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Victim Company: The Relationship Between
Women and Dogs in Intimate Partner Violence
Situations

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Abstract

Previous research shows that women are falling victims to severe types of intimate partner violence, such as intimate terrorism, and that there is a link between this and violence against non-human animals. Dogs have a special and close relationship to humans and are therefore also often falling victims to the same violence as the women. The relationship between women and dogs, as well as the dogs' suffering, have however not yet received much attention in research. This study aims to fill this gap by asking about the relationship's influence on each individual (woman and dog) in intimate terrorism situations, how it impacts the decision to stay or leave and the role of emotions in the relationship while experiencing intimate terrorism. Through in-depth semi structured interviews with professionals in two fields: social-work and dog-work, the purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of women and dogs living in the context of intimate terrorism. By using content analysis, four diverse kinds of ambivalences within the relationship for the women and the dogs were found, namely: staying or leaving, love and dependence, conflicting emotions and being stuck versus moving forward. The study concludes that the relationship becomes ambivalent because of the social and societal context, and that by taking the dogs into account, a lot of issues could be solved for the well-being of both women and dogs.

Key words: Intimate Partner Violence, Intimate Terrorism, Emotions, Human-Animal Relationship, Empathy

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1. Background and research problem

Imagine having a dog while living in a situation where both you and the dog are being physically and psychologically abused, but not being able to leave together with your dog; would you leave yourself and let the dog stay in the abusive situation? This is often the dilemma for those suffering from intimate partner violence (IPV) while having another animal as companion. Many times, this ends in them staying in the abusive relationship (Tiplady et al., 2012, Newberry, 2016). Even though it is known that there is a link between IPV towards women and other animals (Tiplady et al., 2012; Volant et al., 2008; Cleary et al., 2021) the non-human animals' perspectives and experiences are under-researched, as is how the relationship affects the woman. However, one could imagine that both the human and the non-human animal are affected by living under IPV conditions and therefore that both individuals' perspective as well as the relationship between them is of importance to make sure that everyone's well-being is taken into consideration.

Women are more often reporting partner violence and coming forward as victims than men. Men are overrepresented as perpetrators in a type of violence towards women that can be explained through the concept intimate terrorism (IT). IT means that the abuser takes control, threatens the victim, and practice various kinds of violence such as physical, sexual, and psychological violence (Johnson, 2005). The abuser has been shown to use non-human animals to demonstrate their force, as a means of control and by hurting the animal to bring emotional abuse towards their partner (Ascione et al., 1997). This could be interpreted as a way of practicing IT where the non-human animal becomes a tool of control and another dimension to the abuse. The abuse towards animals affects both the victim's decision in leaving and getting help as well as has a continued negative repercussion for both human and animal victims (Cleary et al., 2021).

As the relationship between human and dog is often experienced as a family-relationship, blurring boundaries between the species, and can be thought of in terms of post-human families (Charles, 2016), new challenges emerge. Dogs are a specific case, living closely with humans as they have been moved from nature into society (Haraway, 2003), for being domesticated for a long time (Rivers Editors, 2020) and as they live more closely to humans than any other animal (Mattinson, 2012). This leads to strong emotional bonds between humans and dogs. Dogs have also been claimed to be more likely to be targeted for abuse in comparison to other pets (Tiplady et al., 2012). Considering these aspects, the women-dogs relationship is highly interesting when studying IT and its consequences. The field of study needs further research to fill the existing knowledge gaps, especially in the Swedish context that lacks in taking the dog-perspective into account, as well as the relationship between women and dogs. With a focus on the relationship the ambition of this study is to produce knowledge on something not yet well-researched and highlight the animal welfare perspective to gain insight to possible societal change. The overall aim is primarily to contribute to the field of relationship between human and animal, but also the area of IPV by researching emotions in relation to IT and the human-animal relationship.

This study will be conducted through interviews with professionals in two areas, the fields of social work as well as dog work. The professionals will be viewed as mediators as they reflect upon their experiences with women or dogs that have experience from IT, in order to gain an equal understanding of both women and dogs in such situations. With sociology of emotions as a theoretical framework this study investigates the relationship between women and dogs and its, both positive and negative, emotional consequences for women and dogs in IT situations in Sweden. Research questions will be, from the perspective of the professionals’:

-How does the woman-dog relationship affect both women and dogs when experiencing or having experienced intimate terrorism?

-What emotions do the professionals see that are actualized in the woman-dog relationship in the context of intimate terrorism, and what role do they play?

-What role does the woman-dog relationship play in the women’s decision to stay or leave the abusive relationship?

2. Previous research

This research builds on four aspects of previous research, namely gender and IPV, IPV studies in general, human and pets in IPV situations, as well as the human-dog relationship in IPV. These are all key areas as they, together, encompass vital aspects in understanding the matter.

2.1 Intimate partner violence (IPV) and intimate terrorism (IT)

2.1.1 Gender and intimate terrorism

First, the topic of gender in IPV needs to be addressed as women are more likely to be victims of severe IPV. As pointed out by Anderson (2013), there has been a long-lived discussion concerning which gender is more violent. IPV is described as acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors that occur within an intimate relationship and cause bodily, sexual, or psychological harm (Lawoko et al., 2011). Earlier, there have been contradictory results regarding gender risks in relation to IPV (Romans et al., 2007). However, studies on violence between genders show that women are more often victims of sexual and more severe abuse, as well as murder (Romans et al., 2007; Nowinski & Bowen, 2012; Violence Policy Center, 2018). It is also indicated that gender inequality leads to an increase in IPV (Willie & Kershaw, 2019; González, L & Rodríguez-Planas, N, 2020), showing that gender is related to IPV. It is worthy to note that screenings and larger statistical studies often include all kinds of IPV, including minor acts and not only the more severe types, which explains why gender exposure might be similar in this sort of research. To solve this matter, Johnson’s (2005) concepts and understanding of IPV can be used. The author writes that it is of significance to know that there are several types of IPV, one being intimate terrorism (IT). IT is mostly practiced by men and consists of taking control over one’s partner, while other types of IPV are situational or in reaction to IT and therefore more gender symmetric. Johnson (2008) includes aspects such as threats, intimidation and monitoring in IT. IT also comes to

actualization with technological advancements as technology becomes a tool of control (Dunlap, 2012), and is therefore even more relevant as of today.

Even though IPV in general would have the same gender frequency, the threat and extent of injuries increase with male perpetrators (Johnson, 2005; Nybergh et al., 2013). With IT, it is almost exclusively male perpetrators and female victims in heterosexual relationships, Johnson (2001) showed that 97% of IT had male perpetrators in comparison with 56% in the situational violence. Archer's (2000) and Hardesty and Ogolsky's (2020) studies also indicate that IT is male perpetrated. Because of its severity, IT is the kind of IPV where victims most often seek help from social workers and society (Johnson, 2008). Leone et al. (2007) found that intimate terrorists are more dangerous and cause more damage than other perpetrators and that victims of IT seek formal help more than informal help.

2.1.2 Intimate partner violence and its consequences

With IPV being a huge issue, which influence the lives of millions over the globe (Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020) the victim is negatively affected both in the relationship but also long-term with emotions such as shame and guilt associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as long-term physical pain that triggers emotional and psychological pain (Beck et al., 2011; Cerulli et al., 2012). Cerulli et al. (ibid) show that there is repeated abuse and retraumatizing of the victim through various areas where they meet their perpetrator (i.e., shared parenthood and court). A cross-sectional study by Lövestad et al. (2017) also shows that victims of IPV report higher levels of depression or depressive symptoms than individuals without such experiences. Besides the personal effect of IPV, two studies following each other also show the large cost for England and Wales at large, with large increasing societal costs (Walby, 2004; Oliver et al., 2019). These personal and societal consequences of IPV make the area important to research further, to investigate other implications for the victims, and issues for society to address.

IPV has been claimed to be significantly higher in Sweden than for instance Spain (Garcia et al. 2019). However, it should be noted that this could be because of several aspects such as propensity to report, and not necessarily that Swedish citizens practice IPV more. Dufort et al. (2013) and Lawoko et al. (2011) also conducted studies in the Swedish context. The first study showed that people more often seek help if they have children, and that the victims describe tough living situations as well as psychological stress. Lawoko et al. (ibid.) screened large health facilities in Sweden and found that around 50% of the workers accounted for meeting female clients that possibly suffered from IPV in the last three months. It can be said that this is an issue that is very much alive and needs to be studied further, especially considering the increase of IPV prevalence due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Agüero, 2021; Buttell & Ferreira, 2020; Moreira & Pinto da Costa, 2020; Jetelina et al., 2021).

