

A case for open communication about dating

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh still has a conservative view on dating. Most parents have a very straightforward stance on this topic. “Don’t do it,” they say. This anti-dating mindset means young people usually cannot turn to their parents for relationship advice and are left to figure it out on their own.

I have come across many posts on social media where people share their bad dating experiences. Although everyone has a fair share of those, some of them made me feel genuinely curious as to how the person posting it failed to see the red flags, and how someone could treat their partner so poorly.

However, most adolescents get confused about what to expect out of romantic relationships since they do not receive proper guidance. This may lead to them struggling to figure out how they should be treated, or how they should treat their partner.

The problem with trying to figure this out all on one’s own is the possibility of relying on the wrong sources. Young people may consciously or subconsciously rely on movies and TV shows to form their expectations. The issue with this approach is that movies and TV shows are usually unrealistic and primarily made to entertain, not to impart wisdom.

Additionally, many movies and TV shows glorify unhealthy approaches to dating. With the right background music and set up, it is fairly easy to convince young audiences that the portrayal of a relationship in the movie is romantic rather than toxic.

The truth is, although most people tend to make dating mistakes, a part of why it is so common in Bangladesh is probably because of the taboo surrounding it. Adolescents dating their peers is not uncommon these days, however, most of them are forced to step into it cluelessly, as parents seldom agree to



guide their kids through it due to their disapproval of it.

Although learning from experience can teach valuable lessons, many parts of our personalities come to play when pursuing a romantic interest. Dating advice is just not advice on what to do in a certain scenario, it is also about analysing it. Many things contribute to the way we handle these situations, including, prior experi-

ence, our level of self-esteem, maturity etc.

Open communication on healthy approaches to relationships can allow young people to learn about these factors with ease. This can also build trust between parents and their children, as well as teach the latter that they can turn to their parents for help, instead of feeling the need to keep it a secret.

Many parents are still hesitant about

accepting the new norm, but those who have accepted it, can stay involved in their children’s personal lives and make sure they can avoid sour experiences or avoid becoming the cause of somebody else’s sour experience.

Nuzhat zones out every ten minutes. Tell her to snap out of it at nuzhatchowdhury07@gmail.com

Who’s playing marbles at night?

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

It was the dead of the night. The sun had already melted down into inky blackness. As I went to sleep armouring myself from the buzz of the blood-sucking mosquitoes, something very sinister registered into my ears.

No, it wasn’t the ominous ticking of the hands of the wall clock that sounded like a warning that an explosive is about to go off, rather some strange noises from my neighbours upstairs. Every other day, I hear my neighbour’s children playing marbles on the floor right above mine. On top of that, they never seem to be satisfied with their furniture arrangement. The furniture-dragging noises surround me every time I close my eyes. What have they been up to? Unless...

If you have ever lived in an apartment in Bangladesh, you have most certainly heard these noises. The sounds of doors slamming, chairs shifting, and marbles dropping are so ubiquitous in the commotion around us that we don’t stop to think



where they are coming from.

Yes, it might have crossed your mind whether your house is haunted by the spirits of playful evil kids trying to get your attention. Though it may be a bit of a stretch, what else could it be?

The answer to this question is pretty simple. It is not all in your head, rather in your pipes! Hydraulic shock, also known as “water

hammer”, is a common occurrence in piping systems.

When the water flow inside the pipes is quickly changed or interrupted, a surge of pressure ensues, which hits the pipe walls. This produces noises by causing the walls of the pipes to vibrate. When you flush the toilet or turn off your tap abruptly, the water pressure changes and may

result in hydraulic shock. The hammering and pounding noises from the pipes filtered through the cold, hard concrete may be mistaken for marbles rolling or furniture dragging.

Another apparent reason behind these clanks and bangs could be the air trapped inside the pipes. When these soapy air bubbles pop, they produce an echo that can imitate falling marbles. It takes a while for the water pressure inside the pipes to stabilise. So, the noise may be prolonged.

