

Empathy, Abuse & Animals

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Under all the viral animal abuse videos, almost unfailingly, there are comments that ask, "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" This question is not trivial, in fact, it demands for a sign of empathy on the part of the abuser.

Videos of animal abuse are not uncommon to pop up on social media. However, a recent video stood out. A boy questions his peer on why a dog has the audacity to take up space beside them, before kicking it into a deep, open drain, filled to the brim with filthy sludge. This might seem relatively innocuous compared to the bloodied up animals we often, unfortunately, have to see. What makes this video truly unsettling is how the two boys burst out into laughter upon their "achievement" of making the dog whimper.

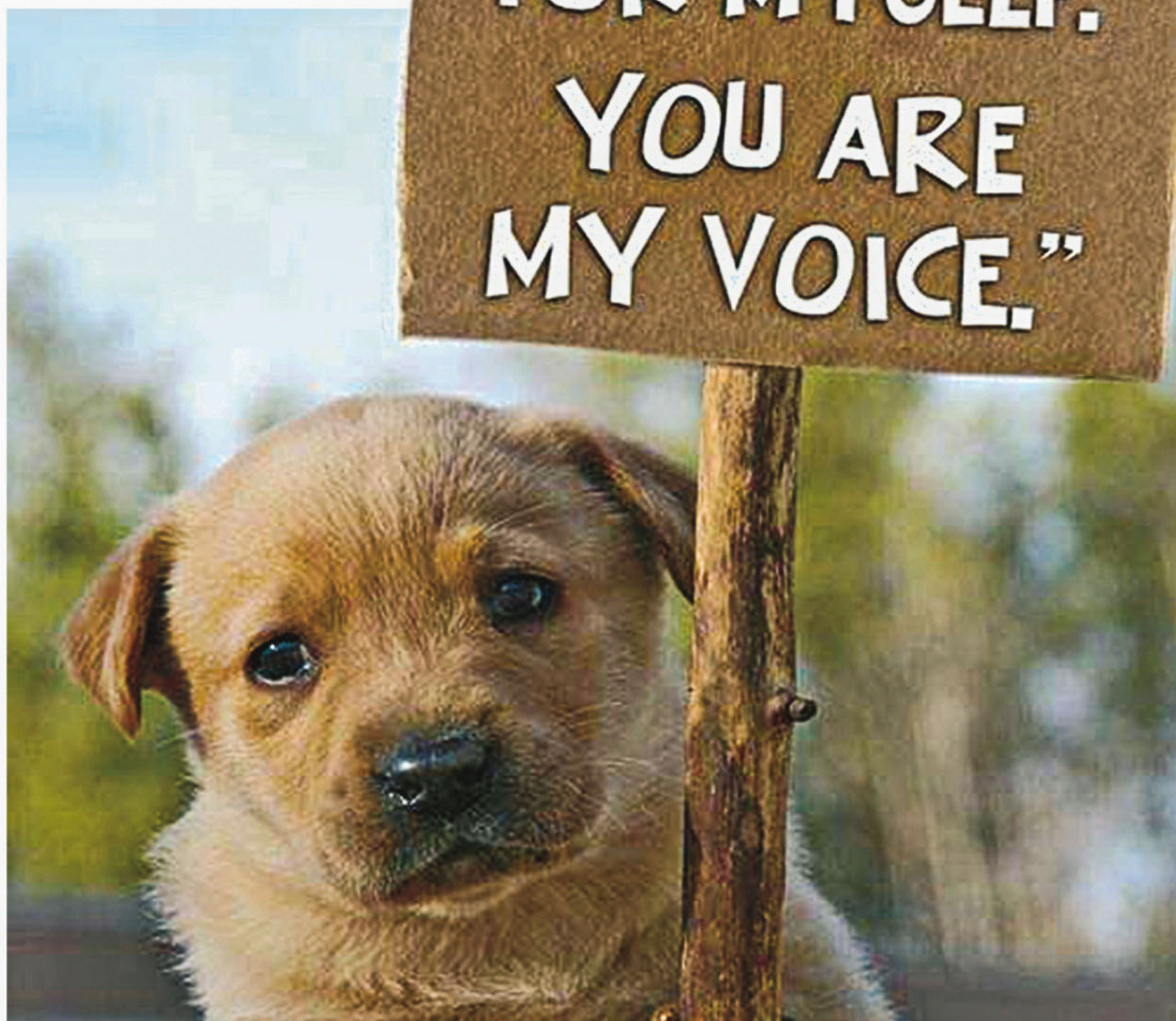
These boys weren't angry, they weren't provoked; they were simply amused by the idea of abusing a defenceless dog. Regrettably, they're far from being the only ones guilty of such heinous acts. In an alarming number of animal abuse cases, it's found that the culprits don't have their actions graze, let alone burden, their conscience. The reason behind this is often a complete and utter lack of empathy.

This inability to understand another being's pain isn't simply a personality quirk that can be overlooked. There is an ever increasing body of evidence supporting the notion that there is a strong link between animal cruelty and violent behaviour as extreme as to lead to homicide.

After all, if a person is incapable of feeling the pain and suffering brought upon an innocent animal by their actions, or even simply understanding the consequences of their senselessness, would it really be a surprise if they exhibit the same level of apathy towards people? While it would be ridiculous to assume every person who kicks a dog has immediate potential to become a murderer, it must be kept in mind that their acts are hinting towards a deficit in their emotional balance.

The video generated approximately 140,000 views at the time of writing, along with about 400 shares and 600 comments. The rage is directed mainly at the boys, however, there was someone filming the entire scene – and silently condoning what was happening throughout. Same is true for all videos shot by an observing party and everyone who decides to watch without action against it.

Inexplicably, there have been some who have tried to downplay the significance of such an act, terming the whole incident an overreaction to boys pulling pranks and having fun. For a minute, let us ignore the cruelty of the boys' actions. Never mind the fact that the poor animal could have realistically spent its last moments drowning in sewerage, or the long term health effects of being exposed to drain water it will probably suffer for the rest of its life, or the gripping fear of all humans it will have to



endure thanks to their "prank". The fact that their definition of fun is kicking a living, breathing thing about speaks volumes.

Perhaps the boys have understood the dreadfulness of what they have done, and perhaps, in hindsight, they would not have done so. Imagine all the other actions *not* caught on camera. As guilty as the culprits are, equally accountable are all the bystanders choosing to look the other way and the indifferent people who could not be bothered less. What does that say about their level of empathy? While everyone is quick to express their outrage on social media, many of the same would simply ignore it even if it happened right in front of them.

Animal abuse is a despicable act and no explanation or excuse can exempt a perpetrator. In fact, culprits should be monitored closely as to ensure their acts don't reoccur,

or worse yet, escalate. And as for others, if you see something like this going down, the least you could do is go up to them and tell them it's wrong. Perhaps, the best way to correct a lack of empathy is to practice compassion.

References:

Exploring Empathy and Callous. Christie Hartman. Hageman. Williams. Mary. Ascione. July 25, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/magazine/13dogfighting-t.html>

With a keen eye and a broken brain to mouth filter, Mahejabeen Hossain Nidhi has a habit of throwing obscure insults from classic novels at random people who may or may not have done anything to warrant them. Drop her a line at mahejabeen.nidhi@gmail.com