2.2 Humans and nonhuman animals in IPV

2.2.1 The link between abuse towards women and abuse towards nonhuman animals

The second theme for previous research is focused on the link between IPV and animal abuse, and the relationship between human and nonhuman animals within such situations. Donovan (2019) defines animal abuse as engaging in acts that prevent non-human animals from living under conditions that they need to thrive. This includes such things as having the non-human animal distanced from their primary caretaker. In 1997, Ascione et al. made a study on the matter of non-human animals in IPV situations. They found that it was common for shelters to meet women that describe animal abuse, but only a small amount asked about abuse towards non-human animals in a systematic way. The study showed that there is a link between IPV and abuse towards the animals in the family. Further, they found that the perpetrator sometimes uses non-human animals to show their force and to control their partner. Fitzgerald et al. (2019) also confirm that surviving victims of IPV perceive their perpetrator to use animals to control and upset them.

The link between animal abuse and IPV has been studied and confirmed by multiple studies. Ascione et al. (2007) concludes that women experiencing IPV were eleven times more likely to have seen their partner hurt or kill non-human animals than those that have not experienced IPV. They also show that having non-human animals made them less likely to seek help, especially true for women without children as they may have stronger attachment to the other animal. Flynn (2000), Volant et al. (2008), Tiplady et al. (2012), Vincent et al. (2019), and Cleary et al. (2021) all confirm that the risk for non-human animal abuse is increased in homes with IPV. Barrett et al. (2020) also found that women who report animal abuse are themselves victims of more frequent and severe forms of IPV. Williams, Dale et al. (2008) found that approximately one out of five to one out of four veterinarians had seen clients that had been physically abused in a deliberate way. Tiplady et al. (2012) also argue that dogs are more likely to become victims of abuse than any other pet animals. This was especially true for dogs owned by the victim and not the perpetrator. With this, the dogs are proved to be a special case, and are therefore in need of investigation as to how and in what ways they are affected by living under such conditions.

2.2.2 The relationship between women and dogs

Lastly, the relationship between the human and the non-human animal victim is central when looking into this matter. Strand (2008) has researched factors that are related to IPV victims' concern for non-human animal companions as well as how this affects their choices regarding staying or leaving the perpetrator. On the contrary to being less likely to leave Strand shows that the victim is more likely to leave due to a concern for the non-human animal's welfare. This indicates that the non-human animal can be both an incitement to leave, as well as a reason for not leaving when they cannot come along. The second finding is that the women are concerned and worried about their pets after coming into the shelter, and that they accordingly continue to have negative experiences even though they have left their perpetrators. Thirdly, the research shows that those without children are more concerned with the non-human animals

and grieve more when they are not able to bring their pet. The author argues that social workers and those that meet these women need to consider the non-human animal to efficiently help the victims further.

Newberry (2016) found that the non-human animals are often considered to be the human-victims main support and that the relationship affects the woman's welfare too. In Sweden, this field of research has not received enough attention. Holmberg (2004) contributes to the area by investigating women's shelters and crime victim hotlines in Sweden. The researcher found that although it is well-known that there is an increased risk for non-human animals being abused, most of the social workers do not systematically ask about the animals. Holmberg also states that ownership of the non-human animal is of importance as the non-human animal is of increased risk of being abused when owned by the victim. Another aspect of relevance for my study is that dogs build attachments and relationships with their humans, and that this leads to humans gaining responsibilities in relation to their dogs. Such obligations require not just looking after their mental and physical well-being, but also maintaining a keen sense of trust (Hens, 2008). Dogs are affected emotionally in the same way as humans when they are affected by or witness violence (Turner & Fraser, 2019). With this responsibility and dogs' dependence on 'us,' I argue that there is a need to understand the specific issues for dogs as well as humans in IPV situations, to make sure that 'we' as a society and caregivers can accommodate for those needs.

There are different human benefits with the human-animal bond such as a decrease in loneliness, stress, anxiety, and an increase in exercise. The non-human animals,' especially dogs' and cats', capability to feel emotions and to form attachment is crucial (Donovan, 2019). When dogs were shown familiar and emotionally salient human features, parts of the brain which are all involved in reward, familiarity, and emotion processing, were all stimulated (Thompkins et al., 2020). Rehn and Keeling (2016) write that the attachment ties that the dogs create with their humans have varying degrees of strength and they argue that dogs, as humans, have different attachment styles. According to the authors, this necessitates a change in the care-approach that humans have in relation to their pets in order to achieve a more successful and happy relationship in the future. Hence, the relationship is important to both the human and the dog and to research, especially considering the increase in having dogs during Covid-19 (Morgan et al., 2020).

All four aspects of previous research come together in this study as there is necessary to understand IT situations, the link between IT and animal abuse and the relationship between the species as they relate to the issue on hand. With the aim to understand the relationship between the woman and the dog as well as the specific challenges that arise under IT conditions, the combinations of these aspects are necessary. To understand the relationship and its impact on both women and dogs in IT situations, more research is required, especially regarding the emotional lives of both parties, which this study aims to contribute with.

3. Theoretical background

The theoretical background builds on multiple aspects and aims at providing a deeper understanding of the human-dog relationship. I am using sociology of emotions with focus on empathy as a theoretical framework.

3.1 The human-dog relationship

As mentioned in the previous research section, Newberry (2016) accounts for the importance of the non-human animal as support in IPV situations. Furthermore, many victims talk about their pets as a family-member and that they fulfill an important relational aspect and produce a feeling of security. To reach the concepts that are used in the analysis, some aspects need to be clarified, as they function as a background to the concepts that are used. Dogs have been the target for domestication for at least 15.000 years, making their relationship to humans strong and special as they have lived together and built dependence on one another (Serpell, 2017; Rivers Editors, 2020). This is important in understanding the human-animal bond as a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship that is influenced by actions that are critical to both individuals' health and well-being (Donovan, 2019). The relationship is actualized in IT situations as companion animals are a part of the daily life in human families, homes, and everyday practices, thus a part of IT situations. Genov (2022) defines social interaction as individuals interacting with meaning, influencing each other, and building their own selves out of this interaction. I take the standpoint that interaction between species is social and similar to human-human interaction (Taylor, 2011; Demello 2021) and can often be understood in the same way as interaction between humans.

Throughout this study, the *relationship's ambivalence* and how the *power-relations* affect the individuals are key concepts. With Charles' (2016) study on humans and dogs living together and how they daily practice kinship, the author argues that this blurs the boundaries between species and produces post-human families. Dogs are no longer only recognized as for example working tools, but instead as parts of the human family and as individuals with different personalities, needs and wants. At the same time, this happens within a context in which there are disproportionate power-relations where dogs are dependent on the other family members. In IT situations this could be an ambivalence for the non-human animals regarding being loved and cared for by their human, but at the same time staying dependent on her in order to have all their needs fulfilled and having to stay in the abusive situation. The human decides when, where and how the other animal eats, exercises and whether they get the care that they need. The dogs have to depend on their humans in everything that they need and want, and at the same time most often gain love and a family-status by them resulting in hierarchical power-dynamics where the animals are both cared for and exploited, making the ambivalence and asymmetry of the relationship obvious (Taylor & Fraser, 2019; Schicktanz, 2006; Charles & Davies, 2008). Swedish research by Redmalm (2020) reveals similar patterns of ambivalence, where the home's limits, the power dynamics between individuals, and the 'conditions of unconditional love' are all important in shaping the pet connection as fundamentally valuable and an essential component of both pet caretakers' and dogs' lives. This kind of ambivalence

is used explicitly in my analysis in this study in order to understand both the positive and negative consequences of the relationship. With this, *human exceptionalism*, where humans are viewed as above other animals, is also of interest. This is because human exceptionalism is still preserved throughout the dog-human relationship (Redmalm, 2015; Fox, 2006).

Another aspect of the relationship is the one of human-nonhuman animals' entanglements (Peggs, 2018) where sociology of the body could be a way to understand why and how the other individual within the relationship is affected by each other's experiences. As a consequence of the strong relationship, I claim that they become *extended parts* of each other's bodies, giving an explanation to why for example abuse towards dogs can be an extended abuse towards the woman and vice versa. When the dog is abused, so is the woman, as dogs are especially entangled with humans (Haraway, 2003) and vice versa. By looking into how the relationship is built through social interaction, practices of kinship, disproportionate power-relations, and extension of bodies, I am analyzing the relationships' role and how it influences both the women and the dogs, both positively and negatively.

3.2 Sociology of emotions

3.2.1 Emotions

Departing from a sociological perspective, emotions are considered intertwined socially, where emotions can be understood as the outcome of and occurring in social processes (Barbalet, 1998), or social and cultural practices (Ahmed, 2014). This indicates that social interaction shapes both the emotion as well as how it is expressed and controlled. It can be emphasized that the meaning of emotion may alter and differ through time and place, as daily social experiences impact emotional expression and interpretation depending on morals, norms, and cultures. This leads to the statement that emotions are taught via socialization, and that they are embodied rather than thought of consciously (Fineman, 2003).

