

Brief Report

A Qualitative Exploration of Young Canadians' Experiences of Undesired Dog Behaviours

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Abstract: There is a need for research that explores the challenges associated with dog ownership. In particular, increasing our understanding of how young people manage their dog's undesired behaviours can inform a more nuanced perspective of dog ownership as well as highlight the impact of such interactions on both dogs and young people. This qualitative study addresses this gap in the human–animal interactions literature through a secondary analysis of a data set of transcribed semi-structured interviews with seven participants aged between 17–26 years. The data were collected during a larger investigation that focused on young people's relationships with their dogs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using thematic analyses, we examined interviews that probed participants' experiences and responses when their dogs misbehaved. The findings identified and explored three emerging themes including Attachment Patterns, which was supported by the codes of connection and kinship. The second theme was Synchrony and/or Lack of Synchrony, which was supported by the codes of reaction and communication. The third theme was Response to Challenging Situations, supported by the codes of emotional reactions and coping styles. Findings suggest that participants handled their dog's undesired behaviours in unique ways and that such situations may negatively impact their emotions. Undesired dog behaviours were not related to participants' perceptions of poor attachment patterns towards their dogs. These findings can inform efforts to foster positive interactions between young people and their dogs and reduce dog surrenders.

Keywords: young people; undesired dog behaviours; dog–human interaction; attachment; synchrony



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1. Introduction

Given that the majority of the human–animal interaction literature is focused on examining positive interactions and their impacts on humans and dogs, fewer studies address the ways in which negative or challenging interactions operate. Importantly, the “pet effect”, which refers to the positive effects associated with interactions between humans and dogs, should not be generalized, because the relationship with dogs is complex and involves both positive and negative aspects [1]. We know virtually nothing about the ways in which undesired dog behaviours are perceived or responded to, nor do we understand much about their impact on the quality of the relationship between dogs and their owners. Undesired dog behaviours often involve dog's reactions to situations that dogs perceive as aversive or distressing. For instance, dogs may display behaviours such as destructiveness because they feel anxious or fearful of being left alone or they may vocalize loudly when they hear loud noises. Undesired dog behaviours often involve canine behavioural issues such as aggression and destructiveness that may negatively impact young people's satisfaction towards their dog by creating more stress and negative

feelings in daily interaction. Such situations may be perceived as a burden, which can have a negative impact on the relationship shared with the dog [2–4].

Understanding how young people manage their dog’s undesired behaviours is relevant for several reasons. First, it plays a crucial role in the quality of the bond between young people and their dogs [5,6] by suggesting what strategies have a positive impact on the quality of the relationship shared with the dog. Second, undesired behaviours (e.g., excessive barking, jumping on people) play an important role in an owner’s level of relationship satisfaction with their dog [2,7], with more undesired dog behaviours linked to lower satisfaction in the relationship shared between owners and their dogs [5,6]. Third, undesired behaviours in dogs are the leading cause of relinquishment among dog owners [8,9]. Fourth, behavioural issues in dogs can cause distress and frustration among dog owners. For instance, it may require extra time to train dogs with behavioural issues to address any limitations related to where to walk or exercise one’s dog; such limitations might, in turn, contribute to feelings of frustration and stress [10,11].

More information about the effects of dogs’ undesired behaviours on their owners can support the design of programs that aim to successfully match dogs and prospective owners and help to reduce conflicts in the human–dog relationship. Additionally, this research may shed light on circumstances requiring further attention when supporting young people dealing with undesired dog behaviours [12]. Additionally, exploring how young people handle—behaviorally and emotionally—undesired behaviours in the relationship shared with their dogs might help to clarify if any of the approaches adopted by young people can decrease the likelihood of experiencing continued stress in their interactions with their dogs.

More specifically, we examined the relationship between dogs and owners who are young emerging adults. Emerging adulthood refers to the period from late adolescence to the middle-to-late twenties [13]. This developmental period is often characterized by a prolonged exploration of new roles, self-focus, emotional instability, and feelings of existing somewhere “in-between” both adolescence and adulthood [13]. Focusing on emerging adulthood when studying interactions with dogs is important because, during this period, young people often face unique developmental tasks such as making adjustments to new routines, roles, and relationships (e.g., first experience living away from one’s family, the transition between high school and university life) [13]. Importantly, relationships with dogs during emerging adulthood can shape young people’s well-being by offering a new source of social and emotional support; however, relationships with dogs can also present new challenges for young people [12]. In addition, it is a period where young adults have the opportunity to make independent decisions about whom they choose to live with, which may lead to first-time pet ownership.

