



Q & A with
Lisa Duggan

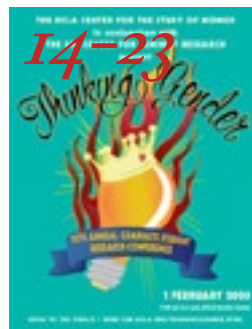
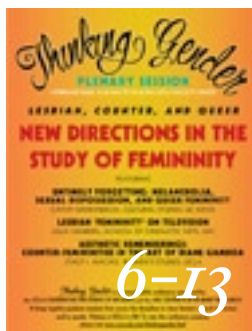
CHAIR OF THE THINKING GENDER 2008 PLENARY SESSION TALKS ABOUT HER TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND FIRST EXPERIENCES OF POLITICAL ORGANIZING

Lisa Duggan is a Professor in American Studies at New York University. She was chair of this year's plenary session, which was entitled "Lesbian, Counter, and Queer: New Directions in the Study of Femininity." She is author of *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, which won the John Boswell Prize of the American Historical Association in 2001. Her new book, *The End of Marriage: The War over the Future of State Sponsored Love*, will be published by University of California Press.

Much of your recent research is interested in investigating the collision between political discourse and issues of gender and sexuality. What forces (biographical, educational, cultural) do you see as having shaped this research agenda?

When I was 15, the principal of my high school weirdly chose me to participate in a program sponsored by the Richmond, Virginia Junior League during 1970—a program designed to train peer counselors for young people with drug problems. The Junior League made what was for them a heinous error, but for me a crucial opening to the larger world of politics. They brought in an organization of Maoist community organizers, called Rubicon, to train the working class public high school students in their peer counseling program! Those organizers introduced us to the city we lived in, its institutions and neighborhoods, and to the forms of widespread

racial and economic inequality that marked that time and place. I was absolutely shocked by what I learned, but also absolutely thrilled by the ways of thinking and organizing that I was exposed to then. The Rubicon guys didn't have much to say about gender and sexual inequalities. But as I learned more about the nascent feminist and gay liberation movements during high school and college, I always understood them within political economic context. I had learned from my time with the Rubicon organizers that inequalities are interrelated, embedded in historical institutions, and subject to political contest and change.



Excerpt from Plenary Session
LESBIAN "FEMININITY" ON TELEVISION

Julia Himberg

DEPARTMENTS



Thinking Gender 2008

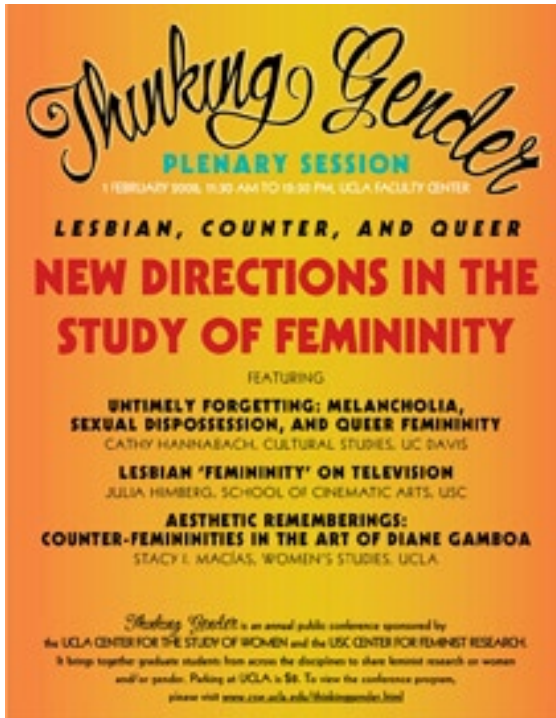


On February 1, 2008, the UCLA Center for the Study of Women and the USC Center for Feminist Research were proud to host *Thinking Gender*, the 18th annual graduate student research conference. Held at the UCLA Faculty Center, it highlights feminist research on gender, sexuality, and women across all 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

How do you see issues of gender and sexuality playing out in the political season currently underway? Do you find yourself and/or your students following the national and local campaigns with acute interest or marked wariness?

Obsessed. That's the only word to describe my relationship to this election season! Riveted and horrified. Race and gender are at the center, with reverence for signs of increasing equality expressed alongside racist and sexist assumptions on a daily basis. A virtual lesson plan in the limits and perils of neoliberal multiculturalism played out in real time.

How have your research interests influenced your pedagogical concerns? Are conversations about the interrelation between sex and politics crucial to the undergraduate classroom? How have your classroom experiences affected your research aims?

My favorite undergraduate class to teach is "Intersections: Race, Gender and Sexuality in U.S. History." It's basically a course in the history of U.S. imperialism, and the ways that political and economic forces operate in the regulation of the social formations of race, gender, class and sexuality. It's a big introductory lecture class in American Studies, but I assign a book a week at the same level as in my graduate seminars. I don't grade the students on their written work, just on their attendance, participation, and on-time delivery of weekly response papers. So they don't need to

worry about what knowledge and skills they walk in the door with, about whether they agree with the authors or the instructor and TAs, nor whether they fully grasp each book they read. They need only grapple with some difficult but provocative ideas. They surprise themselves. By the end of the semester most have stopped complaining about the reading load and are deeply engaged in analyzing how race, gender, class, and sexuality are inter-related historically, in thinking about why there is so much inequality, and in pondering the impact of collective action. I take all my own questions into the classroom, and every year that class has as significant an impact on my own thinking and writing as it does on the students'.

A term that seems to undergird your writing is the concept of "neoliberal multiculturalism." Can you elaborate about what it means in the context of your work?

"Neoliberal multiculturalism" describes a ruse of inclusion, which allows for representation without redistributive justice. The most obviously tokenistic versions have been on display by Republican Party—the many races on the convention stage or in the Bush administration. This "representation" does not alter the overall distribution of material and cultural resources. But even more "well-meaning" liberal versions of neoliberal multiculturalism—the Clinton cabinet that "looks like America" or the Benetton marketing strategy—also substitute nonredistributive inclusion for substantive justice.

Sometimes left critiques of "identity politics" are directed toward this kind of narrow call for inclusion. But more often, all feminist, antiracist and queer politics are misrepresented by being reduced to neoliberal multiculturalism. Left attacks on "identity politics" can then be a way of dismissing all consideration of inequalities shaped by race, gender, and sexuality. It is therefore very important to be clear about the differences—to insist on justice, as material and cultural redistributions of resources and power, and critique both the ruse of neoliberal multiculturalism and the left dismissal of anything that can be called identity politics.