One key concept for this study is that emotions can be divided into *primary* and *role-taking emotions* (Erickson & Cottingham, 2014), where primary are those emotions that are viewed as universal and as something that everyone is born with, including such emotions as fear, happiness, and anger. Role-taking emotions are emotions that are learned, or socialized, through interaction and they include for example emotions of guilt and shame. Role-taking emotions are also influenced by how one believes that others view oneself, and they are therefore affected by the relationships that a person has. Within families, emotions, personhood, and oneself is formed, and through the interaction individuals learn how to put their instincts and impulses into meaningful behavior. But not only the emotions of oneself are developed through interaction, but also *shared emotions* (Erickson & Cottingham, *ibid.*). The idea for this study is that the women and dogs develop shared emotions through victim company and their relationship. Although some emotions might be considered primary and universal, these will still be viewed as affected by societal, situational, and relational aspects when they are expressed (Erickson & Cottingham, *ibid.*). For this study, emotions are recognized to be crucial in interaction and as understood by others through intersubjective

empathy (Scheff, 1990). Women and dogs express and feel emotion through their interaction and at the same time they use intersubjective empathy to understand each other.

As the dogs can be understood as family-members, it is possible to understand the emotions within the women-dogs relationship through a family context. Erickson and Cottingham (2014) write that family can be viewed as an institutional context where emotions, or emotional selves, are produced as well as reproduced. Although the authors refer to human family-interaction I argue that the processes are similar with families consisting of both humans and dogs, and that the concept of *emotional socialization* influences both species. Their own emotional selves and the way that they can or are allowed to express emotions are affected by the *social context* of each other, but also in relation to their perpetrator - who is also part of the family. I look at this as an ongoing process within the context of IT where emotions are learned, formed, and understood through the interaction with both the perpetrator and the other victim.

In this study emotions are, together with cognition or thought, seen as crucial in behavior and *decision-making*. Decision depends on emotional experience (Wettergren, 2019; Collins, 1993; Barbalet, 1998). In this study I reflect upon the role of emotions in IT situations where the women are forced to decide to stay or leave. Emotions become important for the relationship between women and dogs as they affect their behavior, their understanding of each other and their love of one another. Because of this, emotions are not only significant to answer the research question regarding emotions specifically, but also to understand the relationship between women and dogs in IT situations as well as decision-making.

3.2.2 Empathy

Now that it is stated that the relationship between human and dog is an important one, for both individuals, and that emotions are key in this relationship, I will work more in-depth with a crucial aspect of this, namely the meaning of empathy. Empathy is not only one significant aspect to the relationship, but also useful for understanding the emotional experiences between women and dogs. Fairbarin (2002) defines empathy as an acquired ability or state of mind that may be utilized to relate to, interact with, and comprehend others, their circumstances, and the experiences and emotions that they have. It is also argued that empathy is about *imagining* another person's emotions as we cannot fully gain insight to their emotions (Cuff, et al., 2016). With this perspective on empathy, there is no need for words. Instead, the interaction with someone else as well as an ability to imagine how they feel is needed, and it is therefore possible to use concepts of empathy to obtain knowledge about the human-animal relationship. As words are unnecessary, women and dogs can be imagining each other's emotions even though they do not speak the same language and therefore be affected by one another's experiences (Taylor & Fraser, 2019).

McCaffree's (2020) emphasis on the contextual aspects of empathy is useful for me/in my analysis(?), since I want to highlight the differences in the relationship between women and dogs with IT experiences from other women-dog relationships. Empathy is both cognitive and affective, and behaviors are not empathy themselves but can be driven by it (Cuff et al., 2016). It is also important when claiming that the professional participants understand both their

human and dog clients' experiences and emotions as well as when claiming that women and dogs understand each other.

Dog trainers, ethics and ethologists have also discussed the importance of empathy in humans' relationship to other animals. Behan (2011), a dog trainer, writes that dogs are the human *emotional mirrors*, since they reflect the human emotions. With the concept of an emotional mirror, the purpose is not to say that the dog feels or expresses the same emotions that their human does, but that they respond to their human's emotional experience. This is important to note in order to understand that the dogs in IT situations can be affected negatively even though the abuse is not directed towards them, as they respond to the women's emotions. Gruen (2015) emphasizes that there is empathy not only human to human but also inter-species and between individuals within other species. Meijer (2015), a philosopher, argues not only that non-human animal can understand us, but that we can and should try to understand them too. The ethologist, Malm (2017) writes about using empathy to listen to and fully understand dogs. Malm also emphasizes that our emotional response to someone else's emotions can be produced through empathy and not that empathy is what we feel, but about understanding what others may feel. I argue that human and other animals are capable of being empathetic towards one another, and that the human-dog relationship needs empathy to exist, and this is why it is essential to my study as empathy affects the woman-dog relationship as well as each individual. There is an ambivalence within the relationship, where the relationship on one hand is loving, caring and empathetic and on the other hand can affect both individuals unfavorably, especially in relation to IT.

4. Method and methodological choices

4.1 Methodology

As the purpose with this study was to produce in-depth knowledge about the social world of the participants and not to generalize over a large population, a qualitative and hermeneutic method was used. In qualitative hermeneutic research interpretation is key, as well as the context and perspective of others (Snape & Spencer, 2003), which makes it appropriate to use in order to understand the role of emotions in IT situations with women and dogs. This made my role important as my interpretation was of significance when I moved between various parts and the whole, to find answers to the research questions. With this, I needed to stay open throughout the process and move along with it (Ödman, 2017). The study was built on an abductive style where I moved between theory and data and not only obtained knowledge from one or the other but also developed them both throughout the process (Snape & Spencer, *ibid.*). I started out with an idea of a theoretical framework for the research questions, but this developed as I got familiar with the data.

Ödman (2017) writes that preunderstandings are essential in the process of interpretation and understanding different phenomena. However, it can also present an issue where one's preunderstanding stands in the way of new knowledge, something that I have stayed aware of throughout the entire study. My previous understanding of the issue stems from working with an organization which helps individuals with these experiences in Sweden. Furthermore, I have

always lived and studied dogs personally and had an idea about how they would experience IT before conducting this study. To solve this, one central aspect was to really listen and take the collected data in, working closely with the data. This is the reason there was an abductive approach conducted, to make sure that the data is allowed to inform me further, while theory contributes to additional understanding. I study emotions, making it important for me to be in tune with my own emotional responses throughout the study in order to keep my emotions from guiding the result and the process too much. At the same time, the strong emotional experiences that I, the participants, and people outside of the studied have had also reinforced me in that this study is especially important.

4.2 Participants and data collection

The data collection was based on twelve in-depth and semi-structured interviews with professionals in two working areas: social work and dog work. To establish a fair understanding of both humans and dogs, the sample was made with criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) divided into two sets of criteria. The two groups that I wanted to interview were made up of: 1) Individuals that have A) worked in social work for at least two years, B) have some relevant education to such work and C) worked with women that have had dogs when experiencing IT. 2) Individuals that have A) met and worked with dogs for at least two years, B) have education relevant to working with and training dogs, and C) worked with dogs that have experienced IT in the company of a woman. I chose to include only dogs, and no other animals, for two reasons, one being the specific relationship between human and dogs and dogs' vulnerability as mentioned previously. The other reason was practical in that it is easier to come in contact with dog-focused professionals with dog-related education than with any other animal.

The reasons for why I decided to interview professionals are partly ethical, explained in the next section, and partly to ensure that I gained equal understanding of both women and dogs with experience of IT situations. As dogs cannot speak and use words to explain their experience and emotional reactions, I had to find another way than communicating with the dogs. Another benefit is that it was not up to me to interpret women or dogs' emotions as the professionals told me about their interpretations and experiences with their clients, but that also meant that I had to rely on their interpretations. Interviewing professionals is also a way to reach a wider group, as they can represent a wider circle of individuals (Bogner et al., 2009). One substantial difference between these professional groups, however, is that the human-workers can talk to the women and gain an understanding through verbal communication while the dog-workers cannot. On the other hand, the dog-workers all have specific dog behavioral education and training in interpreting dog behavior to figure out dogs' experiences and emotions.

To contact potential participants, I reached out to different networks and organizations for each workgroup. Some emailed me from there, and then it became a snowball sample (Patton, 2002) where others were recommended or reached out to me as they had heard about this study. I ended up with twelve participants, six of each group. With qualitative research and interviews, a smaller sized sample has to be made for resource reasons, and it is used to gain deeper knowledge (Patton, 2015). However, twelve individuals were a sufficient amount for in-depth

interviews, especially considering that the participants have met multiple individuals within their work. All individuals met the requirements and were geographically located all over Sweden, as it would have been too difficult to find all participants within one geographical area. Because of this all interviews were conducted through digital platforms with sound and video, while recording sound. One issue with the sample is that it consists of only women, as no men contacted me. I wanted a maximum variation sample (Ritchie et al., 2003), but I did not gain a man's point of view which might have provided some insights that are overlooked.

