

Animals Are Better Companions than Humans. Here's Why.

BUSHRA ZAMAN

If you tend to obsess over animals featured in movies and TV shows more than the human characters, you may have wondered how lucky these fictional people are to have such wonderful pets and animal friends. I completely understand you; animals can be better companions than humans at times, and these are the reasons why.

IT IS EASY TO PREDICT WHERE THEIR LOYALTIES LIE

The way a dog wags its tail whenever it sees its owner after a long day, or even how a cat softly purrs while resting on your lap, with zero verbal communication, these animals manage to express their feelings towards you clearly. There is no need to analyse their behaviour, no unnecessary drama, no plot-twists, no pretending to like someone when deep down you actually hate them; things are exactly as they seem. Is there not a movie involving a scene where a dog was waiting for their owner to come home, unaware of how the owner had passed away? I'm not crying, you are.

THEY ARE THE ARGUABLY THE BEST COMPANIONS, EVEN IN SILENCE

Suppose you have had a bad day, and are exhausted. You want to take a walk but



are not in the mood to talk to anyone. A dog may prove to be the perfect companion in this case, where it would be happy to go on a walk with you and your very presence is appreciated, without you even having to speak.

THEY MANAGE TO BE A TRUSTWORTHY SECURITY ALARM

Dogs, birds, and even turtles can understand the presence of a stranger in the house.

Many tame animals can recognise their owners from others. You can shower them with love and protect them from harm, and they can try their best to do the same for you. For example, picture a certain cartoon character that tries to protect its owners despite being a cowardly dog. You could even train your bird to dive into people's faces on command when you have an annoying guest over, and can use

this as an excuse to get rid of them.

THEY ARE LIKE HUMAN BABIES MINUS THE POTENTIAL UNGRATEFUL-TEENAGE CHILD PHASE

You won't hear pets randomly saying/indicating that you embarrass them. Cats can have plenty of mood swings, but the mood swings are not an age-specific phase they are expected to go through. The fact that you can easily find the cutest tiniest outfits for your pets at any age is a definite plus point.

THEY CAN EVEN HELP YOU GAUGE THE HUMANITY OF OTHER PEOPLE

Not everyone adores animals, which is alright, but living creatures deserve to be treated with respect. Animals can help you identify any person who is, for example, alright with animal cruelty, after which you may absolutely cut them off from your life. This saves both time and effort being put into a friendship that would have otherwise amounted to nothing.

Do you have pets who you believe are better companions than a lot of people you know?

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushra-zaman31@yahoo.com

My Love-Hate Relationship with the Colour Pink

RAISA CHOWDHURY

The colour pink and I have shared the most intense love-hate relationship over the course of my life. As kids, we were told that pink is for girls and blue is for boys, and I didn't mind that statement then, like I do now.

Like most girls, I loved pink. Everything around me had to be pink – my room, my clothes, my Barbie's clothes (I was a Barbie freak, so that's a lot of pink). At the same time, I was also the girl in class who would lift four chairs at once, just to make a point, whenever a boy was asked to fetch chairs.

Both these aspects of my personality had been coexisting in harmony. Up until that point, I never associated pink with weakness or a lack of substance. Why would I? It was just a colour after all. That would soon change.

I cannot put a finger on exactly when my perception of femininity had shifted. It could be Regina George from *Mean Girls*, the cunning and manipulative high school bully, Jackie from *That '70s Show*, the self-absorbed, superficial, and snobby girlfriend or even Robin Scherbatsky from *How I Met Your Mother*, the aspirational and independent tomboy, that had triggered this shift. At school and on TV, there was no getting away from the constant reminder that pink was "too girly" and "too girly" was either petty or weak.

So began my efforts to reject and denounce my femininity in every possible way. If being a tomboy meant I would be taken seriously, I was ready to give up pink. At that point, I wish I had reminded myself the story of my favourite childhood character, Barbie. Her doll landed on the moon four years before Neil Armstrong did, she's a living (okay, non-living) example of how smart ultra-feminine women can truly be.

I am sure every aspect of my life was affected by this newfound outlook. So deep was its reverberation, that I had entered my teenage years without ever experimenting



with makeup, my wardrobe was largely laddish clothes with little colour. I had turned into the so-called "alpha female" of my circle who was loud, "bossy", opinionated, yet demonised. I was yet to realise that there really is no escape from fighting society's idea of what a woman is, should, or shouldn't be. Neither had I realised the internal misogyny behind these stereotypes.

With slightly more wisdom, I often look back and wonder how different my style, taste and behaviour may have been today, if I had not forced every ounce of "girliness" out of me. For a very long time, I was so focused

on being society's definition of strong and independent, while actively trying to not fit into the same society's interpretation of femininity, I forgot how terribly wrong societal expectations often are. I don't know who decides what is feminine and what is masculine, but what I do know now is that as long as pink is feminine, pink is strong and intelligent.