What broader connections will the plenary session's topic allow us to see? Why is it important for our current cultural moment?

I was deeply impressed by the line-up of papers on the plenary session on queer femininity. They showed, one after the other, how performances of gender are played out within the broader political economy, shaped by the history of colonialism and imperialism. New scholarship like that on the plenary is showing us that "femininity" is a fully contextual sign, always marked with histories of race, class and "family" forms, and given meaning by processes of mediation—aesthetics, arts institutions, mass entertainment, and so on.

Untimely Forgetting

MELANCHOLIA, SEXUAL DISPOSSESSION, AND QUEER FEMININITY

How can forgetting be constitutive of life and action? How can rethinking the relationship between forgetting, unforgetting, and melancholia produce alternative temporalities? I want to ask how queer femme melancholia as both forgetting and unforgetting can offer a politics and ethics of temporality, and an untimely reckoning with sexuality and gender.

I draw here on Kathleen Stewart's theorizations of "unforgetting" as distinct from what is usually called remembering—unforgetting refuses an easy distinction between the subject and object of remembrance. In unforgetting, "the past is never quite past but reverberates in the present, and 'things' are never quite set and contained but reverberate and echo in *signs* and excess signification" (Stewart 75).

One might think that forgetting and unforgetting are mutually exclusive—one either knows or doesn't know that the object is gone. This conventional definition of forgetting would understand the melancholic as lacking knowledge of the object's "real" absence. This definition of forgetting-as-lack, however, fails to take into account the ways that subjectivity is actually reliant upon forgetting as an active project. I want to argue that forgetting is not a passive process, but rather an active venture of tracing the edges of that which must be forgotten in order for subjectivity to be established and maintained. In this way, forgetting is not merely an excision, but is a laborious tending to that which is being forgotten, even while it is being reworked or resisted. Queer femininity exploits the political and ethical potential of this critical forgetting.

Combining unforgetting and forgetting practices can produce a melancholia that is not pathological, but rather politically useful.

Friedrich Nietzsche argues that forgetting is essential for life: “Forgetting is essential to action of any kind...it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting” (Nietzsche 62). Too much remembering prevents one from creating a life in the present, for it can reduce the present to the past and prevent the creation of new subjectivities, cultures, and embodiments. However, such production must also contend with the continuing presence of past events, for to ignore or erase such histories enacts a violence that also prevents such constructions. The task then is to figure out “the boundary at which the past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present” (Nietzsche 62). To forget in this way is not to disregard past invocations of signifiers, but it is to refuse to concede that past uses are the only ones possible. Forgetting then is the labor of analyzing and transforming meaning, a laborious tending to that which has been and the creation of what can be out of the same materials. I want to argue that this labor of forgetting and unforgetting has the potential to queer notions of temporality.

Queering Temporality

As Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, and Beth Freeman have pointed out, generational logics solidify heteronormative reproductive futurity. Such a generational timeline sacrifices the present and past for the future, investing in a capitalist logic of accumulation whereby the present is continually asked to “remember the future.” It is for the sake of this projected future that the present is shaped and the past is invoked. As some psychoanalysis understands queerness as a mere developmental stage on the path to properly reproductive heterosexuality, and as heteronormativity is generational and teleological, we might see queerness as disrupting that temporality by refusing to move on and grow out of this “phase.” Unlike homonormative claims for inclusion in neoliberal society and generational time, queerness “forgets” to grow up into heterosexual domesticity and reproduction. As Halberstam puts it, “queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experiences—namely, birth, marriage,

reproduction, and death” (Halberstam 2).

As part of this queer forgetting, queer femme “forgets” generationality as an adequate to understand time, community, and affect. Forgetting can be a strategy of resisting the heteronormative narrative, and a means to insist on and create the conditions for the survivability of queer lives not entirely outside of heteronormativity (or even heterosexuality), but also not entirely capturable by its terms. Selective forgetting can function as a queer femme melancholic resistance to teleological temporalities and embodiments, forcing into the present that which is supposed to be excised in order for the time of both heteronormative and homonormative generationality to proceed.

However, it is not just heteronormative and homonormative logics that invest in teleological time. Discourses of queerness that base their radicality on surpassing the past also do so, often through aligning femininity with a past that must be overcome. In such a temporality, what is “past” is often erased or denigrated as not-as-progressive or not-as-queer, where queerness is measured by its distinction from what is rendered “past.” Even when this past is not explicitly disavowed, it is

I also want to point out that such forgetting is intertwined with practices of unforgetting, and must not be understood as erasing genealogies of violence. In fact, the process of forgetting entails an often painful reckoning with such genealogies in its struggle to construct new ways of being.

often rendered a mere stepping stone on the road to contemporary queerness, valuing the past but only as a necessary (and somewhat shameful) stage through which we had to go to arrive at the fully queer present. As Elizabeth Freeman points out, this conservative understanding of politics and history “consign[s] to the irretrievable past anything that challenges a dominant vision of the future” (Freeman 734).

However, Freeman also draws attention to the ways that those temporalities that insist femininity remember its proper temporal place (in the past) are unsuccessful in fully structuring such history. As she writes, “some bodies, in registering on their very surfaces the co-presence of several historically-specific events, movements, and collective pleasures” articulate “a kind of *temporal* transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other ‘anachronisms’ behind” (Freeman 729). This eruption into the present of that which is supposed to be past and gone disrupts a presentism that assumes its transgressivity via the disavowal of the past. In this way, queer femininity’s forgetting of such a temporality becomes a way to reckon with “an uncontrol-

lable past, the uncontrollability of the past, its inability to explain the present” (Freeman 741).

The Politics of Queer Femininity

I want to suggest that *femme* can be read as a melancholic refusal to give up certain signifiers of femininity or a forgetting that femininity must signify heterosexuality. If sexed bodies are constructed through heterosexual norms of femininity, queer femininities of multiple genders and sexes can call attention to this construction. They emphasize the queer potentials for inhabiting femininity not as a natural category, and not as a freely chosen identity, but rather as a site of contestation and contradiction, whose pleasures emerge from the friction between such norms and their excess. *Femme* forgetting and unforgetting can resist such heteronormative and homonormative discourses not by simply refusing them (as if it were that easy), but by catachrestically incorporating and transforming them.