In order to keep to the matter on hand an interview guide was used with every interview. I used one interview guide for the human-workers and another one for the dog-workers, but both consist of some of the same questions regarding their experiences and relationship and can be seen in the appendix (1 and 2). Questions include how the women talk about and portray the relationship, emotions, and experiences with their dogs, as well as how the dogs express emotion and the experience of the relationship. Since the participants had the experiences and knowledge that I needed to answer the research questions, there was big room for them to lead the interview. By letting the participants lead the interview, the possibility to gain unknown and unexpected knowledge arises. I used the guide more as support through the interview process, but it has been important for me to stay flexible and listen carefully to what was brought up by my participants (Seidman, 2006). It is about combining the structure with flexibility, having the structure to keep the conversation focused on the same time as flexibility makes it possible to gain unexpected data (Legard et al., 2003).

The interviews ended up being approximately 50-80 minutes long and every interview ended with me asking them if they wanted to add anything to make sure that I did not miss anything of importance. One thing that I really had to keep in mind was to not let my pre-understandings of the matter lead the interview or affect the interviewee. To solve this, I asked the participants to act as if they were talking to someone that does not know anything about the topic, and asked questions that might seem 'unnecessary' as the answers are 'obvious' to someone within the field. Such questions included 'are dogs capable of feeling emotions, and if so, to what extent?' and 'how come that women, being victims of abuse and not perpetrators, feel guilty?.' When each interview was done, I transcribed the material before moving on to the next one. One thing that I might have done differently, if possible, would have been to conduct the interviews in person, but by doing it digitally made it possible to interview people over a large geographical area.

4.3 Method for analysis

As mentioned, the interviews were all sound-recorded and then they were transcribed into text for me to code and analyze. By doing this, I could stay fully in the interview and at the same time not overlook any points made by the participants (Legard, et al., 2003). The initial analysis came forth with the transcriptions as I wrote memos while transcribing as well as right after each interview. Memos consist of initial thoughts and things that came to mind early in the process, as well as throughout the course of the study (Spencer, et al., 2003). However, I did not go into any in-depth analysis before conducting all interviews (Seidman, 2006). As a base of the analysis, the material was coded, and the material was read on multiple occasions. First,

all material was put into a large variety of codes (Miles, et al., 2014). Working through the coded material I mostly focused on finding potential patterns, similarities between interviews as well as contradictions both between and within interviews and anything that could be of relevance to what is researched. Codes were made up by the empirical material, but also the theoretical framework as the method was abductive. I organized my codes and material digitally, by color coding and made the data accessible to myself as organization is key in making sense of the data (Patton, 2015).

The next step was to reduce data and let go of non-relevant data from the content analysis (Spencer et al., 2003). I did this by merging my codes into larger themes and by taking the theoretical framework and my research questions into account. There were a lot of contradictions in each separate interview and that there was a pattern where those contradictions were brought, showing that there might be something to it that refers to multiple individuals with similar experiences (Miles et al., 2014). The contradictions of the women's or dogs' experiences were apparent and showed that there are ambivalences with having this human-dog relationship when experiencing IT.

Lastly, I started writing the results of the data and analysis, as displayed later in the paper. Through this some further analysis was conducted and it got more in-depth as I worked with the text. Another thing to point out is that all of the interviews were conducted in Swedish and the quotes that have been used are therefore translated by me into English. Translating between languages can be difficult and problematic as there can be specific cultural meanings to words which only those who use it understand (Patton, 2015).

4.4 Ethical considerations

First, I want to address the ethical concern of the sensitivity of the matter, which is one reason I did not interview victims themselves but instead the professionals. I did so to reduce any risk with participants feeling discomfort and to make sure that any potential trauma was not to affect them further because of the study, an important ethical issue according to Seidman (2006). Even though some things might have been better understood by interviewing the victims, I weighed the negatives against the positives and decided on not interviewing them with the knowledge and ability that I have.

To inform the participants of the purpose of the study, and all ethical considerations, an information document was written and sent out before carrying through with the interviews, see appendix 3. This document was built on the Swedish Research Council's *good research practice* [god forskningsssed] (2017) and included information on the participants right to withdrawal, how the data would be stored and used, that they would be anonymous, and that they participated freely. Added to this, they had to sign a written consent to participation, that they had taken part of the information as well as them being audio-recorded (see appendix 4). Furthermore, verbal consent was collected at the interview time.

The data was secured on a password protected computer that only I have access to and was coded right after the interview to remove any names or information that could lead to anyone

knowing the participants identities. Furthermore, the participants had the opportunity to reach out to me and remove any statements after the interview, and to cancel the interview at any time. The data is used for the result of this analysis, the paper that it will end up in, and a seminar discussion. Furthermore, the data might be used for later research projects conducted by me, and this was also consented to. Lastly, all participants will get information on how to read the paper and result, if they would want to.

5. The results: Ambivalences

It is conspicuous throughout all data in relation to the theoretical framework that the relationship between women and dogs in the context of intimate terrorism is defined by ambivalences for both parties. With some issues being exacerbated because of the conditions of IT, others coming up and then some positive outcomes that are intensified and brought along because of the relationship within an IT situation.

5.1 The ambivalence of staying or leaving

The first ambivalence of the relationship has been touched upon in previous research, namely the ambivalence of leaving or staying in the abusive situation. However, something that comes forth in this study is that the dogs have no choice in this as well as the role of emotions in women making these decisions. Just about every participant in the human-workers group told me that because the dogs are viewed as family-members, they become highly important persons to the women. For a lot of their clients, experiencing that the dog becomes a victim or that the dog's well-being is compromised make them want to leave, as highlighted in the following quote:

Women have told me that 'I stayed as long as he hit me, but when he hit the dog, I left.' The dog was more important than themselves. They think that the violence against me is because of me, but when the kick towards the dog happens, they understand that the dog is innocent and leave. (Human-worker).

With the ability to feel empathy, the women can imagine the dog's experience of direct violence towards them and understand that the men are wrong in their behavior. Through understanding the dog's emotional experience, they become more inclined to leave. Their emotional response to the dog's emotions leads to them acting. It is easier for the women to see the dog's worth, while they themselves feel worthless, some participants claim. Due to the human-animal bond, they feel responsible to make sure that the dog is taken care of and out of that situation. The interviewees talk about how women that have fallen victim to IT over time start seeing themselves as accountable for the perpetrator's behavior. They are often blamed and blame themselves for the violence directed towards them and others in the household and strong role-taking emotions of guilt emerge. Having that strong relationship with a dog, produces conditions for her to see the violence for what it is and having someone else to care for contributes to her leaving.

On the contrary to dogs being the reason to leave, having that human-animal bond can also be the reason for why the women stay with an abusive partner, something that has been stated in previous research (Strand, 2008). In the same way, my research highlights how emotions highly affect the decision not to leave as the women become subject to a lot of ‘negative’ emotions if leaving without their dog. It is not possible to bring the dog to most shelters and a lot of the women will not leave if they have to leave their dog. Because of the specific conditions of IT, the relationship is strengthened but also creates an ambivalence in which the women lose power over their lives as it becomes harder for them to get out of the violent relationship. The dog becomes an extended part of the woman’s body and a tool of control and further hurt. All of the participants declare that the perpetrator will use the dog to violate, damage, control or break down the woman. If she leaves, he will often threaten her that he will hurt or even kill the dog. If she stays, he will many times use violence at the dog as a punishment for something that the woman has, or has not, done. Having a dog lead to other dimensions in the power-relations between the women and the abusers and strengthens the power that he has over her as the dogs become extended parts of the women, especially when she is no longer present. When talking about this, a human-worker said:

What the woman likes the most, what is the most important to her, they want to destroy that. If he hurts the dog, or threatens to hurt the dog, he hurts her too.
(Human-worker).

My research contributes to understanding the issues with leaving as it shows that the relationship leads to various emotions such as fear, worry, guilt and sadness in relation to their dogs and this is the reason why many women stay when they cannot bring their dogs with them. If they did not have to worry about the dogs’ safety, they could leave and save themselves from further hurt. Another issue that I have found with this is related to law and ownership and this has been overlooked or not found in the previous research which I have read. In cases where there are conditions for leaving the perpetrator together with the dog, some women do not think that they can bring them since the dog is owned by the perpetrator or was bought together with the perpetrator. The women do not want to break the law and take the dog, and as they do not want to leave the dog behind, they end up staying:

We need to make changes with the law or make it clearer for them. I have met women that didn’t know if they could bring the dog because the man owns the dog or because they got the dog together and... they stayed with the man. We help them, and their dogs, anyway but some of them will not take that risk of leaving when they are afraid of becoming accountable for stealing the dog. (Human-worker).

