

## Does Your Cat Act More Human Than Animal? It May Not Be Your Imagination

If you sometimes feel like your pet is a human covered in fur, you may not be imagining things. A team of researchers, studying 3,000 cat personality tests, has discovered a surprising range of human-like behaviors among kitties. Which of these five personality types does your cat fit best?

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Researchers have recently identified five feline personality traits that have similarities with those of humans
- The five feline traits are skittishness, outgoingness, dominance, spontaneity, and friendliness. These closely align with the "Big Five" human traits, with the exception of dominance and spontaneity
- The researchers believe an understanding of the Feline Five can help cat guardians improve their relationships with their pets while simultaneously addressing quality of life issues

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Do you think of your cat as a member of your family? If so, you're in good company. Many people who share their lives with a feline companion feel their pet is more like a furry little human than a member of another species.

And there may be more to this notion than we thought. A team of researchers in Australia has come up with a list of five feline personality traits that are intriguingly similar to those of humans.

According to University of South Australia (UniSA) Discovery Circle research leader Dr. Philip Roetman, the results of 3,000 cat personality tests show that kitties display a range of human-like behaviors, including extroversion and sociability.

### The 'Feline Five' Personality Traits

The kitty personality tests were part of the Cat Tracker project, which was launched few years ago to monitor the movement and behavior of cats. Cat Tracker describes its mission on its website:

*"Cats are mysterious, dangerous and far more unpredictable than one might expect from an animal that is, theoretically, domesticated. Some of the mysteries of cats relate to where they go and what they do; this is especially true of cats that go outdoors."*

*We open our doors. They leave. Just where they go, we can't be sure. Or rather we couldn't be sure, until now. With your help, we're investigating the movement of domesticated cats across the landscape.*

*We want to know: Where do they go? What are they eating? What do they bring home, microbially speaking?"<sup>1</sup>*

The Discovery Circle researchers modified an existing questionnaire that has been used with both captive wildcats and domestic shelter cats. However, this would be the first time the questionnaire was used with such a large population of domestic kitties.

The scientists completed a complex statistical evaluation of survey responses and arrived at the "Feline Five" factors of cat personality:

- Skittishness
- Outgoingness
- Dominance
- Spontaneity
- Friendliness

## **This Score May Indicate Mr. Whiskers Is a Bit of a Bully**

These five factors have some overlap with what are known as the "Big Five" human personality traits.

*"Skittishness is similar to neuroticism in people," explained Roetman. "Outgoingness is similar to extroversion and friendliness is akin to agreeableness."<sup>2</sup>*

Two significant differences between the Feline Five and the Big Five are in the areas of dominance and spontaneity. Roetman feels this knowledge could be useful for cat guardians looking to improve their relationships with their pets.

For example, cats with high dominance scores tend to be bullies who are aggressive with other kitties, whereas a low dominance score indicates a submissive, friendly cat. According to Roetman, if you have a cat at home who scores high on dominance, you may want to think twice about adding another kitty to the household.

If, however, your cat scores low on dominance, he may do quite well sharing space with one or more feline housemates.

Another intriguing finding was what the researchers learned when comparing indoor to outdoor cats. It seems the indoor cats were slightly friendlier than their outdoor counterparts. Roetman thinks this could be welcome news for guardians of indoor cats:

*"People are often concerned about keeping cats indoors too much because it might have a negative impact on them, but this suggests there isn't a negative impact on cat personality by keeping them indoors.*

*If people want to keep their cats indoors, they can feel a bit more confident about it."<sup>3</sup>*

## If Fluffy Is Highly Spontaneous, It Means This

Cats who scored high on spontaneity tended to be impulsive and erratic. A low spontaneity score suggests a kitty who is predictable and reserved. The researchers suggest a high-scoring cat could be reacting to a stressful environment. The same kinds of stressors that affect you can affect your cat, including:

- Noisy environments
- Aggression among members of the household, including pets
- Poor-quality diet
- Competing with other pets at mealtime
- Social isolation

If your cat behaves impulsively and you suspect stress is at the root of it, there are several things you can do to create an environment that is more conducive to helping kitty enjoy a comfortable, more serene lifestyle.

Cats with low spontaneity scores are probably well-adjusted to an environment that features minimal stress and maximum day-to-day consistency.

## What to Do if a Friendly Cat Turns Suddenly Not-So-Friendly

When it comes to the trait of outgoingness, the Discovery Circle researchers describe high-scoring cats as curious and active, whereas kitties with low scores are "aimless" and "quitting" (resigned). The latter group is relatively small, and consists of cats who may be showing signs of aging or health-related issues, according to researchers.

Outgoing cats can benefit from interactive toys, plenty of playtime with their humans, and other efforts to enrich their environment. The cats considered high-scoring in friendliness are those who are approachable and affectionate with people. They adjust well to other members of the household, both the two- and four-legged variety.

Kitties with low scores in this trait may be loners or poorly socialized, say the researchers. However, if a friendly cat suddenly turns aloof or hostile, a trip to the veterinarian is in order to rule out an underlying illness or painful condition.

## If Scooter Is Skittish, He May Need More of These

The fifth trait of the Feline Five is skittishness. Kitties who score high in this trait tend to be anxious and fearful of other cats as well as people. Low-scoring kitties are described as calm and trusting. The scientists suggest that skittish cats need plenty of hiding spots around the home. They may also need stressors in their environment eliminated or at least minimized.

### Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Cat Tracker](#)

<sup>2,3</sup> [The Advertiser, March 9, 2016](#)

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