

# **Guardians vs. Owners Differing Styles with Pets**

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# Guardians vs. Owners Differing Styles with Pets

Abstract- A national study was conducted in the U.S. to examine animal caregivers who consider themselves "guardians" and those who consider themselves their pets' "owners". The study sought to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between these two groups and what, if any, those differences were. Members of the pet-owning public were surveyed about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding their companion animals. The results of this research statistically demonstrated distinct differences between these two groups in terms of the way they thought about and behaved toward their companion animals. Additional insights were uncovered for those animal caretakers "on the fence", reporting that they considered themselves to be both "owners" and "guardians."

*Key words: Guardians, pet owners, companion animals, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors*

Over the course of the past six years the U.S. has seen a movement to change the way people think about their pets by changing the language they use to describe the care-taking of those animals. The Guardian Campaign as it has come to be known, is an effort to foster a social and cultural shift in language from use of the term "owner" to that of "guardian" when referring to caretakers of companion animals<sup>1</sup>. One of the primary objectives of this effort is to inspire a shift in public consciousness about companion animals. More specifically, the campaign strives to make the public aware that companion animals are not objects, possessions or disposable property but rather sentient beings with needs and interests of their own. Through changing language, and ultimately perceptions, the campaign aims to encourage compassion, respect and commitment toward companion animals, thereby helping to end abuse, abandonment and exploitation of companion animals<sup>2</sup>. Research has confirmed the feasibility of the assumption that our perceptions of animals affect the way they are treated (Kidd and Kidd 1987; Herzog and Borghardt 1988; Bryant 1990; Schenk et al 1994; Van Houtte and Jarvis 1995). In a typology of companion animals abusers, "objectification" of animals and classifying them as "property" was argued to more readily lead to abuse because with such belief systems animals are treated at their owners' discretion (Vermeulen and Odendaal 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Elliot Katz, DVM, Founder of In Defense of Animals (IDA) and the Guardian Campaign

While a thorough search of the scientific literature brought forth no previous published scientific research studies on the Guardian movement it is a topic that has seen its fair share of coverage from the mainstream print media in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> It is also an effort that has seen success in terms of legislation. At the time this report was written at least a dozen U.S. cities, one county and an entire state had passed ordinances changing the language and recognizing caretakers as their pets' guardians rather than owners. That translates to approximately three million Americans currently recognized as guardians of their companion animals<sup>4</sup>.

But how many people actually consider themselves to be “guardians”? And do the caretakers who consider themselves to be guardians differ in their attitudes, perceptions, and treatment of companion animals? The only source for answers to these questions has been at the anecdotal level. Conducting empirical research seeking answers to these questions holds the potential for determining if such efforts are actually having an effect on caretakers of companion animals and the animals themselves. Additionally, empirical research holds the potential to reveal key factors about the general pet-keeping public's attitudes, perceptions and behaviors that could play a vital role in the direction and focus of future efforts to improve the lives of companion animals.

### *Overview*

It has previously been argued that language affects our perceptions and treatment of animals (Dunayer 2001). Surveying pet caretakers about the language they use to describe their role and relationship with their companion animals was thought to be an important factor in the present study. Of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Among them are: San Francisco Chronicle; Los Angeles Times; Connecticut Daily News; PR Newswire; The Christian Science Monitor; The Daily News; Dallas Morning News; The News Tribune; Democrat and Chronicle; The Denver Post; The Observer; CBS News

<sup>4</sup> In Defense of Animals' Guardian Campaign tracking statistics: [www.guardiancampaign.com](http://www.guardiancampaign.com)

particular interest was whether people perceived themselves as their animals' guardians or their pets' owners and whether they viewed their pets as property or as sentient beings.

Previous studies have found that the majority of people who have pets view them as members of the family rather than as property (Kellert 1980; Katcher and Beck 1983; Carmack 1985; Voith 1985; Albert and Bulcroft 1988; Sanders 1993; Siegel 1993). In the present study respondents were asked whether they considered their pets members of the family and whether they viewed their companion animals as property.

