ARE DOGS A CHILD’S BEST FRIEND?
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE CHILD-DOG RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT
Scientific Dissertation
Wordcount: 26,986

Marlies Bockstal
Student number: 01510913

Supervisor: Prof. Bart Van de Putte

Master thesis submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Sociology

Academic year: 2018 - 2019
Deze pagina is niet beschikbaar omdat ze persoonsgegevens bevat.
Universiteitsbibliotheek Gent, 2021.

This page is not available because it contains personal information.
Ghent University, Library, 2021.
Preface

There are a lot of people that I’d like to thank for all the help throughout this master thesis, my final work of my studies in sociology.

First of all, I’d like to thank all the wonderful parents, children, and dogs, for their enthusiastic participation. Without all of them, this study on the child-dog relationship wouldn’t have been possible. I also want to thank the people who helped me find these families who participated in this research.

The next person I’d like to thank is my promotor Bart Van de Putte, who mentored me throughout the past two years. His advice, tips and feedback helped me in successfully finishing this challenging research project.

Of course, I want to thank my family as well, especially my parents for letting me study sociology and for their encouragement and support during the ups-and-downs of the past four years. My sister is also someone I really want to thank, because even though she was on the other side of the world the past year, she was still there for me when I needed her.

I would like to thank all my friends and my fellow sociology students for their help, support and encouragement as well. I also want to thank one of my American friends for proofreading my master thesis.

And lastly, not to forget, I’d like to thank my dog for the inspiration of this study. He is my never-ending support, the same goes for my cat.
Abstract (English)

Human-animal relationships have long been neglected by sociology despite the high presence of pets in our modern households, especially the ones with children. Parents often believe a pet can teach children responsibility and care, while also giving the child companionship. However, the child-pet relationship itself has not been studied much even though children do mention them spontaneously as important individuals in their lives. Therefore, this study focusses on the complex dynamics in the child-pet relationship, by including both positive and negative dimensions. Using a qualitative methodology, this research attempted to discover how children view their dogs and how these views are performed in the daily interactions with their dogs, in the context of the family. Both in-depth interviews and observations were conducted with young children who have a dog at home. Children could be characterized under two views: the dog as ‘the perfect friend’ or as ‘just a dog’. The analysis has shed light on how these two views are performed differently in the relationship, based on five dimensions: play, reciprocity, empathy, social support and conflict. Overall children with ‘the perfect friend’-view were found to have an emotionally closer relationship that children with the ‘just a dog’-view, but they both experience some small conflict situations. However, these views were not fixed, and they could switch according to the situation. The family context, and more specifically the influence of parents and siblings, was examined as well because of the embeddedness of the child-dog relationship in other family relationships. Children who wanted a pet themselves and who experienced the absence of an appropriate playmate, seemed to be more likely to adopt ‘the perfect friend’-view. Thus, this research attempted to create more knowledge on how children give different meanings and interact with their pets in the context of family relationships.
Abstract (Nederlands)

Mens-dier relaties zijn lang genegeerd geweest door de sociologie ondanks de grote aanwezigheid van huisdieren in de modern gezinnen, vooral deze met kinderen. Vele ouders geloven namelijk dat een huisdier kinderen verantwoordelijkheid en zorg kan aanleren, terwijl het huisdier hen ook gezelschap geeft. Toch is de kind-dier relatie zelf nog niet veel onderzocht, hoewel kinderen hen spontaan vermelden als belangrijke individuen in hun leven. Bijgevolg focust dit onderzoek zich op de complexe dynamieken in de kind-huisdier relatie, door zowel de positieve als negatieve dimensies op te nemen. Door het gebruiken van een qualitatieve methodologie, tracht dit onderzoek te ontdekken hoe kinderen hun hond zien en hoe deze visies gerealiseerd worden in de dagelijkse interacties met hun hond in de context van de familie. Zowel diepte-interviews als observaties werden afgenomen bij jonge kinderen die een hond thuis hebben. Kinderen konden gedifferentieerd worden onder twee visies: de hond als ‘the perfect friend’ of als ‘just a dog’. De analyse toonde aan dat deze twee visies op een verschillende manier gerealiseerd worden in de relatie, gebaseerd op vijf dimensies: spel, reciprociteit, empathie, sociale steun en conflict. Over het algemeen hebben kinderen met ‘the perfect friend’-visie een emotioneel hechtere relatie dan kinderen met ‘just a dog’-visie, maar ze ervaren wel allebei kleine conflict situaties. Deze visies zijn echter niet vaststaand, ze kunnen switchen volgens de situatie. De familie context, meer bepaald de invloed van ouders en siblings, is ook ondergezocht geweest omdat de kind-hond relatie ingebed is in andere familierelaties. Kinderen die zelf al een hond wouden en een afwezigheid van geschikte speelkameraad ervaren, leken vooral ‘the perfect friend’-visie aan te nemen. Dus, dit onderzoek heeft gepoogt om meer kennis opleveren over de manier waarop kinderen hun huisdier zien en hoe ze omgaan met hun huisdier in de context van familierelaties.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 7
2. Literature review: across the species barrier ...................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Social interaction with animals ........................................................................................................ 9
   2.2. A multi-species family: the pet’s status in the family .................................................................. 10
   2.3. Child-pet relationships: more than a playmate? ......................................................................... 12
       2.3.1. Social support ....................................................................................................................... 15
       2.3.2. Conflict ............................................................................................................................... 17
   2.4. Family context ............................................................................................................................... 18
       2.4.1. Parents as decision-makers ............................................................................................... 18
       2.4.2. Sibling influences .............................................................................................................. 19
   2.5. Research questions ....................................................................................................................... 21
3. Research design ................................................................................................................................... 21
   3.1. Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 21
   3.2. Sample ........................................................................................................................................... 22
   3.3. Negotiation of access .................................................................................................................... 23
   3.4. Data collection ............................................................................................................................. 24
   3.5. Data analysis .................................................................................................................................. 28
   3.6. Ethical issues .................................................................................................................................. 29
4. Analysis .................................................................................................................................................. 32
   4.1. Family status of the dog: “perfect friend or just a dog?” ............................................................. 32
   4.2. The view in action: child-dog relationship dynamics .................................................................... 34
       4.2.1. Play interactions ..................................................................................................................... 35
       4.2.2. Reciprocity ............................................................................................................................ 36
       4.2.3. Empathy ................................................................................................................................ 38
       4.2.4. Social support ....................................................................................................................... 40
       4.2.5. Conflict .................................................................................................................................. 44
   4.3. Switching ....................................................................................................................................... 47
   4.4. Family context ............................................................................................................................... 48
       4.4.1. Parents: the decision- and rule makers ............................................................................... 49
       4.4.2. Relationships with siblings ................................................................................................. 51
5. Conclusion and discussion ........................................................................................................54
Bibliography ................................................................................................................................57
Appendix ........................................................................................................................................60
  1. Sample matrix (In Dutch) ........................................................................................................60
  2. Message for parents (In Dutch) .............................................................................................62
  3. Letter for parents (In Dutch) ................................................................................................63
  4. Announcement (In Dutch) ......................................................................................................64
  5. Questionnaire pilot (In Dutch) ..............................................................................................65
  6. Questionnaire first round (In Dutch) .....................................................................................68
  7. Questionnaire third round (In Dutch) ....................................................................................71
  8. Concentric circle map ............................................................................................................74
  9. Pictures of child-dog situations .............................................................................................75
 10. List positive and negative aspects (In Dutch) ........................................................................76
 11. Background information household ...................................................................................77
 12. Code tree ...............................................................................................................................78
 13. Consent form parents (In Dutch) ..........................................................................................79
 14. Consent form child (In Dutch) .............................................................................................80
1. Introduction

In today’s society, animals are part of our daily lives. They are very much present in our culture, language, social life, and particularly in our social interactions (Bryant, 1979). Yet, the closest interactions between humans and animals are not with any kind of animal, but with pets; the animals people take into their homes (Charles, 2014). These multi-species households aren’t a new phenomenon but have been present for a considerable length of time. The widespread ownership of pets in households can be brought back to the urbanization processes in the 19th Century (Charles, 2014; Covert, Whiren, Keith, & Nelson, 1985). Since then, there have been several cultural changes in the human-animal relationships, particularly between humans and pets. This relationship changed from function to affect, as more and more families started keeping pets for companionship (Charles, 2014; Covert et al., 1985). Nowadays, this phenomenon of pet-keeping is very common in a lot of countries all around the world, including Belgium. Many Belgian households own some kind of pet. In 2016, Belgian households owned all together approximately 1,3 million dogs (“Dog population in Belgium 2010-2016 | Statistic”, 2018).

As a result of this dramatic increase of the population of pets, there has been a simultaneously increasing interest in human-animal relationships from a range of social science disciplines (Arluke, 2002; Irvine & Cilia, 2017). Nonetheless, it is still much of an understudied social phenomenon in sociology as a result of the dominant anthropocentric view; the idea that only humans can be the proper subject of the discipline (Arluke, 2002; Blouin, 2008; Bryant, 1979; Charles, 2014; Irvine, 2012; Melson, 2003; Myers Jr, 2003; Tipper, 2011). However, even within sociological studies on human-animal relationships, one specific relationship has often been neglected; the child-animal relationship. Research has tended to rely on parental reports of child-pet relationships rather than children’s own accounts (Morrow, 1998). These existing dominant adult discourses about the nature of children’s relationship with animals do not adequately explain children’s own experiences (Tipper, 2011). That’s why it is important to include children in research and pay full attention to their own reflections and understanding of these relationships with pets.

Hence, this study will focus on the relationships between pets and children within the family context since children spontaneously mention their pet as someone who matters to them (Morrow, 1998; Tipper, 2011). This implies that pets are the focus of a great deal of social interaction in children’s daily lives. After all, pets perform largely supportive functions due to the nonjudgmental interaction and affection they provide for children (Covert et al., 1985). However, not all relationships between children and pets are positive, conflict can also occur. Pets can be both a source of stress and can be used for the reduction of it (Covert et al., 1985). Therefore pet abuse, in different degrees, can arise during childhood (Arluke, 2006). It can go from
teasing the pet without causing it serious harm to torturing or killing the animal. The teasing of pets is frequently qualified as play for children because they consider it as fun, and thus they often do not consider it as abuse (Arluke, 2006). Both the positive and negative dimensions of the relationship haven’t been integrated together in the same study, which this study intents to change (Melson, 2003).

Thus, as there is a lot of variation in these complex relationships, including both the positive and negatives aspects of the child-pet relationship is important to have a fuller picture on these complex realities (Charles, 2014; Morrow, 1998; Tipper, 2011). The complexity of these relationship also reveals that there are multiple ways to understand pets and integrate them into the household (Blouin, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017). Blouin (2008) found that people relationships vary according to their orientation towards their pet. He makes a distinction between three orientations: the humanistic, protectionistic and dominionistic orientation. According to him, these orientations can be explained by three sources: cultural context, demographic determinants, and biography. The biography sources include childhood experiences, which are found to be an important source of attitudes, relationship with and treatment of animals as adults (Blouin, 2008; Raupp, 1999). If these experiences affect adults’ relationships with animals, then it could be relevant to explore the childhood experiences with pets themselves.

Exploring these different orientations towards the pet and what kind of sources can explain them has only been done for adults, but not for children. That’s why this research will try to change by exploring the views children adopt in the relationship with their dog. Additionally, the family context will be taken into account to explore possible sources within the family for children’s view towards their pet, as relationships with pets are embedded within children’s other relationships in the family (Tipper, 2011). Children’s orientations, knowledge and attachment with respect to animals are inevitably influenced by key role models in their live: particularly parents, siblings (Blouin, 2008). Thus, the following research questions will be attempted to be answered through a qualitative study of child-pet relationships within the family. The main research question is: “What are children’s views on the dog’s status in the family?”. There are two additional questions linked to this main question: “How are these views performed in the daily relationship and interactions between the dog and child?” and “What is the influence of the family context on these views?”. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews and observations were conducted with children between the ages of seven and eleven who own a dog as a pet. This study will first of all discuss the current literature that has been conducted on complexities of human-animal relationships. Afterwards, the research design and findings of this study will be discussed. Finally, the discussion and conclusion will follow.
2. Literature Review: Across the Species-barrier

2.1. Social interaction with animals

One of the first sociologists to recognize the importance of including animals in sociological research on human interaction is Clifton D. Bryant (1979). He criticized sociologists for neglecting the ‘zoological component’ of human interaction by claiming that animals have a big influence on human interaction and our social behavior (Covert et al., 1985; Flynn, 2001; Irvine, 2012; Sanders, 2003). According to him, sociologists should turn their research attention to this “zoological connection” in order to understand more of human behavior in all of its inconsistencies. This neglect of animals in sociological research has its origin at the start of the discipline, when the founders aimed to distinguish human behavior from that of animals, in attempting to create a science of society (Irvine, 2012). Since then, sociology has had a long history of anthropocentrism by wrongly classifying animals as things (Guillo & Hamilton, 2015). Symbolic interactionism is one of the sociological perspectives that excluded animals from social interaction (Cerulo, 2009). Interactionists argue that social interaction requires certain critical capabilities that only minded humans have. These specific characteristics include consciousness, self-identity, intention, other-orientation, the ability to actively negotiate and define interactive situations to develop shared interpretations of values or norms by using language and shared symbols (Cerulo, 2009; Guillo & Hamilton, 2015; Myers Jr, 2003). Because animals lack these capabilities, they cannot take part in social interaction.

In recent years, several researchers have challenged this position. These interactionists insist that animals are able to take part in social interaction by arguing that humans can project mind onto nonhumans, giving them human capabilities and thus legitimizing them as viable others in social interaction (Cerulo, 2009; Guillo & Hamilton, 2015; Myers Jr, 2003). According to them, language is not a prerequisite for interaction (Irvine, 2012; Jerolmack, 2009). Even in the absence of a shared body of linguistic symbols, understandings and emotional connections that bind people and their pets are created and maintained through social interaction (Sanders, 2003). As pets cannot speak for themselves, the person can give voice to what the pet is “thinking” by “speaking” for animals (Sanders, 2003). In this way, the person constructs the mind of the pet (Cerulo, 2009; Sanders, 2003). This is seen as a key indicator of intersubjectivity, and a common feature of people’s relationship with their pets.

A central mode of interaction which takes place between people and their pets is play. Humans play with their dogs all the time and it can take many forms, such as chase games and fetch. Humans do not teach their dogs how to play but they evolve routines together, ones that work for them (Jerolmack, 2009). In contrast to human-with-human play, in which competition is a central factor, human-animal play does not
have winners or losers since keeping the play interaction going is the primary shared goal (Sanders, 2003). Therefore, play with a dog can be an escape because it is one of the few outlets that people have for non-competitive fun (Irvine, 2001). Interconnection with animals becomes possible through play which signals that what follows will be play and subsequent behaviors will follow play's rules (Irvine, 2001). But because human and animal players have different levels of mental and physical ability, participants must learn to adjust their efforts in order to sustain the play interaction (Beck & Katcher, 1996; Sanders, 2003). In human-animal play, humans often think and act like they can access the animal's mind. This enables or enhances play possibilities and the interactive depth in play (Jerolmack, 2009).

Thus, despite the limitations of human-nonhuman animal communication, animals, especially pets, can occupy a significant place in many people's lives (Blouin, 2008). Therefore, it can be considered relevant to include animals in the sociological research on human interaction. In this way, the pet can be seen as a subject, a valuable actor in interaction with humans (Sanders, 2003). The place where these playful interactions between humans and animals occur most often is at home, in the context of the family. Multi-species households are not a new phenomenon, but have been with us for a considerable length of time (Charles, 2014). Still, the pet is the member of the family that has largely been neglected even though people spontaneously include pets in their family and consider them as important social actors in their daily lives (Charles, 2014; Foote, 1956).

2.2. A Multi-Species Family: the pet's status in the family

Pets are treated differently than other animals because there are different characteristics of what an animal should have in order to be considered a pet. According to Thomas (1991) there are three main characteristics that distinguish pets from other animals, and accordingly their relationships with humans: pets are allowed inside the home, they get a given-name and they are never eaten. Franklin (1999) adds two more characteristics: pets are animals that people acquire and who are treated like infants and children. A last distinction between is the tameness of pets, which is the result of a long process of domestication (Blouin, 2008). They tend to be relatively docile, curious, non-territorial, and unconcerned with the species barrier, unlike their wild counterparts (Budiansky (1992) cited in Blouin, 2008, p. 17).

Once the pet is included in the family, the majority of pet owners consider their pet as part of the family (Blouin, 2008; Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Raupp, 1999). This kinship status of pets gives many pets access to parts of the home that used to be reserved for humans only, and access to participate in family rituals, such as eating, sleeping, watching television and family photographs (Belk,
Moreover, living an animal-inclusive life requires compromising the hegemonic view of the home as a showplace. This means that sharing a home with pets requires guardians to modify their household environment for them (Irvine, 2001). However, people do not all mean the same thing when they mention their pet as kin. There are multiple ways to understand pets and integrate them into the household (Blouin, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017). This can depend on the family members, but also on the pets themselves. Charles (2014) found that connectedness with a pet is created rather than given, it is constructed by humans and actively shaped by pets, through interaction with each other.

The connectedness people feel to their pets varies according to people’s orientation towards their pet. Blouin (2008) makes a distinction between three orientations: the humanistic, protectionistic and dominionistic orientation. These represent distinct cultural constructions, understandings of, and relationships with, animals. To dominionists a dog is “just a dog”, they understand their pets as lesser creatures that serve some practical purpose in their lives. They may be quite fond of, and attached to, their pets, but ultimately their pets and other animals are inferior creatures that are valued primarily for their service to humanity. On the contrary, to humanists, a dog is not a dog at all, but a child or friend. They have very intense attachments to, and relationships with, their pets. Humanists view their dogs and cats as surrogate humans and define them as close companions or even children. Lastly, to protectionists, dogs are precious “companion animals” and all animals are deserving of respect and protection. Similar to humanists, protectionists also have close attachments and intensive interactions with their pets whom they adore, but their concern for animals is more universal, with protecting animals that are not their own. Furthermore, while protectionists often think of their pets as close companions and family members, they understand their animals as unique creatures, rather than as surrogate humans (Blouin, 2008).