We explored one main research question: “How do young people manage undesired situations experienced in their interactions with their dogs?” This study builds upon insights from a small sample of studies suggesting that people’s perceptions about problematic dog behaviours may vary with age and can affect people’s level of satisfaction towards their dog [2,3,6,7]. To address this research question, we engaged a secondary analysis of interviews previously explored in a study focused on young people’s coping styles in the context of dog ownership and close relationships [12]. Secondary analysis of qualitative data was deemed appropriate as this approach allowed us to explore our newly developed research questions and involved a separate analysis of our previously collected and analyzed data [14].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Current Study

As described above, we explored one main research question: “How do young people manage undesired situations experienced in their interactions with their dogs?” Based on the idea that there is a link between fewer undesired dog behaviours and satisfaction in the relationship shared with the dog, we hypothesized that participants who reported

fewer undesired behaviours would describe more positive feelings towards their dogs [2]. Importantly, this is a secondary analysis of the data, and this study differs from the first exploration of the data for focusing on young people’s emotional perceptions of their relationship with their dogs instead of exploring young people’s coping styles when handling challenging dog behaviours.

2.2. Methodology

The methods employed in this study are guided by a qualitative exploratory methodology, which is a useful strategy to expand knowledge about a topic that has not yet been extensively investigated [14]. The key method of data collection was online semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interviews ranged from 12 to 20 min in length and included both audio and video components. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. Interviews explored how young people experienced and responded to problematic interactions they experienced with their dogs. Young people’s feelings and thoughts were explored using an interview schedule as a prompt for participant responses (Table 1).

Table 1. Interview Schedule.

Guiding Questions
Relationship with the dog: The questions in this section aimed to elucidate how participants perceived their relationships with their dogs. - How would you describe your relationship with your dog? - What types of activities do you engage in with your dog, and how often?
Undesired behaviours in the dog: The questions in this section aimed to elucidate how participants perceived their dog’s undesired behaviours. - How do you feel, and what do you think when your dog displays any undesired behaviours? - Could you describe in detail any behavioural problems your dog might have displayed in the past (e.g., aggression, disobedience, excessive barking)?
Management of undesired behaviour in the dog: The questions in this section aimed to elucidate how participants managed undesired behaviours displayed by their dogs and their thoughts when these situations happened. - How do you feel when these situations happen? - Overall, how do you handle these situations?
Self-evaluation of strategies used in the past: The question in this section aimed to elucidate how participants self-evaluated their strategies in coping with undesired behaviours displayed by their dogs: Would you change anything in the way you have been handling these situations? Why?

Data analysis followed the systematic approach described by Braun and Clarke [15]. The initial step was engaged by the first author and included immersion with the data by listening to the audio-recorded interviews multiple times. This was followed by transcribing the interviews and then reading the transcriptions while making notes to help discern passages in the data that would lead to insights and preparation for coding. Next, the research team discussed initial impressions of the data set. Different codes were identified and those supported the development of themes. In the context of this study, codes involve initial exploration of the data to identify and label concepts or themes without preconceived categories After coding the data, the authors debriefed and shared their general impressions about the patterns identified in the data and strategies for ascertaining themes from those patterns. The next step involved peer debriefing to reach a consensus about the final themes. The codes were organized into groupings, and the themes were reported as key findings.

2.3. Participants

We obtained university ethics clearance (file# 21-048), and participants consented to be interviewed after they participated in a larger mixed methods study conducted by the research team; at that time, they consented to be contacted via email for follow-up studies [12]. Seven individuals (six females and one male) aged between 17–26 years old responded to the email and participated in interviews for this study. Every participant had a companion dog; of those companion dogs, five were male, and two were female. All the companion dogs were between 3–6 years old and had lived with the participants between 2–6 years.

3. Results

We identified three themes through our analysis of the data, and these included: 1. Attachment Patterns, 2. Synchronicity/Lack of Synchronicity, and 3. Responses to Challenging Situations.

3.1. Theme 1—Attachment Patterns

Our analysis of participants' responses revealed a focus on different aspects of the relationship between young people and their dogs, and such aspects were considered important codes: physical and emotional connection and kinship. Together, these two codes supported the identification of the theme of "Attachment Patterns", which is related to how young people handle their dogs' undesired behaviours by indicating that a closer sense of connection with the dog may help young people better understand their dog's behaviours.