Previous research has found that the majority of Americans with pets surveyed report that their pets are allowed to live indoors with the rest of the family, and that the pets' names appear along with the other family members on greeting cards (Anon 1995). Additionally, some research has suggested that perceptions of pets as sentient beings versus property is correlated with the treatment the family pets receive (Cain 1983; Veevers 1985; Carlisle-Frank et al. 2004). Asking respondents whether and in what ways they actually treat the pet like other family members may be a good supporting indicator of the relationship people have with their pets as well as whether people recognize their pets are sentient beings. In the present study questions were asked about where the family pet was allowed to live, and whether the pets' names appeared with the other family members on greeting cards.

A national study of pet owners found that the majority of U.S. dog and cat owners play with their pets and show affection to them daily (Anon 2000). Showing attention and affection toward pets was thought to be another important question for the present study. Would guardians and owners differ in this regard? Also of interest was whether respondents celebrate their pets' birthdays as such behavior may be indicative of treating pets as genuine family members. Previous research surveying pet caretakers nationwide indicated that the majority of families with companion animals in the U.S. celebrate their pets' birthday (Anon 1995; 2000).

Additionally, previous research findings found that 45% of people with dogs and 16% of those with cats in the U.S. take their companion animals along with them on family vacations (Anon 2000).

Uncovering whether pets were taken along on family walks, outings, picnics or vacations seemed another possible indicator of whether the pet was truly considered a member of the family.

Other questions for determining attitudes about whether pets were viewed as sentient beings and truly members of the family or as objects/property concerned whether the pets were included in the family photo album. Previous research studies have indicated that the family photo album provides powerful insights about family relationships--including those relationships with the family pet (Entin 1983; Ruby 1982). In the present study it was believed that using the family photo album as yet one more marker of the types of attitudes and relationships people have with their animals may help determine if the pet is symbolized or portrayed as a true member of the family.

In order to assess attitudes, perceptions and behaviors that might indicate a tendency towards either viewing the family pet as a sentient being with feelings and preferences or as an object (property) numerous other questions were asked to determine attitudes about the family pet, as well as respondents' attitudes about companion animals in general. All of these responses were then correlated with respondents' classifications of themselves as "guardians" or "owners" to determine if there were statistically significant differences between these two groups in terms of the way they thought about and treated their companion animals.

## **Research Methodology**

A national study was conducted in the U.S. to examine animal caregivers who consider themselves "guardians" and those who consider themselves their pets' "owners". The study sought to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between these two groups and what, if any, those differences were. Members of the pet-keeping public were surveyed about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding their companion animals. Data collection for the research study was derived from

two separate groups: The study group consisted of randomly selected households across the U.S. Surveys were mailed to these households along with a cover letter asking people to participate in a study about people and their pets. The cover letters explained that participation must be voluntary and confidential. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes were supplied for the return of completed surveys. Additionally, mailings were sent to veterinarians and advertisements were placed in veterinarian periodicals calling for participation in the national study. A randomly selected group was then chosen from those veterinarians responding and agreeing to participate. The surveys and cover letters along with self-addressed, stamped envelopes for the return of completed surveys were then mailed to the office managers who placed them inside the veterinarian offices, clinics and animal hospitals. Data were collected nationwide for both segments (randomly selected households and self-selected clients of participating animal care facilities) of the study group to give a geographic and demographic cross-section of the nation.

### *Questionnaire*

Respondents received a questionnaire asking them a variety of demographic-related questions, the types and number of pets they had, their attitudes and treatment of their pets, their beliefs about how companion animals in general should be treated, and whether they considered themselves to be pet owners or guardians. There were 21 questions on the survey including single and multiple-part forced-choice questions, “dummy” questions, and an open-ended question. All surveys were embedded with special coding that allowed the origin (random mailing, veterinarian offices/animal hospitals and clinics) to be identified when completed surveys were returned.

## Research Results

The response rate for the present study was 42 %. After removing all incomplete and questionable surveys the total number of surveys analyzed in the study was 305. The source for participants in the study group was comprised of 178 participants responding from random mailings and 127 participants who were veterinary clients. The regional breakdown for study group participants included Midwest (18%), Northeast (28.9%), Pacific (9.5%), South (30.5%), and Rocky Mountain (11.5%) regions of the United States.