Veevers (1985) makes another distinction, focusing on three different functions that pets can perform for people: the projective, the sociability and the surrogate function. In the first one, the pet may serve as a symbolic extension of the self. This means that the person makes a symbolic statement of their personality and self-image through identifying him or herself with their pet. The second function involves the role of pets in facilitating human-to-human interaction as well as the role to entertain. For example: pets not only provide people with something to talk about, but also with something to look at and play with. The third function involves the extent to which interaction with pets may supplement human-to-human interaction or serve as a substitute for it. Pets are seen and treated as humans. This last function is similar to the humanistic orientation mentioned in Blouin (2008). However, Blouin (2008) notes that the orientations he
found in his research are not fixed. People can adopt a new orientation because of changing life-conditions or new experiences. This ‘switching’ is possible because multiple orientations are readily available.

To explain the variations in animal orientations, Blouin (2008) found that these orientations can be explained by three sources: cultural context, demographic determinants and biography. The cultural context stands for the exposure to different cultural repertoires. Blouin (2008) suggests that the dominionistic orientation probably has roots in religious traditions which views animals as inferior creatures over humans, the humanist orientation represents a more sentimental view of pets that likely has roots in the widespread ownership of pets among the middle classes, and the protectionist orientation likely has roots in the modern animal welfare movement. The demographic determinants of the orientations include class, gender, location or family status. Location indicates that rural attitudes are most often dominionist in orientation, while family status reveals that the presence of young children diminishes the status of dogs because pet owners differentiate between their dogs and their children.

Lastly, biography sources include personality, experiences of social isolation and childhood experiences. Related to experiences of social isolation, Blouin (2008) found that some pet owners who exhibit protectionist or humanist orientations report dissatisfaction with human relationships and prefer animal companionship or qualities to human ones. He also found that childhood experiences with pets profoundly affect their relationships with animals as adults, because they often seek out relationships with animals similar to the ones they had as children. Pet owners refer to childhood experiences with animals to explain why they have dogs as adults and what they enjoy about them. Childhood experiences are considered a common source of attitudes, relationship with and treatment of animals as adults (Blouin, 2008; Raupp, 1999). If these experiences affect adults’ attitudes, treatment of and relationships with animals, then it could provide insights to explore the childhood experiences with pets themselves. It could be possible that these children already adopt certain orientations towards their pets and that there are different sources for these orientations as well. This has only been explored for adults, but not for children. That’s why this research will look more closely at children’s experiences with their pets.

2.3. Child-pet relationship at home: more than just a playmate?

Until recently, adults have been the main focus in most research about human-pet relationships while there has been much less social scientific consideration of children’s own relationships with animals (Covert et al., 1985; Melson, 2003; Tipper, 2011). Research has tended to rely on parental reports of child-pet relationships rather than children’s own accounts, but these do not adequately explain children’s own
experiences (Fifield & Forsyth, 1999; Morrow, 1998; Tipper, 2011). This absence of children in work on human and animals hint according to Tipper (2011) at an enduring assumption that children’s engagements with animals are simply ‘natural’ or inevitable, without looking at the interlinkage with social structures and the embeddedness in other social relationships. This assumption could explain why pets are popularly thought to afford special benefits and enjoyment to children, which may in turn be one of the reasons of the high presence of pets in households with children (Flynn, 2001; Irvine & Cilia, 2017; McNicholas & Collis, 2001; Melson, 2003; Veevers, 1985).

Children see themselves as having particular authority and agency with regard to pet animals. Attending to children’s everyday practice of social life can highlight the value of listening to children’s own views on their relationships with animals, rather than resorting to overarching theories of ‘nature’, development, or innocence versus evil to explain children’s experiences (Tipper, 2011). Like adults, children often consider their pets to be part of the family (Blouin, 2008; Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Raupp, 1999). They even consider their pet as kin for the same reasons as humans, because for them pets are weighted in the same terms as humans (Tipper, 2011). They don’t draw a clear distinction between their pet and human kin as well, but like adults, they still differentiate ‘animal’ from ‘human’. Moreover, they find it easier to identify with pets than adults, due to their similar social positioning in the family and they express openly the closeness to their pet more immediately and spontaneously (Tipper, 2011).

Pets are considered important actors in children’s lives because they are the focus of a good deal of children’s social interaction (Hirschenhauser, Meichel, & Beetz, 2017; Morrow, 1998; Tipper, 2011). The inevitably physical nature of human–animal interaction may even have special significance in children’s lives because interactions with animals allow children the freedom to touch, tickle, pat, or pick up others, embodied activities which are valued but not so readily available in relationships with other humans, particularly adults (Tipper, 2011). But it’s possible that behind these interactions between children and their pets, there are different orientations that guide these interactions, which are similar to adults. The orientations of Blouin (2008) and functions of Veevers (1985), mentioned above, could be applicable to children as well. Taking these orientations and the functions together, they can be divided in two broader views: an ‘inferior’ view and a more ‘equal’ view over the pet. The dominionistic orientation by Blouin (2008) may fit under the former view, while, the humanist and protectionist orientation and the surrogate function by Veevers (1985), may fit under the latter.

An ‘inferior view’ implies that children detach themselves from animals by considering them “other” than human. It refers to the avoidance of emotional and physical contact with animals (Irvine, 2001). Lawrence
(1995) claims that even though more contemporary views generally acknowledge that animals are sentient beings, perceived distinctions between humans and nonhumans almost invariably involve criteria that somehow elevate humans above other animals as well. Common examples of these perceived distinctions include a denial of the following abilities to nonhuman animals: thought, use of tools, involvement in meaningful rituals, awareness of death, individuality, and language (Lawrence, 1995). Mastery over pets also implies an inferior view over the pet. One such aspect of mastery is suggested by Tuan (1984): pets can be used as toys when they are used carelessly or in order to gain a sense of power and control (Tuan (1984) cited in Belk, 1996, p. 136). Another aspect is training them to obey commands. Children fit under this inferior view over the pet when they regard the pet as an object of affection or nurturance (Daly & Morton, 2006; Melson, 2003). Pets may thus not always be full family members. Instead, they can be objects of affection as well as sources of gratification for humans, including children (Belk, 1996).

On the contrary, an equal view over the pet implies that the pet is seen as an equal family member. Guardians adopting this view are considerate of the needs of animals and would even put their pets’ need for play on an equal basis with their own needs (Irvine, 2001). This view also implies that guardians recognize animal’s subjectivity by honoring the language that animals use; they cannot speak but they do use recognizable gestures and vocalizations. People honor those ways of communicating by accepting them and even attempting to understand them (Irvine, 2001). Moreover, children can fit under this view when they find their pets to be ‘more family than family’ because they experience a stronger and more enduring emotional bond than with some human family members (Charles, 2014). This may lead to pets being treated as humans. Pets are given such a human-like role when they are the recipient of serious conversation or confidential matters: if people talk to them with the expectation that they do understand abstract thought, and can talk back (Veevers, 1999). Melson (2003) suggest that children may also give their pets human-like roles by giving them the role of functional younger siblings, peer playmates, or as their own children.

These findings may suggest that the two views that are distinguished, can be applied to children’s relationships with their pets as well. Children can see their pets as more equal to human family members or see them as inferior to humans, as a playmate or as a toy, who they can play with and train. But when children give different meaning to their dogs, they will also interact in different ways with their pet. In other words, these views or understandings of pets are acted out between people and their pets in everyday relationships, as orientations are ultimately both created and adopted through social interaction with the pets (Blouin, 2008). By looking more closely at what characterizes these interactions, distinct patterns that represents the views can be recognized. That’s why different dynamics of the child-pet relationship need
to be explored first, in order to find out what characterizes the relationship of a child with an ‘equal’ view and a child with an ‘inferior’ view, and how these relationships could differ from each other. These relationship dynamics include both positive and negative dimensions. Thus, discussing these different dimensions can shed light on how the two views are acted out differently in the relationship with the pet.

2.3.1. Social support

Morrow (1998) has found that children’s accounts of their relationships with pets reflect different functions that pets are able to perform for them. These functions go beyond the narrow bounds of ‘socialization’ and appear to have an emotional meaning that is important for the child. A first function is the social support function (Charles, 2014; McNicholas & Collis, 2000). Pets can provide different forms of affective social support for children (Charles & Davies, 2008). According to Serpell and Paul (2011) pet-keeping as non-human social support can be broken down into five different components. The first component is emotional support. This means that the pet provides the ability to turn to them for comfort in times of stress and give the feeling of being cared for. Social integration is the second component. Here, the pet can give a person the feeling of being an accepted part of a group or social network. Thirdly, esteem support stands for a sense of positive, self-affirming feedback a person receives from the pet regarding his or her own value, competence, abilities, or worth. The fourth component is practical, instrumental, or informational support. This stands for the knowledge that pets will provide practical, or informational assistance when needed. Lastly, pets also offer opportunities for nurturance and protection, in the sense of being needed or depended upon by others.

These supportive functions are found to be especially important for young children since pets can facilitate the acquisition of basic trust and self-esteem, and feelings of empathy towards others (Robin & Bensel, 1985). Moreover, close relationships with a pet may allow children to express their emotions and feelings in a ‘safe’ and acceptable way because children often perceive their pets as attentive and empathic listeners, ‘knowing’ how their companion human is feeling (Charles & Davies, 2008; Morrow, 1998; Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010; Tipper, 2011; Robin & Bensel, 1985). It’s this form of empathy, together with the provision of solace in times of stress, loneliness or boredom, and the provision of a sense of ontological security and stability, that makes animals such good companions (Charles, 2014; Robin & Bensel, 1985). This all provides evidence that many children derive emotional support from their pets because pets can meet the emotional needs children by functioning as a source of support and companionship (Charles & Davies, 2008; Franklin, 2009; Melson, 2003; Morrow, 1998; Robin & Bensel, 1985, Serpell & Paul, 2011).
Moreover, some caregivers feel that their pets appreciate their love and love them in return, indicating reciprocity, something that is typically seen as a core feature of human friendships (Belk, 1996; McNicholas & Collis, 2000). Morrow (1998) also found that some children describe their pet in terms of reciprocity: their pets loved and trusted them, just as they did.

Besides these dominant support functions that pets fulfill, play is also an important one. Pets can be given the role of playmates with whom they can share a special secret (McNicholas & Collis, 2000). Moreover, Muldoon, Williams and Lawrence (2015) found that play strengthens the relationship between child and animal in a way that leads them to look after pets in other ways, including being involved in caring-activities. There is a wide variation in the degree to which children look after their pets; these activities follow a spectrum of doing everything for the pet versus just playing with their pet. However, some children don’t really make a clear distinction between play and care because they see play as a legitimate form of care, a way of showing love and preventing boredom in the animal (Muldoon et al., 2015). Caring for pets may also be seen as a part of social support as it’s a form of esteem support: caring activities may form an important source of confidence, pride and self-esteem for the child (Morrow, 1998). But a necessary condition for these caring or nurturing behaviors is empathy, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of another (Melson, 2003). By taking responsibility for the well-being of the pet, children learn about the importance of empathy in responding to other beings’ feelings and needs (Vidovic et al., 1999; Williams, Muldoon & Lawrence, 2010).

Thus, relationships between children and pets are generally characterized by deep feelings of love and care. These feelings are enhanced by empathy towards the feelings of animals and their intuitive sense of having a common status with animals (Robin & Bensel, 1985). But even though generally positive relationships with pets are reported, some harmful behaviors such as hitting pets are common as well (Raupp, 1999). As for other close human-human relationships, those between people and pets are characterized by commitment and ambivalence, connectedness and loss, and rewards and problems (Sanders, 2003). Child-animal relationships are complex and cannot be reduced to the idealized view that children have a ‘natural’ fondness of animals or are innately capable of casual cruelty towards animals (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011). Consequently, a concern of Melson (2003) is the tendency to examine either positive aspects of children’s relationships, or less frequently negative aspects, without integrating both dimensions within the same study. Therefore, both dimensions will be included in this study. The negative dimension of the relationship will be explored by looking at the different conflict situations that can occur between children and their pets.
2.3.2. **Conflict**

There are several conflict situations that can occur in children’s daily interactions with pets. One form of conflict that can occur is when children feel like the pet does not like them (Tipper, 2011). Small problems can occur as pets can be messy, do damage, and can disrupt normal routines in the house, by breaking things for example (Belk, 1996). Some routine pet needs or behaviors are found bothersome or stressful by children (Bryant (1990) cited in Muldoon et al., 2015, p. 203). This can especially happen when a child is in charge of caring for the pet but prefers to play with his or her siblings (Belk, 1996). When animals do not live up to human expectations of what a pet should be or do, differences between human and animal behavior can lead to lack of understanding and problems as well (Fox, 2006). Still, children are often aware of what ‘annoyed’ pets or make them likely to bite or scratch (Tipper, 2011). In all these cases, some friction in the interactions with pets is possible (Tipper, 2011). Most of the time such mischief and disturbance from pets are often tolerated by caregivers. As long as no one is seriously hurt, they excuse such silly behavior (Belk, 1996).

A more extreme form of conflict in the child-pet relationship concerns pet abuse. Arluke (2006) explains that children draw boundaries in determining whether an animal is a target for abuse. They exclude some as “not us” while including others in the inner circle as “us”. Pets are most often included in the inner circle because of their special status and are spared from mistreatment. However, there was no consensus about which pets were off limits to abuse (Arluke, 2006). It could be possible that the less extreme forms of mistreatment, the teasing of and toying with animals as play for example, occurs with pets. This may be the case because some expressions of animal abuse may qualify as play for children (Arluke, 2006). It includes teasing of animals without causing them serious harm. Much of this toy-like treatment of pets is done out of feelings of play and love, but the fun can sometimes become sadistic (Belk, 1996). Children see this kind of “dirty play” as having fun with the animal because they do not intent to torture or kill the animal. The “dirty play” is thus kept within certain bounds. Animal abuse can be inspired by children’s interest in being like adults, particularly when what they do is forbidden (Arluke, 2006).

Thus, because there is little known about conflict situations between children and pets, except for more extreme forms of conflict, this research will explore some of the smaller conflict situations. Taking both the positive and negative dimensions together can provide insights in the complexities of the child-pet relationship as Melson (2003). Raupp (1999) for example found that mistreating pets, or the potential for it, and strong emotional attachment with pets can co-exist. This shows that relationships cannot be easily characterized as abusive or caring, nor do people always fall along a single continuum based on their level
of attachment or concern for pets (Blouin, 2008). This complexity points to many inter-related factors that shape these relationships (Hawkins & Williams, 2016). Relationships with pets do not happen in a vacuum but are embedded within children’s other relationships (Tipper, 2011). Blouin (2008) found that the attitudes and treatment of animals by those around pet owners play an important role in their own orientations toward animals. Parents, siblings, friends and setting all affect the type of orientation people adopt. Because these relationships between children and pets occur mainly at home, the people most often around children are parents and possibly siblings. The family context can therefore be an important factor that shape child-pet relationships, and consequently also which view is adopted by children.

2.4. Family context

Children’s relationships with pets are embedded within children’s wider network of social relationships within the family, which include those with parents and those with siblings (Charles, 2014; McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Tipper, 2011). Children’s tendency to care for pets may for example depend on who in the family they identify with, as they may live in a household where some family members are close to pets and some are not (Muldoon et al., 2015). Not only their caring activities, but also their orientations, knowledge and attachment with respect to animals are inevitably influenced by key role models in their live: particularly parents, siblings and friends (Blouin, 2008). Consequently, these role models may affect which view the child adopts in his or her relationship with the pet.

2.4.1. Parents as decision-makers

One aspect of this family atmosphere which deserves continuing scrutiny, is the ways in which restrictions are imposed (Muldoon et al., 2015; Raupp, 1999). These restrictions often involve rules on pet care that are predominantly imposed by parents. This is one way how parents can modify and shape children’s relationships with pets and how these are experienced and expressed (Melson, 2003; Muldoon et al., 2015; Tipper, 2011). A study by Muldoon et al. (2015) has found that these rules on pet care can go in two ways. One way is when parents oblige children to engage in caring tasks by either refusing to help the child or insisting the child does everything. The other way is when parents restrict children from doing certain caring tasks for the pet. This often happens because of the widely held belief that young children lack knowledge on how to look after animals properly (Muldoon et al., 2015). These parental rules and views can thus be a great source of frustration for children because they can get into trouble for not treating their pets properly.
and feel mistreated when their parents spent more time with them (Bryant (1990) cited in Muldoon et al., 2015, p. 203).

All these rules that parent’s impose on pet care can diminish the pleasure of keeping a pet and thus influence children’s relationships with their pets in a negative way. Muldoon et al. (2015) has found that children who get the ‘nice jobs’ of pet care but not the ‘bad jobs’ develop warmer relationships with those pets. The children who reported often playing with their pets, and only occasionally contributed to other aspects of pet care, spoke with more warmth and love for their pets than children who said they had to do ‘all the jobs’. As mentioned before, playing with a pet animal is also a form of care. It may provide the direct interaction necessary for children to develop a ‘natural’ way of caring for them. Parents may again be inhibiting this process, when they restrict children from looking after pets in other ways or expect too much (Muldoon et al., 2015).

Still, many parents view caring for animals as beneficial to teach a child responsibility and care, and consequently that’s one main reason why most parents report that they acquire a pet for their children (Covert et al., 1985; Fifield & Forsyth, 1999; Melson, 2003). Two other main reasons given by parents are providing the child with a companion, or because the child had wanted a pet (Fifield & Forsyth, 1999). The same research has also found that children of parents who had acquired a pet to teach their child responsibility, cared for the pet less often than children whose parents had acquired a pet for other reasons, for example because the child had wanted a pet. This indicates that reasons behind the parents’ decision to get a pet, can have the influence children relationships with their pets. So even though the child is often the one for whom the acquisition is considered, the parent is usually the decision-maker (Fifield & Forsyth, 1999). In other words, children themselves have limited opportunity to select the pet on their own, and sometimes even less when they have siblings (Daly & Morton, 2006). Therefore, the next part will look more closely at the influence of the presence of siblings and these intra-generational relationships.

