

**How to Do Things with Woofs:
Examining the Use of Non-Human Vocalizations as a Genre of Non-Verbal Communication in the Queer Pup Play
Kink Community**

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I) Introduction

An issue of theoretical importance to the question of how language *performs* social acts is the role of inference (Sbisà, 2022). Traditional accounts of communication as a volitional, social act have predominantly focused on explicit recitation of conventionalized, fully linguistic formulae (J. L. Austin, 1975). However, since the development of speech act theory, non-explicit communicative strategies to transmit the metapragmatic intent of the speaker have been recognized as deeply relevant to bringing about speech acts in daily conversation (Searle, 1979; Asher and Lascarides, 2001; Bach, 2006).

Contemporaneously to the increase in importance placed on indirect means of performing speech acts, there has been a steadily growing interest in the role of non-verbal communication as a similarly communicative force (W. M. Austin, 1965; Poyatos, 1993; Clark and Fox Tree, 2002; Wharton 2009). While there is broad agreement that the means and results of the communicative processes in some ways differ from more directly conceptual means of information transfer, non-verbal communication has been increasingly seen as productive avenues for speech act-like communication (Clark and Fox Tree, 2002; Wharton 2009; Bjórnsdóttir and Rule, 2017; Scarantino 2018, 2019).

The present study examines one particular genre of extremely non-semantic communication: the non-human vocalizations (NHVs) of members of the queer pup play subculture. A growing object of academic study, members of this subculture are defined by their mutual engagement in pup play or puppy play, a form of (often) erotic roleplay in which one or more practitioners take on the role of a young dog (Wignall and McCormack, 2017; Wignall et

al., 2022). Participants in this subculture often make active use of the vocalic mimicry of canines as a subculture-bound communicative practice.

This study understands practitioners of pup play as a subculture and a community of practice (CofP) (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; *cf.* Meyerhoff and Strycharz, 2013) based around mutual engagement in pup play as a serious leisure practice (*cf.* Newmahr, 2010). The latter of these frameworks especially has been used fruitfully in analysis of other kink and BDSM-adjacent communities (Newmahr, 2010, 2011). Working from the understanding that pups come together to engage in practices that develop their own subcultural narratives and jargon, this paper thus approaches the NHVs utilized by this CofP as a community-bound non-verbal communicative repertoire.

Particularly focusing on metapragmatic discourses of how pup players understand NHVs and their use, this paper utilizes semi-structured interviews and data collected from an anonymous survey to examine the efficacy and use cases of and narratives surrounding NHVs as a genre of non-verbal communication. In total, 25 interviews and 146 survey responses were analyzed using qualitative methods informed by queer linguistic theory (*cf.* Motschenbacher, 2010).

Initial hypotheses assumed NHVs functioned predominantly as a form of subcultural affiliation flagging, akin to Bucholtz' (1999) notion of positive identity practices. However, participants in both the interviews and the surveys indicated that NHVs are available for far more than simple subculture membership display. Rather, pup NHVs function as procedural information displays that are mediated through discourses on natural codes and sound–meaning metaphors. These metaphors, although situated in broader cultural notions of canine behavior, are further refined by subculturally circulated discourses surrounding particular types of

(biological) dogs as well as particular types of (human) pups. These discourses allow individual pup players to utilize the subculturally mediated ideological construction of canines as an icon to personal indexical effect. While NHVs are not efficacious at communicating complex or spatially or temporally distant content, they are understood to serve as practical displays of immediate, naturally inferable affective stances with indirect illocutionary effect.

The pup play CofP provides an explicit example of how non-semantic communication can be readily circulated and understood as achieving speech act-like effects within a specific CofP. Shared discourses, routine citation, strong feelings of association with the CofP, and shared subcultural histories provide a framework that allows signals that lack propositional content to be understood as containing meaning. The notion of indexicality is particularly relevant to this process. Cultural signs and associations that are circulated in broader society are able to be narrativized and reframed by a specific, embodied queer CofP, which then frames them in indexical narratives thoroughly enough that emergent social contextual information is able to reduce ambiguity to the point that these non-semantic vocalic displays are able to become useful speech act-adjacent social acts.

II) Theoretical Background

This chapter examines the theoretical background of the project. The present community of study tends to be unknown to non-practitioners at best and stigmatized at worst. Likewise, non-verbal communication remains comparatively understudied in the broader field of sociolinguistics. As such, this section will introduce the theoretical basis of the rest of the study by means of a literature review.

Speech Acts and Indirect Speech Acts

Although the question of how utterances are able to communicate and facilitate social meaning had been explored prior (Frege, 1897, 1918; Wittgenstein, 1922, 1953, 1958; as per Sbisà, 2022), J. L. Austin proved one of the first and most influential scholars to codify a theory as to how speech can function as a social act. Speech act theory (SAT) posits that a given utterance can function as an agentive social action initiated by the speaker to affect something within the social world (J. L. Austin, 1975). Austin's earliest examples of utterances that are, in effect, the actual *doing* of a social act were highly scripted rote recitations embedded in a well-conventionalized social framework, like 'I do' within a marriage ceremony, bringing the state of marriage into social reality (J. L. Austin, 1975).

The speech act is typically broken down into three distinct co-occurring acts that make up a cohesive whole. The *locutionary* act is the literal production of the components of an utterance, *i.e.*, its phonetic, pragmatic, and morphosyntactic components (J. L. Austin, 1975). When one utters 'I do,' one is physically producing the phonemes that make up the individual words, which are inserted into a syntactic structure and lexicalized into specific meanings of which the speaker

and listener(s) are aware. These then index specific referents to allow a productive social meaning to be constructed.