If femininity is that which certain discourses of homonormativity (and even certain masculinist dyke cultures) demand that queers let go of, we might read

femme as forgetting to leave femininity behind, as refusing the narratives that would render femininity anachronistic, unfeminist, unqueer, or too flamboyant for “proper” homosexuality. The effort to excise femininity from contemporary queerness, often because of its presumed too problematic history, needs to be understood as grounded in a teleological temporality, where what will be follows inevitably from what was. This type of temporality allows no room for the transformations or productions of new femininities. Critically queer femininities must “forget” this teleology if they are to produce new ways of being in the world.

I also want to point out that such forgetting is intertwined with practices of unforgetting, and must not be understood as erasing genealogies of violence. In fact, the process of forgetting entails an often painful reckoning with such genealogies in its struggle to construct new ways of being. Critically queer femininities cite the violences of both heteronormativity and homonormativity, and “unforget” the ways that both produce and are produced through practices of colonialism, racism, neoliberal capitalist expansion, and state and domestic violence. In fact, queer femininities must contend with such practices

if they are to be critical, for genealogies of femme that excise the co-constitution of racism and heterosexism, whorephobia and femmephobia, and misogyny and classism are complicit in their workings.

In addition to unforgetting that which heteronormativity would like to disregard, queer femme illustrates the ways that homonormative regimes also exclude gendered, raced, and classed bodies that exceed their terms. Homonormativity enacts what Jasbir Puar calls “the ascendancy of whiteness” (Puar 24), upholding rather than critiquing heterosexist and racist norms of monogamy, procreation, a gender binary, whiteness, and upward economic and social mobility. In contrast, critically queer femininities can critique such a will to legitimacy by unforgetting the violences of such desires. Unforgetting such communal violences does not collapse these signifiers into these violent histories, but rather demands an unending interrogation of such genealogies and their undeniably present manifestations. Combining unforgetting and forgetting practices can produce a melancholia that is not pathological, but rather politically useful. Such a melancholia opens up space to examine the ways that unforgetting and forgetting serve not only

as means of establishing subjectivities, but also of destabilizing and undoing them. In this way, melancholia is also a dispossession of identity, revealing how our bodily lives are implicated in and only established through our ties to others.

Cathy Hannabach is a third-year graduate student in Cultural Studies at UC Davis. This article is an excerpt from “*Untimely Forgetting: Melancholia, Sexual Dispossession, and Queer Femininity*” in the forthcoming collection *The Shadow's Shadow*, edited by Liz Constable and Naomi Janowitz (SUNY Press).

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Lesbian “Femininity” on Television

DYSFUNCTIONAL DYKE TO DESIGNER DOLL.
VIVACIOUS AND NEVER FAR FROM A VIBRATOR.
LIPSTICKED, HYPER-FEMME, AND SEXY AS HELL.

Over the past five years, lesbian images on TV have generated a multitude of headlines like these.¹ *The L Word*, *Work Out*, and *South of Nowhere* have triggered battles among critics, scholars, and members of the TV industry about the implications of lesbian femininity on television. Each show predominantly features stereotypically feminine lesbian characters. Showtime’s soap opera *The L Word* follows a closely-knit web of lesbian friends and lovers living in West Hollywood. Bravo’s reality series *Work Out* stars openly lesbian gym owner and personal trainer Jackie Warner, and shows the daily lives of Warner, her entourage of personal trainers, and their clients. The N Network’s *South of Nowhere* is a teen drama about a family dealing with charged issues like teen pregnancy,

interracial families, and the daughter’s coming out experiences.

Academics’ and critics’ debates about femininity run the gamut from a progressive new visibility to an old voyeuristic pandering. Some argue that femme characters debunk the notion that femininity requires heterosexual male appreciation. A recent *Advocate* article by columnist Guinevere Turner touted *The L Word* as “shifting the aesthetic of actual lesbians and the way lesbians in general are perceived.”² Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick’s review of the show for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* places high hopes on *The L Word* to “make a real and unpredictable difference in the overall landscape of the media world.”³ Sedgwick’s praise for the show is tempered however by her claim that “Edgy is not the word for the series’s

relation to reality or political process....”⁴ Critics in this camp argue that femininity sanitizes, depoliticizes, and even de-homosexualizes lesbian characters. As lesbian comedienne Marga Gomez quips about *The L Word*, “you only see plain dykes in the background when the hotties go to a dance.”⁵ Gomez and others, such as *New York Times* reporter Alessandra Stanley and Salon.com’s Hillary Frey, contend that while femme images may challenge traditional viewers’ sense of what being lesbian looks like, these same images are constructed for the pleasure of the straight male. Stanley’s *New York Times* review of *The L Word* calls the show “a manifesto of lesbian liberation and visual eye candy for men.”⁶ These criticisms are concerned with the way that TV as a business commodifies images to sell

to the mainstream public, without regard for political implications. Such business practice seems particularly ignorant of pornography debates, which have raged for decades among feminist media scholars such as Michelle Citron, B. Ruby Rich, Chris Straayer, and Linda Williams, to name just a few.

While debates about lesbian femininity have a deep history, I want to quarrel with critics who neglect to consider class or the economics of the TV industry when writing about lesbian femininity. These shows depict a particularly class-based expression of femininity that relates directly to cable structures, especially its requirements for and methods of targeting audiences. I argue that discussions of lesbian femininity need to incorporate a critique of class which, in addition to race, is crucial to the ways gender and sexuality play out on television. Rather than debate the veracity or authenticity of these images, seeing the characters as desirable to mainstream audiences *because* they're stereotypically feminine, I urge critics and scholars to see these images as being involved in the production and maintenance of social reality itself, particularly embedded in issues of class relations and shifts



The L Word, Showtime Network, Inc

in the television cable market. Building on the work of Communications scholars such as Katherine Sender and Larry Gross, Film Studies scholars such as Patricia White and Kara Keeling, as well as critics in the popular press, I hope to nuance critical understandings of the relationships among the cable market, niche audiences, and lesbian femininity. While

queer theory has clearly shown the importance of deconstructing essential identity categories, I use the terms “lesbian” and “femininity” because they are still relevant categories in the sense that they take into account the cultural forces that play upon TV characters in experiences of coming out, identity formation, and sexual style in everyday, material culture.

From their marketing campaigns to their title sequences to the characters' clothing, jobs, and education, TV shows also foreground high-class lifestyles and aesthetics. The characters are usually white-collar professionals, who make references to canonical literary texts and paintings, know a fine wine when they see it, and understand that the handbag must always match the shoes. Furthermore, femininity in these shows normalizes and adheres to white standards of taste in beauty, education, and physical fitness. While they tend to include characters of color, and directly address timely discussions of race, the characters' high-class look is a distinctly white aesthetic.