2.4.2. Sibling influences

The number of siblings present in the household is found to be another influence on the child-pet relationship. According to Fifield and Forsyth (1999), pet ownership is influenced by the number of siblings in the family. They found that only-children and children with one sibling are more likely to be the sole owners of a pet than children with more than one sibling. The tendency for children with fewer and no siblings in particular to have more pets on their own, conforms to notions that pets can play the roles of companions and playmates for children and may help to compensate the lack of a sibling (Paul & Serpell,
These children may request pets more frequently because of a deficit they perceive, consciously or unconsciously, in their home environment. Such a deficit that children without younger siblings experience, may exist in the absence of age-appropriate playmates, companions, or in the absence of the opportunity to explore authoritative, dominant and caretaking behaviors, which other children with a younger sibling do experience (Dunn (1984) cited in Fifield & Forsyth, 1999, p. 31). For these children pets can offer the opportunity to explore such behaviors. In this way pets can fulfil a surrogate function for these children who experience a deficit (Veevers, 1999). Consequently, this can explain why children without younger siblings spend more time in pet care and play than do children with younger siblings (Melson & Fogel, 1996).

When siblings are present, sometimes sibling rivalry may revolve around getting the attention of the pet, when the pet favors one sibling over the other. As normal sibling rivalry may revolve around winning parents’ praise and affection, the attention of the pet can also be at stake (Belk, 1996). Pets themselves may therefore be a source of conflict or irritation between family members, more specifically between siblings (Charles & Davies, 2008). Thus, the presence of siblings may in this way influence the relationships with pets. Additionally, the context of animal cruelty is at all times a social one because it usually results from relationships with other humans (Flynn, 2001). Arluke (2006) for example found that friends initiate or strongly encourage abuse of animals in the majority of cases. Some respondents mentioned that it was their friends’ idea to abuse animals or they would dare each other to see who doesn’t get caught by adults. In the latter case, the goal of abuse is competitive. On the other hand, friends could also be strongly supportive of each other’s “successful” abuse by rewarding children whose play with animals violated adult civil behavior (Arluke, 2006). Similarly, this may imply that siblings could also encourage or initiate the mistreatment of pets. This could be especially the case for older siblings because they tend to dominate younger siblings (Kitzmann, Cohen, & Lockwood, 2002). And consequently, siblings could dare each other to mistreat the pet and be supportive or competitive about the abuse, in the same way friends do.

In conclusion, there is evidence that children’s relationships are shaped by inter- as well as intragenerational relationships within the family context, more specifically those with parents and siblings. Parents can shape children’s relationships with their pets by being the dominant decision-maker. On the other hand, both the absence or presence of siblings and the relationship with siblings, shape children relationships with their pets as well. The absence of siblings can create a deficit for the child, while the presence of siblings can sometimes lead to competition and conflict. Still, it’s unclear how parents and siblings also influence which view the child adopts in his or her relationship with the pet. That’s why this research will try to explore this further. There could be other relevant factors that shape child-pet relationships and their views, but as the
interactions between children and pets occur most often at home, only the factors related to the family context will be considered in this research. Taking into account this context can possibly explain when and why certain children would see their dog less or more like humans.

2.5. Research Questions

In summary, the existing studies on child-pet interactions have shown that these relationships are complex and cannot be reduced to the idealized view that children have a ‘natural’ fondness of animals or are innately capable of casual cruelty towards animals (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011). Therefore, it’s important pay attention to both the positive and negative sides of the relationship and integrate them together in the same study (Melson, 2003). However, to be able to understand the different patterns in child-pet relationships, the views that are behind them need to be explored as well as the conditions under which these views arise. Exploring these different views on the pet and what sources can explain them has only been done for adults, but not for children. Still, childhood experiences are an important source of attitudes, relationship with and treatment of animals as adults (Blouin, 2008; Raupp, 1999). If these experiences affect adults’ relationships with animals, then it could be important to explore the childhood experiences with pets themselves. That’s why this research will try to answer for this gap. Thus, the following research questions will be attempted to be answered. The main research question is: “What are children’s views on the dog’s status in the family?”. There are two additional questions linked to this main question: “How are these views performed in the daily relationship and interactions between the dog and child?” and “What is the influence of the family context on these views?”.

3. Research Design

3.1. Qualitative research

This research followed a qualitative methodology as it tried to understand the meaning children give to their dog and how the child-dog relationship, as a social process, takes place in children’s natural home-environment, while also looking at the influence of this family context (Mortelmans, 2013). It can provide important insights into the daily lives of children with their dogs (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). To investigate the complexities of the child-dog relationship, two goals of social science research were combined (Mortelmans, 2013). This research has mainly an explorative goal because human-animal relationships in general, and children as valuable respondents in specific, have largely been neglected in sociological research until recently (Bryant, 1979). There is still not much known about the complexities of children’s
relationships with pets regardless of their high presence in many households in our society (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011). Through this research, the newer target group of young children will be researched in this new domain of human-animal relationships. This study includes an explanatory goal as well, because it tried to discover the influence of family relationships on the meaning young children give to their relationships with pets. Going in-depth into the personal living environments of the children give to their relationships explain these relationship variations more in depth, and that why a qualitative methodology is the appropriate method to be used in this study (Mortelmans, 2013).

3.2. Sample

In the selection of the target group purposive sampling was used, by selecting relevant cases that can produce useful information for answering the research questions (Mortelmans, 2013). This method started from selecting criteria with the purpose of getting in-depth insight in the theme of this research and finding an answer for the research questions. Two elements were considered important: the criteria have to embrace all the relevant aspects of the topic and there has to be enough variation left within the criteria. As this research wants to understand the relationships young children have with their pets, this study selected primary school children in middle childhood, between the ages of seven and eleven years old as the target group. Variation within the target group was made possible by the range of different ages, gender, and family structures children live in, to explain the variations in child-pet relationships. The research took place in Belgium, and only Dutch-speaking children were included in the sample.

This group of younger children was selected because research has found that for younger children, pets may be an important source of companionship outside school (Morrow, 1998). The uncritical companionship they receive from pets remains constant in young children’s descriptions, and this is well underway by the age of eight (Morrow, 1998). Additionally, Hirschenhauser et al. (2017) found that a pet dog seems to be optimal for the formation of high-quality relationships in younger children, until about the age of eleven. Dogs are the most popular pet, are seen as more interactive in relationships with humans, and provide greater levels of social support than other pets (Bjerke, Ødegårdstuen, and Kaltenborn, 1998; Charles & Davies, 2008; Vidović, Štetić, & Bratko, 1999). Thus, dogs are selected as the pet to explore and explain the relationships between pets and younger children at home. Of course, it won’t be possible to generalize the findings to other pets as there could be differences in relationships of children with different animal species (Covert et al., 1985; Hirschenhauser et al., 2017).
In total, seventeen children were interviewed. The majority of children were boys, children with siblings, and children who only had one dog at home. The selection of the sample was based on three characteristics of respondents: children’s gender, age and number of siblings. These can be found in the first three columns of the sample matrix in Appendix 1. The composition of the sample changed didn’t really change that much throughout the data collection. In the pilot study, one boy with siblings and one boy without siblings were interviewed. In first round only one girl was interviewed, and all children had siblings. So, in the second round two more girls were found and included as well as two only-children. During the last and third round two more girls were included, but no only-children were found anymore.

3.3. Negotiation of access

During the selection of the target groups, the negotiation of access was also considered. The target groups are not rare but were in other aspects were more challenging to access. This study sought to interview and observe younger children which made it more challenging to get permission as a double approval was needed: from the parent(s) or guardian and from the children themselves (Mortelmans, 2013). Additionally, children could not be contacted directly, this had to be done through contacting the parents. However, because of this there is some social desirability bias present in the sample of respondents as the children interviewed all had some or a lot of interest in their dog. For example, one parent was contacted but the boy didn’t want to participate because he was not that interested in his dog. Additionally, when there were two children within the age category, the parents chose who would participate in the study, and most of the time this was the child who had the most interest in the dog. As a result, children who don’t really care that much or not at all for their dog weren’t found.

This study found most respondents through personal connections, family and friends. The parents of respondents were contacted through Facebook, e-mail, call or text. Three respondents were also found through snowball sampling, where parents were asked if they know other families who would be able to contribute to the study. (Mortelmans, 2013). The message that was send out to parents can be found in Appendix 2. It was not easy to find respondents, because not a lot of family, friends and other personal connections knew families that were suited for this research. Therefore, a letter and an announcement were made as well, as a means to find respondents through schools, a tennis club and an animal food store (Appendix 3 and 4). Only the letters send out to one school and the tennis club were successful, five respondents were found this way. In general, it took some time not only to find suitable families, but also to get into contact with them.
3.4. Data collection

In this study, the data was collected in two ways: through semi-structured, qualitative interviews and observations, both conducted at the children’s own homes. Qualitative interviews were chosen because these enable children to express their subjective experiences with their dog in their own words (Morrow, 1998). In-depth interviews make it possible to find out how children view their dog, how their relationship is experienced, and how the family context can influence the relationship with the pet as well. Alongside interviews, observations were also conducted to provide additional information about the actual interactions between the children, how children treat their dog and interact with them. However, before the actual start of the interview itself, it was important to develop rapport with the participants, meaning that the researcher and respondents took the time to get to know each other. Establishing a working relationship with the child was important as young children did not always fully understand the purpose of an interview and the relationship this context requires (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). With parents, a working relationship was established as well because they were the gate-keepers to the homes-setting (Mortelmans, 2013). Without them, access to the setting wasn’t possible and therefore their permission was needed. They also helped in creating rapport with the children by explaining what would be expected from them as well.

Therefore, two pilot studies were done to test how long this rapport-building would take. In the first pilot, an extra meeting was done a week before the interview to get to know the child and the parents and to already conduct an observation. This meeting beforehand didn’t prove much of greater value, besides an extra observation, than meeting only once, which was done in the second pilot. Additionally, because of time constraints meeting twice was not possible because the interviews and observations had to take place at their home and both parent(s) and children had to be present. For two time-related reasons the decision was made to only meet once: one, driving twice to the homes of the children who lived further away would have taken too much time and second, some families had busy schedules which made it already difficult to find one free moment. The disadvantage of this decision is that the observations could not be done so extensively. But this was not such a big issue as the interviews were considered central in the data-collection and -analysis.

The observation was planned before the interview and would take about 30 minutes. However, observations weren’t done for five children because the child or the dog didn’t want to play or there was no time for it. In the first round, these children weren’t asked again after the interview, and the reflection was made to do so for round two and three. For some of the other children the observations were rather
short, ten minutes or even less. The observations had a second purpose as well, as a way of creating rapport with the child (Irwin & Johnson, 2005; Mortelmans, 2013). Because the form of play must match the needs of the child, the children who did not want to play were not obliged as this could have created barriers to rapport building (Irwin & Johnson, 2005).

Because of this second purpose, the observation included some participation by the researcher as well. Our role was observant as participant (Mortelmans, 2013). This implies that the emphasis was placed on observation but because it was also a means to create rapport with the child some participation was done as well. The children were aware that they were being observed because parents already told them beforehand. They were aware that the researcher was watching them, so this awareness and our presence could have had influence their behavior. To try to restrict our influence as much as possible this participation was limited. The role of the researcher changed between participating a little, when the child or the dog included the researcher in the play interactions, and not participating at all in these interactions. During six observations the mothers were present and influenced the interactions, by giving remarks or suggestions. Their presence was often a distraction as well, because they talked to the researcher.

The first step in the observation was descriptive observation. The home setting was observed together with the activities that took place between the dog and the child, and other actors involved (Mortelmans, 2013). Afterwards, focused observation was done by focusing on the course of the child-dog interaction, in attempting to find differences. First of all, how long episodes of play last, if any problems or interruptions occur, the behavior of the child and the dog, the way the child addressed the dog and how much physical contact there was between them (Jerolmack, 2009; Sanders, 2003). Because some observations were rather short, the focused observations were not always extensively done, and consequently they did not provide many insights in the child-dog interactions. After the observation, the interview took place. Some interviews could build on the observation by asking questions about the observed interactions. For the children who didn’t participate in the observation, the interview was immediately done. Even though there wasn’t really rapport building done, by playing with the child and the dog, the children opened up quite easily and seemed to be at ease.

Further, the setting of the interview was considered carefully (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). For many children, their natural environment involves movement and activity. Therefore, the interview space needed to be adjusted to the expressional style of each child. This was done by letting the child choose the location of the interview, as this was another way in building rapport as well (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Seven children chose their room, seven others chose the kitchen or the living room, three others chose a different place:
outside on the terrace, the playroom or the veterinarian practice of the mother. Similarly, the child had the option to let one of the parents be present during the interview. The parents were told beforehand that it would be better if the child was alone for the interview, because during one interview the mother was present, she suggested some answers and talked often. In this case, the possible effect of the mother’s involvement on the integrity of data collected was considered (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Still, the child did have the option to let the parent stay if they wanted to, but no child asked for this. In the same interview and one other, the younger brother or sister participated a bit as well. So, the influence of the sibling’s presence was taken into account in the analysis as well.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a list of open-ended questions that was made beforehand and used for all respondents (Mortelmans, 2013). These questions encompassed a set of subjects about children’s relationships with their dog. The structure of the interviews followed a pattern from general to specific, because this is according to Mortelmans (2013) the best way to interview children as they are often overwhelmed by the interview situation. The order questions, and some of the questions alternated not only according to the needs of the children but during the different rounds as well. The two pilot studies were done to test if the questionnaire was suited for children. The pilots demonstrated that the questionnaire needed to include more specific questions, because some of the questions were hard to understand for them and not enough information could be gathered for answering the research questions. In the second pilot some changes were already done by adding an activity and changing the order of some questions. The pilot questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5.

The interview structure followed four phases out of the five phases-structure mentioned in Mortelmans (2013). The first set of questions were the opening questions. These questions helped the respondent to get used to the interview situation (Mortelmans, 2013). The children were asked a set of questions about their age, gender, siblings, and how long the dog has been with them. Then, a drop off activity with a concentric circle map was set up, to let the children open up about their family and dog (Mortelmans, 2013). Through this activity children’s perceptions of their dogs, and their closeness in familial relationships could be explored (Jegatheesan, 2012; Weller, 2012). Children were asked to write everyone down who they consider family on stickers, and then place them in one of the three circles of the circle map (see Appendix 8). It was a useful activity to find out if the child considers their dog as part of their family and for what reasons (Blouin, 2008; Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Raupp, 1999; Tipper, 2011). The questions that followed asked about the decision-maker in getting a dog, if they liked it and where the dog is allowed to go. In the third round some questions were added to find out what they think
about their dog and the relationship they have. These questions, including the activity, served to answer the first and third research question because these could be used to find out what they think of their dog, what they think of the parents’ rules, and how well they get along with their siblings and parents.

The second phase of the questionnaire, served as a transition to the core of the child-pet relationships, to move the conversation to their own daily experiences with their dog in the family (Mortelmans, 2013). The transition question consisted of the “draw and tell technique”. Children’s drawings have been used successfully as assessment tool in studying the human-animal bond (Jegatheesan, 2012; Smith, Meehan, Enfield, & Castori, 2005). In the two pilots and the third interview the drawings were used as the drop off. But because the third respondent took very long, which resulted in not being able to finish that interview, the activity moved to this part and was limited to ten minutes. The children were asked to draw an activity they like to do with their dog. After they were finished, they were encouraged to explain their drawings (Jegatheesan, 2012). This activity moved the conversation to the key questions, which covered the central aspects of this research. The first questions asked about the activities they do with their dog and who else is involved. These were asked to find out how play activities take place at home and what the possible problems could be. In the third round some questions about care activities were included.

The next set of questions tried to discover more about children’s relationship with their pets, including both positive and negative dimensions (Melson, 2003). Thus, they served to answer the second research question, as well as the first one a because two different views could be characterized based on these relationship dimensions. To introduce this part an activity was planned again. Four pictures of different situations with dogs were shown and the child had to choose which one or more matched their relationship (see Appendix 9). The pictures show affection and a situation where the dog provides comfort, highlighting the supportive functions of dogs (Charles & Davies, 2008; Serpell & Paul, 2011). Additionally, a play-interaction is shown, and a situation where the child is angry at the dog to highlight the conflict situation.

After this activity more specific questions were asked about different aspects of social support. In the third round, a question about reciprocity and empathy was added, by asking if they comfort their dog as well. This was found to be an interesting question to be able to find out more about children’s views on their dog. After these questions, a last activity was introduced. Here, children had to fill in a list about five things they like and five things they don’t like about their dog, as a way to introduce the conflict dimension of their relationship (see Appendix 10). Children were asked to explain them, with special focus on the things they don’t like about their dog. Afterwards, more questions were asked about the negative side of the relationship, being angry or having a fight with their dog and what they find annoying (Belk, 1996). In the
third round a last question was added about boredom, to find out more about empathy and reciprocity in their relationship.

Lastly, the conclusion questions were meant to end the interview in pleasant way and gives the respondents the possibility to ask questions or say something that they want to mention. At the end, the respondents were thanked again for their participation. The two questionnaires of round one and three can be found in Appendix 6 and 7 respectively. Before the interview the parents were also asked to fill in a paper about their family situation to have a correct overview of the home situation and the ages of sibling(s) and dog(s) (see Appendix 11). This was done to find out if these family characteristics could have an influence on children’s view on their dog, helping with answering the third research question. This was also useful to determine the age of the dogs because not all children knew this. In total, 17 interviews were conducted in the period between September 2018 and April 2019. The interviews were recorded digitally. The length of the interviews varied between 14 and 57 minutes.