Furthermore, it might also be that the concrete and pipes in our buildings expand and shrink in summer and winter, which can give rise to such sounds. At night, the white noise around us dims down to some extent. As a result, these additional noises become more pronounced and eerie.

Sound travels, and just like ghosts, they deceive you into thinking that your upstairs’ neighbours have gone into a frenzy. That’s why, even if you live on the topmost floor, these “supernatural” sounds won’t give you a break.

But then again, we can’t fully rule out the possibility of it being paranormal, can we?

Farnaz Fawad Hasan is a disintegrating pool noodle wanting to stay afloat. Reach her at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com

WHAT WOMEN WEAR

The impacts of clothing restrictions on young women

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

One would think that a threat to our existence, for example, climate change, would bring us together. Needless to say, it didn’t. That doesn’t mean there’s nothing that people care deeply and passionately about.

The trick to finding them is to think of things that should actually be nobody’s business but your own. Such as what clothing one wears as a woman.

Fellow females will resonate with me on how buying and wearing clothes is rarely as simple as buying and wearing what you like. It’s actually quite a burden, since one has to appease the subjective tastes and views of every single person who’ll see you wearing them. They’ll have an opinion, and many won’t keep it to themselves. We could choose to not care and do as we please, but it’s not that simple. It’s a deep-rooted problem.

Not to sound like a broken record but, it starts at home. In Bangladesh, the first and most prominent restriction to the range of women’s clothing is the idea of modesty. What’s problematic about this is when and how this idea is introduced to young, impressionable girls. It’s usually when they start experiencing puberty – an inherently sensitive time. When struggling to adjust to the sudden changes in their body, they often feel a sense of urgency coming from older family members that say they have something shameful to hide.

Aside from all the confusion, frustration, sudden pain and gore, young girls also find the time to start exploring who they are and how they’d like to express themselves. For many, this includes a newfound interest in their appearance and fashion.

Today, fashion trends are global. We are exposed to international pop culture, and presently, local media follows global fashion trends as well. But families and societies restrict us from being able to participate ourselves. Being able to wear what we feel confident in brings forth the satisfaction of being able to express ourselves and changes how we approach life and work.

Grade 11 student of European Standard School Fairooj Rushmila Suhita’s experience tells us how important it is to today’s youth to have control over their choice of attire.

“Having the liberty to choose my clothes makes me feel assured about my identity and self-concept. When I am forced to wear clothes that don’t align with my own fashion sense, not only do I feel violated but also that my body isn’t worthy of being seen and appreciated. It affects how I carry myself back home to feel horrible when I don’t feel pretty enough in the pictures or can’t recognise myself because the clothes don’t resonate with me,” Fairooj shares.

It is true that we are a long way away from an accepting society where we can all be ourselves. But this is very rarely, if ever, constructively explained to young girls. The usual approach is to shame them for their choices. This may include implications of how wanting to dress a certain way is “inappropriate” or attention seeking.

When young girls and women do make the choice to dress modestly or based on their personal and/or religious values, that too comes with barriers, as illustrated by Jarin Tasnim Raka’s experience, who is a Master’s student at North South University.

“A few months into university, I made the choice to wear the hijab. Immediately, I started receiving unexpected comments. A ‘friend’ asked if this was a trick to make my face look thinner, another asked if I was wearing ‘fashion hijabs’ to participate in a trend. Some people asked questions like if I was wearing the hijab, why I was at a concert, or why I wore makeup. At times, my family asked me to take my hijab off on our way to

a dawat because it didn’t align with the values of the people we were visiting and I apparently had to adhere to theirs,” recalls Jarin.

Strangers’ concern over clothing is a source of inconvenience in the daily lives of Bangladeshi women. Jarin shared an instance where, during the act of crossing a road, someone called for her attention and asked her to fix her oma. Women on a daily basis are informed of slip-ups in their clothing such as visible straps in very accusatory tones, which I believe is unnecessary and done just for the sake of doing so.