### *Participants*

A total of 70% of participants from the random mailings were female and 30% were male, and 85% of veterinary client respondents were female while 15% were male. The average age of study group participants was 45 years of age for the random sample and 45 years for veterinary clients.

### *Guardians, Owners and Hybrids*

The percent of all respondents from the study group who consider themselves to be animal guardians was 63.3%. Of those study group respondents considering themselves to be guardians 77% were female and 23% were male. The percent of all respondents from the study group who consider themselves to be owners was 22.3%. Of those study group respondents considering themselves to be animal owners 69% were female and 31% were male. Hybrids, or people who consider themselves to be both guardians *and* owners made up 14.4% of all respondents from the study group. Of those study group respondents considering themselves to be hybrids 82% were female and 18% were male.

### *Number, Type and Source of Companion Animals*

Participants in the study group had an average of 1.2 dogs, 1.2 cats, 0.30 birds, 0.20 small animals, 0.16 reptiles, and 0.33 other types of companion animals for the random sampling and 1.7 dogs, 2.1 cats, 0.26 birds, 0.05 small animals, 0.09 reptiles, and 2.2 other types of companion animals for the veterinary clients.

How did respondents get their animals? The results indicate that owners are more likely to purchase animals ( $X^2= 6.14$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .05$ ) and to have offspring of their pets ( $X^2= 6.59$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .04$ ).

Furthermore, the results indicate that guardians are more likely to adopt their animals ( $X^2= 17.90$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) or take them in as strays ( $X^2= 7.42$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .02$ ). All four of these results were statistically significant. In the study group 27.9% of owners reported that they adopted at least one of their animals. The percentage of owners reporting they purchased at least one of their animals was 48.5%, owners who received at least one of their animals as a gift was 19.1%, owners reporting they received at least one of their animals from a friend, family member or coworker was 20.6%, the percentage of owners taking at least one of their animals in as a stray was 22.1%, those owners reporting at least one of their animals was the offspring of another one of their animals was 16.2%, those owners reporting that at least one of their animals was obtained from answering an ad for “free pets” was 11.8%, and those owners reporting they obtained at least one of their pets from some other source was 8.8%.

The percentage of guardians reporting they adopted at least one of their animals was 56.5%. Another 34.7% of guardians reported purchasing at least one of their animals, 12.4% of guardians reportedly received at least one of their animals as a gift, 25.9% of guardians received at least one of their animals from a friend, family member or coworker, and 38.9% of guardians from the study group reported they had taken at least one of their animals in as a stray. Only 6.2% of guardians said that their animal was an offspring of another one of their animals, just 7.3% of guardians reported they had answered an ad giving animals away for free, and only 3.6% of guardians reported they had obtained their animals from a source other than those listed above.

A total of 59.1% hybrids reported they had adopted at least one of their animals. Fifty percent of hybrids reported they purchased at least one of their animals. The percentage of hybrids receiving at least one of their animals as a gift was 13.6% and 20.5% of hybrids reported receiving at least one of their animals from a family member, friend or coworker. Hybrids reporting they took at least one of their animals in as a stray numbered 43.2% and those reporting they obtained at least one of their animals by either the offspring of another of their animals, by answering a “free animals” ad, or some source other than those listed above were each 6.8%.

### *Treatment of Companion Animals*

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the treatment of their own family pets. Included were questions about: -whether their pets were spayed-neutered; -how many times, if any, their pets have gone missing; -where applicable, whether their pets were registered; -how many times they have relinquished pets in the past because of personal or family problems; -if applicable whether their animals have identification such as microchip, tags, or tattoos; -whether their animals live indoors with the rest of the family; -whether they celebrate their pets’ birthdays; -if they have a family photo album whether the pets are included; -whether the pets’ names are included with other family members on greeting cards; -where applicable whether they take their pets on walks, family outings or vacations; -if they buy gifts whether they buy their pets gifts; -how often they express love to their companion animals.

