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COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION OF TEETH EXPOSURE IN THE GORILLA PLAYFACE

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Primate facial expressions likely play an important role in primate society: through facial signals, individuals can send and receive information and alter their behavior accordingly. Many primates use a relaxed open mouth facial display or 'playface' during play behavior, where the mouth is open but teeth are covered. In addition to this conventional playface, however, gorillas use a full playface where the upper teeth are exposed. As the teeth are also exposed in the bared-teeth expression (which is a signal of appeasement and/or affiliation) the full playface may be a blend of the playface and bared-teeth face, and have a different social function to the playface alone. Continuous focal sampling was used to record the playface and full playface in Western Lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) in a captive zoo setting (N = 10, 12hrs per subject). The full playface was more often observed in intense rather than gentle play and was associated with an increase in affiliative behavior between sender and receiver post-play. Intense playbouts that featured the full playface were longer than those that featured only the playface. Overall, the findings suggest that the full playface and playface have differential communicative functions, and that the full playface may have an additional role in coordinating play.

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