Title
Coordinator's Notes: Thinking Gender 2009

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1ht7p9jj

Author
Riojas, Mirasol

Publication Date
2009-03-01
Usually, when I wake up to the sound of raindrops hitting the roof over my head, it genuinely makes me smile. Whether I head out to face the big, bad world or have the luxury of hibernating under a pile of blankets with some hot tea and a stack of good books and movies, the rain is welcomed, especially in L.A. But on the first Friday of this past February, when my alarm went off and I heard that pitter patter coming from somewhere overhead, all I could think was, “Oh no!” I was terrified that six months of planning were about to go down the drain. I had this fear that the rain was going to keep people from heading out to CSW’s Thinking Gender conference, an event that so many people had worked so hard to make happen.

Thankfully, that fear was completely unfounded. UCLA’s Center for the Study of Women has a reputation for bringing together some amazing scholars who are committed to doing work on women, gender, and sexuality. On February 6th, the CSW community showed up in droves to take part in what proved to be an extraordinary day, proving once again their commitment to their work.

The Thinking Gender conference is typically comprised of four sessions of five panels each, as well as the plenary session, all of which are scattered throughout the course of the day. This year, the 20 panels, along with the plenary, amounted to 86 student presenters. As the Conference Coordinator, I knew that we had an interesting lineup that promised to provoke stimulating conversations, but it wasn’t until I heard the buzz in the California Room at the UCLA Faculty Center at around 7:30 in the morning that I realized everyone else was just as excited to begin the day as I was. It would take more than a little water to put a damper on Thinking Gender. We shook off the rain and got to business.

Attendees had a difficult task of choosing between panels covering a wide range of historical periods. While sessions included topics as vast and varied as gender and disability, spirituality, women in sports, and representations of femininity (just to name a few), selecting from the day’s offerings was a task that everyone seemed happy to have to do. The panels
were well attended from early morning until the end of the day, and in fact, for “Between Girls,” “From Our Doorstep: Contemporary Politics,” and “Changing the (his)story: Women in Film and Television,” attendance was so strong that the rooms were filled to capacity. In some cases, the rooms were actually overflowing. Thinking Gender comes but once a year and is a special opportunity for people to gather with like-minded individuals. This conference is important to our community, not only on a professional level, but for most, also a deeply personal level. It was a true joy to be a part of making it happen.

In between attending to my duties as the Conference Coordinator throughout the day, I was lucky enough to be able to sit in on several of the panels, all of which more than met my expectations. Each of the papers had been carefully chosen from a pool of very competitive applicants, and after much correspondence with students who came from as near as our own UCLA campus and as far as Turkey, the West Indies, and New Zealand, I felt personally invested in seeing each of the presentations, in person. It was a pleasure to meet so many of the students and faculty I had come to know electronically, face to face. I am only sorry that I was not able to be present for each and every one of the papers that was given. Gladly, I have been able to continue to watch podcasts of the select few panels that we were able to film (http://www.csw.ucla.edu/podcasts.html), as well as read the majority of the papers, as most have been posted on-line (http://repositories.cdlib.org/csw/thinkinggender/). I do hope that the rest of our readers will do the same.

The day of the conference passed quickly and before I knew it, unfortunately, it was over. After months of preparation and anticipation, attending to all the details to ensure that everyone had what they needed, that good memories would be made, and that everything would go according to plan, the day passed in a flash. It was truly a whirlwind that I wish I’d been able to more fully experience. I am happy to report that what I remember most about the day is being surrounded by a sea of smiling faces, satisfied by successful presentations and the provocative discussions that our fantastic moderators helped to facilitate after each set of papers. In the end, that is what it’s all about: engaging in a dialogue with colleagues and being challenged to do our best work in a supportive environment. I am proud to say that CSW provides exactly the kind of space where that can happen.

Now that the 2009 conference has come to a close, I find myself checking what seems like a terribly empty inbox a little too often, but life after the conference is slowly returning to normal. I will be passing the torch on to the next Thinking Gender Conference
Coordinator in the very near future. To that person I can honestly say that 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. At first glance you may think it is the colorful walls and the sophisticated decor, but you will quickly come to realize it is the people who work here, volunteer their time, and come through our doors who make CSW such a bright and pleasant place to be. People are doing their work with smiles on their faces because they believe so strongly in what they do. Those smiles come from their hearts. Make no mistake, it can be infectious!

I look forward to attending Thinking Gender on February 5, 2010, as our community continues to thrive and grow. Until then…

— Mirasol Riojas
Conference Coordinator, TG 2009