Because I had coordinated CSW’s Thinking Gender conference in 2009, I knew exactly what I was in for when I had the good fortune of being selected as the coordinator forThinking Gender 2012: a really fun six months of planning and preparation for an extraordinary day that makes a real difference in the lives of young scholars who are, in turn, making a real difference in other people’s lives. There would be brainstorming sessions and some creative problem solving...some arranging and then some rearranging...I would get to read and hear about all kinds of interesting projects in all sorts of areas of study. Lots of anticipation and lots of excitement, all because of one day, one opportunity to be surrounded by all kinds of people from all over the country and, in fact, all over the world. It would be one day during which I could enjoy being completely surrounded by people eager to share their ideas and research about women, gender, and sexuality. My mind would be...stimulated, but even more, my heart would be warmed. I knew my heart would be warmed because, as I remembered it, coordinating Thinking Gender meant working with CSW’s incredible network of good, kind, and generous people. It meant the excitement of meeting lots of new people, along with the joy and comfort of working with familiar faces. This year, 82 presenters shared their work at the UCLA Faculty Center. There was, of course, a strong showing of students from UCLA and the surrounding Los Angeles area. We had students come in from Oregon, Ohio, Maryland, Texas, New Mexico, Indiana, New York, New Jersey, Kentucky, North Carolina, Michigan, and the list goes on... Some of our panelists had even longer journeys and joined us from Hawai’i, Canada, England, Germany, and The Netherlands. The result was a Faculty Center filled with a crowd of people who represented not only geographic diversity, but a range of perspectives and approaches to some really exciting work. As one presenter told me after the conference, she felt Thinking Gender was one of the most genuinely interdisciplinary conferences she’d ever attended. In fact, she said she was happy Thinking Gender was the last conference she would attend before graduating, because it was a truly supportive environment and a positive experience, which is what conferences are supposed to be. Bravo, on all counts!

CSW works very hard to create opportunities for people to connect, and that’s exactly what we saw at Thinking Gender this year. If you were at the morning panel “Mods and Vlogs: Gender Techs,” you know there was even an unexpected virtual connection that took place! Panelist Gopinaath Kannabiran almost missed out on his own panel when he got stuck at the airport during a winter storm. The “Mods and Vlogs” moderator, CSW Research Scholar Rosemary Candelario, wouldn’t hear of it! When I delivered her what I thought was some bad news, she didn’t miss a beat: why not just Skype the presenter in? I asked, “Can you do that?” No problem! And suddenly, there was Gopi on the screen. How fitting for a panel on Gender and Technology... Once again, CSW’s crew came through. Everyone just rolls with the punches, and they do it with a smile.

What I witnessed on the day of the conference was, quite simply, a lot of sharing. Presenters were engaged in conversations about each other’s work, both inside and outside the sessions. They raised their hands with questions, sought each other out in the halls, and offered each other resources—but it doesn’t end there. I have received so
many inquiries from panelists, as well as audience members, who want to get in touch with one another and find out more about the work that was presented at Thinking Gender. People want the dialogue to continue, and it will. It does!

If you missed some of the panels because you couldn’t be in two places at once, or if you were, unfortunately, not able to make your way to the Faculty Center this year, there is still more Thinking Gender to be had:

Many of the papers, drawn from the plenary and the other 20 panels included in the program, will be published through the California Digital Library at the beginning of next month. Papers from panels such as “Altar Alternatives,” “Voices on Violence/Wars on Women,” “Pedagogies across Time: Created, Contested, and Changed,” “Global Spirits,” and “The 99%,” among others, will be available soon. Do watch for their posting at http://escholarship.org/uc/search?entity=csw_thinkinggender in early April.

In addition, CSW filmed the following panels, which you can watch now, at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA929BBDD1F30DC69A&feature=plcp: “Mumbling, Stuttering, Yelling: Gender Inarticulation in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and... Downtown Los Angeles”; “Parasexuality and the Arts”; “Masculinity Inside Out”; “From Chickens to Cookbooks: Creating Community and Meaning with Household Artifacts”; and the plenary session: “Thinking Gender in Space, Place, and Dance.”

My personal thanks go out to all of Thinking Gender’s presenters and moderators, with a special thank you to Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Associate Professor of Dance at UC Riverside, for leading a lively discussion after the plenary, which included papers on women and textiles, the indigenous performance group FOMMA, female mariachis, and gender shifting in Taiwanese salsa. Abbreviated versions of all the plenary presentations can be found in this very newsletter, so please be sure to read on (as well as watch the video that I-Wen Chang has provided to illustrate some of the dancing techniques she describes)!

As I prepare to wrap things up and hand over the reins to next year’s Thinking Gender conference coordinator, I’m reminded of what I said about the CSW staff when I wrote the “Coordinator’s Notes” after my last conference, back in 2009. To the next conference coordinator, I wrote: “You have a phenomenal group of people upon which to depend while you are at CSW. Our Director, Kathleen McHugh, has assembled one of the best teams I have ever had the pleasure to work with, and you will enjoy every minute you are in the office.”

What’s funny is that while the actual staff and volunteer base I had at my side this round was almost entirely different than it was last time, I am compelled to say the same thing. This year’s Thinking Gender team was truly one of the best groups of coworkers with which I’ve had the pleasure to work. Our Director, Kathleen McHugh, and Managing Editor, Brenda Johnson-Grau, have been part of Thinking Gender’s success for many years, and they have a wealth of information to share with the next conference coordinator. Assistant Director Julie Childers was never more than a phone call or e-mail away and always either had or found the answers to my many questions. Associate Director Rachel Lee, thank you for all your enthusiasm and ideas. Your energy is just infectious! No matter who is at CSW next year, I know the next coordinator will have a great team of people behind her or him. While I was coordinating this conference, I never worried about a thing because I knew I had so many reliable people working with me to pull this great day together. I know it will be the same for the next coordinator. Actually, I know it will be even better, because Thinking Gender just seems to keep getting better with every year that passes. So, here’s to the next year... Thinking Gender 2013 – February 1st, to be exact – see you there!

–Mirasol Riojas