The real hearts of SAT are *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts. The *illocutionary* act is the metapragmatic intention willed by the producer of the utterance *through* the speech act. These include such goals as warning, persuading, instructing, commanding, and so on. To use the marriage example, the illocutionary effect is the indication of a desire and willingness to perform the act of marriage. The *perlocutionary* act refers to the act that actually brings about the change in the social world. Although this may seem similar to the illocutionary act, using our marriage example, the intended perlocutionary act is the recognition by the parties present that a state of marriage has been created and entered into by both partners (J. L. Austin, 1975).

Despite the initial focus on explicitly phrased formulae, the notion that speech acts can be brought into existence through more indirect means has been explored for quite some time. Searle (1979) noted that a large amount of on-the-ground communication is achieved without explicit articulation of one's social goals. The notion of socially situated inference grows increasingly important to understanding how a speech act can be communicated when it is phrased in an indirect manner (Searle, 1979; Bach, 2006). Searle's argument rests on the idea that through induction based both on broader knowledge as to the world and certain communicative maxims (particularly those of Grice (1975)), speakers are able to deduce the intent behind non-explicit phrasing. Contextuality provides pragmatic information that aids in the deduction of these non-explicit meanings (Bach, 2006). To paraphrase Searle, when one is asking 'can you pass the salt?' at a dinner table, the context and inductions about the relevance of an utterance point to the notion that the speaker is likely *not* directly enquiring about the psychomotor ability of the addressee to pass salt to them (Searle, 1979).

Social Non-Verbal Communication, the Theory of Affective Pragmatics, and Prosodics

It is not the case that arbitration of a speech act's meaning must be either solely in its formal linguistic content or in the contextual situation of its utterance. Non-verbal communication provides another pathway for meaning-making and sociopragmatic communication. Austin himself mentions in his seminal *How to Do Things with Words* (1975) that prosodic content is often useful in helping to determine the specific type of illocutionary act being performed when the formal content of a sentence could be homomorphous with multiple types of speech acts.

Non-semantic aspects of communication have long been examined as sociopragmatically productive within a variety of frameworks. Contemporaneously with the first publication of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things*, W. M. Austin remarked on the social efficacy and use cases of certain types of 'paralanguage', namely vocalic modifiers, segregates, and qualifiers (W. M. Austin, 1965). Some of these segregates, such as the filler words 'um,' 'uh,' and 'errm,' have also been shown to be able to perform a certain amount of discursive and pragmatic work, such as signalling and mediating turn-taking in discourse (Clark and Fox Tree, 2002). Vocalic resources that seem quite far afield from traditional objects of linguistic analysis, such as laughter, have been argued to have a wide variety sociopragmatic uses and to vary between social groups in much the same way as do the more mainstream objects of sociolinguistic analysis (Poyatos, 1993; Jefferson, 2004).

Wharton (2009) provides a highly detailed analysis of the pragmatic functions of a variety of types of non-verbal communicative methods, such as interjections, gestures, and even facial expressions. Drawing on the distinction between signals and signs, certain non-explicitly

linguistic acts, such as a smile, can function as communication-bearing signals utilized by a speaker with some sort of implicit communicative goal. These form ‘analog codes,’ distinguished from ‘digital’ codes (the type more associated with explicit, formal linguistic utterances) by the lack of clear units separating one value from another. For instance, there are different degrees of a smile, ranging from the faintest grin to the most ecstatic beaming expression one could muster. The variance and lack of specific coded values (of, say, ‘amount of smile per centimeter of lip movement’) means that these extra-linguistic features are able to encode and communicate procedural information, yet not in the concrete, context-independent sense seen in more explicit forms of verbal communication (Wharton, 2009). Inference, in much the same way that it is important for communicating indirect verbal speech acts, becomes of paramount importance in facilitating communicative content present in these natural signs.

The communicative content of natural bodily signals forms the cornerstone of the theory of affective pragmatics, which aims to apply Austinian SAT to facial emotional signals more broadly (Scarantino, 2018, 2019). Scarantino proposes ‘speech act analogues’ as the natural equivalent of the non-natural verbal speech act discussed by Searle and Austin (Scarantino, 2018). In much the same way that indirect speech acts use contextually situated inference and a theory of intentionality held by the speaker when they make an utterance (Searle, 1979), speech act analogues utilize the same means of contextual inference and global knowledge to induce an understanding of communicative intent on the part of their producer. These are likened explicitly to some of the hallmark types of speech acts discussed in the literature, namely expressives, commissives, imperatives, and declaratives (Scarantino, 2018). Similarly to Wharton’s discussion of the limits in communicative ability of natural signals due to their being analog codes, speech act analogues are tied to the formal associations held with the physical production

of the bodily signals, meaning that although they function similarly to traditional speech acts, they are not as free to express as wide a variety of meanings, and likewise require socially situated inference to function communicatively (Wharton, 2009; Scarantino, 2018). Despite this limitation, speech act analogues have been used with analytic success in examining sociocommunicative phenomena such as group-membership display work (Bjórnsdóttir and Rule, 2017).

Explicit, intentional changing of prosodic features (such as stress, pitch, tempo, *etc.*) from a perceived baseline is discussed as one aspect of communication that can be used quite productively in communication (W. M. Austin, 1965; Wharton, 2009; Brown and Prieto, 2021). Working from Grice's Maxims regarding the economy of vocalic production, it is assumed that explicitly and *effortfully* modifying the prosodic features of one's utterance would be used for a communicative purpose of some sort or another, especially in tandem with bodily movements such as gesture or the natural signals aforementioned. Wharton (2009) discusses gestures as sitting on a spectrum of iconicity, as features of communication that work in tandem with prosodics to allow listeners to clue in on the communicative intent of the speaker (or gesturer) through inference. He mentions prosody as useful in helping the listener decode the speaker's meaning present in a given utterance. This is achieved through mechanisms that highlight the relative importance of lexical items, providing genuine communicative content through *procedural* information transfer. This meaning, however, still remains nebulous, as both gesture and prosody are still natural, analog signals. The similarity (and comparison) between prosody and gesture is grounded in their shared role as natural, procedural information displays that occur alongside and aid formal linguistic processes (Wharton, 2009).