In the perspective of human-animal relationships and theories surrounding this, it is well-known that non-human animals’ relationship to humans is ambivalent. They are treated as family, in some senses, and are being cared for and loved. On the other hand, they are highly dependent on their humans and have little or no power over their own lives. This is particularly true for dogs that have a strong connection with a woman experiencing IT. One of the interviewees starts talking about this right away, as this following quote is said within the first few minutes of our interview:

We don't live as we did in the past, it's more of a power thing today. We have all power over their lives. They cannot decide when to eat, pee or whether to stay or leave. They [dogs] cannot leave the abuser. (Dog-worker).

According to her, and some of the other participants, this has changed over time and become even more unbalanced. In the past, humans lived closer with their dogs and worked together to a greater extent. To make it clear, the dog cannot choose to leave on their own and they did not choose to move into that situation from the beginning – this is emphasized by almost every dog-worker that I interviewed, even though one participant tells me that some dogs try to run away. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the dog has no way out, because as mentioned before the women will often leave and take the dog with them when they understand the dog's suffering. If the dog would not have that relationship with the woman and lived in a home without partner violence but with a violent man who hurts them, they would have no way out if nobody outside of the home notices their situation.

One thing that affects the dogs' possibilities to get out of the situation is children. As said, dogs are family-members, but not to the same extent as other family-members. When there are children in the picture, the dog is more often put in second place. Not because they are not loved, not because the women do not feel as strong for them, but because the children come first. Many of the human-workers explain that the women without children will not leave their dog behind while those that have children to a greater extent do. For this reason, the dog also relies on the women's other relationships and social context as human exceptionalism becomes known. The human children are put before the dogs, shifting the power-dynamics further and bringing the ambivalence of the relationship forth again. Human exceptionalism also comes forth as women are always able to bring their children with them to shelters and when getting help, but not their dogs. Society has not given women the choice to consider their dogs as much as their children when fleeing a violent relationship, sometimes leading to the dogs being left behind to fend for themselves. Dogs are protected by law from suffering, but there are not many societal options for bringing the dog, they need to rely on friends, family, or volunteer organizations. The dogs suffer immensely from experiencing IT conditions and will be even more traumatized if they have to stay in that situation for a longer period of time:

They [dogs] are often traumatized, to different degrees... A lot of them feel mentally ill, some are physically injured too. The longer they stay, the greater the risk. Their welfare is absolutely affected. (Dog-worker).

I met a dog that stuck with me. He had had some teeth knocked out, he had injuries all over his body that had healed in the wrong way as he had not been to a veterinarian. His tail wagged but he was very unsure, very scared, especially of men. (Dog-worker).

As mentioned, emotions together with cognition encourage various kinds of behavior, however I would also like to add that the power-relations within the family as well as society comes into play too. The fear and worry of leaving the dog behind could end up in the women not leaving and at the same time, imagining the dog's struggle can also be the reason to leave. Emotions

guide their own reaction and response in relation to the practical possibilities, meaning that even though their emotions push them to leave with their dogs, the practicalities might not allow it. Including the idea of human exceptionalism, where they have to flee the relationship while the dog stays, more negative emotions are provoked. Having a dog in this context can be the basis of increased stress and likewise, to stress-relief which is positive.

5.2 The ambivalence of love and dependence

With this theme, the ambivalence of feeling love and care for each other versus becoming too dependent on one another emerges. When looking at why women with dogs stay in the relationship for the dog, it is important to understand the extent of the relationship. As mentioned, the dogs are mostly referred to as family, as individuals who think, feel, and understand their human. Through the shared trauma, shared emotions develop. The interviewees often talk about dogs as essential to the women, as their “everything” and crucial in their role of comforters. An aspect of this shows in this quote:

The woman is very isolated, partly because the man won't let her interact with others but also because she doesn't want to talk to her friends, family about the situation. This makes the relationship to the dog the only positive relationship that she has, she feels understood, she gets comfort and company. (Human-worker).

Most of the participants talk about how the women are often isolated when experiencing IT and that this strengthens the relationship that they have with their dogs. The relationship is affected in the sense that this might be the only consistent, positive social interaction these women as well as the dogs have, making them more dependent on each other. The ambivalence of the relationship that is shown in human-animal studies concerns the non-human animal (Charles, 2016;Redmalm, 2020), but because of the social context of IT, it also concerns the women. The power-relations change due to this context, making the women dependent on their dog as they lack power over their own lives from living with the abuser. It also strengthens the feeling of them being extended parts of one another, as they become ‘one.’ Professionals from both workgroups indicate that the women get too dependent on their dog, in an, according to some participants, unhealthy way. This also puts additional pressure on the dog, according to some of the dog-workers. The dog is not only a victim to IT, but also gains responsibility over the woman’s wellbeing, which causes further stress. As shown in this quote:

Often, they are too dependent on each other, and in my experience, they would benefit from having the dog rehomed when they are out of the relationship. (Dog-worker).

However, a lot of the time the participants also point out the opposite, that having the dog there is what helps the women in wanting to live and push through the awfulness of their situation:

They [women] tell me that the dog was the reason for them to live, it made them get through the worst situations and the pain. The dog makes it a bit easier to deal

with what their life is. You know, they felt better because of the dog being there.
(Human-worker).

Except for this, most of the human-workers share that talking about the dog is a terrific way to connect with their clients, and in cases with children, connecting the human individuals within a family to one another. Talking about the dog and things that they do together with the dog makes things a bit lighter and easier to navigate. As these women have been through IT, they often have a lack of trust against other people, especially men and government workers, the professionals claim. This makes the dog a valuable tool to utilize when getting to know them and gaining their trust. The woman-dog relationship can therefore affect the women in a positive way when meeting with professionals as they become a gateway to opening up about themselves and their experiences. A lot of the participants who work with dogs emphasize the dog's extraordinary ability to form bonds with humans and talk about how that also leads to them being loved and cared for over and beyond other animals. The relationship that they do have with the woman is talked about as particularly important to the dog, but depends on the dog's background, experiences, and breed. Some dogs create a stronger bond with, and dependence on, their humans than others according to some professionals:

The relationship is very important for them [dogs] but it also depends on why you have the dog and what kind of dog you have. (Dog-worker).

However, all seems to agree on the relationship being of significance to dogs, just that it varies between individuals. The dogs are said to view their humans as family and that they try to behave in ways that will contribute to that person, and the family. With this, the dogs might feel like they are contributing to the family by supporting and comforting the women, something that is positive to the dogs. Nonetheless, this also becomes ambivalent as they gain more stress and responsibility under these conditions. The same goes for the women, as they are both gaining comfort and support by being in the company of the dogs, but at the same time feel responsibility and guilt towards the dogs and their well-being.

Many of the participants testify that when there is a dog in the picture, the perpetrator will in some ways hurt the dog. Since the perpetrator see it as an extended part of the woman, confirming the link found by other researchers. For many of these women whom the professionals meet, the dog is what is the most important and hurting the dog hurts the woman tremendously because of how their relationship and long-lived interaction has led to the dogs becoming extended parts of the woman. The dog is thus another way for the perpetrator to control and hurt their victim, making the link between love and dependence more obvious as the power-relations come into play. As the women fall victim to the perpetrators, their dependence towards their dogs increases and the love for them and their relationship is strengthened. In the same way, it happens for the dogs. What my research shows is that there is not only a link, but that the relationship between women and dogs leads to similar power-patterns, emotional experiences, and dependency for both individuals. They become dependent on each other as they are not in as much control over their own lives as they might be in other contexts.

5.3 The ambivalence of conflicting emotions

The ambivalence of emotions is the focus of the third theme, where there is an ambivalence between the strong positive and negative emotions that are provoked for both parties under conditions of IT, but also how each other's emotions lead to further ambivalence. Both the women and the dogs are perceived to feel a lot of different things as they go through the experience of IT, but for this study I have focused on the emotional responses between the women and the dogs. Their emotional experience of having one another while living in an abusive context is often understood as terribly negative. The women are perceived by the participants to feel emotions of fear, worry, sadness and guilt while the dogs experience emotions of fear, sadness, anger, and nervousness. Nonetheless, other types of feelings are coming through to the professionals too, including feelings of love, joy, and safety.

The guilt the women feel towards their dogs is one of the most prominent emotions in every interview with social workers. It is also what differs the most to the dog's experiences. Guilt is a role-taking emotion which the women feel as they take on the role of being responsible as the dog owner. This is not brought up by the dog-workers in relation to the dogs. The guilt is built on their empathetic understanding of the dog's situation, they tell the professionals that they feel guilty because they have put the dog in that situation. The feelings of guilt are dependent on how the woman imagine the dog's emotional experience and therefore understand the dog as well as their relationship. It is also something that the human-workers assign to how the perpetrator talks to and treats the woman. The women are blamed for what the dog is put through, as said here:

They think that it is I [The woman] who is supposed to calm him [the perpetrator] down, I'm responsible for the violence, I'm responsible for the dog, that makes it my failure. The man will also blame her saying 'why haven't you taken the dog out? If you would, I wouldn't have to hit him.' (Human-worker).