Raisa avoids all her obligations to spend time laughing at badly edited memes on Pinterest. Send her your favourite songs at raisa.2001@yahoo.com

A Cyberspace Unsafe for Women

ADHORA AHMED

Your phone suddenly buzzes to announce a notification. You pick it up, expecting something important. However, the notification comes from the requests folder of one of your text messaging apps. You are almost certain what it looks like, a completely random stranger, most probably a man, sent you an inappropriate text.

If you're feeling indifferent, you just ignore it. If it bothers you too much, you block the person. If you're feeling light-hearted enough to make fun of it, you take a screenshot and send it to your friends. If you believe in its meme potential, your screenshot might even make its way to some subreddit dedicated to hilariously poor attempts at flirting.

Women on social media are familiar with the scenario above. In most cases, we tend to brush off such attempts to breach our online privacy, because these things seem relatively harmless compared to the more pressing issues when it comes to women, such as the recent spike in gender-based violence. However, are such acts really that harmless?

Women are harassed online in many ways, and unsolicited texts are just the tip of the iceberg, along with friend requests from unknown people. You must have come across revolting comments under pictures of female celebrities or of any woman that goes viral, most of which can be classified under hate speech. You most probably have heard stories of leaked private pictures, videos or information without consent – also known as doxing – and the devastating toll it takes on the victims.

"I have been harassed online by men on many counts. Often, they were in the form of continuous pestering texts that start off nice, but get more degrading with time. Sometimes, their texts are accompanied by inappropriate pictures or videos," shares Fabiha Fairouz*, a freelance writer.

"Once, when I was in high school, a group of boys decided to bully my friends and I in a group chat," says Zareen Tasnim*, who is now completing her undergraduate degree abroad. "They made very weak yet unacceptable attempts at insulting me, which had to do with my financial status, my dual nationality, my looks etc. They were even

petty enough to make comments about me sending memes in that group chat."

This is a serious problem which has only increased during the pandemic since we are forced to spend more time online than ever before. According to a recent report by *The Daily Star*, 80 percent of the victims of cyberbullying in Bangladesh are adolescent girls and women in their early twenties. In another report by *Dhaka Tribune*, most victims of cyberbullying do not report to the police, hence the statistic does not take into account the cybercrimes that go unreported.

The question arises, why don't people report cybercrimes? Anika Anjum Iftee, Head of Content Development and Marketing at WeMen View, a non-profit social welfare organisation which works to raise awareness against cyber harassment of women, thinks that such cases are generally taken less seriously than physical ones. "It's because there are too many factors to consider. With the ongoing calling out culture, the conversation around things like unsolicited texts could be easily manipulated, which can make the main discourse rather confusing. Also, since how we behave on social media is an evolving process, there is still so much to define and to make laws on concretely. While all of that happens, a lot of us will be unfortunate enough to fall victim to online harassment."

The fact that technology is evolving too fast for us to catch up on the expanding confines of online harassment rings very true. Almost every day, new strides are being made in technology with more opportunities for harassers to abuse



them. In this dizzying mess, no wonder tech-savvy women are struggling to deal with a constant barrage of harassment, both big and small. "I don't think there's much to do. In my experience of receiving unwanted texts, I find that confronting these men is very draining because most see no wrong in their actions and will continue to verbally abuse you or others," Fabiha adds.

It is as clear as daylight that the toxic standards most men in this region have been brought up to contribute to their interactions online. The firm belief that they will get away with harassing women in both physical and virtual spaces unfortunately enables them to do so. In addition, the common yet unjust shaming of female victims further encourages these abusers to carry on, as Zareen and her friends had faced, "This cyberbullying incident was reported to the school management, but they didn't fulfil their promises. Instead, they resorted to victim blaming by accusing us of isolating one of our classmates who egged those boys on, even though we weren't friends with her in the first place."

For all kinds of abuse, for too long, women have been putting in all the work to rage against the injustice. In the case of cyber harassment, from tightening privacy settings to filing cases, women still carry the burden to take preventive measures.

However, prevention is not the only cure, at least in this case.

In order to see an end to harassment not limited to the digital realm, education comes first, as Anjum explains, "Measures should be integrated into the way we socialise from an early stage. At WeMen View, we want to teach children how to respect other genders and expand to do workshops with parents too. Humility and kindness are very important in the process of learning how to behave. Children need to know about the obvious red flags because if we're not aware of the danger, we won't be ready to tackle it."

In the end, it all comes down to getting acquainted with some very simple, basic concepts: consent and respecting one's personal space, and that these apply to everyone regardless of any parameter that you can think of. If we keep all these in mind, perhaps one day all the spheres we occupy, the virtual one included, can be safe for everyone.

**Names have been changed to protect identity*

References

1. The Daily Star (December 10, 2020). 80% of cyberbullying victims are women: Cyber Crime Division of DMP.
2. Dhaka Tribune (September 24, 2019). 70% of women facing cyber harassment are 15-25 years in age.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY