for any surprises. I also acknowledge the commitment of the UCLA, USC, and other local university faculty who moderated panels. This year, we asked all panel moderators to do more than simply introduce panels and panelists, but to comment on each student's paper. All agreed to perform such a task, and did so with gusto! Equally energized, graduate student presenters relished the unique opportunity to receive feedback from prominent intellectuals in their fields of study. Thus, faculty willingness and graduate student professionalism combined to create a dynamic site of scholarly exchange and community. And, *Thinking Gender* would not have achieved this new height without the vision of Kathleen McHugh, who took the feedback from previous year's participants and moderators into serious consideration when planning this year's conference, in order to instill the conference with even more intellectual rigor and energy.

I was also fortunate to participate in this year's conference as a panelist in the plenary

session, "Lesbian, Counter, and Queer: New Directions in the Study of Femininity," which was moderated by Lisa Duggan, Professor in American Studies, New York University. She was the requisite scholar for a plenary addressing the contemporary valence of queer femininity, lesbian fems, and racialized sexuality. I know my co-panelists would concur that she was an entirely astute and gracious interlocutor, and we wish we could experience that moment again.

Perhaps the highlight I would most hope to share with conference attendees, presenters, moderators, volunteers, staff, and invited special guests is the experience of creating a vibrant feminist community at UCLA that maintains a focus on gender, sexuality, and women in relation to the sometimes under-researched topics of queerness, the sciences, the pre-modern, and women of color. This year's conference proved to be such a community, and I, along with the several hundred attendees, benefited from it!

– STACY I. MACÍAS