When left to feel ashamed of their choices, young girls often start believing there’s something wrong with their bodies, which is why they must always be carefully concealed. My mother’s urgency to hide my development made me ashamed of my body when I was going through puberty.

“There were times I was slut-shamed by teachers for not wearing an oma at school even though I was wearing extremely loose kameez. The idea of covering up my chest made me feel like my growth was something to hide, so I would slouch in order for my clothes to seem looser. This practice led to posture issues that made me look and feel underconfident in public spaces,” shares Rasmissa Haque*, a grade 12 student of Vigarunnisa Noon School and College.

The sheer emphasis on how women dress contributes to their safety, or more frankly the idea that they need to dress a certain way not to be sexually harassed is a problematic narrative in and of itself. Exposure to such narrative, coming especially from her close ones, demoralises the woman herself.

It’s natural to internalise the values of the people around you when you’re exposed to them from a young age. In this context, women start to feel as if it is somehow their responsibility to make sure they aren’t harassed. In the all too common scenario that she is, she may blame herself for it, because she had failed to dress or act a certain way.

Restrictions fall even heavier on women who do not have the much glorified, conventionally “beautiful”, thin body type. When they exercise their right to

dress how they feel confident, often they are asked not to wear certain clothes because they would look “provocative” or “it wouldn’t suit them as it does thinner girls.”

It’s hard enough to be confident and feel beautiful when all around you, beauty is described to be something you’re not.

Nayara Noor, a student of Brac University, believes that parental regard is crucial for young girls to build a strong base that upholds lifelong self-confidence. She says, “Parents are the ones you seek the most validation from as a young child. Constantly being told that nothing you wear makes you look good takes a huge toll on you where you constantly tear down your own appearance and hence struggle with low self-esteem.”

“The problem with telling people it’s ‘for their safety’ is that we’re having conversations with the wrong group of people. If you’re not safe wearing certain clothes then you shouldn’t be policed, the person who is the threat should be policed. Instead of shaming their daughters, parents should teach their sons. This is a problem that’s beyond bad parenting or sexism, it feeds into more serious issues like rape culture and victim-blaming,” Nayara adds.

Moreover, little things about how young girls are brought up can have lifelong negative impacts on their mental health and sense of self-worth.

The idea that it is women who “provoke” or “seduce” to warrant inappropriate behaviour from men, makes allowances for society to objectify and view a woman differently according to how she dresses, implying once again that a woman’s worth is determined by her appearance, and not that she too, is human.

People are often adamant that women must always dress in cultural attire. “Western clothing” and “immodest/inappropriate clothing” are terms used interchangeably. The same is not expected from men, in fact, the norm for men’s casual wear is Western clothing. A bride donning a gown at her wedding is sure to face controversy from her relatives and/or on social media, while a suit is perfectly acceptable for the groom. Why are women expected to carry culture on their backs with their clothing?

Presently, it’s a common practice for women to defy and rebel against said restrictions and norms and prioritise their own choices. As much as we want to fight on, it is quite tiring to keep up, as apparent from Ramisa’s experience, “As I got older, I started standing up for my own clothing choices. This resulted in multiple feuds with my family. It was extremely draining to constantly fight with the people who decide everything about my life, but it’s something I have to keep on doing for myself.”

In reality, trying to defy these restrictions is seldom a pleasant experience. It is hard to feel confident when relatives, teachers, elders in general jab at your attire and shame you for it.

It is a big step for most girls to try to heal from the damage done to their self-esteem from years of being told by media and society that she cannot dress in certain ways or deserve to be fashionable. When her attempts to overcome this is squashed

with pointless restrictions, displays of negative judgment, and narrow-minded accusatory comments, we have all failed women as a society.

Amrin Tasnim Rafa is always confused, it’s literally her dominant personality trait. This is maybe her email, she can’t be sure: amrinrafa@gmail.com

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