



# Are We Getting Nastier?

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**Abstract.** Nasty actions such as bullying and discrimination cause serious mental problems and creates an increasing cycle of nastiness, which shows that we, cross-culturally, are getting nastier. This essay explores this problem from the aspects of gender-based and sexuality-based, through literature review and case study. Sexual harassment and bullying in workplaces and in school environments are investigated in this essay, to show how our nasty behavior has performed. I hold the view that we are getting nastier due to our increasing bullying behavior and discrimination, which will be argued in this essay.

**Keywords:** Nastiness, Nasty, Bully, Discrimination, Mental health problems

## 1 Introduction

Bullying is one of the nastiest actions in our daily life because it is harmful and omnipresent. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, in recent years,

“About 20% of students aged 12-18 experienced bullying nationwide” [19](U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [DHS], n.d.). Globally, one out of three young teens have recently been bullied [18](United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018). These are huge and shocking numbers, the effects of which are difficult to imagine but plain to see.

Nastiness can be defined psychologically as “a readiness to cause pain for the satisfaction of doing harm” [15](Stankov & Lee, 2016). It is directly related to “amoral social attitudes, grudge, proneness to aggression, and pro-violence” [15](Stankov & Lee, 2016). Bullying is defined as a repeated, unwanted, aggressive behavior that causes, “physical, psychological, social, or educational harm” [4](Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2021). Bullying is a key form of nastiness because it harms people in ways that can cause lasting damage to their mental health. Bullying behaviors have a strong connection to the “dark triad” of socially undesirable traits: narcissism, machiavellianism, and sub-clinical psychopathy [3](Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco & Vernon, 2011). These personality traits all are predictors of behavioral issues, including criminal activity and domestic violence [14](Southern Methodist University [SMU],

2022). While bullies may have their own mental health issues, which cannot excuse their nasty behavior. Bullying harms others, creating mental health issues in victims and forming a cycle of nastiness that is difficult to break.

Bullying is also rooted in culture, and various systems of discrimination cause this cycle of nastiness to continue unabated. For the purposes of this essay, I define “we” cross-culturally, because the data that I am using to support my points are spread across a wide range of age groups and cultures. We are getting nastier and the effects and progression of bullying in our society show this. To illustrate this, I will inquire two forms of discrimination to understand bullying and nastiness: gender and sexuality-based discrimination.

## **2 Gender-Based Discrimination and Bullying as Forms of Nastiness**

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a clear example of a form of bullying where we see ourselves getting nastier. It is defined as an unwelcome sexual behavior done to a person without their permission [22](Women Watch, n.d.). In workplaces, females might feel threatened to keep their jobs, becoming very frightened or pained following comments about their clothing or behavior. The workplace is one traditionally male-dominated space where gendered abuse of power occurs across cultures. Bullying appears between people who have power and those without [4](CDC, 2021). In workplaces, this can be a relationship between superiors and subordinates or among male and female co-workers.

Last year, a female worker from the Alibaba company accused her boss of rape, urgently protesting against company officials afterwards, without success [21](Wee & Zhong, 2021). She claimed that she was very frightened and helpless after the event, and hoped that there would be an appropriate response from the company. Despite her efforts, she never received support or compensation from Alibaba. The victim was even eventually fired from her job for speaking out publicly against her rapist [21](Wee & Zhong, 2021). Workplace sexual harassment harms one’s mental health so badly that it can make a person not want to go to work, socialize with coworkers, or worse, contemplate or attempt self-harm [5](Finne, Knardahl & Lau, 2011). In one study of Norwegian workers, it was uncovered, using self-reporting measured through the Hopkins symptom checklist, that the long-term sexual harassment in workplaces is a strong predictor of mental and even physical health problems like fibromyalgia [5](Finne et al., 2011). At Alibaba and countless other companies, gender discrimination is upheld by individual or group bullying behaviors like sexual harassment.

This kind of treatment in the workplace causes serious mental health problems, the proliferation of which is part of a cycle of nastiness. The system of gender discrimination in the workplace leads to divergent effects in terms of self-reporting mental health consequences. Males actually experience sexual harassment at similar rates to females, which also imposes negative consequences upon their mental health, but they are unlikely to report this or react to the event [11](Nielsen, Bjørkelo, Notelaers & Einarsen, 2010). Data show that people who experience sexual harassment are more likely to have

“decreased job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, [withdrawal] from work, ill physical and mental health, and even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder” [11](Nielsen et al., 2010). Thus, we see that sexual harassment in the workplace causes and reproduces lasting mental health problems in its victims and represents a core, bullying behavior that contributes to an overall increase in nastiness.

Both children and adults are capable of perpetuating gender-based harassment. We see this not only in workplaces but also in schools. Gender expression is defined as, “the way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through their appearance, dress, and behavior” [12](Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). Bullying is increasingly perpetuated in school environments against those who do not perform gender as society expects. Transgender and gender-nonconforming (GNC) students have been most harmed by this kind of bullying action.

The nastiest part of this behavior is that it causes serious, lingering mental health problems for these marginalized groups, as well as a rise in suicide rates.

