qsa workshop #3: (trans)gender

designed by talia young, <talia@sccs.swarthmore.edu>, fall 2000

note: the “alien anthropologist” was taken from the web site http://www.chaparraltree.com/raq.html

objectives:
- to familiarize people with some trans vocabulary, including:

  - transgendered
  - transsexual
  - tranny

- to make people think about the gender binary system, to question it and also to understand the problems with breaking it down
- to make people think about “how does this apply to me?”
- to make people think about “how does this apply to the queer movement?”

materials needed:
- volunteer alien anthropologist, preferably in costume

icebreaker:
- human knot

name game:
- give your name and a brief story of at least one alter ego that you have or have had

ground rules:
- confidentiality: not that you can’t talk about what goes on here (on the contrary, please do continue discussions outside of the workshop) but don’t go around saying “so-and-so was at the workshop and said such-and-such”
- respect: there are probably a lot of us coming from different places; please respect each other. feel free to disagree with each other but please use “i” statements
- no stupid questions: on a similar note, there are no stupid questions here; you should feel free to ask everything. i realize this can sometimes be a risky position to take, but i think it’s important. if you think a questions is offensive, you should say so, but that doesn’t mean that it was stupid. anyway, we’ll see how this one works.
- any others?

activity:
- introduce the anthropologist from mars. “it’s been stranded on Earth by a faulty starship drive and it wants us to explain gender to it.” let the discussion proceed for 15-20 minutes
- let’s talk about some definitions:

  - sex:
    - kate thinks sex just an act: the only questions are how you’d like to do it and who you’d like to do it with
    - others (often biologists) think that sex describes physical/biological differences, like genitalia

  - gender is more complicated than we all thought it was
  - kate divides gender into the following

    - gender assignment: “what do the authorities say i am?”
    - gender role: “what does the culture think i should do in my life?”
    - gender identity: “what do i think i am?” often conflated with gender assignment

  - gender attribution

  - transgendered
  - transsexual
  - transvestite
  - cross-dresser
  - FTM
  - MTF
  - pre-op
  - post-op

- how does sexual reassignment surgery work?
- do the gendered/transgendered exercise if you have time
- have a discussion about:
  - how does all this stuff apply to me?
  - how does all this stuff apply to the queer movement?
  - so now we’ve talked about the binary system and how it can be problematic. can we talk too about how breaking it down might be problematic as well?

follow up/wrap up/conclusion:
- go around and say something that you’ve learned or something that you’ve thought about or share a story