One of the most instructive ways to see how class is embodied in these shows is to look at their marketing campaigns and title sequences. Ad campaigns and title sequences are often the first glimpse viewers have of a show, conveying key information to attract audiences. *The L Word's* initial ad campaign promoted the show as a lesbian version of *Sex and the City*, using the tag line, "Same sex. Different city," hoping to make associations with the show's bold approach to talking about and having sex. Billboard and print ads frequently

feature the show's cast dressed in elegant gowns and feminine suits, foregrounding their looks above all else. Utilizing fashion photography lighting and runway poses, the show's cast stand alongside one another, looking directly at the camera, lights accentuating their lean, female figures against a sleek black backdrop. Aside from the show's name and tag line, the ads have no text, do not promote the show with any actor names, and instead feature only exquisitely adorned, hyper-feminine women. The network also advertised for the show in upscale women's publications, like *Elle* magazine, which target consumers interested in "fashion, beauty, and style – with a brain" who are looking for "high-end inspiration," marking class as central to the show's identity.⁷

Work Out, which premiered in 2006 following Bravo's success with programs like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Project Runway*, presents lesbian sexuality within the context of Beverly Hills beauty culture, where high-end fashion, food, and bodies are the norm. The title sequence immediately draws the viewer into an elite world, first with street signs marking the entrance to Beverly Hills and Rodeo Drive, and then with quick cuts

of Warner and her trainers in the gym, on the gym equipment, and shots of their well-toned bodies. Along with the images, the show's theme song establishes a tone of fame, voyeurism, and exhibitionism that comes from the worked out body: "you can really work it out... Beverly Hills where the rich keep it sexy, work hard, play hard, turn into celebrities... whatever drives your passion, Jackie keeps you motivated, top of your game, your lifestyle will change..." Opening with Beverly Hills culture establishes a tone of an elite world of fitness and beauty that only few attain. Like much of TV, it targets working class or lower-middle class viewers who are aspiring to make it in a white-collar world. There are no signifiers of Warner's sexuality or lesbianism in general. The show's title sequence codes itself foremost as high-class rather than as conventionally lesbian.

Contrary to assumptions about U.S. lesbian consumers and audiences, narrow-casting and niche marketing provide fertile ground for representations of lesbian sexuality. Since the early 1980s, cable has been seen as an efficient and relatively inexpensive way to target narrow segments of viewers, offering a remedy for under-represented minorities.⁸ Satellites and the

government's relaxation of cable's restrictive structures allowed the industry to become a major force in providing high quality television to consumers. In this environment, large networks established numerous niche cable stations aimed at smaller audiences. Targeting niche audiences creates an intimate and loyal relationship between specific groups of viewers and cable channels.

Unlike broadcast channels, which are subject to heavy regulation because they use public airwaves, cable is a profit-driven, private enterprise, one that is less regulated and more diverse in its ownership. Cable's fewer regulations tend to mean more sex, violence, and profanity, as well as more images of non-heteronormative sexualities, such as lesbianism. At the same time, as profit-driven companies, cable channels still require minimum audience numbers to get the advertising revenue needed to sustain and market themselves. As Katherine Sender notes, "In order to be included in the Nielsen Cable Activity Report, the cable equivalent to the broadcast television ratings, a cable channel has to be available in at least 3.3 percent of U.S. households and to generate a minimum .1 rating in those households (approximately 100,000 homes)."⁹ This dynamic forces cable chan-

nels to constantly walk a fine line between targeting small, loyal audiences and appealing to a big enough audience to keep advertisers invested. With channel proliferation, this also means maintaining a uniqueness that distinguishes each cable channel from the hundreds of others that target niche markets.

Showtime, like other premium cable networks, courts a loyal customer base through programming choices, advertising in LGBT publications, and sponsoring fundraisers with LGBT organizations such as GLAAD and HRC. These promotional tactics target LGBT viewers who presumably are out, interested in LGBT-directed products, and who actively support LGBT rights. As research by scholars such as Larry Gross, Katherine Sender, and Suzanna Walters shows, a particular consumer image drives these promotional strategies. As Walters says in her history of gay visibility in the U.S., "the image of free-spending, brand-loyal gays has captivated public relations firms, animated corporate headquarters, and excited gays themselves."¹⁰ These consumers are presumably financially able to be out, to buy print or TV subscriptions, and have the money and time to pay for and attend fundraisers.

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Productive Invisibilities

In investigating the tensions between visibility and invisibility, each of the presenters on the Productive Invisibilities panel took up related arguments regarding the politics of subjectivity, representation, and hegemonic discourse. One of the most salient connections among panelists was their congruent interrogation of the way in which feminist analytical and theoretical demands for intersectionality and differentiated inclusion get homogenized and rearticulated in hegemonic discourse. For example, Evangeline Heiliger questioned the way in which the profound atrocities related to the HIV and AIDS epidemic become commodified by international nongovernmental organizations through the production of ‘ethical consumerism.’ Kolleen Duley investigated the way

in which feminist demands for gender responsiveness in California’s women’s prisons have been taken up by the state and by feminist actors in order to expand the prison industrial complex and to legitimize the racism of the criminal justice system. Similarly, Nisha Kommatta examined lesbian women in Kerala, India in order to complicate the ‘globalization’ of queer discourses that demand visibility. And finally, Nicole Wilmms investigated the way in which the visibility of Japanese American basketball players upsets hegemonic representations of Asian people as “weak and feminine.” While each paper reflected varying epistemological and methodological trajectories, panelists were able to disrupt and challenge popular notions of visibility, ultimately suggesting that visibility is an uneven, contest-

able, and differentiated process that need not be embraced unilaterally throughout feminist praxis.

Evangeline Heiliger’s paper “Ado(red), Abhor(red), Disappea(red): Re-Scripting Race, Poverty and Morality under Product (Red)TM” contested the merits of “ethical” capitalism. Heiliger, a UCLA Women’s Studies doctoral student, discussed (Product) Red,TM a marketing campaign put forth by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria ostensibly aimed at providing relief for HIV/AIDS affected women and children throughout the continent of Africa. One of her central questions asks, “what are the implications for ‘ethical’ consumers and producers of (Red)TM products, and those who receive (Red)TM aid?” Ultimately, she argued, “(Red)TM sets up a continuum of

human valuation whereby certain gendered and racialized bodies have access to commodified social justice while others are ignored, made invisible, or left off the spectrum completely.” Heiliger questioned the use of consumerism as a path to justice when it is used by corporations in positions of power.

UCLA Women’s Studies doctoral student Kolleen Duley presented the paper “Revealing and Concealing: The Gender Responsive Prison, Race Formations, and State Interest.” This paper explored the state’s recapitulation of feminist demands for gender consciousness in California’s prisons and related efforts to isolate gender difference and to establish gender conscious remedies within the criminal justice system. Duley suggested that such policies preclude a more accurate analysis of the intersectional power relations and structural inequalities upon which mass incarceration relies. Perhaps most problematic, she argued, is that the state reformulates such singular demands for gender responsiveness in order to expand the prison system and to legitimize state authority while the very real suffering of women prisoners remains unaddressed. In response to this dangerous paradox,

Duley examined possibilities for race and conscious remedies based on a platform of intersectional and prison abolitionist thinking and organizing.

Nisha Kommatta, of the department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, presented “Parasyamaaya Rahasyam/The Public Secret: Figurations of Female Same-Sex Desire In Kerala, India.” Her paper debated familiar and highly contentious issues of visibility in a new provocative context. One of her questions regarding the visibility of Lesbian women living in Kerala, India asked, “Is negative representation better than no representation at all?” She suggested that unlike ‘mainstream’ US LGBT “coming out” discourses, where visibility is a laudable goal, visibility is dangerous in Kerala. Although Kerala is considered “highly progressive” in that it is home to many women’s programs and it has the highest literacy and education rates in the country, it also has the highest rate of suicide for lesbian women. In an effort to address violence, international NGO’s have sensationalized these women’s stories, often deploying pathological negative stereotypes that perpetuate violence. Kommatta suggested that because

increased visibility renders lesbian women more vulnerable to violence, invisibility might be considered a method of resistance. This type of intentional strategic act, she argued, should be coupled with other forms of action located outside the visibility paradigm.

USC Sociology doctoral student, Nicole Willms presented the paper, “Japanese American Sports Icons and the Question of Gender.” Willms explored the prominence of Japanese women as icons in Los Angeles Japanese American sports. Here, she suggested that the Japanese American communities’ focus on basketball should be seen as a reclamation of a “strong” masculine identity denied from Asian men who are represented as “weak and feminine” in popular discourse. In the attempt to look at the intersections of race and gender, she examined San-Tai-San, an annual basketball tournament Little Tokyo. She suggested that their choosing of Japanese American women basketball players as “special guests,” indeed any representation of a successful Asian athlete, serves as a useful counterpoint to popular negative stereotyping of Asians as weak and feminine.

Kolleen Duley is a graduate student in Women's Studies at UCLA.

Penetrating Death

SAINTS, HYSTERICIS, AND THE EXPRESSIVE BODY

Attendees of the panel “Penetrating Death” were treated to four well-informed papers investigating the manner in which female bodies have been probed and evaluated by patriarchal “experts” throughout history; while tied thematically, the papers ranged widely in historical specificity, from predynastic Egypt to late Victorian England. The first speaker, Christine Gottlieb of UCLA, examined the “epistemology of gynecology” in the late nineteenth century in her paper, “Penetrating Knowledge and Attacking Mysteries: The Cases of *Dracula* and *Dora*.” By reading the novel *Dracula* in tandem with Freud’s account of his hysterical patient *Dora*, Gottlieb demonstrated how *Dracula*’s obsession with actual and metaphorical penetration pertains to the dominant medical discourse of its day. Just as the physician Van Helsing is allowed intimate access to the rooms, tombs, and bodies of his female patients, Freud’s narrative

reveals a desire to penetrate female hysteria through inserting his own “key” to its mystery. The second paper, given by Brown University’s Stephen Higa, exhibited a like interest in the historical probing of female bodies for meaning. Entitled “Exposing Virgins in Early Norman England,” Higa’s paper concentrated on the paradoxical representation of virgins by the eleventh-century hagiographer Goscelin. On the one hand, the sanctified virgin could repel access to marauders even from within her tomb, so sealed and cloistered was her body. On the other hand, church authorities performed sensual and pleasurable examinations of the corpses of sainted women and recorded their findings in lascivious detail. Higa’s paper intimated the importance of approaching issues of gender on terms specific to the cultural and historical moment, which was the primary thesis of the third paper, given by Krystal Lords of UCLA. Lords’ paper, “The Importance of

Gender Studies for Predynastic Egypt: A Case Study of Cemetery N7000 at Naga-ed-Deir,” claimed that early Egyptologists only considered gender in their studies to the end of determining whether women enjoyed equal or subjugated status in the predynastic period of 5,000–3,000 B.C.E. Lords’ own archaeological work with the bodies and objects discovered at Naga-ed-Deir suggests that a more nuanced approach is in order, one which looks to the material culture to deduce the particular roles enacted by each gender. The fourth paper, presented by Ericka Swensson-Tsagakis of USC, returned us to Goscelin and early Norman England. In “An Abbess Entombed: St. Mildrith and Female Monastic Enclosure,” Swensson-Tsagakis focused on how the removal of the remains of a powerful female saint effectively neutralized her popularity. After the Norman Conquest the authority of female monks was greatly curtailed, and the appropriation of

Mildrith's remains by St. Augustine's Abbey, a move which enabled the elevation of the male saint over the female one, provides one such example of the gendering of Christian worship in the medieval period. Moderator Lisa Bitel of USC raised a variety of issues through which the papers might speak to each other ideologically, and chief among her concerns was the question of agency: in what ways, if any, did female bodies resist or encourage access to the patriarchal narratives imposed upon them? While no answer to this question (or the others provoked by "Penetrating Death") could ever be the final word on such a complex and multivalent topic, the panel revealed the surprising perseverance of gender bias across a broad cross-section of academic disciplines. But if female bodies have typically been subjected to patriarchal inscription in the past, a new generation of scholars promises to discover and assert a more balanced and inclusive perspective.

Lana Finley is a graduate student in the Department of English at UCLA. Her dissertation focuses on the literature of the occult in nineteenth century America.



Labor Relations AND Subaltern Sex

LABOR RELATIONS

Despite Barack Obama's appearance on the UCLA campus that afternoon, the post-lunch session panel, "Labor Relations: Theory and Practice," was well attended by an attentive audience. Dr. Kelly Lytle Hernández, Assistant Professor of History at UCLA, moderated the three person panel consisting of Munia Bhaumik (Comparative Literature, UC Berkeley), Suyapa G. Portillo Villeda (History, Cornell), and Magalí Rabasa (Cultural Studies, UC Davis). Using distinct disciplinary frameworks, the three presenters explored neoliberalism and its effects on labor and resistance in three Latin American countries.

Munia Bhaumik opened the panel with her presentation, "Molina's Touch and Dorda's Music: The Schizophrenia of

Gender in Post-dictatorial Argentine Fiction." Her paper examined the work of two Argentine authors, *Plata Quemada* (*Burnt Money*) by Ricardo Piglia and *El Beso de la Mujer Araña* (*The Kiss of the Spider Woman*) by Manuel Puig, which both take place against the backdrop of Argentina's transition from a dictatorship to a democracy in the 1980s. However, as Bhaumik notes, the transition is not from one political system to another, but from a political dictatorship to an economic one. Argentina's "democracy" consisted of imported neoliberal economic policies which opened Argentina to a flurry of foreign business and investment; the population became a new market for products and in turn they became regulated by their consumer desires and consumption habits. The main characters in Piglia and Puig's novel disrupt the narrative of the seemingly seamless transition between the dictatorship and "democracy."

In *Plata Quemada*, Dorda is a schizophrenic, queer bank robber who falls in love with his partner-in-crime; his sexual desires merge with economic ones. In *El Beso de la Mujer Araña*, Molina, a gay cross-dresser, and Valentín, a Marxist revolutionary, meet in a prison cell. Their confinement results in a mutually transforming encounter in which they end up as lovers. The characters' queerness and schizophrenia counter the normalizing narratives of neoliberalism and the implementation of "democracy" and speak to the alternate ways in which desire and subjectivity are produced outside of consumptive habits and the marketplace.

Suyapa G. Portillo Villeda continued the conversation with her paper on "Campeñas y Compañeras: Gen-

dered Roles and Worker Identity in the North Coast of 1950s Honduras.” Villeda’s work examines the new social and economic spaces carved out by working class women within the banana fields of the United Fruit Company in Honduras. She looks at the role of the *patronas*, women bosses who ran their own eatery businesses in the *campos bananeros*, banana fields. She argues that their work in providing subsistence to the male laborers was instrumental not only to labor production but also to the formation of working class identity. *Patronas* occupied a unique space that allowed a certain amount of economic and social mobility very uncharacteristic for any group of women at the time, particularly middle-class women. The *patronas* operated in-house eating establishments which created an informal economy within the formal economy of the United Fruit Company’s banana fields in which their male counterparts worked. The informal economy served women in that they could determine their workflow and business negotiations without the interference of the government or company; some even earned more money than men. Despite this, women were able to maintain more egalitarian relationships with male labor-

ers than the laborers could with their male bosses due to a shared class background. Women were able to occupy this intimate social space with men without the stigma of “loose” sexuality because they were performing a purportedly “feminine” task of helping provide food and a certain form of companionship. Due to their close proximity to the fields and living quarters of workers, *patronas* were most familiar with men’s working conditions. Indeed, they were on the front lines of the 1954 strike not only providing food but also preventing the military from shooting the striking workers. During this time, the men became dependent on the *patronas* for subsistence; the *patronas* supplied food, not out of altruism, but out of a notion of reciprocity with the knowledge that their work would be remunerated at the end of the strike. Villeda’s research on this segment of women workers provided an insightful look at the ways in which women negotiate neocolonial economic conditions and complicate traditional notions of femininity.

Magalí Rabasa concluded the conversation with her paper “Remembering Fanon: Zapatista Women and the Labor of Disalienation” which discussed the ways

in which indigenous Zapatista women not only resist traditional gender roles, but actively create new female subjectivities. She began her presentation with a quote by Homi Bhabha: “Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never quite an act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (from “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition”). In this quote, Bhabha references Fanon’s idea of disalienation, the rejection of the internalization of the oppressive dynamic between the colonial subject and the colonizer. The process of disalienation is a crucial step in anti-colonialization processes and movements, such as that of the Zapatistas who struggle and resist the neocolonial effects of neoliberal economic policies placed on their communities as a result of NAFTA. Zapatista women, who face a triple marginalization through gender, class, and status as a (neo)colonial subject, particularly embody the process of critical “re-membering” of consciousness and identity through their work of *conscientización*, or consciousness-raising, among

themselves and in public declarations such as the Revolutionary Women's Law. As Rabasa's work shows, an application of Fanon's concept of disalienation deepens our understanding of the ideological labor that Zapatista women produce. Conversely, moderator Hernandez provocatively asked, "How can Zapatista women's work deepen our understanding of Fanon?"

SUBALTERN SEX

"Subaltern Sex," one of the last panels of the day, explored the constructions of female sexualities in distinct historical moments and geographical contexts. This panel was moderated by Dr. Tamara Ho, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at UC Riverside and consisted of Yuning Chen and Monghwa Chin (Institute of Technology Law, National Chiao Tun University in Taiwan), You-Sun Crystal Chung (History and Women's Studies, University of Michigan), Lena McQuade (Women's Studies, UC Santa Barbara), and Christina Owens (Cultural Studies, UC Davis).

Yuning Chen and Monghwa Chin began the session with their joint paper on "The Role Replaced: Unmarried

Taiwanese Women and Foreign Brides." Their work examines the ways in which Taiwanese societal attitudes are gradually becoming more accepting of these two populations of women and provides policy suggestions that might expedite an ideological shift in the negative conception of these women. Due to more opportunities in the workforce, more Taiwanese women are opting out of marriage because there is no financial impetus; however, they are subject to societal censure for not becoming "complete" women through marriage. Conversely, the population of women that comes from Southeast Asia to Taiwan as brides, primarily because it is more cost-effective for men to marry women than to hire them as domestic workers, are highly stigmatized because they are thought to bring diseases to the country. There are no integration programs for these new immigrant women and their isolation is sometimes augmented by domestic violence situations. Chen and Chin advocate for laws and other structural changes that would provide accessible outlets for immigrant women in domestic violence households as well as a deconstruction of the social system through education that would de-stigmatize unmarried women

and foreign brides. In the meantime, citizens have formed education centers to assist foreign brides with cultural adjustment and integration, which speaks to the changing attitudes in society that has prompted people to reach out to these women.