3.1.1. Physical and Emotional Connection

For some participants, feelings of physical and emotional connection were identified as an important factor in their relationship with their dog. Such feelings contributed to building a stronger sense of trust and proximity in their relationship with their dog. For one participant, the emotional connection she shared with her dog included a sense of physical proximity. Additionally, living with a dog seemed to relieve feelings of loneliness by offering company when the presence of friends and family was not possible:

She always likes to be by my side and just kind of keeps me company I guess, especially in the past like year and a half, it's been very nice to have—just kind of that extra companion since I do live on my own as well (female, 23 years old).

Another participant discussed how some aspects of the dog's behaviours fostered a sense of connection:

And I love taking like long walks and hikes, so, um, yeah. He's always happy and willing to do that (female, 25 years old).

3.1.2. Kinship

Another code revealed in participants' responses was kinship, which included comparisons between the relationship with their dogs and relationships with siblings or babies. For one participant, the relationship with the dog involved kinship feelings, with a mix of love and hate:

I think we kind of have like a brother relationship like it's a little kind of love and hate (male, 22 years old).

Another participant compared her connection towards her dog to the relationship shared with a baby, but also perceived complications linked to their relationships with other people:

Um, yeah, he's kind of like a baby to me—like I treat him like a kid pretty much. Um, um, yeah, like my dog is quite obsessed with me—he's very possessive of me. Um, he loves me a lot, and I know that, but um sometimes causes trouble because he's very jealous of other people and other animals coming near me and stuff (female, 26 years old).

Additionally, all the participants used different aspects related to the dog's behaviour to explain the sense of connection they felt towards their dogs. For example, for one

participant, perceptions of similar personalities in the relationship shared with the dog was a positive factor and helped to create a sense of connection:

I guess her personality you could say is very similar to mine, and we get along really well—she is a very friendly dog (female, 19 years old).

3.2. Theme 2—Synchronicity/Lack of Synchronicity

Participants described the parallels and distinctions regarding their own and their dogs' reactions and their shared communication style. Our analysis of participants' responses revealed a focus on the following relationship aspects with their dogs and these aspects were considered important codes: reactions (e.g., different reactions towards different family members) and communication (e.g., communication style in the relationship shared with the dog). These codes supported the identification of the theme "Synchronicity/Lack of Synchronicity," by suggesting that perceptions of synchronicity between young people and dogs may help to foster positive feelings even when the dog misbehaves.

3.2.1. Reactions

When describing their interactions with their dogs, participants described aspects related to their own and their dogs' reactions to people and to the environment. One participant highlighted distinct reactions from their dog toward different family members, which suggests that the dog's levels of synchronicity towards different family members vary:

Like, my relationship with him is different than his relationship with my mom and dad. I think he sort of, in a way, respects them more- he listens to them a lot more because they're the authoritative figure for him (male, 22 years old).

A key aspect of participants' responses was a feeling of attunement in the relationship they shared with their dog. The feeling of attunement that one participant described sharing with her dog was associated with interactions involving other people living in the house:

Um, I guess when we go to bed, for example, he has to—because I go to bed earlier than my husband—come and lay with me, but he has to be like a little spoon. So he'll do that until my husband comes to bed, and then as soon as my husband comes in the room he jumps off the bed and leaves (female, 26 years old)

However, another participant described how her dog's behaviours sometimes led her to feel a lack of attunement with her dog, particularly when her dog displayed undesired behaviours such as barking:

If I'm trying to do work and, you know, his barking is getting annoying, um but most of the time we don't really have an issue with it. It's just like, 'oh ok'. Like just going out and doing his thing kind of thing (female, 19 years old).

3.2.2. Communication

Some participants emphasized how their communication style during interactions with their dog differed from their communication style towards people. Such a description helped to explain potential emotional barriers (e.g., ability to create an emotional connection, ability to understand the dog's feelings) in the relationship with the dog:

I would say the biggest differentiation is communication because sometimes, like even though I will verbally converse with my dog, obviously, my dog is not speaking back to me, so it's harder to understand how the dog is feeling versus how the person in front of me is feeling because I can gauge the tone of their voice, their body language, their facial expressions, whereas with my dog it's often just the body language that you're looking at (female, 19 years old).

