I thought this module gave a really good look at the role that toxic masculinity plays in our society. I think toxic masculinity often gets overlooked as people talking about gender inequality seem to usually talk about feminism and men committing wrongs against women without considering why so many men behave in this way. That said, I want to be very clear that talking about men being victims of a culture of toxic masculinity is NOT releasing them from culpability for their mistreatment of women or perpetuation of gender inequality.

From watching the two documentaries, *The Mask You Live In* and *Tough Guise 2*, it was very clear that toxic masculinity is based in what young men are told throughout childhood and that this is an issue that has been exacerbated for generations. Boys are told that they have to be tough, that to show emotion is weakness, and that things characterized as feminine are bad or “gay” or to be valued less. I thought it was really interesting how in *The Mask You Live In,* one of the experts talked about how young men are taught to equate respect with fear and violence because they have been told that “being a man” means constantly asserting oneself over others. I think this is a really important aspect of how toxic masculinity informs the social hierarchy and motivates violent or aggressive behavior. Where I went to middle school, there was a large low-income population and a lot of gang activity, even involving boys who only 12 of 13. In *Tough Guise 2,* the film demonstrated how especially in low income and especially African American and Latino communities, toxic masculinity drives gang behavior and can underlie gang violence. Especially in dynamics like a gang hierarchy, where respect is necessary to ensure one’s safety, it’s easy to see how violent behavior develops. Gang activity also a good example of why it’s important to consider the implications of masculinity through an intersectional lens. Young white men generally experience less pressure to become involved in gang activity but have other challenges that require a different approach. Additionally, men who grow up in higher socioeconomic communities also experience toxic masculinity differently.

In one of my other classes, we have been talking recently about how social hierarchies and social stress can impact neurological and immune health. We learned that in societies where the dominant group constantly has to re-assert their dominance through aggression, this group experiences high levels of toxic stress that can have serious health consequences. I thought this related very closely to what we are discussing in this class, especially since both films discussed the high rates of suicide and mental illness in boys and young men, in large part due to the pressures of living in a toxically masculine society.

Like many of the other concepts we’ve discussed in this class, I think toxic masculinity is hard to get rid of completely because it is so ingrained in what we are taught about the nuclear family, and men being the breadwinners, etc., but I think the best first step is awareness and changes in our educational system that would teach boys healthier ideas about masculinity from a young age.