I think by far the clearest takeaway from this module is that sex, gender, and sexual orientation are each completely individual components of what make up a person’s identity. Additionally, these categories should really be broken down even further to consider things like romantic versus sexual orientation and gender identity versus gender expression.

This module was interesting to me because even though I have always understood that sex is completely detached from gender identity and sexual orientation, it’s still sometimes difficult, as a pre-med student, not to default to the concept of binary sex at birth. In life sciences classes we are taught about sexual dimorphism, how chromosomal abnormalities result in people who are intersex, how sex determines different physiological mechanisms and hormones, and how some diseases present higher in populations of one sex versus another. I think this is all important, true information that is ultimately being taught with the goal of having a better scientific understanding, but it does sometimes fail to account for the distinct separation between sex and gender or sexual identity. For this reason, I think it is critical for people to view these ideas through not only a biological lens, but also a sociological one. As described by Goffman, gender identity is completely a result of social construction, and should not be conflated with biological sex.

It’s an unfortunate reality that our society is set up to benefit mainly heterosexual, white, Protestant men. Pretty much any deviation from that invites scrutiny and often ridicule. The most notable and extreme example of this can be seen in the disproportionate number of Black trans women who have been assaulted or even murdered in the US, especially in the last few years. Black trans women likely make up the most at-risk group in our society for being victims of gender or sexual orientation-based discrimination. This a direct consequence of sociological precedents of racism, homophobia, and misogyny. For example, toxic masculinity comes from the idea that a man should be as masculine as possible, in that he should be a provider, a protector, invulnerable, and should be ultimately more capable than women or those who are more feminine. Conversely, this promotes the idea that women should be just the opposite, that they should be feminine, incapable of protecting or supporting themselves, and ultimately vulnerable. The *Codes of Gender* documentary illustrates how people, even on an unconscious level, try to fulfill these gender-based expectations during their day-to-day interactions and activities. The beliefs belie the dynamic in our society in which so many women and women-identifying individuals are the victims of sexual harassment and assault.

On a more positive note, more and more people are being educated about and becoming more accepting of the idea of gender identity and sexuality being a spectrum. Even in medicine, more and more providers are being taught how to be sensitive to the concerns of trans or gender non-binary or intersex patients and more LGBTQ+ health resources are becoming available. The more we can dispel ignorance and stereotypes that have existed for too long, the more normalized a more fluid understanding of gender and sexuality will become.