Despite prosody's lack of coded, translational meanings, there has been some discussion as to a broader, pan-contextual series of codes that are associated with specific prosodic features. Of chief relevance to this study is the notion of the frequency code (Ohala, 1984; Gussenhoven, 2002). Likened expressly to vocalizations found in non-human animals, the 'frequency code' refers to the general phenomenon where higher-pitched sounds are associated in metaphoric use with 'smaller' or more diminutive readings (Ohala, 1984). Through social implicature and routine citation, these 'smaller' meanings can be used productively (or inadvertently) to index friendliness, politeness, or submissiveness (Gussenhoven, 2002). Alongside the frequency code, other forms of prosodic modulation (such as the effort code) have been explored as being able to do much sociopragmatic and discursive work, from the aforementioned politeness display to identity performance, signaling ironic detachment from a statement, or modulating the actual flow of a discourse (Brown and Prieto, 2021).

Forms of communication that are non-verbal and lack fixed, translational semantic definitions can thus be understood as efficient bearers of meaning. These communicative genres are able bear both through conventionalized and contextually dependent means, as well as through more universal metaphoric or 'natural' displays. These can work in tandem to allow extralinguistic, paralinguistic, or quasilinguistic communicative displays to either aid or serve as nebulous analogues to agentive forms of speech, such as speech acts.

The Community of Practice and Queer Linguistics

The matter of how frameworks for situating meaning come about becomes relevant once the notion that certain forms of communication require greater amounts of inference and contextuality. Within the subfield of linguistic study that focuses on gender and sexuality, the

community of practice (CofP) framework has proven a useful methodological tool both in analysis and theory.

The CofP is defined by *practice*. That is, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) put it, ‘A community of practice is a group of people who come together around mutual engagement in an activity.’ Due to their shared engagement in whatever activity is central to the community, CofPs come to share beliefs about the world, ways of talking, narrative structures, narratives of belonging, and boundary delineation methods (Meyerhoff and Strycharz, 2013). The key here is the mutual engagement of participants in a shared enterprise or goal—this allows the framework to be applied liberally to a variety of different types of groups. People associate *with* a given CofP *because* they are engaging in the practice. This routine mutual association then allows participants in this CofP to develop a shared repertoire of communicative strategies, values, jargon, terminology, icons, and references (Meyerhoff and Strycharz, 2013).

The CofP has been used quite productively in the analysis of youth subcultures in both qualitative sociolinguistic work and more quantitative sociophonetic work (Lawson, 2011; Meyerhoff and Strycharz, 2013; Eckert, 2018). Subcultures, especially among young people, tend to be concerned with identity performance work, and in the realm of linguistics, the field has found much analytical fruit in examining the ways young people mediate their performance of social belonging. The CofP framework in particular is of use in navigating peripheral and core members’ practices and similarities and differences between them (Bucholtz, 1999).

In her 1999 study of ‘nerd girls,’ Bucholtz introduced the concepts of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ identity practices, forms of linguistic stylization (Coupland, 2007) that index affiliation towards one group (in a positive practice), or antipathy and lack of belonging towards another (in a negative practice). This conceives identity as something that results from active

performance, indication, and reification. This notion of identity being performed, constructed, and reified has been used productively in both feminist literature and more discourse-focused analysis (Bucholtz, 1999).

The notion of positive and negative identity practices aligns well with the notion of indexicality. Explored thoroughly by Silverstein (2003), indexicality refers to the discursive and metapragmatic ability of language to indicate affiliation with a concept through socially constructed association. In the context of the youth subcultures often discussed in the CofP literature, there are lexical or phonetic choices an individual speaker can make that index affiliation with a certain social group. To give a concrete example, one can prefer hyper-corrected and standardized lexical forms as a linguistic resource to index a ‘nerdy’ identity (Bucholtz, 1999).

One domain where indexicality, constructionist theories of identity, and the CofP framework have been especially useful is queer linguistics, or more broadly the study of sexual and gender minorities (Motschenbacher, 2010). Particularly relevant here is the notion that certain practices and identity frameworks are established as normalized, with divergence from these being labeled and othered. Despite this othering, those who fall outside of the normalized discourses still interact knowingly or unknowingly with the discourses that reify their othered status (Motschenbacher, 2010). Queer linguistics shines a light on these discursive practices by highlighting the emergent, contextually grounded and discursively mediated narrative structures that give rise to identity categories and affiliations.

An important point to consider when engaging in queer linguistics is to avoid essentializing the practices of any given community as representative of a broader ‘queer’ reality. Strategies for indexing affiliation with, or performing the practices of, any given queer

community are as diverse as are those communities to begin with, as speakers use locally available discursive material. The CofP framework localizes the community of study, understanding their practices as emergent within a specific local framework and the discourses that they produce as mediated by their own specific social scaffolding and dynamics.

