

3. Sample Essay: What Makes Me Laugh

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English 1213

21 Feb. 2022

Cats and Humor: The Purrfect Pick-Me-Up

Everyone has their own sense of humor and their own reasons to laugh, developed over a lifetime and reflective of our individual needs and experiences. While many things in this world make me laugh, the most consistent source of humor in my life lately comes from cats. Whether watching online cat videos on *YouTube* and *TikTok* or laughing at the hijinks of the three felines who live in my house, these little weirdos never fail to get a chuckle out of me.

Sometimes I think the internet was created solely for the sharing of cat videos—or at least I think the world would be a better place if all we did on the internet was share cat videos. Lucky for us, while there are lots of other things to do and learn on the web, there are plenty of cat videos to watch too. Any number of these videos can make me laugh, but lately I've been really enjoying the way the *TikTok* users edit short and hilarious cat content using the app and its many sounds. One of my favorite such videos uploaded by @meredithdylan captures the essence of what makes a great, funny cat *TikTok*. In the video, captioned “my working theory is that she’s stupid,” we see a cat approach an automated feeder looking for a meal. For those unfamiliar with these devices, they are designed to help limit a pet’s food intake and help control weight. Many cat people end up needing feeders like this as housecats are notoriously lazy and can get fat, leading to complications like diabetes down the road. The feeder works by limiting access to food except at certain times. When the cat is allowed to eat and approaches the feeder, a chip in its collar or an implant signals the feeder and opens the food bowl giving the cat access. When the cat is not allowed to eat, the feeder will not open. In the more advanced models, like the one in @meredithdylan’s video, a message might appear (as if the cat can read it) letting everyone know that now is not feeding time. This is precisely what we see in the video as the cat approaches the feeder and a message displays on its screen saying “Sorry! No mo [sic.] until later!” To a cat lover, seeing a hungry cat denied food might not inspire laughter. On the contrary, some might initially feel sorry for this furry girl. However, because of the clever editing, such a reaction quickly turns to humor as the 9-second video unfolds.

Upon reaching the closed feeder and seeing it fail to open, our feline heroine responds by looking at the camera—most likely held by her owner/person—then back at the feeder. The video then cuts to a slightly closer shot of the cat standing menacingly over the feeder and glaring at its forbidden food. As all this happens the sound of a piano, voice, and drum machine play. Many viewers will recognize this as the intro to Rihanna’s “Take a Bow,” but you don’t need to know the song for the video to make you laugh. All you need to do is listen

to the lyrics. It's the lyrics that makes the video really humorous because right as the editing shifts from the cat looking at the camera to her staring intensely at the unopened feeder, the opening line of the first verse of the song plays: "You look so dumb right now" sings Rihanna, and viewers immediately associate the "you" in the song with the cat in the video. Every time I see this video it brings a smile to my face and a pleasant chuckle. Watching a cat struggle to understand the machinations of human beings and being playfully mocked by RiRi's soulful voice is exactly the kind of pleasant, lighthearted, humorous content that can lift my spirits on a tough day.

Any time I need a quick jolt of joy, I know that cats have got my back both in the form of the delightful videos that populate my social media feeds and my actual cats at home. Of course, I'm not the only one who loves a funny cat. The stranglehold that cat videos, cat memes, and internet cats like "Grumpy Cat" have on online culture attests to a larger truth about one of the ways that humans find humor. While many of us laugh at many things, a vast population of people love to laugh at cats specifically, and an even larger group at pets/animals in general. Recognizing this potentially provides us another way of understanding our relationship to nonhuman animals and our senses of humor. Or maybe the truth is simpler than that: cats are just funny.

Work Cited

@meredithdylan "My working theory is that she's stupid." *TikTok*, 10 Jan. 2022.
https://www.tiktok.com/@meredithdylan/video/7051717994522807599?is_copy_url=1&is_from_webapp=v1.