In one case from British Columbia, Canada, a 13-year-old transgender student was bullied so badly that the victim could not remain in school or continue his studies. Before being forced out of their middle school, the student’s classmates would bully him by telling the student to “kill himself” [20](Walker, 2022). The student’s parents implied in response to this, “the implication is, 'you're a dog, you're not conventionally attractive like you're supposed to be.' It's a judgment on physical attractiveness, but done in a pack-like behaviour, which is kind of awful" [20](Walker, 2022). This kind of nasty, bullying behavior doesn’t allow transgender and GNC students to live without fear. The suicide and attempted suicide rates for transgender and GNC youths are much higher than that of cisgender youths. In one study of suicidality in transgender youth, it was uncovered that 56% of youth reported a previous suicide attempt and 86% reported symptoms of suicidality [2](Austin, Craig, D’Souza & McInroy, 2020). This is a persistently increasing trend [6](Heino, Ellonen & Kaltiala, 2020). Suicide and attempted suicide rates for transgender and GNC youths show the harmfulness of gender expression-based bullying. Through the cycle of trauma and the effects of suicide and suicidality perpetuated across families, schools, and friend groups, we see nastiness fester.

### **3 Sexuality-based Bullying: Severe and Lasting Effects**

Mental health problems are not only a result of gender discrimination, but also an occurrence concerning sexuality-based discrimination. LGB (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual) students are subject to unique forms of bullying, yet the mental health effects they suffer are similar to those seen in gender-based bullying. Bullying among LGB youths occurs in school, but also in spaces where they should be most comfortable, say, their homes. If nastiness can be measured through the effects of bullying, then we see that discrimination-based bullying like this often causes the nastiest consequence to the victim - suicide.

A large number of LGB youth face the serious problem of rejection from their family. Not all families support their children for being who they are, putting youth in a sexual minority group under increased pressure. Some family members even say

unbelievably harmful words to their children. Mia, a lesbian teenager, was re-traumatized by having to go back in the closet when she returned from college during the COVID-19 pandemic because of her Evangelical Christian parents who rejected her sexuality. Her parents told her, “you can't be gay; you have to leave that at the cross if you want to be a Christian” [10](Neighmond, 2020). Amit Paley, the CEO of the Trevor Project, an organization dedicated to helping LGBTQ youth in the US, says, “in fact, the emotional damage that rejecting parents have is enormous.” Data shows that LGB youth whose families reject their sexuality are eight times more likely to attempt suicide than those who do not have rejecting families [10](Neighmond, 2020). Additionally, having one supportive adult in a young person's life reduced his or her risk of suicide by 40% [17](The Trevor Project, 2021).

Schools, which should be safe environments for all students to pursue learning, are often not for LGB students. They experience unique forms of bullying, mental health problems, and trauma stemming from school environments. Nigel Shelby, a black, gay 15-year-old student in Alabama, USA committed suicide in 2019 as a result of the bullying he experienced in school and the subsequent depression it caused him, despite his supportive family [1](Allen, 2019). Data show that LGB youth have a higher risk of self-harm than their heterosexual counterparts and also a high suicide rate [9](Mental Health America [MHA], n.d.).

LGB bullying produces uniquely nasty effects, which are almost always more intense than those in their heterosexual classmates. According to one article, “nearly 43 percent of gay, lesbian and bisexual high school students have seriously considered attempting suicide, compared to about 15 percent of their heterosexual counterparts” [1](Allen, 2019). More than one-third of LGB respondents had missed a day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe there [9](MHA, n.d.). Additionally, LGB youth are more than twice as likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol than their heterosexual peers [16](Stop Bullying Now!, n.d.).

## 4 Conclusions

According to one study, over 25% of humans deal with mental illness at some point in their lives [8](Jett, 2019). However, mental health problems are still not treated seriously in our society - another form of discrimination. Because of this, when systems of discrimination and bullying cause mental health problems to form, the victims often have no places to turn for help, and their loved ones have no way to effectively cope with their problems. In already marginalized populations, like non-gender conforming and non-heterosexual youth, this cycle of nastiness is harder to break because systems of discrimination present give them even fewer options for support when in crisis.

In conclusion, we, cross-culturally, are getting nastier and this is shown through the increase in bullying behaviors and the self-perpetuating cycle of mental health problems coming from that. The phenomena of gender-based harassment and sexuality-based bullying are serious, and contribute to cycles of increasing nastiness. Physical bullying across school environments is a standard practice in recent years, which has shown signs of increasing in some meta-analyses [23](Youth Truth Student Survey,

n.d.). Additionally, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many forms of bullying have worsened for the groups discussed in this essay. Violence against LGBTQ individuals, including hate crimes, has increased [7](Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Sexual harassment in the workplace has also increased, despite many not being in-person [13](Roepe, 2021).

Thus, we can see that LGBTQ+ youth and people are suffering gender-based discrimination and experiencing higher rates of bullying, which incurs greater rates of mental health problems and often, suicide. The examples in my essay clearly show that the lives of LGBTQ+ youth and those subjects to gender discrimination are tough, and sometimes they suffer because of bullying and systems of discrimination in place. In addition, these bullying behaviors and discriminatory systems cause severe and lasting mental health problems, which leads to increasing cycles of nastiness that are difficult to break. Ultimately, we are getting nastier due to the individual, bad behavior of bullies, alongside deeply entrenched systems of discrimination. Although we are getting nastier overall, through targeted community work and active participation in supportive foundations, we can still push to make the world and our different cultures more welcoming and inclusive.

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