Scholarship on BDSM - ‘Serious Leisure’ and Linguistic Practice

Despite the growing acceptance of certain forms of sexual minority expression in some parts of the world, practices associated with various BDSM communities and subcultures remain relatively stigmatized (Newmahr, 2010). The term ‘BDSM’ refers to a variety of non-normative sexual practices that often touch on power exchange, exemplified by the expansion of the acronym itself: bondage and discipline (B/D), dominance and submission (D/S), and sadism and masochism (S/M) (Chambers, 2019; Hanafi and Pratama, 2024). Traditionally pathologized by sexologists, there has in recent times been an increase in the visibility and recognition of kinky sexual practices and identities in popular discourse (Hughes and Hammack, 2019). Despite this increase in visibility, however, many stigmatizing discourses remain in wide circulation surrounding the variety of practices categorized under the label (Chambers, 2019). This increase in visibility has coincided with an increase in the amount of linguistic research on the practices of BDSM communities, predominantly within the realm of discourse analysis. This research ranges from examining speech acts in BDSM community writings to critical discourse analysis of erotic hypnosis message boards (Chambers, 2019; Hanafi and Pratama, 2024; Crane, 2024).

Many ethnographic studies have examined local networks of BDSM practitioners, ranging from broader sadomasochism communities to BDSM-adjacent subcultures such as the traditionally queer-dominated leather subculture (Mains 2002; Newmahr, 2010, 2011). These

networks tend to be formed through mutual engagement in practice and develop much of the same terminological and repertoire systems (in dialogue with broader kink communities) as any other CofP, such as the notion of ‘headspace’—flow-like states that are accessed by many (especially submissive) practitioners of BDSM. Newmahr (2010) applies the notion of ‘serious leisure’ to BDSM practices; that is, rather than assuming practices associated with BDSM are simply sexual acts, BDSM can function as a form of sustained, routinized leisure with mechanisms for acquisition of technical skills and an identity within a cohesive social network around the endeavor. This approach provides an explanation as to the durability of social networks that arise in local kink scenes and allows mutual engagement in the serious leisure activity to form the cornerstone of CofPs that fall under the category of BDSM.

The community frameworks that form around kink practices can sometimes become all-encompassing of a given practitioner’s social network (Newmahr, 2010). This is particularly true given the ways in which the stigmatizing discourses around kink can often lead to feelings of distaste for one’s identity with, or interest in, BDSM practices (Hughes and Hammack, 2019). Hughes and Hammack (2019) provide documentation of three sorts of narratives that are utilized by some individuals with kink identities to mediate this stigma: affirmation of a liberatory narrative, compartmentalization of kink identity from other aspects of life, and feelings of isolation. Central to those with an affirmatory view of their kink practices was the notion of the centrality and feelings of pride in their association with the kink community, which provided them access to narratives and tools to come to terms with and celebrate their kinky identities (Hughes and Hammock, 2019).

These general trends indicate that kinky communities, or those with roots in or ties to broader BDSM practices, can function as communities of practice that are important to the

subjective identities of their participants. These communities provide social scaffolding that can help circulate shared narratives and meaning-making tools through affiliation with and acquisition of the specific intricacies of the given CofP.

The Pup Play Subculture

One specific BDSM-affiliated subculture that has been of increasing interest in the literature is the pup play (or simply ‘pup’) community. Traditionally associated with young gay and bisexual men, the pup play community is defined by practitioners engaging in role play as (typically young) dogs (Wignall and McCormack, 2017; Wignall et al., 2022). The practice has its roots in the post-World War II gay male leather subculture, particularly through the practices in which leather ‘Sirs’ would make their ‘boys’ perform ‘dog-slave’ punishments for misbehavior (Lawson and Langdridge, 2020).

The pup community has, over the years, solidified into a cohesive subcultural group with distinct values, accoutrements, symbology, and narratives of belonging. Likewise, much as ‘headspace’ is subjectively relevant to many submissives in the broader constellation of BDSM communities, ‘pupspace’ is a narrativized experience subjectively important to many pup play practitioners. Pups often see themselves as differing from ‘old guard’ leather practitioners due to a focus on playfulness instead of the strict ritualism of roles; however, despite this self-conceptualized separation, following the increase in popularity of the practice (particularly with those who do not identify as cisgender gay men), discourses of authenticity and propriety have become increasingly visible as a diversity of opinions on topics such as the role of sexual-focused play and identity-making have become salient (Lawson and Langdridge, 2020; Hammock and Wignall, 2024).

Despite the documentation of an increase in the popularity of pup play, particularly mediated through circulation of online social media content, certain demographic trends remain (Hammock and Wignall, 2024). A 2022 survey by Wignall et al. found that cisgender gay males still make up the majority (60.30%) of those who identify as members of the pup play community, despite discourses of diversification being circulated. Throughout the present study, a few other subcultures were tangentially discussed as being relevant to pups and intersecting demographically in some way. Most prominently amongst these was the furry subculture, a community which began to emerge in the 1980s, defined by its celebration of anthropomorphic animals and art that depicts such characters (Heinz, 2020; J. R. Austin, 2023). Therians were also perceived as being relevant to the pup play community. Although often mistaken for furies, therians are those who hold some sort of non-human identity as integral to their sense of self in an often overtly spiritualized framework (Robertson, 2013). Lastly, there exists a similar and often co-occurring kink identity among transfeminine lesbians known as ‘puppygirls’ as discussed by Szpilka (2025). Although many who identify as ‘puppygirls’ engage in similar or analogous practices as those who identify as ‘pups,’ there is considerable variation among individuals in how much they associate themselves with the term ‘pup’ or the communities surrounding it, often reified structurally by the presence of many pup events in cisgender gay male-dominated spaces (Lawson and Langdridge, 2020).