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis of the interviews was conducted in line with the Grounded Theory. Two elements are central in this framework: theory, the formation of theories based on empirical data, and procedures, the cyclic process during the research (Mortelmans, 2013). Beforehand, sensitizing concepts were used to give direction to the research and to make the researcher theoretically sensitive during the data-analysis. The central codes chosen for this research were: children’s views on the dog, social support, conflict and family. This analysis followed a cyclic process where interviewing was constantly alternated by analyzing (Mortelmans, 2013). Based on the analysis of the first pilot study, the questionnaire changed for some part for the second pilot study. And based the analysis of these pilot studies, the questionnaire changed even more. During the first round, interviews were constantly altered with analysis, and based on the analysis, the questionnaire changed by a few questions according to the usefulness of the question for the research questions and about which topics more information was needed. The second and third round were done in a similar fashion.

The usefulness of the Grounded Theory is the possibility to constantly adapt our analysis according to the findings in our data (Mortelmans, 2013). This is especially relevant for this research as the main goal is to explore meaning that it was not clear on beforehand what the results would be. In the data-analysis of the interviews, three different phases of coding were followed: open, axial and selective coding (Mortelmans, 2013). In the phase of open coding, the data was split into smaller sections by giving labels to sections of
text in the data. Here, separate concepts that were considered relevant for answering the research questions were isolated, resulting in a very extended set of codes. That’s why the second phase of axial coding was needed to link these separate codes together into categories or concepts. These two phases were always done after every interview, except when interviews were conducted the next day. And by comparing the findings, the questionnaire changed a bit. In the last phase of coding, selective coding, concepts were linked together to form and elaborate the theory. This was done after the second round, and again after the third round. Two central categories were chosen to answer the research questions about the child-dog relationships, specifically the view on the status of the dog and the child-dog relationship dimensions, because these are very much linked to each other. The coding tree can be found in Appendix 12. All coding phases were done in a Word-document, in Dutch. The quotes and snippets that were used in the analysis of this paper, were translated into English.

The data-analysis for the observational data was done through field notes written after the observations (Mortelmans, 2013). These field notes included everything seen and noticed during the observation of the child-pet interaction and were written down within the hour after the interview. They had the form of scratch notes, and were later on developed into comprehensive field notes (Mortelmans, 2013). Because there was a delay in the registration of notes, some of the observational findings were lost. Methodological notes were also written within the hour after leaving the home of the respondents. These notes included the assessing of our own research role and the influence of our presence and participation in the research setting, as well as the influence of the parents when they were present. Finally, the analytical memo’s, covered the ideas that occurred to the researcher about answering the research questions (Mortelmans, 2013). These notes were written simultaneously with the selective coding phase of the interview analysis, after the second and third round. The field notes and methodological notes were first written down in a notebook and afterwards in a Word-document, both in Dutch as well.

3.6. Ethical issues

The careful consideration of ethical issues beforehand, during and after the research is necessary in qualitative research because of the comprehensive and personal involvement of people (Mortelmans, 2013). As a researcher, it is important to be aware of our own role and responsibilities as well as the consequences of our role during the interview, because of the implications it can hold for the results. This study conducted interviews with children. Hence, the consideration of ethical issues is even more important as they are an under-aged and thus a vulnerable group. Also, dogs were involved in the research during the
observations. The wellbeing of the dog must also be considered as well by make sure no harm comes to the dog while observing the child-dog interactions. Therefore, all of the three types of ethical issues were considered for this study: procedural, situational, and relational ethics (Mortelmans, 2013).

Procedural ethics involves four principles (Mortelmans, 2013). The first one, informed consent, included three elements. The first one was getting the approval of someone who’s capable of giving it. In this research double approval was needed: from the children, who are considered a vulnerable group, and their parents (Mortelmans, 2013). Two ethical questions were considered as well. Firstly, when the parents refuse, but the child wants to participate. Then it’s not possible to do anything because the child is under aged. Secondly, when the parents approve but the child doesn’t want to participate. This happened once. The mother gave permission, but her son didn’t want to and therefore it was not possible to force him to participate as it goes against voluntary participation (Mortelmans, 2013). The researcher had to watch out from possibility of parents coercing their children to participate. This was done by explaining to the parents that, when they had given their approval, they should also ask their child if he or she was willing to participate. Most parents asked their child first before making an appointment, but even if they didn’t, every child was asked permission in person through the consent form. This form explained the objective of the study, what would be expected of the respondent, and the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. This is the third element, namely the provision of sufficient information about the study (Mortelmans, 2013). Both parents and children were given a consent form to sign, each written in age-appropriate language (see Appendix 13 and 14) (Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010).

A second principle is the avoidance of deception (Mortelmans, 2013). This was only a bit of an issue for the observations. The real purpose of the study was not unknown, and the respondents were aware of the fact that they are studied. At first the plan was that only the parents would be aware that the children were being observed. But because they already told their child beforehand, the children were all aware of this. The only thing the children weren’t aware of, is that these observations were being written down, as this still limited some of the bias in their interactions. The parents were aware of this, and all of them had given their approval through the consent form. Another principle that was included in the consent forms, is the guarding of privacy. This includes the basic rule in research that respondents should not be recognized outside the research-context. Thus, when reporting the results an alias was used for the mentioned respondents, dogs included. In spite of this absolute rule to protect the privacy of respondents, in some situations it cannot be justified to keep information about possible illegal behavior that the respondents
This did not occur during the research because no pet abuse or mistreatment was discovered, so the parents didn’t need to be informed.

The violation of privacy is part of the last principle as well: do not inflict harm on the respondent (Mortelmans, 2013). Another form of harm that should be avoided is the reputation of social research as a whole. It was important to be professional during the interview with children to enable future researchers to access this group of respondents. A last form of harm can occur during the interview itself, when respondents talk about stressful or traumatic experiences. This is connected to the second form of ethical issues: situational ethics. It was very important to realize that ethics of this study didn’t end with “informed consent”, but it is part of the daily lives and the execution of the research itself. Therefore, it was important to be able to recognize situations where the ethics of our actions could be in danger, and sensitivity to these “ethical important moments” have to result into action. If difficult situations occur during the interviews with children, the researcher was prepared to react appropriately in these situations (Mortelmans, 2013). There weren’t any children who talked about any stressful or traumatic experiences, so no action was needed to be done.

The last ethical issue is relational ethics. For the avoidance of this issue, there has to be an ethically correct, and respectful relationship between the researcher and the respondents (Mortelmans, 2013). In this sense, ethics is a bidirectional process where answers to problems are established through dialogue between the researcher and the respondent, here the under aged child. Lastly, awareness of our own influence on the respondent is needed. In the context of the interview it has been suggested that assisting a participant in finding words might compromise the integrity of the data collected (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, minimization of leading the child must be pursued because a child is more inclined to agree with the researcher’s choice of words to complete their stories. However, in some situations it is needed to help children find the words to express themselves. When this is done it is very important to ensure that the words offered fit the ideas of the child (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Sometimes this was an issue during the interview, when children couldn’t answer the question. Suggestions were done by the researcher by asking a closed question but making sure this was not a leading question. This could have had an influence on some of the answers that were given by the children.

To conclude the methodological part, the management of data will be discussed. All collected data is saved on the computer, a USB stick and google drive, to ensure that no data would be lost during the research. The data is safely stored because both the computer and the google drive data-base can be accessed with a password that only the researcher knows. The USB drive is also safely stored at home where no other
person can access it. All of the collected data will be destroyed after the research is officially finished, after receiving the results of this dissertation. This will be done at the latest by September 2019. The data will not be shared with anyone except the promotor and the commissioner who are evaluating this work. The only data that will be shared with them are the recordings, the transcriptions and the observation notes. The real names are only used in the recordings.

4. Analysis

4.1. Family status of the dog: “perfect friend or just a dog?”

As several studies already found, once a dog enters the family as a pet, the status of the dog changes to a kinship status (Blouin, 2008; Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008; Hirschenhauser et al., 2014; Irvine & Cilia, 2017; Morrow, 1998; Raupp, 1999; Tipper, 2011). All seventeen children in this research considered their dogs to be ‘part of their family’, except for one girl who wasn’t asked during the interview. This was found through an activity where the children had to write the names down of everyone that they consider family and place them on a circle map to display how well they got along with them. The circle map had four circles: a blue circle in the middle to represent the child him- or herself, and the remaining circles go from green, yellow to red, to represent the persons who they get along with very well, a bit less and not at all (see Appendix 8).

Overall, the dogs were almost always placed in the green circle, revealing that they get along well with their dog. However, there were four exceptions. One boy first placed his dog in the yellow circle but when asked further about it he said he also could place the dog in the green circle explaining they get along well but doesn’t really like it when the dog steals something like food. Another girl who had seven dogs at home and only placed her ‘favorite dog’, and the three youngest dogs in the green circle, while she placed the remaining three dogs in the yellow circle. Lastly, two other boys wanted to place their dogs closer to them than the green circle. One of them placed the dog on the border with the blue circle along with his other family members because he thought they were all ‘super fun’. The other boy even went further by placing the dog in the blue circle, knowing that the blue circle represents himself, and said: ‘With Kai I always get along, right Kai?’. Five children didn’t spontaneously write their dog down as a family member. Even so, when they were asked later on if they see their dog as a family, they all said they did.

This clearly shows that the children include their dog in their family and see them generally as good family members with whom they get along well and care for. This finding would seem to suggest that all children
see their dog as an ‘equal’, but this is not the full story. Some children interviewed could give a reason of why they think of their dog as a ‘family member’ and here, different views on the family status of the dog already come a bit into picture. On the one hand, some say it’s because of the activities they do with their dogs: ‘we do most activities with him’, ‘I train them’, the dog does everything with them, or they are always with the children. So, their presence is another reason why they are considered family: ‘because he’s a lot inside here’, ‘once he’s here, you cannot miss him anymore’, ‘I wouldn’t be able to live without Nanou’ or ‘he belongs with the family’. On the other hand, there are a few children who give their dog a human-like role. These children see their dogs as ‘good friends’ or ‘best friend’, as their ‘brother’, or as ‘half human’. While some others think that their dog can be a real family member, similar to other ‘human family members’. For that reason, one girl finds it’s important that her dog should be treated in the same way as her ‘human family members’:

*Elisa (girl, 11, ‘the perfect friend’-view):* “I would be very hurt if she (the dog) would die and if Gabriella, Seppe or mom and dad as well. And uhm I think that if a dog or cat comes here, or any other animal as well, that they are also part of my family. Yes, that they should be equally well treated, that they are just family as well.”

This girl is an example of a child who gives her dog an ‘equal’ status to other ‘human’ family members. Consequently, she can be characterized under the first view on the family status of the dog that could be found based on the accounts and interactions of children. This view is called the dog as ‘the perfect friend’ because in a lot of aspects the dog can be seen as a ‘perfect friend’: he or she can’t argue with the child, always wants to play and is there for the child when he or she needs company or comfort. The children who are characterized under this view, see their dog as more than just a pet who they can play with and who does what is asked. They are predominantly the children who give their dog a human-like role and see their dog more or less equal to their other family members. Eleven children can be characterized under this view. These children all have an emotionally close relationship with their dog. They appreciate their dog for not only wanting to play with them but for comforting them and listening to them as well, for the social support they provide. Among them, there is a lot of understanding for the dog’s own needs and feelings as well, which points to empathy they have for their dog. However, most of the children do have some small conflict experiences with their dog, indicating that their dog is not always ‘the perfect friend’.

The opposite view of the dog as ‘just a dog’, isn’t found in an extreme way among the children interviewed. Even these children characterized under this view do care for their dog to some extent for their dog and
see them as a family member. Still, they have a more top-down view on their dog. They command their dog more and want their dog to listen to them and do what they say. One girl for example, mainly talked about ‘training’ her dogs. Additionally, they feel like the dogs ‘don’t understand people’ because they only know the words they were taught. Thus, these children don’t really see their dog as more than ‘just a dog’. The six children characterized under this view see their dog mainly as a playmate, without much emotional closeness. Most of them don’t look for social support with their dog, they don’t go to their dog to get comforted and don’t really talk to their dog about their problems. But some look for some social support with their dog, indicating that sometimes their dog is more than ‘just a dog’. Similar to the opposite view, they experience some conflict in their relationship as well.

These two views represent distinct meanings and understandings of the dogs. They are somewhat inspired by Blouin (2008) who characterized three orientations that adult pet-owners adopt towards their pet. The view of the dog as ‘just a dog’ overlaps partially with the dominionistic orientation, by giving the dog an inferior status to humans as well. The view of the dog as ‘the perfect friend’ overlaps partly with the other two orientations, by giving dogs a more equal status to humans. However, the meanings of each view in this research are somewhat different than the meanings given in Blouin’s orientations because of three reasons: there are only two views in this research instead of three, they are applied to children instead of adults, and lastly, they are only applied to pets instead of all animals. The views in this research are analytic generalizations, based on different dimensions found in children’s relationships. Children in this research are associated with one of these views, but none of them do not perfectly represent a view as there is variation within the views as well. These variations can be seen through the way they are adopted in children’s daily relationships with their dogs.

4.2. View in action: child-dog relationship dimensions

These two views mentioned in the previous part are closely associated with specific relations, interactions, and treatment of the dog. Therefore, the views were identified through different relationship dimensions that were found in children’s accounts about and interactions with their dogs. The child-dog relationship can be broken down in five dimensions: play, reciprocity, empathy, social support and conflict. Though associating these dimensions with the two views, distinct patterns will become clearer in children’s relationships and interactions with their dogs. This will shed light on how the relationships are experienced according to the dominant view children adopt. But these patterns are not always so straightforward.
Therefore, the complexity of child-dog relationships itself, as well as the variation within and between the views, will also be explored in this section.

4.2.1. Play interactions

Play is one of the most important modes of interaction for the children in this interview. This is in line with previous research (Irvine, 2001; Jerolmack, 2009; Sanders, 2003). The dog is an important playmate for all children, no matter which view they adopt. One central element in these play situations is that it is not competitive unlike those between siblings or other people (Sanders, 2003). However, three boys with ‘the perfect friend’- view contradict this assumption of non-competitive fun. They have competitiveness in their play when they race together: the dog ‘is almost always first, I won one time’ or he ‘is sometimes faster, sometimes slower, sometimes the same as me’, ‘we run often together as well, but of course he’s a lot faster’. They do seem to like this competitiveness with their dog. Something most children really appreciate in their dogs is their ‘playfulness’: that the dogs ‘always want to play’, they are ‘very playful’, and ‘always active’. However, this is not true for all children. Sometimes the dogs don’t feel like playing, usually when they are tired. This contradicts the finding of Veevers (1985) that pets always have time to play with children. Similarly, two children with the ‘just a dog’-view and three with the opposite view, don’t always feel like playing with their dog as well, when doing something else like ‘playing on the PlayStation’ or ‘being busy on the phone’. So, while the dogs are an important playmate, children do not always include them.

Some observations of play interactions between the children and their dogs were also conducted. Overall, all children who played with their dog were excited and smiled or laughed a lot, seeming to really enjoy the play activities they did with their dog. There were some differences in the play interactions observed between children with ‘the perfect friend’- and ‘just a dog’- view. The first difference was seen in their physical interaction. When the dog for example didn’t let go of the ball, two boys with the ‘just a dog’-view weren’t always that careful when they took the ball from the dog. One of them pulled the dog a bit by his tail or held the dog’s snout to take the ball out of his mouth. The other boy pulled his dog by the collar till she stood on two paws or kicked the soccer ball when she still had it in her mouth. Both boys accidentally threw the ball in the face of their dogs, but only the first boy checked if the dog’s eye was okay. Taking the ball out of the mouth of the dog was done by some of the children with the ‘perfect friend’-view as well. One boy tried to pull the dog to him when he didn’t let go of the ball, but he didn’t really pull that hard. Children with both views were petting their dog during the play interactions as well, but most of the children with ‘the perfect friend’-view did hug their dogs more.
Some other differences between the two views were related to the activities that children were involved in. For example, one girl with the ‘just a dog’-view was ‘training’ her dog to sit and lay down, using cookies. She did not have a lot of patience when the dog didn’t lay down and eventually gave up. Another girl with the opposite view was doing the same thing, but she did not call it ‘training’. Instead she was demonstrating the ‘tricks’ her dog could do. In her case, the dog listened almost all the time and she would constantly pet her dog, telling her she did a good job, something the other girl only did for a bit. Two other children both with ‘the perfect friend’ view even let their dog decide on the toy they wanted to play with. One girl had a basket full of toys, and she let her dog take the one he liked out of basket. The other boy wanted to test which one of the balls his dog likes the best. So, multiple times he threw different balls together, but the dog always chose the tennis ball. The same boy also thought his dog wanted to play soccer when he went to the garage to supposedly take the goalkeeper gloves. He tried twice to put the gloves on the dog’s paws, but the dog didn’t seem to like it and threw them off twice. Thus, there are different play activities children were involved in, and they sometimes had the same or different reactions to similar situations, usually depending on the view they adopt.

4.2.2. Reciprocity

The next dimension of the child-dog relationship that was found demonstrates a two-way relationship present between the child and the dog. This means that the children feel like the dog is not only there for them, but they feel like they should be there for their dog as well. Children who feel this way, pay more attention to the dog’s own needs for attention, love and affection. Just over half of the children interviewed experienced some elements of reciprocity in their relationship, all of them have ‘the perfect friend’-view. It is the opposite of a one-way, and top-down relationship where the dog is trained to listen to the child commands, which is more prevalent in the relationships of children with the ‘just a dog’-view. Here on the other hand, the child listens to the dog’s needs as well, and they recognize his or her agency. One boy for example explained that reciprocity is an important reason why he considers his dogs family members and ‘good friends’: ‘sometimes, I give them something and then they sometimes do something in return. I give them for example a little present and then they give me a little kiss, then they lick me and that’s why I like them a lot’. He really appreciates his dogs being ‘very sweet’ to him, and that’s why he does something in return for them.