You-Sun Crystal Chung continued the discussion of changing societal conceptions of women's sexualities with her paper, "Representation and Its Discomforts: Writing a Subaltern History of the 'Comfort Women'" in which she looks at the competing claims to victimhood and who has the power to re-write the past. Korean state discourse around 'comfort women' has changed, especially with the U.S. House of Representatives 2007 Resolution 121 that calls for Japan to issue an apology for its sexual enslavement of women during World War Two. The Korean government has newly revered the former comfort women and adopted them as "grandmothers." The former comfort women foreground their work productivity as proof of their being contributing members of society; they accept the term of grandmother and adopt a pronounced asexual identity. The bitter irony is that they are decidedly not grandmothers and

were denied the opportunity to become one. However, this is not acknowledged in official discourse around the former comfort women. Chung is critical of the ways in which the Korean government appropriates the comfort women discourse and cautions against the state using the issue as part of a nationalist project that elevates male honor in seeking justice for the former comfort women. She argues that self-representation is most critical to writing a subaltern history.

Lena McQuade's paper, "Reframing Reproductive Oppression: Medical Research into Mortality at San Juan Pueblo," uses a reproductive justice framework to examine the ways in which female sexualities are mutually constructed in opposition to one another on the basis of class and race. Dr. Sophie D. Aberle, a white middle-class woman who completed her Ph.D. at Stanford in 1927 and medical school at Harvard in 1927, received funding from the Rockefellers to conduct research on mortality rates among the indigenous women in San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico. She was the first scientist to publish on this subject; as such, she was instrumental to the construction of the racialized sexual identities and reproduc-

tive capacities of San Juan indigenous women. Her research found that San Juan women had the same fertility rates as white women, but twice as high mortality rates. This disproved the idea the supposed correlation between "civilized" societies and fecundity, but provided the basis for the belief that cultural "inferiority" caused mortality, as opposed to vast inequities in the public health system. While Dr. Aberle was marginalized in her field due to her gender, she occupied a position of power in relation to the women she was studying. Her research and its outcomes speak to ways in which white women are implicated in colonial processes and scientific endeavors. McQuade emphasizes that it is crucial to understand this historical moment within a reproductive justice framework that recognizes the attack on the reproductive capacity of women as part of a larger colonial, genocidal project. The struggle for reproductive justice is not centered solely on gender, but is intimately linked to other social justice struggles, such as land and development rights.

In the final presentation of the panel, Christina Owens discussed the racialized sexuality of Japanese women in her paper "Liberal Intimacy and Racialized Women:

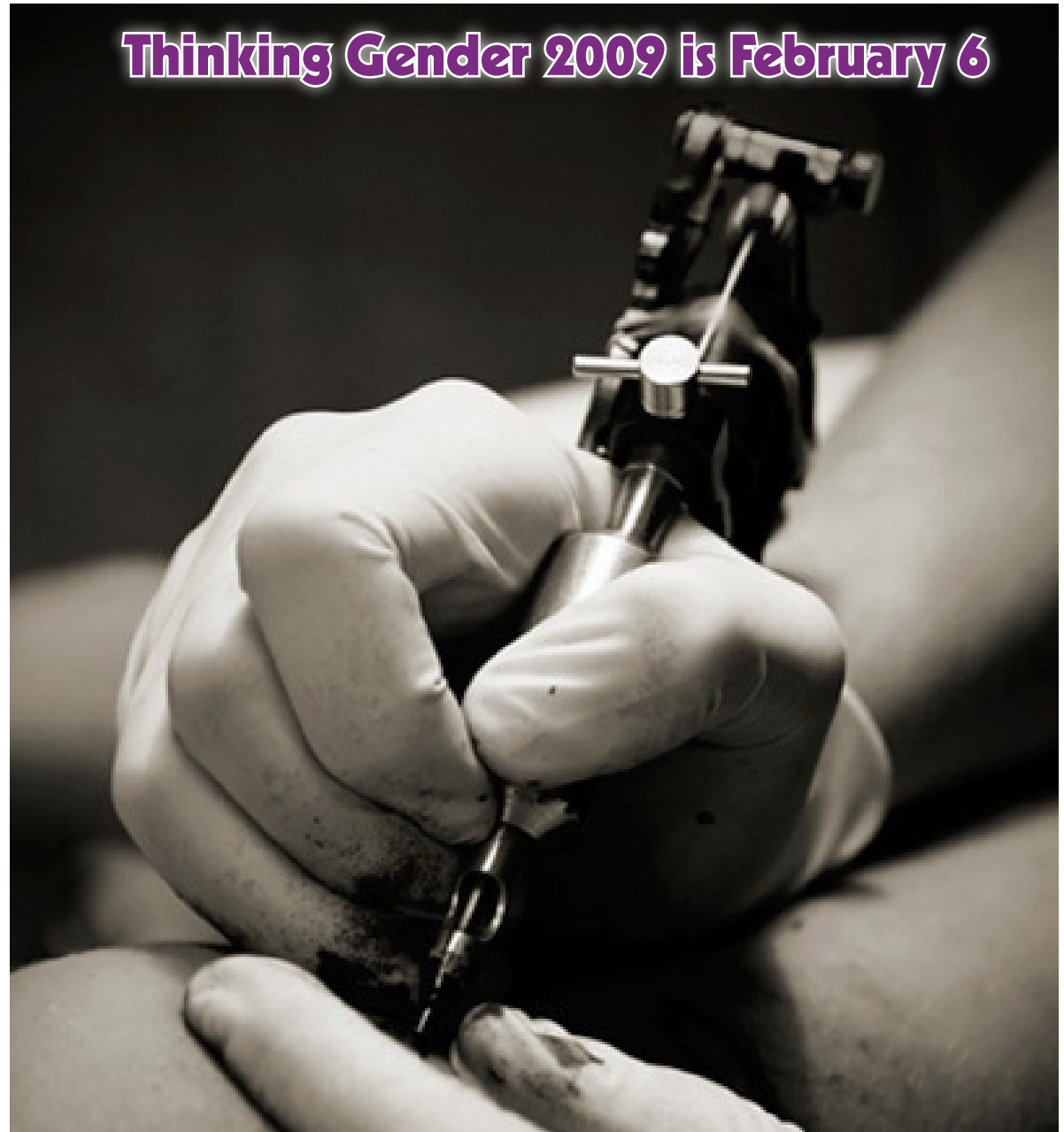
Constructing the Japanese Female Child Abductor." Owens focuses on the Children's Rights Network (CRN) founded by American fathers whose children have been supposedly "abducted" and taken back to Japan by their Japanese wives. Using the CRN website as her site of analysis, she examines the way in which the Japanese woman child abductor is constructed as being inextricably tied to and driven by her genealogy vis-à-vis her partner, a (presumably white) male individual. CRN posits that Japanese wives try to recreate the close relation they shared with their mothers through kidnapping their children. These "kidnappings," or breaches of father's rights, are framed within a Liberal legalistic framework that invokes science (Parental Alienation Syndrome) and vocabulary around rights of the individual – the rights of the father to see his child and the rights of the children to be loved by both their parents. Within this framework, Japanese women are constructed as being bound to their genealogical ties; race and purported social norms are conflated with one another and are seen as inherent in the biology of Japanese women. Reasons (i.e. domestic violence) as to why a woman might leave her part-

ner with their child are notably absent from the discussion. Owen's analysis of gendered, racialized identities constructed in opposition to one another in the case of the Children's Rights Network deepens our understanding of the long legacy of the ways in which America positions itself against the Eastern "Other."