Additionally, autistic people are highly represented in the pup community; in another study by Wignall et al. (2025), over half (55.7%) of 413 participants were at 60 points or higher on the Autism Spectrum Quotient, just 10 points below diagnostic criteria. One-third of the sample (35.4%) scored above diagnostic criteria. It is hypothesized that the prevalence of autism-

spectrum pup play practitioners is related to routinized expectations around roles and clarity of communication being prized in the pup play community (Wignall et al., 2025).

One of the key practices of pups is their utilization of a distinct mode of communication: non-human vocalizations (henceforth ‘NHVs’). These are often tangentially introduced in the literature as ‘barks,’ and refer to the vocalic performance of canine mimicry that is practiced by members of the pup community (Hammock and Wignall, 2024). Although briefly mentioned in the literature alongside physical displays of canine mimicry, the NHVs of pup players have not been explored by linguists. A sense of community and the organization of events and groups provide ample opportunity for individual pups to interact with other practitioners, and as such NHVs could serve as a shared repertoire of a given pup CofP.

As mentioned, the vocalizations of non-human animals have been discussed as being of relevance to certain prosodic codes (Ohala, 1984). NHVs of pups, then, may interact with features such as prosody, in a way deserving of examination. Likewise, if this is a repertoire (linguistic or non-linguistic) available to pups, then there remains the chance that pups could utilize NHVs as a communicatively useful resource. If a smile embedded within a shared context that elucidates the speaker’s intent can achieve some of the same goals as a more conventional speech act, then pups may be able to use NHVs (which by their very nature carry more vocalic content) to similar effect, or they may, at the very least, be discussed and believed by pups as being able to do so.

III) Methodology and Research Questions

With pups established as a community of practice, the question remains: how exactly are NHVs utilized as a communicative repertoire? There are three areas that are of particular interest in answering this. Firstly, how do pups utilize NHVs with communicative intent? In more SAT-grounded terms, what are the illocutionary acts and intents that are present when a pup utters a given NHV? Secondly, to what extent do pups feel that interlocutors are able to take up the communicative intent behind an NHV? And lastly, how do various other identities held by participants interact with narratives about NHVs?

Following Bucholtz' (1999) notion of a 'positive identity practice,' my initial hypothesis held that the main illocutionary intent behind a pup's production of NHVs was to indicate membership in and affiliation with the subculture and the CofP. This subcultural flagging would be aided by other contextual cues, such as gear or location of utterance, to indicate a shared orientation towards the community and to help build solidarity between subculture members. The intended perlocutionary act would thus be to induce recognition of one's identity in the individual being addressed by the NHV.

In order to test these research questions, two streams of data were utilized: a qualitative semi-structured interview and a more quantitative anonymous survey, both asking similar questions regarding illocutionary intent and perceived efficacy. These methods essentially seek to provide insight into the nature of metapragmatic discourse surrounding the efficacy and use-cases of NHVs within this CofP.

Recruitment

Self-identified pups were recruited for participation predominantly through the snowball sampling method. A community member was commissioned to create a recruitment poster, which was then distributed to Greater Toronto Area bars and event spaces that regularly host events aimed at the pup and leather communities. Word-of-mouth recruitment was spread by the organizers of local pup and leather groups with whom I was acquainted prior to my research. Namely, the Toronto-based organizations Trans Unleashed, the Toronto Kennel Klub, the PALS Society, and Northbound Leather, as well as the Los Angeles-based Southern California Creatures Collective, were instrumental in spreading awareness of the research. Participants were offered the chance to win one of two C\$50 gift cards for the Toronto-based business The Men's Room, which sells pup gear such as hoods and harnesses, and is staffed by members of the local Toronto pup scene. Due to my prior participation in the community, and a desire to facilitate research, the gift cards were provided to me free of charge.

A large number of participants were informed of the project through online networks, spread organically by participants in the pup subculture. The recruitment poster was uploaded to my personal Instagram account, from which it was shared and reposted by members of the pup subculture with large online followings. Multiple participants indicated that they first discovered the project through smaller community forums and group chats that I was unaware of. As a participant in the community myself, I was afforded a degree of trust by participants that allowed access that might not otherwise have been easily attained.

Pickles (2024) discusses the unique challenges faced by researchers undertaking ethnographic projects in communities with non-normative power structures, with his article coincidentally examining pups in particular. An optional, non-legally binding handler assent

form was provided to participants. This choice was made following the ethical concerns raised by Pickles (2024), and out of a desire to indicate an understanding of and respect for community norms. While the majority of participants did not utilize the handler assent form, multiple individuals (even some who did not submit the form) noted that its presence indicated a familiarity with community norms that made them feel comfortable enough to participate. Given the stigmatized status of many non-normative sexual identities and based on comments from the participants, I believe that the inclusion of recognition of cultural practices in recruitment methodologies grounds research in community practices and proves useful in recruiting individuals in kink communities that would otherwise be hesitant to discuss their experiences.

Data Stream 1: Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was the primary stream of data, where most of the analysis was situated. The interview ranged from roughly twenty minutes to well over an hour and a half, depending on each participant's level of social engagement with local pup play communities.

Although the specific flow of questions differed from participant to participant based on the course of conversation, as is natural for a semi-structured interview, all participants were asked the same skeleton of questions. Each interview started with an establishment of demographic information, such as sexual and gender identities, length of time in the pup community and affiliation with other subcultures (namely the furry, therian, and leatherqueer subcultures) that I believed may have influence on one's production of or expectations surrounding NHVs. Once demographic backgrounds were established, participants were asked about their judgments as to the efficaciousness of NHVs, the actual communicative goals they have in mind with any given utterance, and social or contextual situations that would inhibit or

facilitate communicative goals. Additionally, participants with a high level of participation in the social networks of the pup community were asked metalinguistic questions such as whether or not they feel they would be able to distinguish NHVs of those affiliated with the subculture from simple canine mimicry by non-pups, as well as more community-makeup-focused questions, such as about changes in demographics they've observed and whether certain aspects of participation in the community had noticeable impact. Participants who have been active members of the CofP for some time (sometimes more than a decade) were asked whether or not any expectations, etiquette, or actual practices surrounding NHV production have changed. Lastly, if participants were comfortable doing so, they were invited to produce NHVs representative of their normal repertoire.