Another way reciprocity occurred in most relationships of children with ‘the perfect friend’-view, is through comforting each other. The dog comforts them when they are sad, and they do the same for their dogs.
This finding shows that some children describe their relationship in terms of reciprocity: their pets love and trust them, just as they do (Morrow, 1998). On top of that, they even comfort the dogs in more or less the same ways the dog comforts them. They engage in embodied activities when comforting them; besides ‘hugging’ them, they also ‘pet them’ or ‘play with them’. They will not really talk to their dogs to comfort them, pointing to the significance of this inevitably physical nature of human–animal interaction for children (Tipper, 2011). One boy talked about his dog who came to him when she wanted to be comforted and he comforted her in the same way she comforted him, indicating a reciprocal relationship between them:

Jasper: “…Alice gave Milan a hug, uhm Milan pushed Alice away and she-, I was here in the, in the stairwell here. I was doing my homework and Alice came to me with a tear in her eye, giving me a hug. Yes, it was really like a tear.”
Researcher: “Was it like a tear?”
Jasper: “Yes.”
Researcher: “And what did you do when she came to give you a hug?”
Jasper: “Well, give a hug in return and she stayed then, she continued to sit next to me.”
(Jasper, boy, 10, ‘the perfect friend’-view)

The ones who do not have reciprocity are nearly all of the children who view their dog as ‘just a dog’. They do not comfort their dog when he or she is sad, because according to most of these children, their dog has never been sad. Only one of them does comfort his dog, together with his family, but he does not get comforted by his dog, so this isn’t really considered reciprocity. One form of reciprocity that almost all children with both views, experience in their relationship is when they go to each other whenever they want to play. The children go to their dog when they want to play, and according to them, their dogs go to them as well. This reciprocity was also present in case of boredom. Two girls and one boy, with ‘the perfect friend’-view, mentioned that their dog is someone they go to when they or the dogs themselves are bored. These children notice when their dog is bored, and it seems that they don’t like it because they can rely themselves on their dog when they are bored. One boy even says he never gets bored when his dog is around: ‘When Nanou (his dog) is here, never!’. In return, he sometimes goes to her when he notices that she’s bored, or when somebody got mad at her, to make her feel better by petting her, thus comforting her as well. These last examples of reciprocity in case of boredom also point to some empathy that children with ‘the perfect friend’-view have for their dog.
4.2.3. Empathy

The second dimension of empathy is very closely related to reciprocity because without empathy there wouldn’t be any reciprocity in their relationship. All children who had reciprocity in their relationship by comforting their dogs and going to them when they are bored, have some empathy for them. This demonstrates that they have the ability to understand and share the feelings of the dog (Melson, 2003). That’s why most of these children have ‘the perfect friend’-view. Most examples of empathic behavior towards the dog is thus when children comfort their dog if he or she is sad. They know when their dog is sad: ‘when he’s all alone’, ‘when nobody’s with them’, ‘when he doesn’t get his bone’, and ‘when she limped’. When they notice these things, they try to hug or play with their dogs, so they won’t feel lonely or sad anymore. Moreover, two children even feel like their comforting helps because they notice that their dog is ‘happy’ again. One boy thinks so, after he gave his dog a lot of hugs: ‘I think so, because then, she acted like it was out of happiness. Because before, she started to yelp very quickly and at that time it seemed like her tail wagged more’. The other girl hugged her dog too when he was feelings sad. However, she felt like it didn’t make the dog feel entirely happy again: ‘At that moment he is still a bit sad but after that, I start playing with him and then he has forgotten everything.’ These two children know how to make their dog feel better.

Another way how children emphasize with their dog’s feelings, is when they show understanding for the dog who doesn’t always feel like playing or wants to stop playing with them. Nine children show understanding when their dog is tired and doesn’t want to play. As one boy with ‘the perfect friend’-view frames it: ‘I don’t mind it because, sometimes I don’t feel like it and sometimes I do, that’s why.’ They don’t oblige the dog to play: ‘when she doesn’t want to play and she’s tired, I just let her rest for a bit’. Only one girl with ‘the perfect friend’-view does try to get her dog to play with cookies. When children notice that the dog is tired or when they’re ‘not into it anymore’ during play, most children stop playing as well. One boy with the same view even said he doesn’t like it when he plays too much with his dog because he feels like ‘she can also be alone for once’. During an observation one boy stopped playing when he saw his dog panting, while another boy with the ‘just a dog’-view kept playing even though the dog was panting and wanted to go inside. Still, most of the children with the ‘just a dog’-view do show understanding when the dog feels tired, thus showing some empathy as well.

A situation where empathy for the dog’s feelings is prevalent for nearly all children with ‘the perfect friend’-view, is when their parents get mad at the dog. For example, one girl did not dare to tell her parents when her dog did something wrong because she was afraid that they would get mad at him. Two other boys don’t
like it when their mothers get mad at their dogs. One of them pities his dogs because his mother and brother would hit the dogs, while the other boy comforts his dog. This was something another boy and girl did as well. However, these two children only comfort them when they feel like the dogs haven’t done nothing wrong: ‘sometimes I think it’s quite correct, but sometimes I think: “Oh, it’s only this tiny thing.”’, ‘Sometimes it’s good, and sometimes it isn’t. But if it is not really bad, then I don’t really like it when they are mad at Nanou because Nanou actually didn’t do anything wrong.’ Only then, they show empathy for their dogs and act on it, by comforting the dog. Lastly, one girl shows some empathy by understanding why her dog ‘sometimes takes her matrass out of her bench and ruins it’, something her father gets mad for. According to her, she does that because ‘she’s sometimes too hot’.

This last situation is something that also happened for one boy with the ‘just a dog’-view. He shows a bit of empathy when the dog bites the carpet and his father gets mad about it. He understands it’s because ‘his teeth itch and then he starts biting the carpet and he’s not allowed to do that’. There are four children with the same view, who do have a bit of empathy as well, when their dogs do something that they shouldn’t do. But here, it’s about themselves, they don’t really get angry with their dog when he or she does something wrong because they understand why the dog did what he or she did. For example, the dog of a boy bit him once when the dog was still a puppy and he understood why, so he couldn’t get angry with his dog:

_Sam_: “Sometimes, _in the beginning when he was young because his teeth were itching, then because they are growing, and then he bit me once in my thigh._” (Laughs)

_Researcher_: “He bit you once in the thigh?”

_Sam_: “Yes.”

_Researcher_: “Yes. And what did you do, when he did that to you?”

_Sam_: “I was already used to it already because I got my bike chain in my thigh as well.”

_Researcher_: “Oh ouch! And were you angry with him or not?”

_Sam_: “No.”

_Researcher_: “No?”

_Sam_: “I thought it was normal because I know his teeth are itching.” (Sam, boy, 9, ‘just a dog’-view)

So, as this interview fragment exemplifies, some of the children who see their dog as ‘just a dog’, show a bit empathy as well, not exactly for what the dog is feeling, but for the misbehavior of the dog. They show understanding and don’t really get mad at their dog for doing these things. However, they don’t really
emphasize with the dogs’ feelings, but with their actions and the reasons behind it. They show more understanding than empathy. On the other hand, the children with ‘the perfect friend’-view really try to emphasize with how their dog is feeling and, in some cases, even try to make their dog feel better. In other words, they sometimes act on those empathic feelings, something the children with the opposite view didn’t really do as well.

4.2.4. Social support

This third relationship dimension is social support, which stands for how emotionally close the children feel to their dog. It can be broken down in three important aspects that children in this research experience in the relationship with their dog: comfort, talking to the dog and feeling like the dog listens or understands them and telling secrets to the dog. Comfort has already been mentioned as an aspect of reciprocity as well as empathy. That’s why these two dimensions are closely related to this third one of social support. Thirteen children mentioned their dog as someone who comforts them when they are sad, ten of them with ‘the perfect friend’-view. This is in line with Charles (2014) who found that dogs can provide emotional support and comfort for children. However, there are only two children, one of each view, who only brought up their dog as someone who comforts them. The other eleven children mentioned one or both parents and sometimes their siblings as well. The remaining four children who did not mention their dog as a comforter are all children see their dog as ‘just a dog’, except for one. Instead, they mention their mom, older sisters or even the whole family. Thus, almost all children can rely on more than one person for comfort, but most of the children who seek comfort with their dog have ‘the perfect friend’-view.

Something that dogs and other ‘human’ family members have in common when comforting the children, is ‘hugging’ them. Besides that, the ways of comforting are different between them. To comfort the children, parents for example talk to them to make them feel better by talking to them: saying ‘it’s okay’, asking what’s wrong, or telling a few jokes. In contrast, the dogs are not able to comfort in these ways because they cannot speak in ‘human language’. But they do succeed in comforting the children in other ways. And for some, they even succeed in comforting them better than any other family member, as one boy claimed: ‘he’s the only one that can comfort me the best’ because the dog licks him and that makes him laugh. Other children mentioned similar ways how the dog can comfort them: by licking, jumping on them, hugging them or coming to them to play. Sometimes merely their presence is enough for some to feel better. This inevitable physical nature of human–animal interaction seems to have indeed special significance in children’s lives (Tipper, 2011). Moreover, eight children, including two with the ‘just a dog’-view, said that
they don’t have to go to their dogs when they want to be comforted crying or is feeling sad. Instead, their dog comes to them:

*Jules:* “Yes, sometimes I cry, then the dogs come to me. I like that very much.”

*Researcher:* “What do they do when they come to you?”

*Jules:* “When they come to me, they run around me and so on, then I pet them once and then it is usually over with the sadness.”

*Researcher:* “Yes, and how do you feel then, when they come to you like that?”

*Jules:* I really think it’s very nice and sweet of them, that they see that and that they come immediately to me then.” *(Jules, boy, 9, ‘the perfect friend’-view)*

The boy in this fragment really appreciates his dogs’ attention to his feelings. It’s something he values in his relationship with his dogs and probably one of the reasons why he views his dogs as ‘the perfect friends’. One girl with the same view even said her dog comes to her and her parents when they have a hard time and she interpreted his intention as him wanting to ask: ‘Tell me what’s wrong?’. According to her, the dog seems to understand how she and her parents are feeling. Additionally, some children say their dog is able to comfort them when they are angry with another family member. Two boys and two girls with ‘the perfect friend’-view also go to their dog when they are mad at their siblings or parents: ‘when I’m angry at my mom or dad, I usually go to Nora (the girl’s dog)’. For them, the dog is indeed considered like ‘the perfect friend’ because when they want to be alone, they still appreciate their dog’s presence. Based on this last finding it can be suggested that dogs provide comfort for most children because they seem to understand children and listen to them when feeling upset *(McNicholas & Collis, 2001; Morrow, 1998; Tipper, 2011)*.

This leads to a second dimension of the social support: talking to the dog and feeling like the dog listens to them or even understands them. Unlike the comfort dimension, the children go most often to their siblings and sometimes their parents, when they want to talk to someone about their problems or personal stuff. The reasons why children not always go to their dog when they want to talk, is because they think: ‘a dog doesn’t understand me’, ‘he doesn’t know what you’re saying’. The children who gave these comments have the ‘just a dog’-view. According to one boy, his dog doesn’t understand him because he only knows the words that they trained him:
Researcher: “And do you sometimes go to Pluto to chat or not?”
Sam: “Hmm sometimes.”
Researcher: “Sometimes?”
Sam: “When it’s about animals, then I go to Pluto.” (Laughs)
Researcher: “Yes? (Laughs) And what do you say to Pluto then?”
Sam: “Uhm like, when this cat died, then I said like: “Pluto! Your buddy died…””
Researcher: “Ooh... Yes. And what did Pluto do then?”
Sam: “Because dogs don’t understand people. (laughs) Only the words they practiced.”
(Sam, Boy, 9, ’just a dog’-view)

This boy clearly thinks his dog doesn’t understand him, although it doesn’t stop him from going to his dog to talk about animals. On the contrary, some children with ‘the perfect friend’-view do feel like the dog can understand them, as one girl states: ‘when I tell him something about me or so, then he looks at me like he really understands it well’. Two other children think their dog only understands them ‘a little bit’. For others there was some hesitation. For example, one boy first said that when he talks to her ‘most of the time, she will run away because usually she doesn’t understand what you’re saying’, but he thinks she can understand jokes because she would laugh when somebody tells a joke. Another girl hesitated as well: ‘she actually doesn’t understand me, I think. Maybe she does understand me, but she certainly cannot talk back... So, Nora sometimes does understand me, but by my tone, not based on what I say, or sometimes by my body.’

Unlike these two children one boy did not hesitate at all and feels like the dog understands him by what he does and how he feels. According to him his dog knows when he’s happy ‘because when I like something, Nanou will also start wagging her tail.’ He even thinks she understands that he can’t always be with her:

Tobias (boy, 9, ’the perfect friend’-view): "Nanou understands me because when I do something different with her, she won’t start whining because I have to do that with her. Because I cannot always be with Nanou, I also have to eat and go to bed, and then I can’t always be with her as well."

So, these children with ‘the perfect friend’-view do think the dog can understand them in some way. Consequently, they talk more to their dog about personal issues compared to the opposite view. Only one girl with the opposite view talked to her dog ‘when something happened’. These children do talk about personal stuff even though they are aware of the limitations of human language in their interactions with
their dogs (Morrow, 1998): ‘of course they cannot react’, ‘maybe he wants to tell something, but that’s not possible because he cannot talk’. Children characterized under both views realize this limitation, but children with ‘the perfect friend’-view are more likely to feel like the dog does understand them, at least a bit, when they talk about their problems. Something all the children had in common is that they talk to their dog by saying that they’re ‘a good dog’, they ‘have to come here’ and they feel like the dog listens to them in terms of doing what they asked like ‘sit’ or ‘stop’. This shows a more top-down part of the relationships where the dog has to obey, which is even present for children with ‘the perfect friend’-view.

The last aspect of social support, specifically telling secrets to their dog, is another way that demonstrated how some children really thought that their dog could understand them. Eight children said that they share their secrets with their dogs, only one of them with the ‘just a dog’-view. It seems that keeping a secret also makes the dog a ‘perfect friend’, as five of them only tell their dog and no one else in the family. One of them said she doesn’t really tell secrets, but gossips to her dog, telling her dog what she thinks of some people. Seven others don’t tell their secrets to anyone, not even their dog. The children who share their secrets with their dog, do this because they are reassured that their secret would be safe with their dog as children assume that the dog can’t tell anyone else: ‘that’s not possible, because he can’t speak’, ‘it is a dog, and he won’t tell’, ‘I know that she can’t tell anyone else. I trust her the most’. Some of the other children, however, assume that their dog won’t tell anyone else: ‘she won’t tell it so fast’, ‘he’s the only one who can keep his promise’, ‘I think that she does know she can’t tell others’.

Here a difference is noticed between the children who think their dogs can’t tell their secrets and the children who think their dogs won’t tell their secrets. The first group of children know that their dog can’t speak and thus recognize the limitations of the dog’s communication, they are reassured that their secret is safe. The other children assume their secret is safe because the dogs would be aware that it has to stay a secret. These latter three children have ‘the perfect friend’-view, indicating again that they think their dog really understands them. For them, their dog does allow them to express their emotions and feelings in a ‘safe’ and acceptable way because the dog is someone with whom they can share their secrets (McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Morrow, 1998; Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010; Tipper, 2011). Besides, secrets there is one girl with ‘the perfect friend’-view who trust her dog that much that she tells him everything about herself and goes to him when she needs someone to talk to about the problems or secrets that she can’t share with her parents at home:
Researcher: “And do you sometimes tell secrets to Boy or not?”

Nina: “Boyie? Yes, often! Usually, actually he knows all my secrets.” (laughs)

Researcher: “Yes? And why do you tell him?”

Nina: “But, usually, when he’s sitting upstairs or something, then I’m calling and I tell my friends about it, then he’s sitting next to me and then I say something like: “yes, I will call you back soon”.

And then I tell Boyie what’s wrong and yes, I really like it that I can discuss it with somebody.”

(Nina, girl, 11, ‘the perfect friend’-view)

The social support dimension has exposed that the children who look for their dog when they are sad, talk to their dogs about personal problems and share their secrets with them can be seen as having an emotionally close relationship with their dog. These are predominantly the children with ‘the perfect friend’-view. On the other hand, the children who only see their dog as a playmate, the children with the ‘just a dog’-view, don’t really have much of an emotionally close relationship with their dog. They don’t really seem to talk to their dogs about personal problems and feelings and don’t always look for comfort with their dog. In other words, emotional closeness is less prevalent in the relationships of children who see their dog more as ‘just a dog’. But as this part has shown, there is some variation within the two views as well.

4.2.5. Conflict

As in every social relationship, some friction in the child-dog relationship occurs from time to time. Therefore, conflict is the last dimension and can be broken down in three aspects: annoying behaviors, being angry with each other, and fights. However, there were three children, including one girl with ‘the perfect friend’-view, who said they never experience any conflict with their dog. Of course, it’s not known if this really is the case as the children maybe didn’t want to admit it. The rest of the children did admit there was a bit of conflict present in their relationship. The most often conflict situation that occurs between a child and her or his dog is when the dog does something that the children don’t like or found annoying. As the study of Belk (1996) found, problems can occur in the child-pet relationship as pets can be messy, do damage, and disrupt normal routines in the house by breaking things. Two boys with ‘the perfect friend’-view did talk about such a situation: when one dog broke a workpiece of the boy, and another dog ruined the boy’s bal. Other annoying behaviors that were found in most children’s accounts are: ‘barking’, ‘biting’, ‘growling’, ‘jumping on me’, ‘licking’, ‘when the dog doesn’t listen’.
When their dog does some of these ‘annoying’ behaviors some children do something about it, while others don’t. The most often named reaction is getting angry with their dog, this is the second aspect of the conflict dimension. Yet, there was some inconsistency about this in the accounts of three boys, including two with the ‘just a dog’-view. They couldn’t decide whether or not they get mad at their dog. One time they say they don’t get mad at their dog, and another time they admit they do sometimes get a little bit angry with their dog. The boy with ‘the perfect friend’-view for example claimed that he was angry with his dog when she dog broke something, but he couldn’t stay angry for long because the dog’s ‘face’ was too funny. However later on in the interview, he said he’s ‘never angry with her, unless she’s annoying but then it’s her own fault’. This inconsistency reveals that these children don’t get angry that much with their dog, and when they do, they don’t get that angry and not for long. This was also true for the other children who get angry with their dog from time to time: ‘I don’t stay angry for long’ or they’re ‘not really mad… just a little bit angry’. Some of them even said they don’t really get angry, instead, they just tell the dog to stop doing something they aren’t allowed to do, and when the dogs listen to them, they have no reason to be angry. This was present in the accounts of eight children with both views.