While the panels spanned a wide range of theoretical ground, historical moments, social contexts and geographical boundaries, each presentation cogently and insightfully demonstrated the fluidity of gendered relations that are in constant flux. As evidenced by the aforementioned research projects, the inherent instability of constructed categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, provides fertile grounds for rich research, analysis, learning and ultimately, growth.

T-Kay Sangwand is currently a Master's student in the Information Studies and Latin American Studies joint degree program at UCLA. Her research interests include oral history, audiovisual and community based archives, and hip-hop as a form of oral history and its relevance to the archive, particularly within the Cuban and Brazilian context. She is currently working on CSW's Mazer Project.

Thinking Gender 2009 is February 6



From State Pump to Transnational Abolitionist

CHANGING DISCOURSES AND APPROACHES TO PROSTITUTION

Buzz words such as “human trafficking,” “sex work,” and “slave trade” haunt the daily media and evoke a gamut of emotions. Enunciated by activists, sectarians, public officials, and sex workers alike, discourses on prostitution abound. Why are such discussions on prostitution so prolific? And, what is at stake for the people who publicize them? How do the words and ideas that surround and define “the prostitute” shape the business of sex work in the first place?

Ann Marie Davis opens the panel with a consideration of the anti-prostitution movement in late nineteenth-century Japan. In particular, her research explores how transnational discourses on abolitionism (re)presented “the prostitute” in the midst of overarching debates on the future of “modern” Japan. Next, Shawna Herzog suggests that due to the restructuring of Russian policies, certain Russian women were at greater risk of being “pimped-out” through sex trafficking across state lines. She notes especially that an

affiliation with western-style feminism was seen as detrimental to anti-sex trafficking organizing, and that women involved in the Russian sex worker movement actively distanced themselves from those women labeled “feminist.” Third, Jennifer Musto investigates the unexpected networks and alliances that have formed in current U.S. movements against human trafficking. Considering the “prostitution question” from various angles, her analysis sheds further light on the shifting inscriptions that human trafficking debates have imposed on the very notion of sex work. Finally, Michiko Takeuchi focuses on a “reverse course” for Japan, in which “ordinary” women were recruited by the Japanese government to cater sexual services to U.S. Occupation Forces after World War II. Her paper reveals how both the U.S. and Japan benefited from the commodification of women, despite their imbalanced post-war relationship.

This panel offered an exciting array of recent scholarship on trafficking, and the audi-

ence exchange with the panelists was lively and informative. Many of the questions centered around the importance of terminology to accurately describe different types of trafficking (for example, sex trafficking and labor trafficking) and sex work. The terms become important for understanding how women who have been trafficked self-identify and why they often do not align themselves with groups who might seem, to outsiders, “natural allies”. This panel took a multidisciplinary and transnational approach in considering some of these critical issues. By tracing how discourses on prostitution have changed across time and space, the panel members drew attention to a surprising array of approaches and strategies for investigating the phenomenon of prostitution.

Ann Marie Davis is a doctoral student in History at UCLA. Jennifer Musto and Evangeline M. Heiliger are doctoral students in Women's Studies.

All these Thinking Gender presentations are now available for viewing on our website.

PLENARY SESSION :

Lesbian, Counter, and Queer: New Directions in the Study of Femininity

Untimely Forgetting: Melancholia, Sexual Dispossession, and Queer Femininity, Cathy Hannabach

Lesbian 'Femininity' on Television, Julia Himberg

Aesthetic Rememberings: Counter-Femininities in the Art of Diane Gamboa, Stacy I. Macias

SESSION 1: Therapy, Health, Intervention

Relationship Functioning and Immune Health in HIV+ Latinas: A Longitudinal Analysis, Felicia L. De La Garza-Mercer

Affirming Incarcerated Women of Color as HIV Experts: Feminist Insight into the Possibilities of HIV Education and Participatory Action Research, Kathleen Hentz

Women's Pathways to Mental Health in India: Comparing Psychiatry and Mystical-Spiritual Healing, Anubha Sood

Leading Clients to SEE-Sistas Embracing Empowerment: Counseling Strategies for Black Women Experiencing Race and Gender Related Distress, Chantal Stepney

SESSION 2: Gender & Entertainment Industries

'Who You Callin' a Bitch?' Black Women's Complicity in Misogynistic Hip Hop Mass Media, Imani M. Cheers

Madonna's Performance: Avant-Garde or Commercial Art for Sale?, Stephanie Crahen

Gender and Record Label Strategies for Success, Patti Lynne Donze

Queens of the Dancehall and Rudegyals: Rasta Women and Reggae-Dancehall in Brazil, Marisa McFarlane

SESSION 3: Penetrating Death

Penetrating Knowledge and Attacking Mysteries: The Cases of Dracula and Dora, Christine Gottlieb

Exposing Virgins in Early Norman England, Stephen Higa

The Importance of Gender Studies for Predynastic Egypt: A Case Study of Cemetery N7000 at Naga-ed-Deir, Krystal Lords

An Abbess Entombed: St. Mildrith and Female Monastic Enclosure, Ericka Swensson-Tsagakis

SESSION 4: Subaltern Sex

The Role Replaced: Unmarried Taiwanese Women and Foreign Brides, Yuning Chen and Monghwa Chin

Representation and Its Discomforts: Writing a Subaltern History of the 'Comfort Women', You-Sun Crystal Chung

Reframing Reproductive Oppression: Medical Research into Mortality at San Juan Pueblo, Lena McQuade

Liberal Intimacy and Racialized Women: Constructing the Japanese Female Child Abductor, Christina Owens

Papers from Thinking Gender 2008 at the California Digital Library

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