Another participant explained her communication difficulties with her dog when trying to understand her dog's reactions to the environment and people:

So, I have a hard time with like the, you know, what's going on in my head and that's not necessarily going on in his head. Um, and I need to direct him in the right direction, basically (female, 26 years old).

3.3. Theme 3—Responses to Challenging Situations

Participants described a range of challenging situations with their dogs (e.g., aggressive behaviours towards people and animals, excessive barking), which included reactions to other people, dogs, and types of animals. Our analysis of participants' responses revealed a focus on the following relationship aspects with their dogs and these aspects were considered important codes: coping strategies and emotional responses. These codes supported the identification of the theme "Responses to Challenging Situations" by indicating how young people respond to situations involving undesired behaviours in dogs.

3.3.1. Coping Strategies and Emotional Responses

Participants described how they managed challenging situations with their dogs and detailed different strategies. For example, one participant talked to her dog:

If he doesn't know how to react, he just will get up out of his down and, you know, try and interact with whoever is there, whether it's a person or a dog. Um, but then I need to, you know, correct him and tell him like "no, you need to stay there and be good" (female, 23 years old).

Some participants emphasized that the strategies used were not as effective as expected in handling undesired behaviours in their dogs. For example, one participant described her feelings of frustration when working with a trainer:

When I first started seeing the aggressive behaviour I got a trainer right away, but I've been with three different trainers because the first trainer I got, I found it just made it worse because she took not such a positive reinforcement approach (female, 26 years old).

The same participant described the use of treats in her coping style, and highlighted the limitations of her approach by explaining that some behaviours are difficult to manage and could only be accepted:

I can kind of just distract him with treats, but he cannot move closer to like the thing that's triggering him (to be reactive) without freaking out if there's not treat. So I don't really know—I've kind of just accepted that this is probably just how he is (female, 26 years old).

3.3.2. Emotional Response

Participants also referred to their thoughts and feelings when describing challenging situations faced with their dogs. In some instances, participants highlighted feelings of frustration, "But he also gets really excited when there are people around, um, so that can be a little more challenging and a little more frustrating" (female, 19 years old). In other situations, participants described feelings of embarrassment and concerns about other people's reactions towards their dog:

Honestly, probably embarrassment, just because it happens around other people and I don't want people to think that like I'm a bad dog owner which is why he's doing that (male, 19 years old).

Participants also described the emotional effects of constantly dealing with difficult to manage behavioural issues exhibited by their dogs:

It's a lot of extra work and it's really stressful, and like, even like you kind of skip-out on the training—like what you're supposed to do—which is like positive reinforcement and like teach them that these are positive things, but sometimes you just want to like snap because it's like so frustrating. (female, 26 years old).

4. Discussion

This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews with young people to explore how young people manage their dog's undesired behaviours. First, participants described feelings of physical and emotional connection, perceptions of kinship relationships, and similarities, comparing their personality and their dog's personality. Second, participants described the parallels and distinctions regarding their own and their dogs' behavioural reactions to people and their shared communication style. Third, participants described various challenging situations with their dogs (e.g., aggressive behaviours to-

wards people and animals, excessive barking), which included reactions to other people, dogs, and types of animals. This study's secondary exploration adds to our previously published findings on young people's coping styles when handling undesired behaviours in dogs by offering an understanding of what aspects of the bond between young people and dogs may help young people to establish a positive relationship with their dogs even when the dog displays undesired behaviours. These findings emphasize the relevance of young people's perceptions of shared kinship relationships, feelings of synchrony and personality characteristics in the management of undesired dog behaviours.

4.1. Attachment Patterns: Physical and Emotional Connection

One key finding in this study was that feelings of physical and emotional connection were important aspects in the quality of attachment shared with the dog, as described by the participants in this study. This finding is important because physical interaction with dogs may contribute to relaxation by buffering stress and offering a positive source of affiliation and comfort for some individuals [16]. Research by Pendry and Vandagriff [17] with university students shows that merely ten minutes of petting a dog can reduce cortisol levels. Such a finding suggests that interactions with a dog may be associated with reduced physiological stress among university students. It is possible that managing undesired behaviours in dogs will be easier when young people have more opportunities to establish physical and emotional contact with their dogs. Considering that emerging adulthood is a transitional stage that involves several stressors, this is an important finding that highlights what aspects of the human–dog relationship among young people can help to balance the potential negative impact of a dog's undesired behaviours, which in turn can be beneficial to the quality of dog–human relationships in the context of emerging adulthood.

