

Housecats use hundreds of facial expressions to interact with other cats

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Brittany Florkiewicz, an assistant professor of psychology at Lyon College, and Lauren Scott, a medical student at the University of Kansas Medical Center, have together found that housecats have hundreds of

facial expressions that they use when interacting with other cats. In their study, [reported](#) in the journal *Behavioral Processes*, the pair recorded and analyzed the facial expressions of a large number of domesticated housecats residing in a cat cafe in Los Angeles.

Housecats have over time earned a reputation as individualistic creatures who are often impassive. They are also considered by many to be antisocial. But this [reputation](#) may be unwarranted, at least according to the findings by Florkiewicz and Scott—they found that cats make 276 distinct facial expressions, which is high compared to other species. Humans, for example, make only 44.

Noting that little research has been conducted regarding housecat facial expressions, the researchers decided to conduct some of their own. At the time of the study, both were living in Los Angeles, near an establishment known as the CatCafé Lounge—a place where humans can lounge with large numbers of adoptable cats. At the time of their study, they noted that the café was home to approximately 50 cats.

Over the course of a year, the pair periodically visited the café after hours, when there were no other humans around. Each time, they recorded the facial expressions of the cats as they interacted with one another. In all, they captured 194 minutes of such interactions. They then studied the facial expressions captured on video, giving each unique expression a code name. They also excluded expressions that were clearly not communicative, such as chewing, yawning and simply breathing.

They found that the cats demonstrated 276 unique [facial expressions](#). They also found that 45% of such expressions were friendly in nature and that 37% of them were clearly meant to show aggression. The other 18% fell somewhere in between.

The researchers were not able to identify what sorts of messages the [cats](#) were communicating with many of their expressions, which, they suggest, could be an avenue for further investigation.

More information: Lauren Scott et al, Feline Faces: Unraveling the Social Function of Domestic Cat Facial Signals, *Behavioural Processes* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.beproc.2023.104959](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2023.104959)

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