

Exploring belief in an animal afterlife

August 3 2016, by Jordan Bartel



Credit: North Carolina State University

A personal belief in an afterlife for humans is likely to shape belief in an animal afterlife, according to a study by three North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine professors.

In the study titled "Do All Dogs Go to Heaven?" Clinical Science professors Kenneth D. Royal, April A. Kedrowicz and Amy M. Snyder found that of the participants who believed in human afterlife, 73

percent also believed in animal afterlife.

Of the 800 research participants, the groups more likely to believe in the existence of an afterlife for animals are females (51 percent), American Indian/Alaska natives (71.4 percent), African-Americans (58.5 percent), Buddhists (77.3 percent), people living in the South (50.3 percent) and pet owners (45 percent).

"The notion of the human-animal bond is pervasive in the United States," said Dr. Royal. "Yet, Americans are incredibly diverse in terms of their backgrounds, experiences and views. We wanted to explore this issue further by investigating the role that one's religious views might have in understanding this relationship and the value of pets."

The study, set to be published in August in the journal *Anthrozoos*, is believed to be the first to systematically explore American's beliefs about animal afterlife using a national sample of participants.

Another notable finding: Of 12 different animals presented to the research participants, dogs, cats and horses were rated the most likely to experience an afterlife. Those rated least likely: insects, fish and reptiles.

While the study found widespread belief in an animal afterlife, participants were less certain when asked whether animals have souls: 16 percent stated "definitely no," 16.7 percent stated "probably no" and 19.5 percent were "unsure," compared with 25.8 who stated "probably yes" and 22 percent who said "definitely yes."

Such findings could help guide veterinarians in their interactions with [pet owners](#).

"Spirituality and beliefs about animals, including animal afterlife, undoubtedly impact what clients think, how clients feel and what

decisions they make," said Dr. Kedrowicz. "So veterinarians should explore and acknowledge client perspectives to build trust and actively engage them in the process of animal care.

"This requires an open approach to communication where the veterinarian asks clients to provide their perspectives with a focused attention to really listening and exploring client meanings and intentions."

Provided by North Carolina State University

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