Sex and Gender: What’s the Difference?

The terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably, but refer to very different concepts. While they are related, they are not necessarily connected.

**Sex:** Biological and physiological characteristics that define human beings. These are typically labeled as male, female, or intersex, as identified by medical professionals. This is frequently referred to as ‘sex assigned at birth.’

**Gender:** The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s perception of their gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they identify with what they understand their options for gender to be.

Many cultures exist in a binary of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ being the only options for gender—however, other cultures recognize more. For example, in India and other Southeast Asian countries, ‘Hijra’ is a recognized third gender. In certain Indigenous American cultures, a person may identify as ‘Two Spirit.’