The reasons why children don’t or don’t stay angry for long with their dog is because most of the time the dog immediately stops with the annoying behavior. The dog can’t argue with the children as well, the dog just follows the command of the child to stop. This is a reason mainly given by the children with the ‘just a dog’-view as well as children with ‘the perfect friend’-view. This finding reveals that even the children who take ‘the perfect dog’-view also take a more top-down view when they are angry with their dog as their dog needs to listen to them in these situations. But, for this group another reason can be added for not being able to stay angry for long. One girl for example said it’s ‘because she looks with puppy eyes or she does something sweet, by giving a lick or something.’. She even doesn’t stay angry that long when her dog ‘killed a few chickens’, her favorite animals. Another girl’s reason was ‘because he’s always so sweet and then if there’s something going on, he also comforts me’. When these two girls are angry with their dogs, they think about all the sweet things their ‘friend’ has done for them, so that they cannot stay angry for something small their dog did wrong. Thus, most of the times such mischief and disturbance from the dogs are tolerated by the children and they excuse such silly behavior (Belk, 1996).

Children’s reactions when they got angry with their dog are similar for most children. They simply said: ‘stop’ or ‘bad dog’. Three children, including one boy with the ‘just a dog’-view and two girls the other view, reacted differently from the rest by giving ‘little knock’ or ‘tap’ on the dog’s head or snout. These physical reactions imply a more top-down view, even for children with ‘the perfect friend’ view. Not only did the
children get angry with their dogs, but five children thought their dogs also get angry with them. When their dogs are angry, the dogs reacted by ‘biting’ or ‘growling’. This usually happened when children are playing with their dogs, as for this girl who said her dog bites her because he got angry with her when they were playing together: ‘he becomes very aggressive and then he starts to run like very fast laps and I say: “Boyie, stop!”, ...then he comes to me and bites me sometimes’. Play does not always happen smoothly as well. Most children understand that biting and growling is not a good sign and when that happens, they stop playing or they just go away for a moment to ‘take a break’.

As these examples demonstrate, some friction in the interactions with the dog does happen, for both children who see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ and those who see their dog as ‘just a dog’ (Tipper, 2011). But even though both children and dogs got angry at each other from time to time, no big fights happened between the children and their dogs. For nearly all children, fighting didn’t appear to be part of their relationship. Only three children with ‘the perfect friend’-view said they had a fight with their dogs very occasionally but two of them couldn’t really give an example. One girl did talk about a situation where she was in a fight with her dog. She was mad at her dog for killing her chickens. The fight was solved in the same way as the fights with her friends, implying that she sees her dog as her ‘friend’:

Researcher: “Did you already have a fight with her or not, with Nora?”
Elisa: “I was angry with her when she killed my chickens.”
RES: “Yes, then you had a bit of a fight?”
UNID: “Yes.”
RES: “And how did you solve it then?”
UNID: “Uhm yes, it actually solves a bit on its own. Like when I fight with my friends, the day after, everything is fine again. Then we just don’t talk about it anymore and then it’s okay.”

(Elisa, girl, 11, ‘the perfect friend’-view)

This conflict dimension did not reveal many notable differences between children with ‘the perfect friend’-view and children with the ‘just a dog’-view. In both cases, the children get angry with their dogs, even though they can’t stay mad at them for long, and they don’t really get into fights as well. Dogs can’t argue because they cannot speak, one girl with ‘the perfect friend’-view finds this a good one girl ‘because you can never have a fight with her’. This could probably be a reason why the other children don’t really get into fights as well. Hence, in conflict situations, the children of both views seem more similar than different to each other. They both give the dog a status of ‘perfect friend’ or ‘just a dog’ who they don’t need to get
into fights with because for the former, they are their ‘perfect friend’ who is always there for them, and for the latter, they are the ‘good dog’ who does what is asked. But the findings about conflict do suggest that the dog doesn’t always fulfill these roles.

4.3. Switching

On that note, the previous part of the analysis has given some insights on the variation in the children’s relationships with their dog, based on the five dimensions discussed. Especially in the two last dimensions of social support and conflict, some children of each view seemed to change their view more towards to opposite one. In the social support situations, the dog is considered ‘the best friend’ when the child is in need of comfort or wants to talk to somebody about a problem, while in the conflict situations, the child needs to take a top-down attitude when the dog does something he or she shouldn’t do, thus the dog has to obey. Two children in this research with the ‘just a dog’-view sometimes go to their dog when they wanted to be comforted, seeming to change their dominant ‘just a dog’-view to seeing their dog as a ‘perfect friend’ who is there for them and can make them feel better. On the other hand, most children with ‘the perfect friend’-view become a little angry when the dog does something annoying. At that moment, the dog isn’t considered ‘the perfect friend’ anymore but ‘just a dog’ who needs to listen to them, making these children change towards the opposite view. Nevertheless afterwards, they forgive their dog very quickly because they still consider him or her as their friend. These findings reveal that the two views are not fixed, and children can switch their view according to the situation.

Hence, both positive and negative dimensions of the relationship quality demonstrated that there is some variation between, as well as within the two opposite views. Most children who see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ sometimes get angry with their dog and have to take a top-down approach when the dog does something wrong. This shows that in these conflict situations, they have to switch to the opposite view. For some of the other children, the ones who view their dog as ‘just a dog’, switching happened as well, when they needed somebody to comfort them. In these social support situations, they see their dog as more than just a playmate, rather, as a friend who they can rely on when they feel sad or distressed. These situations show that most children do not take only one fixed view of the dog as ‘the perfect friend’ or the dog as ‘just a dog’, they sometimes have a mix of these views and switch between them according to what they think is appropriate in the situation.

Switching over time hasn’t really been found among the children interviewed as they haven’t experienced that many life changing situations like adults (Blouin, 2008). Only a few children said their relationship
changed a bit compared to when the dog came into their lives. The change was always considered positive: ‘it got better’. They were a bit more often angry with their dogs in the beginning. This was due to the fact that in the beginning, they had to get to know each other first or sometimes the dog was still a puppy, and he or she had to be taught what to do and what not to do. So, the maturation of the dog was seen to be a reason for a positive change in some children’s relationships. Still, children who talked about some change that occurred in their relationship, did not talk about big changes. However, there wasn’t enough information found that these children really changed their view over time as well. To conclude, this part has revealed why sometimes children switch between the two views, but how the predominant views come about in the first place has not yet been explained. To find possible explanations, the family context is brought into the picture.

4.4. Family context

The above section has given more clarity on how children of the two views differed in the five relationship dimensions and how these views can switch in conflict situations or social support situations. But then the question rises what can explain these differences, more specifically why some children see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ or ‘just as a dog’. One answer that is found in this research, is that the relationship between dogs and children is embedded in the context of the family (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011). Children have parent(s) and a lot of times sibling(s) who can influence their relationship with the dog in some way or another. Exploring the influence of this context on the child-dog relationship can help discovering in what situations the child needs ‘their perfect friend’ and in other situations they ‘just need a dog’.

4.4.1. Parents: the decision- and rule makers

Most of the times it is the parent who decided to get a dog, not the children, because the children were either too young when the dog came into the house or because the parents themselves wanted a dog. Eight children who were interviewed said that they really wanted a dog did, all of them having ‘the perfect friend’-view except for one. Only three of them, with ‘the perfect friend’-view, explicitly said they chose the dog as well, with the permission of the parents. This finding may imply that children who wanted a dog in the first place, already show more openness to be involved with the dog because it is a self-chosen relationship. On the other hand, one boy with the ‘just a dog’-view claimed that the dog came into their home to keep his father company. He was also not involved in choosing the dog and his name, which he wasn’t that happy about. In his case, it is not a self-chosen relationship. In the end, the parents are always the ones who
eventually the decision-maker and children often have limited opportunity to select the pet on their own, which corresponds to previous studies (Daly & Morton, 2006; Fifield & Forsyth, 1999). Nonetheless, even for some children who did not choose their dog, the dog can still be considered a best friend.

Another thing that parents are the decision makers of is where the dog is allowed to go. For two children the dog isn’t allowed inside the home at all times, while for three others, they are only occasionally allowed inside. By deciding this, these parents show a top down view on the dog. But what was found here is that only one child takes over the parent’s view of the dog as ‘just a dog’ by adopting the same view, even though he would still want his dog to be able come inside so he can play with him. The other four children don’t follow their parent’s view and they choose to view their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ instead. They also don’t agree with their parents’ space restrictions because three of them would even want to share their room with their dog. So, despite these space restrictions set up by parents, these children are able to form a close bond with their dog. Similar space restrictions are present for most children whose dogs are allowed inside. The parents don’t always allow the dog to go everywhere in the house: they are not allowed to go upstairs, in the living room or most often in the children’s bedrooms. Nearly all of them would want their dog to be able to come inside their room or in their bed so that they ‘can play with her’, or because ‘you don’t sleep alone’. These children’s accounts reveal how much of their personal space they are willing to share with their dog, children with the ‘just a dog’-view included. However, even if the dog is allowed in the room, some children don’t always want them there. They don’t want to sleep with their dog because their dogs would wake them up:

_Thijs (boy, 9, ‘just a dog’-view): “Because I don’t like to sleep with animals because it wakes you up and you see Blacky lie down and then you always play with him, you pet him and so on and then you see: “Oh no, it is that late! I still have to sleep!” Well and that’s why I cannot sleep with dogs!”_

This boy doesn’t want to sleep with his dog because he would be too distracted by his dog and not be able to sleep. He doesn’t have any space restrictions set up by his parents, and still, he chooses to see his dog as ‘just a dog’. The other girl, with ‘the perfect friend’-view doesn’t want to sleep with her dog either because he can’t stay still, and he wakes up too early for her, but she wants him inside her room at other times. There was only one boy, with ‘the perfect friend’-view, who sleeps with his dog almost every night. In his case, his parents do allow the dog inside his room. So, overall parents do impose restrictions where the dog is and isn’t allowed. This puts limits on the space that the child can share with the dog and also influences
in some way the relationship with the dog. However, some children are able to go beyond these restrictions set by parents and still choose to view their dog as ‘the perfect friend’.

A last thing the parents are the decision-maker of, is the care or responsibility for the dog. The parents are always the ones who feed the dogs, and most of the children occasionally helped their parents. No child in this research was solely responsible for feeding the dog. The children didn’t really mention that their parents oblige them to be involved in these caring tasks. However, not enough information was found about this, so it’s not clear if this is really the case. Walking is a caring task that almost all children do like to do and most of them are not obliged by parents to it. Only two children with ‘the perfect friend’-view mentioned that their parents sometimes make them go for a walk even though they don’t want to. The girl eventually likes it, the boy on the other hand, doesn’t think the walking is fun anymore because he is obliged to go. By imposing these kinds of rules and obligations on pet care is another way in which parents can modify and shape children’s relationships with pets and how they are experienced and expressed (Melson, 2003; Muldoon et al., 2015; Tipper, 2011).

These rules and restrictions demonstrate that children are not free to do what they want with their dog. During some of the observations conducted, the influence of mothers on children’s play interactions with their dogs was seen as well. Six mothers who were present during the observations, gave remarks about some of the children’s actions towards their dogs. Most of the time, this happened when the children did something that they shouldn’t do according to their mother. For example, one mother said: ‘be careful of Trixi her mouth!’, when the two boys shot the soccer ball that one of the dogs still has partly in her mouth. Another mother told her son not to tease his dog and tells him to ask the dog to let go of the ball instead of pulling the ball out of his mouth. Thus, by telling children what to do and what not to do during play-interactions, they also impose rules on the appropriate behavior towards the dog.

The influences of parents that were found are very limited and cannot explain much why some children adopt the view of ‘the perfect friend’ or ‘just a dog’. The rules and restrictions children talked about seems to influence only small aspects of children’s relationship with their dog, rather than the view itself. One possible explanation for the adoption of ‘the perfect friend’-view or the ‘just a dog’-view, is related to the decision of getting a dog. If the child wanted the dog him or herself and gets to decide on that matter, they seem to be more open to developing an emotionally close relationship with their dog and are more likely to view their dog as more than ‘just a dog’. Children with ‘the perfect friend’-view more often have a self-chosen relationship than those with the ‘just a dog’-view. However, parents aren’t the only influences in the family. A lot of times, children have to share their home and their dog with their siblings.
4.4.2. Relationships with siblings

In some ways the relationships with dogs are similar to siblings: they share their home with them and do a lot of the same activities together: play games, run, and watch television together. The big difference with siblings, however, is that they don’t need to go in competition with their dog for the same ‘toys’ or attention from parents. This is one of the reasons why the child-pet relationship is less characterized by conflict than the relationship with siblings. A fight or quarrel is part of almost every sibling relationship, and it is the main explanation why they don’t really get along very well. Most of the time the dog isn’t involved in these fights. In this research, there were only two girls who do experience some competition for attention of the dog. They had a fight with their sibling because they both want to play with the dog:

Researcher: “And do you sometimes fight over being able to play with the dogs or not?”
Lara: “Uhm no because I play the most with Roxy. But, then Ine says, very occasionally she says: “oh no, I was playing with Roxy first!” while that wasn’t true at all because I started training her and then I practiced without cookies. And then she says: “No, you cannot do that now! You already trained her!”
Researcher: “Oh and what do you do then?”
Lara: “Then I tell her: “Uhm Ine, It’s my favorite dog. Your favorite dog is Dory. You can train Dory, I train Roxy.”
(Lara, girl, 9, ‘just a dog’-view)

So, for this girl, there is some competition between her and her sister for play time with the dog. Moreover, Lara does not want to share ‘her favorite dog’ with her sister. This is similar for another girl, with the opposite view, who also had a fight twice with her brother over playing with the dog. One time he was playing with the dog and she wanted to play with him, and the other time it was the other way around. So, for these children, some sibling rivalry revolves around getting the attention of the pet (Belk, 1996). Besides these fights for attention of the dog, both children and their siblings do play together with the dog sometimes. This was also true for most children with siblings, even though they didn’t get along that well and had a lot of fights with their siblings, they did include them in some of the play activities with their dog. However, for others, the age-difference between them and their siblings limit them from including their siblings in the play interactions with their dogs. Two boys don’t play together with their sibling and their dog, because of a five-year age gap between them. The first boy, who has a ‘just a dog’-view, said he doesn’t get along very well with his older sister because she’s older, but he has another brother who is only two
years older than him. That’s why he only plays together with his brother and the dog. The second boy, with ‘the perfect friend’-view, goes to his dog when he wants to play because of the age difference with his younger brother: ‘he is always annoying and a little bit too small for me I think’. For these two boys, the age-difference with their sibling really matters. These findings point out that the absence of a sibling of close age creates a kind of deficit in the availability of age-appropriate for some children. This deficit is in line with previous research (Paul & Serpell, 1992; Dunn (1984) cited in Fifield & Forsyth, 1999, p. 31).

Apart from age and gender differences, six children who see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ don’t get along that well with their sibling(s) and play for most part alone with their dog. It means that sometimes their sibling is not an ‘appropriate playmate’ anymore because they often have fights. At those times, they can still play with their dog who they are much less likely to fight with, and that’s when the dogs are considered a better playmate than the siblings. Yet, two children, one of each view, who do get along with their older sibling don’t really play together with the dog because of the lack of time their sibling has. They experienced the same thing with their parents: ‘my dad is busy now with his work and my sister is working on something, she has other things to do’, ‘nobody has that much time’. Similarly, another boy with ‘the perfect friend’-view goes to his dogs to play when his sisters ‘don’t feel like it’. In these instances, they feel like sometimes they don’t have anyone to play with and again the absence of a playmate can be noticed.

This absence of a playmate is especially present for children without siblings. One boy goes to his dog because of the lack of times his parents have: ‘because I’m alone and otherwise I ask mom or dad. But usually I ask mom because dad is always busy working and only finishes when I’m already sleeping. And I ask mom, but she has to clean sometimes and make diner.’ This is in line with Veevers (1985), who found that pets always have time to spend with child when the parent may not. This boy even explicitly expresses the deficit of this absence by saying that he’s alone. Another girl without siblings did so as well. She’s the one who asked for a dog because ‘I’m an only child’. The last only child in this research didn’t explicitly say it, but he did say he ‘always plays with Paco’, the dog he grew up with. Even though these children enjoy having their dogs as playmates as they don’t have a sibling to play with, it doesn’t mean that they automatically see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’. Only the girl does, who really wanted a dog as well, the other two boys had no say in getting their dogs, it was their parents’ decision and they see their dog as ‘just a dog’. This links back to the previous section where it became clear that when the relationship is self-chosen, most children are more open to see their dog as ‘the perfect friend’.