Spay-Neuter: When asked whether their animals were spayed or neutered 69.1% of owners responded that at least one of their animals was spayed or neutered, and 92.6% of guardians and 95.5% of hybrids said that at least one of their animals was spay-neutered. The difference between these groups’ treatment of their pets in terms of spaying and/or neutering their animals was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 36.02$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Lost Pets: When asked whether/how often they had a pet go missing during the previous two years 30.9% of owners responded they had a pet become lost. (Of those owners who reported their pet had gone missing in the past two years 19.1% had a pet lost one time, 5.9% had a pet lost two times, 2.9% had a pet go missing four times, 1.5% had a pet lost five times, and 1.5% reported they had a pet turn up missing 10 times in the past two years.) The number of guardians who reported having lost a pet in the previous two years was 15.5%. (Of those guardians who reported having lost a pet 9.8% had lost their pet one time, 4.2% lost their pets twice in two years. One person reported losing a pet three times, another person reported losing a pet six times and one person reported losing their pet at least 20 times in two years.) The number of hybrids reporting losing a pet was 11.4%. (Of those hybrids reporting having lost a pet 9.1% had it occur one time in two years. One person reported losing a pet three times during that time period.) The difference between these groups with regard to whether or not they have ever lost a pet was statistically significant ( $X^2= 9.57$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0083$ )<sup>5</sup>. On average, guardians and hybrids combined lost their pets an average of 0.30 times while owners lost their pets an average of 0.65 times.

Registering: When applicable to do so (that is, where it is legally required to register the specific type of animal the caretaker has) 32.7% of owners reported they did not register their pets while only 8.2% of guardians and 5.4% of hybrids reported they did not register their animals. The difference between these groups in terms of registering their animals was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 23.67$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Relinquishment: When respondents were asked how many times, if any, they had relinquished a pet due to personal or family problems such as moving or divorce, 33.8% of owners reported they had

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<sup>5</sup> A chi-square test was performed after reducing pets being lost to a bivariate yes/no variable.

relinquished a pet, and 18.6% of guardians and 27.3% of hybrids reported that they had relinquished a pet. Of those who had relinquished their companion animals the most frequently reported number of times it had been done was “once”; 21% of owners, 11% of guardians, and 16% of hybrids reported they had relinquished their pets only one time. The difference between these groups’ treatment of companion animals in terms of whether or not they had ever relinquished their pets was statistically significant ( $X^2= 6.94$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p= 0.03$ )<sup>6</sup>. Owners relinquished animals an average of 0.8 times while guardians and hybrids relinquished animals an average of 0.4 times.

Identification: When asked whether their pets had some form of identification such as an ID tag, micro-chipping, or tattooing, in cases where applicable (type of animal) 44.1% of owners’ pets did not have identification, 30.1% of guardians’ animals had no ID, and 20.5% of hybrids’ animals did not have identification. The difference between these groups with regard to assuring their pets had identification was statistically significant ( $X^2= 7.64$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p= 0.02$ ).

Living Indoors: How do owners, guardians and hybrids stack up when it comes to permitting their pets to live indoors with the rest of the family? The results indicated that 76.5% of owners allow their pets to live indoors while 97.4% of guardians and 97.7% of hybrids permit their companion animals to live indoors. The difference between these groups with regard to permitting their pets to live indoors was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 34.81$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Birthday Celebrations, Gift Giving, and Greeting Cards: Questions were asked to determine whether respondents’ treatment of their pets was similar to how many Americans typically treat human family members. For those respondents reporting they celebrate the birthdays of human family members only 26.5% of owners reported they celebrate their pets’ birthdays. In contrast, 61.7% of guardians and

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<sup>6</sup> A chi-square test was performed after reducing pets being lost to a bivariate yes/no variable.

56.8% of hybrids reported they celebrate their pets' birthdays. The difference between these groups in terms of who celebrates their pets' birthdays was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 25.28$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Of those participants who give gifts to human family members 48.5% of owners also give gifts to their pets. In contrast, 80.8% of guardians and 77.3% of hybrids reported they give their pets gifts. The difference between these groups in terms of gift-giving to companion animals was highly significant ( $X^2= 35.14$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Of those participants who reportedly give greeting cards with all family members' names on them 29.4% of owners include the pets' names along with other family members' names on the cards. By comparison, 69.4% of guardians and 65.9% of hybrids reported they sign their pets' names along with other family members on greeting cards. The difference between these groups in terms of including pets with other family members on greeting cards was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 34.30$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Family Photos and Family Outings: Are the family pets included along with other family members in the family photo album? For those respondents who have a photo album 65.6% of owners have their pets included, while 93.6% of guardians and 87.8% of hybrids have their pets' photos along with other family members in the family photo album. The differences between these groups with regard to including the pets along with other family members in the family photo album were highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 33.31$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Who takes their pets along on family walks, picnics, outings or vacations? Where applicable 52.9% of owners take their pets along on family outings. In contrast, 76.2% of guardians and 79.6% of hybrids reported they take their companion animals along on family outings and vacations. Again, the difference between these groups with regard to including their pets in family activities was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 14.95$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .0006$ ).