Following online or in-person interviews recorded through the recording features of online video-conferencing software, such as Zoom or Google Meet, the recordings were initially processed through an automated speech-to-text transcription service: the ASR system provided by Whisper. These transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy, after which they were qualitatively coded using five primary analytic categories: illocutionary intent, community practices, meaning-making strategies, identity, and limits. Each category was comprised of numerous subcodes, which were compiled into a codebook, and the applied codes were compared from interview to interview to examine recurrent themes and trends in the data. The subcodes emerged naturally through read-throughs of the data and the examination of specific descriptors of how NHVs function in communication, identity work, and social framing. Some examples of subcodes could include those as broad as 'codified NHV meanings' to as specific as 'breed identity acquired through discussion with others' or "centrality of closeness with NHV producer to understanding meaning'.

Interview Participants

In total, 26 individuals were interviewed for this project. However, due to data corruption that occurred midway through the project, not all interviewed participants were able to be included in the final analysis. As a result, the full interviews of 25 participants were included in the final analysis. The demographic profiles of 23 participants are included in Fig. 1; the demographics of two omitted participants, Pups Aspen and Orchid, could not be recovered from the corrupted data, although their interviews are included in the final analysis. A distinction is noted between those who participate in in-person subcultural events and activities and ‘private practitioners,’ those who either engage in pup play solely by themselves or exclusively with partners in private contexts.

Fig. 1: Demographic Profiles of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexuality	Identity with other Subcultures	Length of time as pup	Breed	Private or Community Involvement
Pup Apple	Cis Man	Gay	Furry	1 year	N/A	Community
Pup Apricot	Cis Man	Gay	Rubber Community	9 years	Fox	Community
Pup Asparagus	Cis Man	Gay	N/A	1 year	‘Smaller, long dog’	Close-knit Circle
Pup Berry	Agender Transmasc	Pansexual, Gray-Asexual	N/A	3 years	Wolfdog	Community
Pup Cactus	Cis Man	Gay	Furry-adjacent	1 year	N/A	Mostly Private
Pup Celery	Transmasculine	Gay, Queer	Leatherqueer-adjacent	4–5 years	Lab	Private
Pup Eucalyptus	Cis Man	Gay	Furry	6 months	N/A	Close-knit Circle
Pup Fennel	Genderfluid	Pansexual	Therian-adjacent	6–8 months	Pit Bull	Community
Pup Fern	Non-Binary Transmasc	Queer, Fagdyke	Furry, Leatherqueer	4 years	Hungarian Mudi	Community
Pup Grape	Cis Man	Gay	N/A	6 months	Husky	Community
Pup Grass	Cis Man	Gay	N/A	5 years	Papillon	Community
Pup Hawthorne	Trans Woman	Asexual	N/A	3–4 years	N/A	Community
Pup Honeysuckle	Trans Woman	Pansexual	Therian-adjacent	3–4 years	Rough Collie, ‘Aliewolf’	Private, Content Creator
Pup Jasmine	Nonbinary Transfem	Pansexual	Furry	10 years	Pharoah Hound	Community
Pup Lavender	Trans Woman	Lesbian	N/A	2–3 years	N/A	Private, Friends
Pup Lemon	Trans Man, Two-spirit	Bisexual	Furry, Therian	1–2 years	‘Alien Dog’	Community
Pup Lily	Non-Binary, Intersex	Pansexual	N/A	1 year, 6 months	N/A	Community
Pup Lime	Trans Man	Gay, Pansexual	Furry, Therian-adjacent	1 year (Furry 5 years)	N/A	Community
Pup Moss	Transmasculine Butchdyke	Lesbian	Leatherqueer	3 years	Not Settled, leaning Pinscher	Private
Pup Oak	Cis Man	Gay	Leatherqueer (Gear Community)	10 years	Pitsky	Community
Pup Pear	Nonbinary Transfem	Queer	Furry, Therian	2 years	Irish Red Setter	Community
Intl. Puppy 2025 Pup Star Orion*	Transgender Fluid	Queer, Pansexual	Leatherqueer	8–9 years	Bull Terrier	Community
Pup Tumbleweed	Transmasculine Transfag	Queer	Rubber Community	7–8 years	Mixed, Many Ideas	Community

All participant data was fully anonymized, with legal or scene names replaced with the names of plants. However, one participant, Pup Star Orion, holder of the title International Puppy 2025, specifically requested his scene name and title be utilized in the final paper, following community norms. As such, his wish has been respected and he is referred to as such throughout the paper. Due to the fact that online word-of-mouth recruitment was very successful, participants came from a variety of locations throughout Canada and the United States and from as far afield as New Zealand.

Two demographic notes are important to mention: the minority status of cis male participants, and the correlation between therian identity and transgender status. Only one-third (34.78%, n=8) of participants were cisgender gay men, the group traditionally associated with pup play (Wignall and McCormack, 2017; Wignall et al., 2022). Another third (34.78%, n=8) were explicitly transmasculine of some variety or another, and transfeminine individuals followed (21.74%, n=5). My hypotheses why transgender participants made up the majority (65.22% n = 15) of participants are expanded upon in the Discussion chapter. Additionally, while the sample may be skewed by the high representation of trans individuals, I believe it interesting to note the correspondence between trans and therian (those who identify as one or more animal species) identities. Not a single participant who identified as a therian also identified as cis, and multiple therian participants discussed a mutual interaction between their pup, trans, and therian identities as they relate both to NHV production and a cohesive narrative of self.