The women will take on the role-taking emotion of worrying when the dog cannot flee with them and moreover, they will continue to talk about the dog even after they have left the perpetrator. They are highly affected by having to leave the dog together with the perpetrator, long after coming out of that relationship themselves. Most of the professionals tell me that it is too hard to talk about the dogs' feelings and experiences. The women do not want to think about that and when they do, they hurt. Since they imagine the dogs' emotions, the guilt escalates in response to what they perceive that the dog is feeling. There seems to be some avoidance in relation to the dogs' emotions because that is harder to deal with than what they themselves have been exposed to.

Regarding the dog's emotional lives, in every interview with the dog-workers, one of my initial questions related to the dogs' abilities to feel. Every dog-worker stood firm in that dogs have a wide emotional world and that their feelings or emotions are very similar to humans.

Dogs have the same feelings, emotions, as us humans and they show it through their body language, in their behavior. They are equally sensitive beings as

humans. [...] Dogs are the same as us with their emotional life. Because of this, you can hurt them just as much as you can hurt us humans. (Dog-worker).

I wanted to emphasize this, especially as a lot of the participants told me that dogs are often perceived to not feel in any way similar to us humans. Another thing that I asked about initially was whether dogs can understand humans' emotions and to what extent they understand them. It was clear, from every dog-worker, that dogs are exceptionally good at this, it is their specialty. The results show that in relation to the context of IT, the dog can understand the awfulness of the situation even though they are not themselves the direct victim of violence. They work as emotional mirrors, responding to and understanding the suffering of the women, increasing their stress levels as the women are in a bad place. In the same way, they are also affected by the women when they feel joy, have fun and from the love that dogs themselves are the target of:

They [dogs] are very skilled at reading our [emotions] the domesticated dog is expert at this. They will respond to every feeling or emotional state and if their owner is having a bad day, so will they. (Dog-worker).

As dogs are "very skilled" at understanding human emotion, it can be said that they have great empathic abilities, and they respond to this. The dogs' emotional experience becomes ambivalent as the woman's emotional experience is ambivalent, and as they both are entangled through empathy this is also true for the women. The dogs are said to experience a wide range of primary emotions such as fear, anger, happiness, and love. The dogs with experience of IT that the dog-workers meet, often express emotions of fear and anger, and these expressions are generally expressed in three ways. The first one is dogs that are said to channel their fear and anger outwards, as a way to protect themselves but also to protect their human as people often back off as a reaction to this. This could be understood as the dog taking on a role-taking emotion of responsibility towards their human. Another normal reaction is for the dog to become completely passive and avoid the situation:

Either you fight, or you flee, but a lot of them become passive, almost frozen. These dogs tend to be overlooked, they tend to not get any help or support. (Dog-worker).

Some professionals claim that these dogs rarely get the help of someone educated on dog behavior as this behavior is easy to accept and deal with. They depend on humans to use their ability of empathy in the sense that they do what they can to listen to and understand their dog, even though their behavior is no problem for the human. The dogs also depend on the women to not only understand them but also to do something with that understanding in order to help them. The reason why dogs that are outgoing and aggressive get help might be because the women feel negatively about it, and this guides them into seeking help. The third way that the dogs deal with their experiences is to become overly friendly and obsequious to show that they are no threat. This is susceptible to the consequences that their behavior has had before. Some dog-workers tell me that the dogs often start out as protective and outwardly aggressive but then change strategy as the result is negative. The dog undergoes emotional socialization to show or hide certain emotions because their social context determines them to do just that. In

the context of IT the dog is often susceptible to violence if they do act out and will therefore with time make themselves smaller and start expressing things as joy, avoidance, and passiveness. This statement really hits the nail on its head:

We have taught dogs to not feel and express certain feelings, they limit themselves according to how we have limited them. (Dog-worker).

Dogs' emotions are vulnerable to their social surroundings and will change or be expressed differently in relation to their context. The women are also said to change their emotional expression and emotions in order to fit the social context, especially with their abuser and/or other men. Both individuals are emotionally socialized due to the context, but also in relation to each other in an attempt to calm the other one down or make them happier and primary emotions such as anger can be suppressed. With that, they also become part of emotional socialization for each other. The professionals describe how dogs are very in tune with their surroundings and will act and respond accordingly. In the same way these women are often more in tune with their surroundings than other women as they are used to having to keep an eye on their perpetrator to avoid threat and additional harm.

Although a lot of the emotional experiences of dogs and women in relation to the other when experiencing IT is tough, there are a different side to things as well, and this is the source of the emotional ambivalence. Workers in both groups account for the unconditional and strong love that dogs feel towards their humans, and vice versa. They care highly for each other and will do their best to comfort one another when they are sad or in other ways upset and they will also seek each other out when being upset themselves. Similarly, to when the dog is receptive to the woman's negative emotional experience, they are also open to the positive emotions and will be affected by those too:

They are having fun together, it is important, I think. The dog becomes happy from the interaction that they have together, feel joy, calmness, and satisfaction. The interaction with the woman in this context becomes a pause, she is often safe and not as unpredictable. (Dog-worker).

Having the relationship with the woman in this case can be of importance to the dogs. Without her, they might only interact with a violent man. A lot of this is comparable to how the dog becomes that safety for the woman, that pauses from all of the stressful and painful events. They become each other's safety and joy; each other's victim company.

There is an emotional ambivalence for both parties in relation to the other within the context of IT. This ambivalence is because of their situation, and that the emotions are provoked and gain importance in that specific context. The interaction that they have with each other leads to emotions in reaction to how they perceive the other's situation. They do not only have emotions in direct reaction to what they themselves go through, but their emotions are intensified due to what the other individual experiences. Because of the situation with IT, both positive and negative emotions are strengthened, creating an ambivalence where the relationships within this context are both emotionally positive and negative. There are conflicts

between emotions such as joy and guilt as well as love and worry but also in the sense that dogs become ambivalent in having certain emotions but not being allowed to express them. They become even more emotionally ambivalent as the other individual experiences emotional ambivalence, leading to that ambivalence gives rise to further ambivalence.

5.4 The ambivalence of being stuck versus moving forward

There is an ambivalence in whether to stay or leave, between love and dependence as well as with their emotional experiences. Lastly, the relationship also leads to an ambivalence when coming out on the other side of IT and as they move forward. The relationship's ambivalence with moving forward heavily depends on two things, namely the social context and the conditions for receiving help, including finances. For the women, the dog becomes help in moving forward, but at the same time the tough emotions in relation to the dogs keep them from doing so. For the dog, there is a similar pattern where they on one side gain help, love, and support from the women, but at the same time they might benefit from being rehomed as the women are having too hard of a time to deal with their dog's trauma.

Dogs in IT situations are even more dependent on their humans for their welfare to be taken into consideration than dogs outside of IT, some of the dog-workers claim. They are very dependent on that person to help them on the other side of it when they no longer live together with the perpetrator. Most of the dog-workers explain to me that the women might seek out help for their dogs but are not able to continue the treatment plan that they set up for two major reasons. The first being financial reasons, since gaining the help from a professional is expensive and demands multiple meetings or sessions. A lot of the women have explained to the interviewees that their finances are bad as the perpetrator has used money as a means of control and to demonstrate their power. Additionally, a lot of the dogs need veterinarian help either for physical injuries or to get medicine to help them through this mentally and going to a veterinarian is even more expensive, workers in both groups say:

Most of my clients will not continue the training program or come back to me for more help. They cannot afford my fees and I often think that they just do not have the energy to deal with it. It is a lot of hard work to help these dogs after what they have experienced. (Dog worker).

Secondly, as shown in the previous quote, they are too hurt themselves and too deep within the process of healing themselves, so they do not have the energy to work with the dogs as much as needed, or for as long as needed. They are very emotionally affected by the situation themselves, and as mentioned previously, it can be hard for them to comprehend what the dogs have been through and how they feel. This is why some of the professionals argue that a lot of these dogs would benefit from being rehomed. Some of them also say that the women will benefit from this too, and workers in both groups testify that this is a normal practice. The reason for this is that the relationship can come in the way of rehabilitation and recovery. Having the dogs' issues to work with to move on, sometimes seem to stand in the way of the women's processing and moving forward. The human is crucial in the rehabilitation of the dog, and some are doing very well with this, as pointed out in the quote below:

It's a lot about teaching the dog owner. I work about 90% with communicating with the dog owner and 10% with training the dog. It's on the owner to work with the dog between our sessions... I have had amazing dog owners that have moved to make the dog feel better, who adapt their entire life for the dog and turn themselves inside out. (Dog-worker).