Some participants focused on the emotional aspects of their interactions with their dog and perceived that a sense of physical proximity helped to create feelings of emotional connection. Regarding descriptions of emotional connection in the relationship with dogs, past studies have associated secure attachment and greater feelings of physical and emotional connection to one's dog to more positive attitudes towards dogs and greater satisfaction in the relationship shared with one's dog [3,18,19]. Additionally, it is possible that such feelings of connection with a dog are beneficial in the context of managing undesired dog behaviours by balancing the negative feelings that may be associated with challenging situations experienced in the relationship shared with a dog. However, participants were not explicitly asked if positive feelings towards the dog helped to balance potential negative feelings that may emerge when the dog misbehaves.

4.2. Attachment Patterns: Kinship

Kin relationship mechanisms may help to explain people's emotional investments towards their dogs by increasing the likelihood of engagement in daily activities such as dog walking [20]. In this study, one important finding was that participants described their dogs as babies or siblings and such descriptions were associated with feelings of emotional connection. Interestingly, ref. [21] highlights that dog owners who perceive their dogs as family members show higher levels of psychological well-being as compared to those who perceive their dogs as animals. Although participants were not asked about their psychological well-being, it is possible that perceiving the dog as a family member not only helped in promoting positive interactions between the participants and the dogs, but also helped to increase young people's quality of life or sense of well-being.

Relatively little is known about how perceiving dogs as humans or family members (e.g., babies, siblings) can affect young people's management of undesired behaviours. This knowledge is key because it can indicate if the positionality of the dog within a family can influence young people's choice of strategies when handling undesired dog behaviours. For example, it is possible that perceiving the dog as a family member will lead to greater feelings of empathy towards the dog and lower levels of rejection when the dog displays undesired behaviours.

Therefore, perceiving the dog as a sibling or a baby might help to preserve positive feelings towards the dog when the dog displays undesired behaviours. This, in turn, might help to prevent the deterioration of the human–dog relationship. Second, perceptions of the dog as a baby or sibling might increase feelings of emotional connection during interactions with the dog. Such a pattern might promote higher engagement in daily activities or greater satisfaction towards the dog.

4.3. Synchronicity/Lack of Synchronicity: Reactions to People

Another significant finding involved participants' descriptions of differences in the way their dogs interacted with family members and unfamiliar individuals. Dogs vary in their sense of affiliation to different individuals and such variation influences the quality of their relationships with others. For example, a greater sense of affiliation has been associated with greater synchronization and emotional closeness in social interactions, while a lower sense of affiliation (e.g., interactions with unfamiliar people) has been associated with lower behavioural synchronization [22,23]. Therefore, dogs may be more likely to approach and display synchronized behaviours (e.g., walking together, staying in the same position) toward those emotionally close to them.

Participants in this study described a greater sense of emotional connection when their dog displayed behaviours that were synchronized with their own behaviours (e.g., staying calm when required). Such a finding indicates that greater behavioural synchrony between dogs and young people may be beneficial for the relationship and may positively influence the quality of the daily interactions and can help to mitigate the negative feelings that may be associated with challenging situations such as those faced when the dog displays undesired behaviours.

Conversely, the participants in this study described how a lack of synchronization in the relationship shared with their dog was annoying and stressful. For instance, one participant discussed how the dog's barking behaviours disturbed her routine, particularly when she was engaged in activities that required greater focus. As discussed by Barcelos [24], ongoing behavioural issues in dogs can decrease feelings of satisfaction and create barriers in interactions with the dogs, which can negatively affect engagement in daily activities.

4.4. Synchronicity/Lack of Synchronicity: Communication Style in the Relationship Shared with the Dog

Another important study's finding was that participants described key distinctions in synchronicity/lack of synchronicity based on communication styles or differences in the expectations towards people and their dogs. For example, one participant mentioned lower expectations towards her dog, which led her to be more understanding with her dog than are other people. Another participant shed light on communication characteristics and indicated that it was more complicated to communicate with the dog than with people, which sometimes created barriers in their relationship with the dog. For instance, participants in this study noted that the non-verbal communication of their dogs sometimes created barriers to their understanding of their dog's needs.