Data Stream 2: Anonymous Survey

Providing quantitative data, the anonymous survey was created with the goal of triangulating the narratives and trends discussed in the interviews with their prevalence in broader community practice. Unlike the interview, the survey was open to handlers as well as pups. The number of questions asked each participant was determined by that participant's role in pup dynamics, ranging from eighteen at the shortest (if a participant identified solely as a handler) to thirty at the longest (if the participant engaged in both pup and handler roles at different times).

Many of the questions discussed in the interview were also discussed in the survey. These included establishing the demographic backgrounds of respondents, such as their roles in pup dynamics, length of time in the community, and gender and sexual identities. Participants were asked in free-entry text fields to discuss the sorts of things they (or the pups they interact with) tend to utilize NHVs for, rate the efficacy of their NHVs on a 7-point Likert scale, and discuss differences between pup- and handler-directed communicative practices.

The survey itself was provided through the survey-hosting platform Qualtrics. Participants were directed to an electronic version of the ethics consent form where they could also choose to indicate their interest in entering the draw for the gift cards. Data was collected anonymously, outside of demographic information which was decoupled from any personally identifying markers of the participants. Data analysis was performed in both the on-platform data analysis suite provided by Qualtrics and using the programming language R. Responses to questions that required medium- to long-form text input on the part of participants were manually coded following the same codebook as the interviews.

Survey Respondents

In total, there were 146 respondents to the survey. Of those, 92 (63.01%) identified solely as pups, 9 (6.16%) identified solely as handlers, and the remainder occupied either both roles depending on the context or differently identified their role in their narratives of play. The discrepancies in number between cis and non-cis participants was quite stark among survey respondents as well. Cis men did not make up a plurality by any margin (19.17%), with the largest single group being binary-identified trans men (24.65%). Cis individuals as a collective came together to make up roughly a quarter of responses (26.07%). Still, explicitly masculine-identifying individuals made up a plurality of responses (50.68%.)

Not a single survey respondent (nor interviewee) identified as heterosexual, though there was ample diversity in the descriptors with which respondents defined their sexual identities, from commonly used terms such as ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ or ‘queer,’ to more niche descriptors such as ‘aegosexual’ or ‘abrosexual,’ and even a few jocular responses such as ‘confusing’ or ‘bi for every woman, most enbies [a term referring to non-binary individuals], and only the most pathetic boys available.’

Fig. 2: Gender Categories of Survey Responses

Gender Category	No. of Responses
Cis Masc	28
Binary Trans Masc	36
Cis Fem	10
Binary Trans Fem	16
Non-Binary Masc	10
Non-Binary Fem	3
Non-Binary	16
Agender	6
Other	21

Methodological Limitations

One of the project’s chief limitations is that its methodology is unable to capture *in situ* production of NHVs. Resultantly, this paper predominantly describes community-situated

attitudes towards and narratives surrounding illocutionary intent, efficacy, and identity work. As such, there is a reliance on what individual participants *think* they do with their NHV production rather than an examination thereof embedded in active use, which leaves lapses in memory and over- or under-estimation a potential issue. However, the large sample size does to some extent ameliorate this through the broad overlap of descriptions and narratives across individuals.

The snowball sampling recruitment method likewise introduces the potential that people associated with specific social networks may have been more likely to have encountered the research, and thus the responses may be limited to a specific subset of the broader pup community. This is part of the rationale I posit for the prevalence of trans-identified individuals in the demographics of research participants. While this is an issue, the research was spread by relatively popular social media accounts within the pup community, which may have increased its visibility to more casual consumers of pup-related online content.

Additionally, there was some asymmetry in the themes of the questions between the interviews and the survey. Certain topics, such as association with the leather, furry, and therian subcultures, were not explicitly included in the questions asked of survey respondents. This was due both to a desire to maintain a reasonable length for the survey as to encourage completion, and to the shifting nature of what was found to be important to discuss as more interviews were conducted. Some topics that may have analytic value, such as the racial identities of participants, were not explored unless specifically brought up by a participant, which may leave unexplored certain narratives surrounding subcultural affiliation.

IV) The Illocution of NHVs

Participants indicated that they use NHVs with a varied collection of illocutionary intents. Despite my initial assumption that the primary illocutionary intent was to flag subcultural affiliation, participants reported using NHVs to perform a variety of communicative functions, and are described as being relatively efficacious and perceived quite accurately by interlocutors. Rather than serving as simple identity flags, NHVs are utilized by pup play practitioners as active displays of dispositions, emotional states, and reactions to events, objects, and actions. These displays are utilized with communicative intent, where context-situated inference allows interlocutors to interpret indirect illocutionary goals, and respond with the according perlocutionary act. While lacking stable semantic correlates, the frequent use of certain types of NHVs has allowed their usages to become conventionalized, self-directed acts able to broadcast and modulate emotional experiences, particularly in response to negative stimuli.

Communicating Basic Wants and Needs

Many participants in both the survey and the interview process described NHVs as being useful in communicating basic desires, needs, and requests. Of the 107 individual written responses to Q21 of the survey ('What sort of things do you use non-human vocalizations to communicate?'), 34 responded with various basic desires, while 24 described basic needs. Many of the direct objects of these desires or needs were simple, such as food, water, or a specific toy. While there were many instances of using NHVs to indicate desire for something directly within an instance of play, some participants in the interview noted that they utilize them outside of explicitly kink-related social encounters.

