What is the difference between gender and sex?
Although our society often uses the terms interchangeably, “gender” and “sex” are NOT the same.

What is sex?
A person’s sex refers to one’s biology - specifically, one’s chromosomes, external genitalia, secondary sexual characteristics (development of breasts, pubic hair, etc.), and internal reproductive system. Sex is a term used historically and within the medical field to identify genetic/hormonal and physical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex. Sex is a legal assignment at birth. How sex is determined is socially constructed and historically and culturally variable.

What is gender?
Gender is a set of socially constructed, assigned behaviors and identity patterns which are often perceived to be intertwined with and/or equivalent to one’s sexual biology. In fact, gender is constructed and fluid, having multiple meanings across cultures, geographies, communities, and individuals. Although society promotes the dualistic concept that people are either a woman or a man, there are more than two genders.

Gender can be understood as having several components, including “Assigned Gender,” “Gender Expression,” “Gender Identity,” and “Gender Role.”

What is assigned gender?
Assigned gender is the declaration at birth that a person is a certain gender, usually based upon what that person’s sexual biology appears to be. One is then expected to grow up, comply to, and exist within a certain set of gender roles “appropriate” to one’s assigned gender. An example is a physician declaring “it’s a girl!” after the birth of a baby.

What is gender expression or gender presentation?
Gender expression, also called gender presentation, is the conscious or unconscious choices a person makes to visibly express their gender. Our society traditionally recognizes only feminine and masculine gender expressions. In actuality, there is a wide range of gender expressions that includes combinations of masculine and/or feminine qualities, as well as androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) qualities.

What is gender identity?
Gender identity is one’s sense of one’s own gender. It is the felt sense that one is a man, woman, both, neither, two-spirit, multi-gender, bi-gender or another configuration of gender.

What is gender role?
Gender role is the social expectation of how an individual should act, think, and feel based upon one’s assigned gender. A gender role is a social prescription that an individual must be defined as a man or a woman. Gender role includes expectations about behavior characterized as feminine or masculine according to cultural standards of a particular group.
What is gender oppression?
Gender oppression is verbal, physical, legal, emotional, sexual violence and legal discrimination based on one’s gender. Gender oppression oppresses the members of a society, regardless of whether or not they are gender-conforming, because the threat of it intimidates everyone into maintaining a gender binary system and prevents people from exploring other forms of gender expression and identification.

What are gender stereotypes?
Gender stereotypes are assumptions made about gender. Gender stereotypes are limiting - often people who do not relate to traditional categories such as woman or man are left without language to describe themselves, or are forced to identify with one or the other in an “either/or” sense.

Where can I find more information on gender and sex?

**Gender Public Advocacy Coalition**  
(GenderPAC)  
A national organization working to end gender discrimination through lobbying and education.  
www.gpac.org

**Gender Talk**  
www.gendertalk.com

**Gender Education and Advocacy**  
www.gender.org

**My Gender Worksbook**  
By Kate Bornstein

**Gender Trouble**  
By Judith Butler

**Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue**  
By Leslie Feinberg

**Sexing the Body**  
By Anne Fausto-Sterling