Thus, when a deficit is experienced, the dogs can be seen as an alternative for these absent age-appropriate playmates. Two children even go further by seeing their dog as a replacement for absent siblings. This is
only found for two children with ‘the perfect friend’-view. They explicitly said they see their dog as their ‘brother’. In line with previous research, the child-dog interaction serves as a substitute for absent child-sibling interaction, and for that reason they are considered surrogates for human siblings (Blouin, 2008; Veevers, 1985). One of them does have a younger sister, but he’s still glad the dog came into their home because ‘then I had someone to play with, of boys’. He thinks it’s important to have a playmate of the same gender, even though that is a dog. The other girl is an only child, and for her, her dog helped her from feeling lonely without siblings, by giving her companionship and playfulness:

Researcher: “And what do you think about having Boy at home?”
Nina: “I think it is cozy actually.”
Researcher: “Yes? What do you find cozy about it?”
Nina: “Because well he is very playful and so on and outside as well, when it’s summer or when the sun’s shining, then it is also fun because I’m an only child. Uhm and it is fun then if I have someone with me to play with and so on because if else it is just alone, well with Boy I really don’t feel alone.”
Researcher: “You don’t feel alone?”
Nina: “No. With Boyie, I don’t feel alone, no.” (Nina, girl, 11, ‘the perfect friend’-view)

This demonstrates that her dog not only provide companionship against loneliness but also against boredom, because when she’s bored, she goes to her dog as well and she feels like ‘it’s more fun’. She does experience a deficit of not having a sibling to play with. Two other children go to their dog when they are bored as well, and one boy even claims he’s never bored because of his dog. These findings reveal that the dog can make up for the deficit that children sometimes experience, not only when they don’t have siblings, but also when they have siblings who don’t have time for them or don’t want to play with them. This could be another possible explanation for why these children view their dog as ‘the perfect friend’. They spend more time with their dog and have more opportunities to form a closer bond. Additionally, because of the dog, they can still enjoy themselves with someone when no one else in their family has time for them.

Finally, two situations related to the family context were found in some children’s accounts to be a possible source of one view or the other. The first source is the number of dogs that are present in the family. Four children in this research had more than one dog at home. The boy with two dogs adopted the view of ‘the perfect friend’, the others with three or seven dogs adopted the opposite view. It seems that the children with more than two dogs can’t form such a close bond with their dogs because the dog is not alone. In other words, the dog may not have a ‘unique status’ when more than two dogs are present. The second source
is the marital status of the parents. Three children had separated parents, all of them with ‘the perfect friend’-view. This could suggest that they may need more emotional support, when they have been through the divorce of their parents. This social support is something their dog can provide. Of course, because of the small number of children in these two situations, it’s not easy to know if these are indeed important sources of the views. These are findings that are suggestive based on this small sample. There are probably a lot of other sources of the children’s views as well.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This research sought to explore more in depth how child-dog relationships are experienced at home. Based on the interviews and observations conducted, two opposite views on the status of the dog could be distinguished: the dog as ‘the perfect friend’ and the dog as ‘just a dog’. This reveals that children have multiple ways to understand their dogs and include them in the family, and adds to previous studies who found this only for adults (Blouin, 2008; Irvine & Cilia, 2017). It provides and answer to the first research question on what children’s view are on the dog. The differences and similarities between children of both views were found by exploring five dimensions in child-dog relationships, to be able to answer the second research question about how these views are performed in the daily child-dog relationship: play, reciprocity, empathy, social support and conflict. Based on these dimensions, there were some patterns found in children’s relationships with their dogs, based on their views. However, not all children characterized under the same view showed the same patterns, there was some variation within these views as well, so there is some nuance in these findings.

This research found that children who adopted ‘the perfect friend’-view have an emotionally close relationship with their dog. Almost all of them experienced social support from their dog who comforts them and allows them to express their secrets in a ‘safe’ way. This is in line with previous studies (Charles, 2014; Charles & Davies, 2008; Franklin, 2009; Melson, 2003; Morrow, 1998; Robin & Bensel, 1985). Some of them even felt like the dog can understand them to some extent. They also exhibited empathy by paying attention to the dog’s own needs and feelings, knowing when the dog is sad or bored. This is in line with previous research (Vidovic et al., 1999; Williams et al., 2010). A lot of children acted on these empathic feelings by comforting the dogs and going to them to play when they are bored. This was something the dogs also did for them, indicating reciprocity in their relationship. These findings contribute to previous studies which found reciprocity in terms of love and trust (Belk, 1996; McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Morrow, 1998). In contrast, even though the children who adopted the ‘just a dog’-view overall experienced a good
relationship with their dog as well, they didn’t really feel emotionally close to their dog. Only a few of them experienced some social support. The dog was seen mainly seen as a playmate who is there for them. Therefore, their relationship didn’t really include reciprocity, except in terms of going to each other to play. They only showed some understanding for the dog’s actions, instead of empathy. Most of them also thought that the dog can’t understand them as they are ‘just a dog’.

On dimension of conflict, this study found no striking differences between the children of both views. Small conflict situations were actually quite common in nearly all children’s relationships with their dogs. When their pet did something wrong, they got a little bit angry, but they could not stay angry for long. Such disturbances were overall tolerated, something that previous research had already found for adults (Belk, 1996). In those conflict situations, even the children with ‘the perfect friend’-view switch to a top-down view, to make their dog listen. This revealed that these two views are not fixed. This was also found for a few children with the ‘just a dog’-view, who see their dog as more than a playmate when they experience social support from their dog. This finding contributes to the research of Blouin (2008) by revealing that switching doesn’t only happen for adults, but children’s view can switch temporarily according to the situation as well. By including both positive and negative dimensions, this research contributes to understanding the complexity of these relationships, indicating that they cannot be reduced to the idealized view that children have a ‘natural’ fondness of animals or are innately capable of casual cruelty towards animals (Charles, 2014; Tipper, 2011).

This research also confirmed that children’s relationships with their dog are embedded within other family relationships (Tipper, 2011). This family context was taken into account in attempt to explain how these two views come about. The only possible influence of parents on the view that was found, is related to the decision of getting a dog. This study revealed that when children already wanted a dog themselves, they seemed to be more open to adopt ‘the perfect friend’-view. Still, most parents were overall the decision-maker in getting the dog, and this is in line with previous research (Daly & Morton, 2006; Fifield & Forsyth, 1999). The other possible explanation for these views is related to the siblings. Most children who expressed a deficit in the availability of age-appropriate playmates because of the absence of a sibling, the absence of a sibling of close age or the lack of time of the sibling, seemed to take on ‘the perfect friend’-view. This feeling of a deficit is in line with previous research (Paul & Serpell, 1992; Dunn (1984) cited in Fifield & Forsyth, 1999, p. 31). However, these explanations were rather limited and therefore the last research question, on what is the influence of the family context is on these views, could not be answered
extensively. More research will need to be conducted on the possible influences of the family context to find out in what kind of situations children choose to view their dog as ‘the perfect friend’ or ‘just a dog’.

There were some limitations to this research. First of all, this research focused mainly on exploration, aiming to find out how children view their dog and experience their relationship with their dog. Consequently, in what kind of context certain views come into existence, could not be explained extensively. This is something future research can do by looking at other important sources connected to the family context, family relationships and -structure or even broader by looking at demographic factors or culture. Secondly, because of the cyclic nature of the research process that was used, some questions were not asked to all children, so there was not always enough information found about certain aspects for every respondent. Thirdly, the sample was rather small and only included dogs, so the findings were specific for this group and cannot be generalized to other children with other pets. There is also some social desirability bias present in the sample because all children who participated in this study had some or a lot of interest in their dog and overall had a good relationship with their dog. Additionally, during the interviews some children maybe didn’t want to admit that they experience some conflict with their dog, so there could be some social desirability here as well. Consequently, the findings on the conflict dimension are limited and future research should look for children who experience a more negative relationship with their dog, where the child doesn’t show much interest in the dog. This could possibly help in finding more variation within and between the two views found in this research and could help in explaining when they arise as well.

To conclude, the last limitation of this research is that the focus was placed on the child’s perspective and less on the dog’s agency in this relationship. This research tried to acknowledge the dog’s agency by paying some attention to the behavior of the dog during the observation as well. However, these observations were not extensively done and not much information was found. Future research should conduct more observations and pay attention to both the dog and the child in their interactions. Still, this research did find that dogs don’t always feel like playing or always pay attention to the child. These findings could imply that dogs can decide themselves if they want to listen or show affection to the child or not, just as the child can decide this. So, the dog’s behavior could possibly have an influence on whether the child adopts ‘the perfect friend’-view or the ‘just a dog’-view as well. Similarly, it’s not because the child experiences a good relationship with his or her dog, that this is also true for the dog. There are two actors involved in this relationship, and the dog is one of them, so future research will need to pay more attention to this actor. Thus, this research has revealed that the dog, and possibly other pets, play a big part in the social lives of children at home, and therefore, they deserve sociological research attention as well.
Bibliography


## Appendix

1. **Sample matrix (In Dutch)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Geslacht</th>
<th>Leeftijd</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Leeftijd siblings</th>
<th>Aantal honden</th>
<th>Leeftijd honden</th>
<th>Periode hond in huis</th>
<th>Burgerlijke status ouders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R1: Noah</strong> (pilot)</td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>7 jaar</td>
<td>Nee</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mikado: 10 jaar Paco: 9 jaar Bailey: 5 maand</td>
<td>1 jaar 9 jaar 3 maanden</td>
<td>Ongekend (Beide ouders waren aanwezig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R2: Simon</strong> (pilot)</td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>8 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Kevin: 6 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bobby: 9 jaar</td>
<td>3-4 maanden</td>
<td>Ongekend (Enkel mama was aanwezig in huis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R3: Thijs</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Lars: 7 jaar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blacky: 4 jaar Lila en Trixi: 1 jaar</td>
<td>4 jaar 1 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R4: Jasper</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>10 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Milan: 5,5 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alice: 7 maanden</td>
<td>6 maanden</td>
<td>Gescheiden (Interview vond plaats bij de mama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R5: Nicholas</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>8 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Bas: 6 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lily: 8 jaar</td>
<td>8 jaar</td>
<td>Samenwonend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R6: Mila</strong></td>
<td>Meisje</td>
<td>7 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Marcus: 10 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Akina: 5 jaar</td>
<td>5 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R7: Nick</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>7 jaar</td>
<td>1 zus</td>
<td>Camille: 12 jaar Maxence: 9 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guust: 5 maanden</td>
<td>3 maanden</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R8: Jules</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>1 stiefbroer 2 zussen (tweeling)</td>
<td>Mathieu: 14 jaar Lise en Sarah: 7 jaar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lilly: 10 jaar Lola: 6 jaar</td>
<td>Nog maar een paar weken bij de papa</td>
<td>Gescheiden (Interview nam plaats bij de papa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R9: Arno</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>8 jaar</td>
<td>1 zus</td>
<td>Emma: 6 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kai: 4 jaar</td>
<td>2,5 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R10: Lara</strong></td>
<td>Meisje</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>1 zus</td>
<td>Ine: 5 jaar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mika: 5 jaar</td>
<td>Kiki: 4 jaar</td>
<td>Dory: 3 jaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R11: Sam</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>Nee</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pluto: Bijna 3 jaar</td>
<td>Bijna 3 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R12: Nina</strong></td>
<td>Meisje</td>
<td>11 jaar</td>
<td>Nee</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Boy: 2 jaar</td>
<td>2 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R13: Maya</strong></td>
<td>Meisje</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Maro: 11 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Diablo: 6 jaar</td>
<td>6 jaar (vanaf 6 weken)</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R14: Timo</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>8 jaar</td>
<td>1 halfzus 1 halfbroer</td>
<td>Lisa: 23 jaar Tom: 16 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Luca: 12 jaar</td>
<td>12 jaar (vanaf 4 maanden)</td>
<td>Samenwonend (Enkel halfzus woont nog thuis, in het weekend, halfbroer woont niet bij de mama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R15: Laurens</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>11 jaar</td>
<td>1 broer</td>
<td>Liam: 10 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bono: 1,5 jaar</td>
<td>1,5 jaar</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R16: Elisa</strong></td>
<td>Meisje</td>
<td>11 jaar</td>
<td>1 zus 1 broer</td>
<td>Gabriella: 9 jaar Seppe: 7 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nora: 2 jaar</td>
<td>2 jaar (vanaf 4 maanden)</td>
<td>Getrouwd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R17: Tobias</strong></td>
<td>Jongen</td>
<td>9 jaar</td>
<td>1 zus 1 stiefbroer 1 stiefzus</td>
<td>Jasmien: 14 jaar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nanou: 1 jaar</td>
<td>1 jaar</td>
<td>Gescheiden (Interview vond plaats bij de papa thuis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.  Message for parents (In Dutch)

Hallo (naam ouder),

Mijn naam is Marlies, (naam persoon die mij de contactgegevens heeft doorgegeven van een mogelijke respondent) had mij doorverwezen naar jou omdat ik families zoek met een kindje tussen de 7 en 11 jaar die een hond thuis hebben en zij/hij liet me weten dat jij een hond en kindje in deze leeftijdscategorie hebt.

Ik studeer sociologie aan de Universiteit van Gent en ben momenteel met mijn masterproef bezig waarbij ik onderzoek doe naar de relaties tussen kinderen en honden binnenin het gezin. Ik zou voor mijn onderzoek graag je kindje willen interviewen over zijn/haar relatie met de hond en ik zou ook zijn/haar interactie met de hond willen observeren. Normaal gezien zou het interview en de observatie een uurtje tot 1u30 in beslag nemen.

Ik vroeg me af of je eventueel interesse hebt om deel te nemen en of je kindje dat ziet zitten om geïnterviewd te worden of niet?

Indien je eventueel meer informatie wil over mijn onderzoek, mag je mij zeker contacteren op mijn gsm nummer (gsm nummer).

Alvast bedankt!

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Marlies Bockstal
Beste ouder

Mijn naam is Marlies Bockstal en ik studeer sociologie aan de Universiteit van Gent. Voor mijn masterproef (thesis) doe ik onderzoek naar de relaties tussen kinderen en honden binnen het gezin.

Ik zoek hiervoor gezinnen met een hond en waarvan minstens één kindje tussen 7 en 11 jaar oud is (er mogen meerdere kindjes aanwezig zijn in het gezin). Het kindje dat momenteel in deze leeftijdscategorie valt zou ik graag interviewen en observeren. Het interview samen met de observatie zal ongeveer een uurtje in beslag nemen.

Indien u en uw gezin willen meewerken aan mijn onderzoek kan u mij contacteren via mijn e-mailadres Marlies.Bockstal@UGent.be of via mijn telefoonnummer 0471 23 54 07. Voor bijkomende vragen in verband met dit onderzoek kan u mij ook steeds contacteren.

Kent u iemand die interesse zou hebben om deel te nemen aan mijn onderzoek, dan mag u hen zeker mijn contactgegevens bezorgen.

Alvast bedankt en hopelijk tot binnenkort!

Met vriendelijke groeten

Marlies Bockstal
GEZINNEN MET KINDJES EN HOND GEZOCHT VOOR ONDERZOEK MASTERPROEF

Mijn naam is Marlies Bockstal en ik studeer sociologie aan de Universiteit van Gent. Voor mijn thesis doe ik onderzoek naar de relaties tussen kinderen en honden binnen het gezin.

Hiervoor zoek ik gezinnen met een hond en minstens één kindje tussen 7 en 11 jaar oud (er mogen meerdere kindjes aanwezig zijn in het gezin). Het kindje dat momenteel in deze leeftijdscategorie valt zou ik graag interviewen en observeren voor mijn onderzoek. Dit zal samen ongeveer een uurtje duren.

Interesse om deel te nemen? Heeft u vragen?
Kent u iemand die zou willen deelnemen?

Contacteer mij:

Marlies.Bockstal@UGent.be
0471 23 54 07

Bedankt en hopelijk tot binnenkort!
5. *Questionnaire pilot (In Dutch)*

**Inleiding**
Hallo, mijn naam is Marlies. Ik studeer Sociologie aan de Universiteit van Gent en voor mijn eindwerk probeer ik meer te weten te komen over de relaties die kinderen hebben met hun hond.

**Ethiek**
Ik zal je in dit interview enkele vraagjes stellen over jou en je hond. Sommige vragen zullen misschien wat moeilijker zijn, maar maak je geen zorgen want ze horen wat moeilijker te zijn. Als je een vraag niet begrijpt, mag je dat zeggen. Als er vragen zijn die je niet wil antwoorden, mag je mij dit ook zeker zeggen. Je bent niet verplicht te antwoorden op een vraag als je niet wil en niemand zal ook boos zijn op jou. Ik wil meer te weten komen over jouw relatie met je hond, dus je bent vrij om te zeggen wat je wil, er zijn geen foute antwoorden op de vragen die ik zal stellen. Ieder kind heeft een unieke relatie met hun huisdier, dus je kan niks zeggen dat fout is, oké? Alles wat je zegt in dit interview is anoniem, dus jouw naam en de namen die je gebruikt zullen vervangen worden door andere namen zodat niemand weet dat het over jou gaat. Het zal ongeveer een half uurtje duren. We gaan dit gesprek ook opnemen, maar maak je geen zorgen niemand anders zal deze opname beluisteren buiten mezelf. Is het oké voor jou dat we een opname maken? Is alles duidelijk voor jou of heb je nog een vraag over iets? Als je nu geen vragen hebt, kan je mij nog steeds op elk moment vragen stellen, oké? Dan beantwoord ik deze met veel plezier.

**Openingsvragen**
1. Hoe oud ben je?
2. In welk leerjaar zit je?
3. Ben je een jongen of een meisje?
4. Heb je broertjes of zusjes?
   a. Indien ja: hoeveel en hoe oud zijn ze?
5. Sinds wanneer heb je de hond al?

**Drop Off**
   a. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen wat je hebt getekend?
   b. Waarom heb je de hond er wel/niet bij getekend?

**Transitievragen**
7. Wat heb je vandaag al gedaan hier thuis?
a. Wat heb je met je hond gedaan?

8. Wie heeft er beslist om een hond in huis te nemen?
   a. Wie heeft de hond gekozen?
   b. Wie heeft de naam van de hond gekozen?

9. Foto activiteit: kinderen moeten uit vier foto’s de foto kiezen die het best overeen komt met de relatie die ze hebben met hun hond (zie Appendix 9). Ze mogen er meer dan één kiezen.
   a. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen waarom je die foto(s) hebt gekozen?

Centrale Vragen

10. Wanneer ben je onlangs eens verdrietig geweest: kan je me uitleggen wat er is gebeurd?
   a. Wie heeft jou getroost?
   b. Hoe voelde je je als die persoon jou kwam troosten?
   c. Troost je hond je ook wel eens of niet?
   d. Wie luistert er naar jou?