Expressing Affection: The final question concerning the treatment of companion animals asked respondents how often they show affection toward their pets each week. For owners, 45.6% reported they showed affection toward their pets between once a day to once a week (1-7 times a week) and 38.2% of owners reported they show affection toward their pets more than once a day (8 times or more a week). Sixteen percent of owners reported they never show affection toward their companion animals. For guardians, 25.4% reported they showed affection toward their pets between once a day to once a week (1-7 times a week) and 65.8% of guardians reported they show affection toward their pets more than once a day (8 times or more a week). Nine percent of guardians reported they never show affection toward their pets. For hybrids, 29.6% reported they showed affection toward their pets between once a day to once a week (1-7 times a week) and 63.6% of hybrids guardians reported they show affection toward their pets more than once a day (8 times or more a week). Seven percent of hybrids reported they never show affection toward their pets. The differences between these groups with regard to the frequency with which they show affection toward their companion animals was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 16.59$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .0023$ ).

A secondary measure was performed to determine the differences between the groups with regard to how often they showed affection toward their companion animals. Guardians and hybrids (who had no significant differences in the affection they showed their pets) were merged together and compared to owners to determine if they differed in the amount of times they told their pets they loved them. The two groups were compared using an unpaired, two-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances (tests for equality of variances between t-test groups yielded significant differences). The results appear to indicate that guardians and hybrids express affection toward their companion animals significantly more often than do owners. The results were highly significant ( $t = -5.75$ ,  $df = 176$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) with guardians-hybrids having a mean score of 37.19 times a week expressing affection toward their pets and owners having a mean score of 13.77 times per week expressing affection toward their pets. A total of 10% of respondents overall reported they never show affection toward their pets.

## *Attitudes about the Family Pet*

The survey asked respondents several questions concerning their attitudes about their own companion animals. Respondents were asked how satisfied they are with their pets, if they view their pets as members of the family, whether they consider their pets as property, and whether they are attached to and can identify with their pets.

Satisfaction with Pets: How do the groups compare with regard to being satisfied with their animals?

In the study group 82.4% of owners reported being satisfied with their pets, while 95.3% of guardians and 90.9% of hybrids reported being satisfied with their companion animals. The difference between these groups in terms of their satisfaction with their pets was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 43.08$ ;  $df= 12$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). An additional test was performed to determine the level of differences between the groups with regard to how satisfied they are with their companion animals. Guardians and hybrids (who had no significant differences in the satisfaction levels of their pets) were merged together and compared to owners to determine if they differed in the level of satisfaction they had with their pets. The two groups were compared using an unpaired, two-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances (tests for equality of variances between t-test groups yielded significant differences). The results appear to indicate that guardians and hybrids are more satisfied with their companion animals than are owners. The results were significant ( $t = 3.01$ ,  $df = 92.5$ ,  $p = .003$ ) with guardians-hybrids having a mean score of 6.5 on a 7-point scale of satisfaction with their pets and owners having a mean score of 5.9 on a 7-point scale of satisfaction with their pets.

