



Module 30

Human–Animal Interactions

Student Activities

Questions

- 1. Name two different theories that can be used to explain why humans form an emotional attachment with animals. Describe each theory.**

(4 marks)

Attachment theory:

Focuses on humans as a social species that have a natural predisposition to form emotional bonds with non-human animals as well as with other humans.

Biophilia theory:

Focuses on the human capacity for love of living beings and nature.

- 2. What is ‘cognitive dissonance’?**

(2 marks)

- First described by Festinger (1957), cognitive dissonance is when a person holds conflicting or incompatible views and motivations, causing them to experience unpleasant emotions.
- They subsequently change their attitude or behaviour in order to avoid feeling the unpleasant emotions associated with this state of internal conflict.

- 3. Identify and explain one of the main reasons why animal patients may be difficult to examine and handle within the veterinary clinic.**

(2 marks)

- Interactions with veterinarians can be unpleasant for animals, meaning that they may develop negative associations with visiting and interacting with the vet over time.
- The animals might start to anticipate unpleasant or painful interactions with the vet, and therefore attempt to avoid being examined and handled by becoming fearfully aggressive.

4. Describe how the feelings, behaviour and physical functioning of an animal that experiences a long-term negative interaction with a human may be affected.

(3 marks)

- The animal may experience negative feelings (such as fearfulness) in a chronic way if fear is experienced on a daily basis.
- The animal may start to engage in vigilance behaviour and therefore be inhibited from performing behaviours that are typically important to the animal.
- The animal may undergo a decline in physiological functioning such as reduced immunity and productivity, which – in the case of food animals – may subsequently impact upon the quality of its products.

5. What three indicators could you use in practice to determine if an animal is fearful of humans or the veterinarian?

(3 marks)

- The length of time it takes for the animal to approach the person.
- How close the animal is content to get to the stationary person.
- How close the animal will let the person get if they move towards them.

6. Outline four benefits to humans and/or animals of handling animals carefully.

(4 marks)

- Animals that are handled carefully are less likely to experience negative emotions and more likely to experience positive emotions.
- If animals are less restless and fearful during handling procedures this increases the safety for humans who work with the animals.
- Some research indicates that positive handling can increase animal productivity and the quality of animal products
- Research suggests an increase in job satisfaction experienced by those people that work with the animals.

7. The practice of keeping animals as companions has occurred in most cultures throughout history. Explain four reasons why people may seek companionship from animals and what the benefits of doing so may be for pet owners.

(4 marks)

- Keeping an animal may prevent or counteract a human feeling loneliness or isolation.
- Providing care and showing affection to a pet may improve a person's ability to interact and socialise with other people.
- Keeping or having exposure to pets may improve physical health parameters amongst people with cardiovascular disease
- Keeping or having exposure to pets may improve mental health parameters amongst people with dementia

8. a) Explain what is meant by 'bond-centred veterinary practice'.

(2 marks)

- 'Bond-centred veterinary practice' is the term increasingly used to describe a veterinary approach that seeks to strengthen the bond between the owner and their pet by, for example, helping to prevent illness or undesirable behaviours.
- A bond-centred veterinarian respects the owner's needs and wishes but does not lose sight of the obligation to safeguard the welfare of the animal patient.

b) Describe two negative welfare issues that may arise for companion animals as a result of a strong human-animal bond.

(2 marks)

Any two of the following:

- Being overfed, which can lead to obesity and other secondary illnesses including diabetes mellitus and osteoarthritis
- Development of undesirable behaviour patterns due to undesirable behaviour being inadvertently rewarded or reinforced by the owner. For example, in the case of companion dogs excessive barking can be inadvertently rewarded by the owner giving the dog attention when he or she does it.
- A dog that is overly bonded to the owner may become highly anxious when left alone (also known as separation anxiety) and therefore engage in destructive or eliminative behaviour.
- The owner's perceptions of their pet's health and quality of life may become biased and could result in overly positive or overly negative estimations of the pet's welfare.