11. Bij wie gaat de hond als hij/zij wil spelen?
   a. Wat vind je hiervan?
   b. Bij wie ga jij als je wil spelen?

12. Wat doe jij allemaal van zorgtaken voor de hond?
   a. Wat vind je er leuk aan? Wat niet?
   b. Wie zorgt er nog voor de hond?
      i. Zo ja: welke taken doen zij?

13. Waar zou je de hond en je andere familieleden plaatsen in één van deze cirkels? (concentric circle map zie Appendix 8)
   a. Waarom heb je de hond in die cirkel gezet?
   b. Kan je mij vertellen waarom je de hond dichter/verder bij jou hebt gezet dan je andere familieleden?

14. Is de hond onlangs eens ambetant geweest?
   a. Wat doet de hond dan?
   b. Wat doe jij als de hond dat doet?
   c. Wat zijn andere dingen dat je niet leuk vindt aan je hond?
   d. Wat vind je wel leuk aan je hond?

15. Iedereen heeft wel eens ruzie of wordt boos op iemand anders, zoals op broertjes en zusjes, vriendjes? Heb je dat al eens gehad met je hond?
a. Indien ja, hoe kwam dit?
b. Hoe heb je dit opgelost
c. Ben je wel eens boos op je hond of niet?

Besluitende Vragen

16. Heb je nog vragen? Wil je graag nog iets vertellen dat je nog niet hebt kunnen zeggen?
17. Dankjewel om deel te nemen aan dit interview.
6. Questionnaire first round (In Dutch)

**Inleiding**
Hallo, mijn naam is Marlies. Ik ben student, dus ik ga nog naar school zoals jou. Voor mijn eindwerk probeer ik meer te weten te komen over de relaties tussen kindjes en hun hond.

**Ethiek**
Ik zal je in dit interview enkele vragen stellen over jou en je hond. Als je een vraag niet begrijpt, mag je dat zeggen. Als er vragen zijn die je niet wil antwoorden, mag je mij dit ook zeker zeggen. Je bent niet verplicht te antwoorden op een vraag als je niet wil en niemand zal ook boos zijn op jou. Ik wil meer te weten komen over jouw relatie met je hond, dus je bent vrij om te zeggen wat je wil, er zijn geen foute antwoorden op de vragen die ik zal stellen. Ieder kind heeft een andere relatie met zijn/haar hond, dus je kan niks zeggen dat fout is, oké? Alles wat je zegt in dit interview is anoniem, dus jouw naam en de namen die je gebruikt zullen vervangen worden door andere namen zodat niemand weet dat het over jou gaat. Het zal ongeveer een half uurtje duren. We gaan dit gesprek ook opnemen, maar maak je geen zorgen niemand anders zal deze opname beluisteren buiten mezelf. Is alles duidelijk voor jou of heb je nog een vraag over iets? Als je nu geen vragen hebt, kan je mij nog steeds op elk moment vragen stellen, oké? Dan beantwoord ik deze met veel plezier.

**Openingsvragen**
1. Hoe oud ben je?
2. In welk leerjaar zit je?
3. Ben je een jongen of een meisje?
4. Heb je broertjes of zusjes? Hoeveel en hoe oud zijn ze?
5. Sinds wanneer heb je de hond al?

**Drop Off**
1. Opdracht: Stikkertjes waar ze de naam van familieleden opzetten en erna moeten ze deze stickers in de concentric circle map plaatsen om aan te duiden hoe goed ze overeenkomen met elk van hun familieleden. (zie Appendix 8)
   a. Kan je mij vertellen waarom je de hond dichter/verder bij jou hebt gezet dan je broertje/zusje/mama en papa?
   b. Waarom maakt de hond al dan niet deel uit van de familie volgens jou?
2. Wie heeft er beslist om een hond in huis te brengen?
   a. Wie heeft de hond gekozen?
   b. Wat vond je ervan dat er een hond in huis kwam?
c. Wie heeft de naam van de hond gekozen?

3. Waar mag de hond overal komen in huis?
   a. Waar slaapt de hond?
   b. Waar zou je willen dat de hond nog mag komen?
   c. Wat doe je als de hond toch ergens komt waar hij/zij niet mag komen?

Transitievragen

4. Wil je een tekening maken van een activiteit met je hond thuis? Je mag zelf kiezen wat je tekent. Is het oké als ik je een 10tal minuutjes geef?
   a. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen wat je hebt getekend?

Centrale Vragen

5. Wat heb je gedaan nadat je van school kwam (vandaag/gisteren)?
   a. Wat doet de hond als je thuiskomt?
      i. Wat vind je daarvan?
   b. Wat is het eerste dat je doet als je thuiskomt en je hond ziet?
   c. Wat doe je zo nog allemaal je nog met je hond?
   d. Wat doe je samen met je broertje(s) en/of zusje(s) en de hond?
      i. Hoe verloopt dit? (Wat verloopt er goed/minder goed)
      ii. Wat doe je enkel met je broertjes, zusjes?
      iii. Wat doe je enkel met de hond?
      iv. Hoe voel je je tijdens het spelen met de hond?

6. Bij wie gaat de hond, als hij/zij wil spelen?
   a. Wat vind je hiervan?
   b. Bij wie ga jij als je wil spelen?
   c. Wie speelt er het meest met de hond? (Wat vind je daarvan?)
   d. Stel nu dat de hond wil niet spelen, hoe ga je daar mee om?

7. Foto activiteit: kinderen moeten uit vier foto’s de foto kiezen die het best overeen komt met de relatie die ze hebben met hun hond (zie Appendix 9). Ze mogen er meer dan één kiezen.
   a. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen waarom je die foto(s) hebt gekozen?

8. Wanneer ben je onlangs verdrietig geweest? Wat is er gebeurd?
   a. Wie heeft jou getroost thuis?
   b. Wat doet die persoon dan om jou te troosten?
c. Hoe voelde je als die persoon je kwam troosten?

9. Bij wie ga je als je wil praten met iemand thuis?
   a. Over wat praat je met je broertje(s), zusje(s)?
   b. Wat vertel je tegen je hond?
   c. Aan wie vertel je geheimen?
   d. Bij wie heb je het gevoel dat ze goed kunnen luisteren naar jou?

10. Vul het lijstje aan met dingen die je leuk vindt aan je hond en dingen die je minder leuk vindt (zie Appendix 10).
   a. Bespreken
   b. Hoe reageer je als de hond iets doet dat je niet leuk vindt?
   c. Wat doe je als de hond je wil bijten tijdens het spelen?
   d. Wat doe je als de hond gromt naar jou?

11. Iedereen heeft wel eens ruzie met iemand anders, zoals met broertjes, zusjes en vriendjes.
    Met wie heb jij al eens ruzie gehad in de familie?
    a. Hoe is dit opgelost?
    b. Heb je met je broertje/zusje wel eens ruzie gehad om de aandacht van de hond of niet?
    c. Heb je al eens ruzie gehad met je hond of niet?
    d. Is je hond als een boos geweest op jou?
       i. Indien ja, hoe kwam dit?
       ii. En jij op je hond?

**Besluitende Vragen**

12. Heb je nog vragen?

13. Wil je graag nog iets vertellen dat je nog niet hebt kunnen zeggen?

Dankjewel om deel te nemen aan dit interview
7. *Questionnaire third round (In Dutch)*

**Inleiding**
Hallo, mijn naam is Marlies. Ik ben student, dus ik ga nog naar school zoals jou. Voor mijn eindwerk probeer ik meer te weten te komen over de relaties tussen kindjes en hun hond.

**Ethiek**
Ik zal je in dit interview enkele vraagjes stellen over jou en je hond. Als je een vraag niet begrijpt, mag je dat zeggen. Als er vragen zijn die je niet wil antwoorden, mag je mij dit ook zeker zeggen. Je bent niet verplicht te antwoorden op een vraag als je niet wil en niemand zal ook boos zijn op jou. Ik wil meer te weten komen over jouw relatie met je hond, dus je bent vrij om te zeggen wat je wil, er zijn geen foute antwoorden op de vragen die ik zal stellen. Ieder kind heeft een andere relatie met zijn/haar hond, dus je kan niks zeggen dat fout is, oké? Alles wat je zegt in dit interview is anoniem, dus jouw naam en de namen die je gebruikt zullen vervangen worden door andere namen zodat niemand weet dat het over jou gaat. Het zal ongeveer een half uurtje duren. We gaan dit gesprek ook opnemen, maar maak je geen zorgen niemand anders zal deze opname beluisteren buiten mezelf. Is alles duidelijk voor jou of heb je nog een vraag over iets? Als je nu geen vragen hebt, kan je mij nog steeds op elk moment vragen stellen, oké? Dan beantwoord ik deze met veel plezier.

**Openingsvragen**
1. Hoe oud ben je?
2. In welk leerjaar zit je?
3. Ben je een jongen of een meisje?
4. Heb je broertjes of zusjes? Hoeveel en hoe oud zijn ze?
5. Sinds wanneer heb je de hond al?

**Drop Off**
6. Opdracht: Stikkertjes waar ze de naam van familieleden opzetten en erna moeten ze deze stickers in de concentric circle map plaatsen om aan te duiden hoe goed ze overeenkomen met elk van hun familieleden. (Appendix 8)
   a. Kan je mij vertellen waarom je de hond dichter/verder bij jou hebt gezet dan je broertje/zusje/mama en papa?
   b. Waarom maakt de hond al dan niet deel uit van de familie volgens jou?
   c. Wie is jouw beste vriend/vriendin thuis?
      i. Waarom heb je deze persoon gekozen?
7. Waar mag de hond overal komen in huis?
a. Waar zou je willen dat de hond nog mag komen?

b. Wat doe je als de hond toch ergens komt waar hij/zij niet mag komen?

c. Waar slaapt de hond?

8. Wat vind je ervan om een hond in huis te hebben?

   a. Wie heeft er beslist om de hond in huis te nemen? (Wat vond je daarvan?)
   b. Hoe zou je (de persoonlijkheid van) je hond omschrijven?
   c. Wat vind je van de relatie met je hond?
      ii. Hoe was je relatie vroeger? (Is er iets verandert of niet?)

Transitievragen

9. Wil je een tekening maken van een activiteit met je hond thuis? Je mag zelf kiezen wat je tekent. Is het oké als ik je een 10tal minuutjes geef?

   b. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen wat je hebt getekend?

Centrale Vragen

10. Wat heb je gedaan met je hond vandaag?

    a. Wat doe je zo nog allemaal met je hond?
       i. Hoe verloopt dit? (Wat verloopt er goed/minder goed?)
       ii. Wat doe je enkel met je hond? (En wat enkel met sibling?)
    b. Hoe voel je je als je bij je hond bent?

11. Bij wie gaat de hond, als hij/zij wil spelen?

    a. Wat vind je hiervan?
    b. Bij wie ga jij als je wil spelen?
    c. Stel nu dat de hond wil niet spelen, wat doe je dan?
    d. Hoe zie je als de hond iets nodig heeft? (Spelen, honger/dorst, uitlaten)
       i. Wie geeft de hond eten/drinken?
       ii. Wat vind je daarvan?

12. Foto activiteit: kinderen moeten uit vier foto’s de foto kiezen die het best overeen komt met de relatie die ze hebben met hun hond (zie Appendix 9). Ze mogen er meer dan één kiezen.

    a. Bespreking: Kan je me uitleggen waarom je die foto(s) hebt gekozen?

13. Als je verdrietig bent, wie komt jou dan troosten thuis?

    a. Wat doet hij/zij dan om je te troosten?
    b. Hoe voelde je als die persoon je kwam troosten?
    c. Wanneer is de hond eens verdrietig geweest?
i. Hoe zie je dat?
ii. Wat doe je dan?

14. Bij wie ga je als je over iets wil praten met iemand thuis?
a. Wat vertel je tegen je hond?
   i. Hoe reageert de hond als je praat tegen hem/haar?
b. Aan wie vertel je je geheimen?
c. Bij wie heb je het gevoel dat ze goed kunnen luisteren naar jou?
   i. Wie begrijpt jou het best in de familie?

14. Vul het lijstje aan met dingen die je leuk vindt aan je hond en dingen die je minder leuk vindt (zie Appendix 10).
a. Bespreken
b. Wanneer is de hond ambetant volgens jou?
   i. Wat doe je als de hond iets doet dat niet mag?
   ii. Plaag jij de hond wel eens of niet?
   iii. Wat doe je als de hond bijt of gromt?

15. Iedereen heeft wel eens ruzie met iemand anders. Met wie heb jij al eens ruzie gehad in de familie?
a. Hoe is dit opgelost?
b. Heb je met iemand in de familie wel eens ruzie gehad om de aandacht van de hond of niet?
c. Op wie ben je al eens boos geweest in je familie?
   i. En ben je al eens boos geweest op je hond of niet?
   ii. En je hond op jou of niet?
d. Wie is er nog boos geweest op de hond?
   i. Wat vind je daarvan?

16. Verveel je je wel eens thuis of niet?
a. En verveelt de hond zich wel eens of niet?
b. Wat doe je dan?

Besluitende Vragen

17. Heb je nog vragen? Wil je graag nog iets vertellen dat je nog niet hebt kunnen zeggen?

Dankjewel om deel te nemen aan dit interview
8. Concentric circle map
9. Pictures of child-dog situations
10. List of positive and negative aspects (In Dutch)

Ik vind het leuk als mijn hond...

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Ik vind het niet leuk als mijn hond...

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.
### Gezinssituatie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burgerlijke status ouder(s)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job ouder(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeftijd ouder(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoogst behaald diploma ouder(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aantal kinderen + leeftijd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aantal honden + leeftijd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aantal jaren hond(en) in gezin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Context
Parents as decision-and rule-makers
Sibling relationships

View on the status of the dog
‘The perfect friend’ ↔ ‘Just a dog’
Switching

Child-dog relationship dimensions
Play interactions
Reciprocity
Empathy
Social support
Conflict
13. Consent form parents (In Dutch)

Beste ouder/voogd,

In het kader van mijn masterproef Sociologie aan de Universiteit Gent, voer ik onderzoek uit naar de relatie tussen kinderen en honden in het gezin.

Ik zou u graag willen vragen of u toestemming wilt geven aan uw kind om deel te nemen aan dit interview en de observatie.

1. Een interview ongeveer de 30’-40’ duurt en wordt opgenomen voor analyse doeleinden.
2. Een observatie zal ongeveer 30’ duren en wordt niet opgenomen, maar wordt beschreven via notities.
3. Er geen echte namen worden gebruikt in het presenteren van, en rapporteren over de data.
4. Enkel ikzelf deze data zal gebruiken in het kader van dit onderzoek over de kind-hond relatie in het gezin.
5. De verzamelde data enkel gedeeld zullen worden met de promotor en de andere studenten die dezelfde promotor hebben.
7. Participanten meer info kunnen vragen over dit project en de resultaten door contact op te nemen met Prof Bart Van de Putte: Universiteit Gent, Vakgroep Sociologie, Korte Meer 5, 9000 Gent, tel: 09 264 68 00 ,email: Bart.VandePutte@UGent.be.
8. Enkel een interview af te nemen als de interviewer zelf en de respondent deze brief hebben ondertekend en elk een exemplaar krijgen van die ondertekende brief.
9. Ook de toestemming van het kind te vragen om deel te nemen aan een interview.
10. U de toestemming geeft om het kind te observeren, zonder dat het kind dit weet.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

[datum, naam en handtekening interviewer]

marlies.bockstal@ugent.be (0471 23 54 07)

[Contactgegevens interviewer (mailadres, telefoon en/of adres)]

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Ik, ouder van ………………………………………………………...... (naam van persoon die deelneemt aan interview) heb kennis genomen van de inhoud van deze brief en geef WEL/GEEN (schrapp wat niet past) toestemming aan mijn kind om deel te nemen aan een interview en observatie in het kader van het onderzoek naar de relatie tussen kinderen en honden in het gezin.

Datum Naam, voornaam ouder Handtekening ouder
Beste (naam kind),

Mijn naam is Marlies Bockstal en ik ben een student aan de Universiteit van Gent. Ik vraag je om deel te nemen aan mijn onderzoek omdat ik meer wil te weten komen over de relatie tussen kinderen en honden in het gezin.

Als je akkoord bent om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek, zal ik je binnen een week enkele vragen stellen over jou en je hond.

1. Een interview zal ongeveer een half uurtje duren en wordt opgenomen.
2. Alles wat je tegen mij zegt is anoniem. Jouw naam en de namen die je vermeldt zullen dus vervangen worden door andere namen.
3. Aangezien je minderjarig bent op het moment van het interview, moet je toestemming vragen aan je ouder / voogd om deel te nemen.
4. Als je ouders toestemming hebben gegeven voor je deelname aan dit onderzoek mag jij nog steeds beslissen om niet mee te doen.
5. Ook al neem je deel aan dit onderzoek mag je me op elk moment laten weten als je liever niet meer deelneemt en wil stoppen. Niemand zal boos op jou zijn.
6. Als je een vraag hebt mag je mij die altijd tijdens het interview stellen of mag je mij bellen op het nummer: 0471 23 54 07. Je kan ook mijn professor, Bart Van de Putte, bellen op het nummer: 09 264 68 00.
7. Je naam onderaan dit blad zetten betekent dat je akkoord bent om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Als je niet wenst deel te nemen hoef je dit niet te doen.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

[datum, naam en handtekening interviewer]

marlies.bockstal@ugent.be (0471 23 54 07)

[Contactgegevens interviewer (mailadres, telefoon en/of adres)]

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Ik, ......................................................................................... (naam van persoon die deelneemt aan interview) heb kennis genomen van de inhoud van deze brief en wil WEL/NIET (schrap wat niet past) deelnemen aan een interview in het kader van het onderzoek naar de relaties tussen kinderen en honden in het gezin.

Datum ........................................... Naam, voornaam kind ........................................... Handtekening kind ...........................................