Some also mentioned that this is affected by the strength of the relationship. Their experience is that women that care more strongly about their dog seek help with them, but more importantly that a strong relationship leads to them working harder for their dog. Some do however also make it a point to tell me that this does not mean that the women who do not seek as much help, or work as hard, always care less. They tell me that it also relies on their trauma, stress, and life overall, but that people who hire them have a strong relationship with their dogs and that might be the reason for why they ask for help instead of getting rid of the dog. The strength of the relationship therefore adds to the dogs' and the women's ambivalence as they move forward.

The workers often hear that the dog is the reason why these women chose to live, and how they found the strength to keep moving on. Concepts such as "lifeline," "the reason to live", "their everything" and "their rock" are used frequently. It is often thought that positive and warm emotions such as love lead to more positive emotions, but because of this context, that is not always the case. Since they feel so strongly about their dogs and since the dog is a family-member, it gets harder and evokes difficult emotions. Despite this, the dog, and the positive emotions that the relationship conjures are of importance to both endure the relationship with the perpetrator as well as in moving forward. Many professionals clarify that the women also have fun with their dog, provoking emotions for joy and happiness, and giving them a pause to their situation. They claim that this is very important when they work with them after the abusive relationship ends, to make their everyday life somewhat happier or lighter:

When they talk about the dog, they do it with joy, warmth, with a lot of positive emotions. Pride, they are proud of their dog. Love. When they talk about the dog, they get happy, they talk about fun things that they do together. (Human-worker).

Some of the professionals explain that the topic of the dog is not brought up by the professional themselves as it is not natural in the setting in which they are working. They do however tell me that they should and everyone in the human-workers group said that there is a need to talk about the dog's emotional experiences. If they do not, they miss working with the women in moving forward with processing the situation that they have lived in. As the guilt is so strong and leads to sadness and worry, the workers reveal that it is necessary to deal with it to heal. Since the dog is thought of as a family member, the women feel that the dogs need protection and as they imagine and understand what the dogs are feeling strong emotions come forth. However, within the context of IT and the extreme conditions that they live in or have lived through, the women sometimes seem to not want to use their ability to feel empathy. It is just too difficult within the situation that they experience, but they do use it to some extent anyway. On the other hand, there are a lot of emotions that are positive and help the women while they experience this or try to move forward after:

The dog is safe; it is the two of them against the world. That unconditional love and to feel needed which these women rarely experience. (Human-worker).

The dog is the lifeline, the only thing that keeps them moving forward. I've had clients that express gratitude because the dog helped them out, helped them after. (Human-worker).

As shown in the quotes, the women do not only feel tremendous love for the dog, but they also feel loved by the dog, and this is of importance in moving forward. These emotions are said to be essential in the women's lives, especially in the context of a family. In cases where the women work hard together with their dog to move forward, they are also said to be a great asset in the dog's recovery and future happiness. Moving forward depends on the opportunities in help-seeking, the ability to bring the dog with and that the social workers that they meet are understanding the importance of the relationship when counseling them. Human exceptionalism remains within a lot of places where the women are seeking help, making it harder for them to deal with their emotions regarding the dogs, and therefore becomes a challenge in helping the dog and the woman to move forward. If the dog was viewed in an equivalent way as human children, the workers might be more open to and in tune with the importance of talking about the dog and the relationship that they have with them.

The ambivalence of moving forward stems from; the possibilities in coming out of the relationship together, whether they both have the opportunity to process, rehabilitate and deal with their shared trauma and their relationship. The women are both held back by having to deal with the tough emotions regarding their dogs as well as pushed forward because of the love, joy, and support of the dogs. The dogs need their humans not only to see their hurt, but also to be able to seek help and work with them in moving forward. The ambivalence intensifies in the dilemma of rehoming a dog to give the dog a better chance to be rehabilitated but having to deal with the long-going grief of the loss for both individuals or to keep the dog but risking both of their processes but where they have each other and are able to keep that strong, important relationship. They end up becoming both dependent on each other and at the same time responsible for each other's well-being. The emotions of victim-company can result in additional hardship as well as positive opportunities for both women and dogs.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the woman-dog relationship in the context of IT has been analyzed, in order to understand both women and dogs, their emotional experiences, and the role of the relationship, as there is a gap in previous research in the area. It was especially significant to me to highlight the matter of animal welfare and take the experience of the dog into account. Not only because dogs are also affected, but because I thought that the women might benefit from understanding both themselves as well as their dogs. The answers to all three research questions: (1) How does the woman-dog relationship affect both women and dogs when experiencing or having experienced intimate terrorism?, (2) What emotions do the professionals see that are actualized in the woman-dog relationship in the context of intimate terrorism, and what role do they play? and (3) What role does the woman-dog relationship play in the women's decision to stay or

leave the abusive relationship? show that the relationship and both individuals' experiences are characterized by ambivalences. The findings from this study point to a relational ambivalence throughout every part of the women's' and the dogs' lives as they experience IT. These ambivalences are intertwined with the prevailing power-relations as well as the emotional experiences and empathic abilities of both parties. My research shows that the ambivalences of the relationship, power-relations, emotional experiences, and empathy are all intertwined as women and dogs experience IT together.

Previous research shows that there is an ambivalence for non-human animals living with humans. My research shows that this is also true for women living with dogs within the context of IT and that the dog's ambivalence intensifies due to the context. The ambivalence reveals that the relationship leads to both positive and negative factors for both individuals when experiencing or having experienced IT and that human exceptionalism gets in the way for both beings. The results show that both parties are affected individually and together as they are influenced by the context and the other. I found that both individuals experience four types of ambivalences, namely: *the ambivalence of staying or leaving*, *the ambivalence of love and dependence*, *the ambivalence of conflicting emotions* and *the ambivalence of being stuck versus moving forward*. The relationship can both be why they come out of the abusive relationship and at the same time the reason to why they stay. As stated in previous research, this kind of relationship affects whether the women chose to leave or stay with their abuser, however the results also show that emotions are key in this decision and that both individuals are affected in this. Secondly, the relationship is the source of feeling strong love as well as feeling loved, yet this love also leads to an unhealthy codependency between women and dogs. Furthermore, there is also an ambivalence with their emotional experiences, and this is reinforced as they use their empathic abilities to understand each other's emotions as they react, respond, and reflect to them. There are conflicting emotions throughout the relationship for both individuals. Lastly, the relationship also becomes ambivalent for both of them as they move forward after living under conditions of IT. For the women this means that they might lean on the dog to move forward and that they have positive experiences due to the dog, but that it also leads to strong negative experiences as they might need to talk about and deal with what their dogs have been through. The last ambivalence results in whether to have the dog rehomed or not, losing the strong relationship while it at the same time might be best for the dog.

7. Discussion

What this study contributes to, compared to previous research, is the understanding of both individuals in IT situations, and not only the human. This is done by the use of theories on the human-animal relationship, sociology of emotions as well as empathy where empathy is a clear factor in all aspects and leads to the ambivalences as each party responds to the other one. It is difficult to give a fair portrayal of two distinct species, as we do not share the same language (Demello, 2021). I have tried to solve this issue by interviewing experts rather than those that have experienced IT themselves. However, there is a difference in how these professionals understand their clients because of the difference in species. This is something that we need to be aware of when studying non-human animals. Nonetheless, I do believe that the results give

indications on how dogs experience IT and their relationship to the women. My previous understanding of dogs as a long-term dog-enthusiast and on an educational journey to become a dog behavior expert was beneficial. Still, I made sure to confirm or challenge my own pre-understandings with the choice of interview questions.

I can also see that further research is needed; research that takes other non-human animals into account, that interviews individuals who themselves have experienced IT while living with pets and also studies on children and pets in IT situations. Another matter that I have found, that requires exploration, is how to deal with situations where the non-human animal is ‘owned’ by or bought together with the perpetrator. Furthermore, the experience of species other than humans and dogs are important to understand to produce knowledge on the specific challenges that they face. Previous research has shown a link between abuse towards women and dogs, that it affects them both whether the women leave the relationship or not and that perpetrators use non-human animals to control and hurt the human victim. I, however, found that emotions and empathy play a vital role in this and that the experiences result in relational and emotional ambivalences for both women and dogs when experiencing IT, and that both individuals are affected by the power-relations within this context.

Both women’s and dogs’ perspectives need to be considered in order to understand that they might need each other and can be a positive influence in each other’s lives even though they live under tough circumstances. But to make sure that they can be just that, society needs to adapt and find solutions to the specific challenges that these individuals meet. Challenges of the intense negative emotions that they gain because of each other, finances in help-seeking and the possibilities to bring the dog to shelters come forth in this research paper. If we can hold both thoughts in our head at once, we can understand that helping both individuals benefit the two. If we, as a society, stay with our ideas of human exceptionalism, we can at least acknowledge that the women need us to care for their dogs to help them, as pointed out in one of the interviews:

If we want to help the woman, we must help the dog. She will not leave without her dog, and she will suffer from the dog’s suffering. (Human worker).