Importantly, the interpretation of a dog's behaviour is associated with factors such as previous experience with a dog and level of animal empathy. In this context, a history of being responsible for a dog and higher levels of empathy can help people to interpret dog behaviours accurately [25]. For many participants, this may be the first dog they are responsible for. They might still be learning how to adjust their communication style to this new relationship. This finding indicates the need for providing further information (e.g., information about dog welfare and dogs' affective states) for young people that may help them understand their dog's communication style, particularly in situations that may be challenging for young people.

4.5. Responses to Challenging Situations: Coping Styles, Emotional Responses

Another relevant finding was that no participant in this study described avoidant approaches and, rather, only proactive and hands-on approaches were identified among the participants in this study. In the context of this study, “proactive coping strategies or coping styles are those strategies involving direct and conscious actions” (i.e., using treats to reinforce desired behaviours) [12]. As indicated in past studies, hands-on approaches are more common among young people than older people [26,27], and this response pattern might impact participants’ emotions. For example, proactive coping styles might help young people to feel more confident in handling undesired behaviour in their dogs, while less proactive coping styles (e.g., ignoring the behavioural issue, increasing the physical distance) might create more barriers in the emotional connection between dogs and young people.

In addition, in this study, most participants indicated being able to manage their emotions when handling situations with their dogs. No participants described intense negative emotions that were drastically affecting their well-being, which might be associated with the use of more proactive approaches when handling undesired dog behaviours. Understanding how young dog owners handle their emotions when facing challenging situations with their dogs is key because negative social interactions have been associated with detrimental well-being [26]. Offering support to young people dealing with persistent behavioural issues in their dog might alleviate the emotional pressure (e.g., feelings of frustration, dealing with different trainers) faced in daily interactions with their dog.

4.6. Study Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

Limitations of this study include its small sample size. While these findings are based on interviews with only seven participants, the small sample size was well-suited to our research question, which was to qualitatively explore, using in-depth interviews, how young people manage undesired dog behaviours. Additionally, we reiterate here that several impactful studies in the human–animal interactions field also have small sample sizes. For example, a recent review of studies about the effects of animals on the health and well-being of residents in care homes included 35 qualitative articles, and 16 of them had samples below 10 participants [28]. Second, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is possible that participants were already facing stress in their routine due to reduced social interactions with peers. Third, only one male was interviewed for this study. Therefore, it includes a female-biased sample of participants. Future studies could explore potential gender differences.

Despite these limitations, this qualitative study has several strengths, and the findings may also contribute to real-world applications. For instance, this study’s findings help clarify aspects related to how young people manage problematic dog behaviours. Looking further, this study’s findings highlight the role of behavioural synchronization in daily interactions between young people and dogs and elucidate some dog behaviours associated with negative and positive feelings among young people. This information may offer information on how to successfully pair up prospective young dog owners and dogs, which may help organizations working with dog adoptions. This type of application can be helpful in reducing relinquishment and re-homing.

Additionally, this study offers a qualitative exploration of young people’s perceptions of their interactions with their dogs during challenging situations. The study findings revealed young people’s unique lens and illuminated some key aspects of their complex daily interactions with their dogs. As highlighted by Herzog [1], the “pet effect” should not be generalized across all populations. In this study, young people’s rich qualitative descriptions contribute to a more nuanced picture of young people’s interactions with their dogs, one that involves both positive and negative aspects of their shared interactions.

Additionally, this study focused specifically on young people and relatively little is known about how young people manage undesired behaviours in their dogs; more studies focused exclusively on young people are needed. Understanding how young people have

been managing challenging situations with their dogs addresses gaps in the literature and offers a more nuanced analysis of the quality of the relationships between young people and their dogs.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this qualitative study uniquely unpack young people's perceptions of challenging behaviours in their dogs. This exploration contributes to the human–animal interaction field by providing a nuanced perspective of the pet effect and the challenges associated with dog ownership. A variety of emotional reactions and perceptions were observed among young people about their dog's challenging behaviours. Participants described a preference for more proactive coping styles and did not describe intense negative emotions that were drastically affecting their well-being. However, they felt annoyed when the dog displayed undesired behaviours such as excessive barking. Additionally, higher levels of behavioural synchronization and physical/emotional connection between owners and their dogs seemed to be associated with a positive attachment relationship. In contrast, a lack of synchronization seemed to create barriers within the relationship shared between owners and their dogs. These findings help to clarify how young people manage challenging situations with their dogs and how positive aspects of this relationship may help to balance negative feelings that emerge when the dog misbehaves, which may promote positive interactions with the dog even during challenging situations.

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