Pets as Members of the Family: The study group differed in how they responded to whether they considered their pets members of the family. For owners, 86.8% reported they viewed their companion animals as members of the family. In contrast, 99.0% of guardians and 100% of hybrids reported they

viewed their pets as members of the family. The difference between these groups with regard to beliefs that their pets are full-fledged family members was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 23.45$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Pets as Property: We know where respondents from the study group stand on perceiving their pets as members of the family but do they still believe their pets are property? Even though 86.8% of owners stated they believed their pets are full-fledged family members, 80.9% said they believed their pets are property. In contrast, only 10.4% of guardians said they believed their companion animals are property. Hybrids came in down the middle with 52.3% responding they believed their pets are property. Once again, the difference between these groups was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 124.24$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Attachment to Pets: What sort of relationship do people have with their pets? For owners participating in the study 76.5% said they were attached to their pets. In contrast, 99.0% of guardians and 100% of hybrids said they were attached to their pets. The difference between these groups in terms of their attachment to their pets was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 55.43$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

Identify with Pets: Can people relate to their companion animals? Again there was a distinct difference within the study group. For owners 70.6% reported they can relate to their pets. By contrast, 96.9% of guardians and 95.4% of hybrids reported they identify with their companion animals. The difference between these groups in terms of their ability to identify with their pets was highly statistically significant ( $X^2= 49.70$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < .0001$ ).

## *General Beliefs and Perceptions about Companion Animals*

What do pet caretakers think about companion animals in general? The survey asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with several general statements about companion animals. Participants were asked whether or not they believed in issues such as long-term chaining of dogs, spaying-neutering companion animals, keeping pets living long-term in cages, viewing pets as property, de-clawing cats, spending energy to protect animals, and helping animals because they are dependent on us. The table below offers a breakdown of participants' responses.

<b>GENERAL BELIEFS/PERCEPTIONS About Companion Animals</b>	<b>% Owners Agree</b>	<b>% Guardians Agree</b>	<b>% Hybrids Agree</b>	<b>STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE— DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GROUPS</b>
Long-term chaining of dogs should not happen	63%	93%	84%	$X^2= 34.22; df = 2; p < .0001$
Spay-neuter of pets should be done to stop overpopulation and suffering of animals	60%	96%	95%	$X^2= 62.43; df = 2; p < .0001$
Pets should not live long-term in cages	66%	97%	95%	$X^2= 53.73; df = 2; p < .0001$
Viewing pets as possessions is wrong	46%	97%	93%	$X^2= 109.94; df = 2; p < .0001$
De-clawing cats for convenience of people is wrong	47%	80%	70%	$X^2= 27.30; df = 2; p < .0001$
We should not make a big deal out of protecting pets	32%	1%	0%	$X^2= 72.42; df = 2; p < .0001$
We should help animals because they are dependent on humans/helpless	68%	97%	98%	$X^2= 61.65; df = 6; p < .0001$
Animals are sentient beings with needs/interests of their own	65%	97%	91%	$X^2= 55.89; df = 2; p < .0001$

Red lettering connotes Highly Statistically Significant

## Discussion

The present study scientifically examined issues that previously have been limited to only anecdotal observation. Perhaps the most interesting finding was that there appears to be clear differences with regard to attitudes about pets, beliefs about companion animals in general, and treatment of companion animals between those who consider themselves to be owners of their pets and those who consider themselves to be animal guardians. Also of interest was the emergence of a third group—those people who consider themselves to be both owners *and* guardians (or hybrids, as they were referred to in the present study). Hybrids were, by and large, far more similar to guardians in their attitudes, beliefs and treatment of companion animals than they were to owners.

In terms of identification, registration, spay-neuter, relinquishment, and lost pets, guardians appeared to exhibit more responsible behaviors than owners toward their companion animals. Guardians also appeared to treat animals more as family members than property and appeared to have closer relationships with their animals. Guardians also differed in their beliefs regarding how animals should be treated in general, exhibiting attitudes that were generally more sensitive to animal welfare issues than their owner counterparts.

The results of the present study suggest that the initial phases of the Guardian campaign efforts to raise public consciousness and change attitudes about the treatment of companion animals may have been successful in persuading many pet caretakers in the U.S. to change their language from pet owner to guardian. Furthermore, the results suggest that the differences between guardians and owners in their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors appear to be quite dramatic. It is possible that these differences are at least in part a result of changes in thinking about companion animals that resulted from the shifting of language and mental constructs from an “owner” frame of mind to that of a “guardian.” However, it is also possible that the differences in attitude came first and the differences in choice of language merely reflect preexisting differences in attitude. It is equally possible that both are true, with language and attitudes creating a feedback loop where both work to reinforce one other.

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