However, I will go out on a limb and argue that the dogs are persons themselves and that we need to take them into consideration on their own merit. Throughout this study, dogs have been claimed to care for humans, understand humans, comfort, and do positive things for their humans. Are we not obliged to do at least the bare minimum for them? This is highlighted as I asked one interviewee about the importance of this study:

I think that this study is very important as we need to focus on dogs too. They feel, react, and respond to what they experience just like we do, and the only ethical way forward is to care for their well-being just as much. (Dog-worker).

The idea of human exceptionalism becomes counterproductive as it becomes an issue for both the human and the dog. To make sure that the women get the best help and care, there is a need to help their dogs and to bring their relationship up when working with them as well. If society

gives these individuals this kind of help and opportunity, the relationship will become more of a positive influence in both of their lives. This is why this study is of significance, and why more research needs to be conducted.

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide for human workers

- Skulle du vilja berätta vad du jobbar med och hur en vanlig dag ser ut?
- Skulle du fritt kunna prata om dina erfarenheter i ämnet?
- Har du ett exempel som berört dig?
- Skulle du kunna berätta om något exempel där det blivit bra?
- Är husdjur något ni berör systematiskt i er verksamhet?
- Är det viktigt för kvinnan att ni pratar om hunden? Varför/varför inte?
- Hur pratar de du möter om relationen till sina hundar?
- Vilka känslor beskriver dina klienter när det gäller sina hundar? Hur känner de inför sina hundar?
- Har de berättat om hur de tror att hundarna känner? Exempel?
- Vilka utmaningar har framkommit för dina klienter och deras hundar?
- Hur påverkar dessa utmaningar klienten?
- Skulle du säga att det finns positiva konsekvenser av relationen mellan kvinna och hund i dessa sammanhang? Exempel?
- Har hunden hjälpt kvinnan på något vis?
- Tror du att det finns positiva känslomässiga konsekvenser? Vilka?
- Om vi vänder på frågan, vilka negativa konsekvenser har du sett? Exempel?
- Vilka negativa känslor uppstår i relation till hunden?
- Hur skulle du beskriva empati i allmänhet?
- Upplever du att empati har någon betydelse för kvinnan och hundens relation? Varför/varför inte?
- Hur påverkade relationen möjligheten att ta sig ur den våldsamma relationen?
- Har du mött några av dina klienter efter att de tagit sig ur den våldsamma relationen? Hur lever de då? Har de tagit med sig hunden?
- Finns det någonting som du vill betona av det vi pratat om? Något att tillägga?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for dog workers

- Kan du börja med att berätta om vad du arbetar med och vad du är utbildad till?
- Kan du berätta om hundars känsloliv?
- Hur förstår du en hunds känslor när de inte kan prata?
- Hur yttrar sig känslorna?
- Tror du att människor generellt sett förstår hundar?
- Tror du att hundar generellt sett förstår människor?
- Kan du berätta om dina möten med hundar som levt i eller lever i hem där det förekommer våld?
- Har du något exempel som berört dig?
- Har du något exempel där det blivit extra bra?
- Kan du berätta om relationen mellan hunden och hens människa?
- Vad känner hundar inför ”sina” människor? Hur är relationen mellan hunden och människan? Hur viktiga är relationerna?
- Vilka beteenden uttrycker hundar som levt under dessa omständigheter?

- Vilka känslor uttrycker hundar som levt under dessa omständigheter?
- Skiljer det sig mellan hundar som själva blivit utsatta för våld, och hundar som enbart sett någon annan bli utsatt?
- Hur förstår hunden vad den utsatta människan går igenom?
- Hur påverkas hundar av människor sinnesstämning?
- Vilka positiva känslomässiga konsekvenser har hunden av sin människa?
- Vilka negativa konsekvenser?
- Hur kan relationen påverkas av det som de upplever tillsammans?
- Hur förändras relationen när de kommer ur det våldsamma sammanhanget?
- Finns det något som sticker ut i relationen mellan hund och människa i dessa fall?
- Kommer hunden alltid påverkas av sina erfarenheter?
- Vad tycker du är extra viktigt att betona i det här? Något att tillägga?

Appendix 3: Information to participants

Information till intervjudeltagare

I det här dokumentet får du information om studentprojektet ”Victim company: the relationship between woman and dog in intimate partner violence situations” för en master uppsats och vad det innebär att delta i detta. Master projektet görs självständigt av Madeleine Thorsander med ansvarig handledare Cathrin Wasshede, docent i sociologi, på Institutionen för sociologi och arbetsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet. Kontaktuppgifter finns längst ned i dokumentet. Projektet genomförs i enlighet med de centrala etiska riktlinjerna framtagna av Vetenskapsrådet. För vidare information om de forskningsetiska riktlinjerna till deltagare, se nedan.

Vad är det för projekt och varför kan du bidra?

Projektet ”Victim company: the relationship between woman and dog in intimate partner violence situations” syftar till att bidra till forskning om relationen mellan kvinnor och hundar när de levt eller lever i sammanhang med våld i nära relation. Med fokus på både kvinnan och hunden ämnar projektet bidra till ny kunskap om hur relationen påverkar båda individer när de utsätts för våld i nära relation. Jag kontaktar dig med anledning av att jag är intresserad av dina erfarenheter och din expertis i din professionella roll där du mött dessa kvinnor eller hundar.

Hur går studien till?

Om du vill delta kommer en intervju hållas via en digital plattform som Skype, Zoom, på telefon eller annan plattform om du önskar. Intervjun beräknas ta 45–90 minuter. Ditt namn och andra personliga detaljer som framkommer är konfidentiella och kommer inte användas muntligt eller skriftligt i någon text som studien leder till och obehöriga har inte tillgång till dina uppgifter. Jag skulle vilja spela in intervjun för att ha möjlighet att lyssna på och transkribera den för analys. Intervjufilen kommer att förvaras på en lösenordskyddad dator vilken bara jag har tillgång till. Ditt namn kommer inte att synas på någon av dessa filer – bara en kod som döljer din identitet.

Om du ångrar dig kan du välja att avsluta ditt deltagande. Du kan också kontakta mig i upp

till två veckor efter intervjutillfället för att be mig ta bort specifika uttalanden eller hela din medverkan. När studiens resultat presenteras/publiceras kommer alla deltagares identitet skyddas med hjälp av en pseudonym.

Vad händer med dina uppgifter?

Det insamlade materialet kommer att användas för att skriva en masteruppsats och diskuteras vid ett seminarium. Materialet kan också komma att användas i en akademisk tidskrift eller rapport som är riktad till exempel professionella grupper inom fältet. Informationen hålles i säkert förvar och är endast tillgänglig för relevanta forskare. Dina svar kommer att anonymiseras så att obehöriga inte kan ta del av dem. Intervjuerna kommer, med ditt samtycke, spelas in och sedan transkriberas i text. I den slutgiltiga uppsatsen/artikeln kan utdrag ur intervjuer citeras och intervjudeltagaren får en pseudonym (det vill säga ett falskt namn). Intervjuerna och det transkriberade materialet kommer inte användas för annat än vetenskaplig forskning.

Materialet kan eventuellt senare bli publicerad i någon rapport eller artikel i akademisk tidskrift. Materialet kommer att sparas på lösenordskyddad dator tills detta och eventuellt relaterade projekt är avslutade.

Hur får jag information om resultatet av studien?

Resultaten kommer publiceras i en masteruppsats som blir färdig i juni 2022. Om du önskar ta del av resultatet kan du meddela mig och där inkludera din mailadress så skickar jag ut länk till GUPEA där den kan laddas ner. Deltagare är välkomna till presentationer om de vill den 16–17 maj 2022. Om deltagare vill komma på presentationen skickas information om specifikt datum och tid för presentationen samt om den genomförs på fysisk plats eller zoom (då skickas också zoomlänk). På grund av pandemin är detta ännu inte fastställt.

Deltagandet är frivilligt

Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och samtycke ges skriftligt i det formulär du fått. Jag kommer också be om samtycke muntligt vid intervjutillfället. Du har möjlighet att ställa frågor om projektet innan du signerar ett 'samtyckesformulär'. Om du ångrar dig kan du när som helst välja att avsluta ditt deltagande under pågående intervju och du behöver inte uppge varför du inte längre vill delta. Du har också rättighet att radera uppgifter i efterhand.

Kontaktuppgifter

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Appendix 4: Consent form for participants

Samtycke till deltagande

Jag har läst och förstått omfattningen och resultatet av att delta i denna students masterprojekt. Alla frågor jag haft har fått ett tillfredsställande svar.

Med detta avtal samtycker jag till att delta, och till att intervjun blir digitalt inspelad.

Jag samtycker också till att mina personliga uppgifter hanteras som beskrivet i det informationsblad jag fått innan deltagande.

Datum och plats	Namn (deltagare)
Datum och plats	Namn (student)