**9. Explain three reasons why animal abuse is an important concern for veterinarians.
(3 marks)**

- Animal abuse causes avoidable suffering.
- There is strong correlational evidence to suggest that where there is animal abuse there is an increased risk of the perpetrator also demonstrating violence towards humans.
- Children who see or practice animal abuse are at an increased risk of growing up to become violent adults, indicating that animal abuse is a part of the cycle of intergenerational human to animal abuse and human to human violence

In-class activities

Discussion

This discussion explores the issues around how vet students and vets interact with a range of animals. It relies on the matrix set out below which can be printed out and handed to small groups for completion or projected onto a screen for the class as a whole to contribute together. Allow approximately 30–45 minutes for this activity.

Using companion, farm, laboratory, working and wild animal categories ask the class to generate a list of the typical types of interactions that occur between vets and animals. For example, this may include procedures such as inoculating a pet dog against rabies, conducting dissection on an animal under anaesthesia during an anatomy class, assistance with the slaughter of farm animals or culling wild animals, completing a routine rectal examination on a pig or cow, conducting castration on a horse, routine tooth-clipping or tail-docking of farm animals, etc. The list does not need to be exhaustive and all suggestions should be accepted. Depending on the size of the group and the time you have allocated for this task, a list of 6–10 interactions should be adequate.

Either in their groups or as a class, ask them to discuss the vet–animal interactions in the list. Using the matrix framework below (or something similar) try to fill each box according to how each interaction affects the animal (both physically and mentally) and the veterinarian negatively and positively.

Once the matrix has been completed, the groups should examine the scenarios that demonstrate possibilities for cognitive dissonance (where both positive and negative feelings are experienced by the vet during the same interaction). They should then discuss ways in which vets may overcome or avoid these feelings in these scenarios.

Key prompts:

- Do different people employ different ‘strategies’ to avoid cognitive dissonance?
 - e.g. varying beliefs in how sentient the animal species are in the different interaction scenarios
- Are some people more susceptible to emotional conflict than others?
 - e.g. males and females, first year students compared to final year students, vet students compared to veterinary educators, recent graduates compared to established vets in practice.
- Are there practical measures that can be applied either before, during or after the interaction to increase the positive impact for both the animal and the vet student/vet?
 - e.g. scheduling time for people to bring their pet dogs to the vet clinic simply to have positive interactions with the vet in order to counteract any negative associations developing with visiting the vet.

If the class was divided into small groups, time should be reserved for whole class feedback.

Human-animal Interaction	Animal				Vet student/veterinarian	
	Physical experiences		Mental experience		Positive	Negative
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative		
<i>Vaccinating a pet dog</i>	<i>Improved health in the long-term</i>	<i>Some discomfort from needle</i>		<i>Stress or anxiety in associated with restraint and needle discomfort</i>	<i>Satisfaction knowing the dog's long term health is improved</i>	<i>Guilt or unease with seeing the dog (and the owner) stressed during restraint and vaccination</i>

Project

Design an information leaflet

Create a one page leaflet concerning the incidence, recognition and reporting of animal abuse and neglect, for circulation to veterinary practices. Refer to the Animal Abuse resources in the CAW Toolbox to help you with this project.

Notes to lecturer:

In order to assess the quality of the information leaflet, some basic contents it should cover are defined below.

1. The role of veterinarian
 - Clarify why the issue of animal abuse is important in the work of veterinarians and what the veterinarians role is
2. Incidence
 - How often does animal abuse and neglect occur?
 - How often do vets see animals that have been abused or neglected?
3. How to recognise animal abuse or neglect – what to look for
 - The owner
 - The animal
4. What to do if you suspect animal abuse and neglect
 - What to document
 - Who to contact.

Ensure that you refer to research and relevant publications concerning animal abuse, ‘the link’ and the veterinarian’s role (e.g. journal articles, legislation, professional codes of conduct).

If there is scope, you can circulate this leaflet to vets in practice and see how the information is received, sharing the feedback you gain with the rest of your class.