Not all of the things requested by a pup using NHVs were quite so concrete.

Occasionally, a participant described indicating a desire for more of an ongoing process, such as a belly rub or being pet in a specific way. 24 survey participant responses to Q21 discussed attention requests. Occasionally, simple displays could be used with multiple objects of desire, in which case the whole vocalization wound up being utilized to solicit attention and some sort of action.

Quote 1: NHVs to communicate desire for an object outside of a kink encounter. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Grass: “I’ve been trying to find, like, a Jasperware brooch for myself, and I was out with my Sir—functionally my Handler—one time, and we went into an antique shop [...] and we saw quite honestly the exact type of brooch I had been looking for for ages. It was like \$28. So I started making a whining like—and I was like, pawing at the glass.”
- B) Pup Honeysuckle: “It’s not just exclusive to certain scenes either. It’s like, okay, it’s like all the time for certain things. [...] Well, like, if I want something, like if I wanna snuggle or if I want attention or if I’m—even if I’m like, hungry or wanting, like, to go on a walk [...]”

The use of desire-indicating NHVs is described in Quote 1 as part of the daily or cross-situational communicative repertoires of both Pup Grass and Pup Honeysuckle. In the case of the former, explicit whine-like vocalic productions are able to signal direct desire for a single concrete object specified through contextual clues and embodied physical performance, whereas the latter shows that the actual productive use case of similar NHVs to indicate ‘I want something’ can be varied and attached to broader conceptual desires, such as attention, or initiating a non-concrete act, such as a stroll. In this latter case, the NHV itself can be seen as a broadcasting of a state of *desire*, the specific object of which can be contextually determined as evidenced by the broad use cases described by Pup Honeysuckle.

These affective states indicated by NHV production are described by some participants as being useful to pragmatic illocutionary effect. Participants describe how they can indicate

through their production of NHVs that they want their addressee to perform some sort of action. Pup Star Orion, for instance, discusses how this affective display for a need allows him to ‘alert’ his interlocutor to some sort of action that they ought to take.

Quote 2: NHVs as an ‘Alert’ to Fulfill a Need or Want

Pup Star Orion: “... I would say, um, when I wanna call someone’s attention to something is when I use [ruffs] the most. Whether it’s like, ‘Oh, something’s wrong with my hood,’ or like, ‘I want you to pet me and you’re not paying attention to me,’ or like, ‘I want something that I can’t reach.’ Like, it’s more like: ‘Hey—I need to alert you about a need that I have.’”

Emotion and Orientation Display

Requests for attention and a disposition of desire or want each fit into the broader trend of NHVs being used quite frequently to index a participant’s dispositional state—particularly as it relates to emotions. Just over half of all survey respondents (53.27%; n=57) indicated that they utilize NHVs to communicate their emotional state or orientation towards the addressee or situation. The wide incidence of explicit emotional and orientation display work in both the surveys and interviews indicate that these sorts of affect displays are important to the pragmatic, situated use cases of NHVs among pups.

These sorts of displays can be explicitly grounded in the immediate circumstance, such as indicating interest in or active happiness regarding something in the environment, or they may indicate broader feelings or states, such as being tired. Sometimes it is the case that these dispositional displays are described as being used with explicit metacommunicative intent—not solely to indicate one’s state of mind, but rather to provide some sort of information for the interlocutor to utilize in reference to an interaction or an occurrence.

Quote 3: Emotional Display NHVs as Pragmatic Communication

Pup Fern: “Going back to the scene with the Handler a couple months ago. We played for a long time, and then I got very tired. Um—and so, he let me rest by his feet. [...] But I was thinking to myself, like, okay, what does a dog sound like when they’re exhausted? [...] It’s just like this... I don’t know... a low rumble? [...] But it’s just to indicate to the Handler like, y’know, ‘I’m relaxed, I’m enjoying myself.’”

Quote 3 provides an explicit example of canines being utilized as a designated indexical reference in production. Using a particular metaphorical association of ‘what dogs sound like,’ Pup Fern uses NHVs to mimic said association to communicate a particular affective state of mind to the individual with whom he is communicating: in this case, to indicate being tired and content after a particularly physically draining scene.

Many of the emotional states that participants found themselves able to communicate with NHVs were those that were likened either to the archetypes of the breeds of dog that they saw themselves as, or to simply being what ‘dogs are like.’ As such, some participants described emotions and orientations such as ‘affection,’ ‘playfulness,’ and ‘gratitude’ particularly easy to communicate, or likely to be transmitted through NHV production. Some pups, such as interviewee Pup Apple, indicated that the majority of emotional displays they affect through NHVs are ‘positive’ in nature. However, this is not the routine state of affairs for all participants. Some pups indicated that they utilized NHVs to display emotional states that might be considered more ‘negative,’ or which dovetail more fully with an affective state that implores the interlocutor to take some sort of action, such as ‘impatience’ or ‘discomfort.’ Even in these more ‘negative’ examples, the general semiotic resource of ‘canine-like’ qualities or displays are routinely utilized to position the NHV production in a pragmatic frame.

Reactions and Boundaries

Many of the sorts of emotional displays participants broadcast with NHVs are explicitly framed through the environmental and physical context of the interaction. Many participants

described NHVs as being primarily utilized in reaction to some sort of occurrence—either positive or negative—in their immediate environment with 24 survey responses (22.42%) discussing using NHVs in this manner. Some of these displays are described as being used affectively to induce interlocutors to continue or stop an action.

Quote 4: NHVs as reactions to stimuli. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Pear: “I’d like to say that it’s very much that if someone is doing something that I want them to do, then I can [use NHVs there]. I can make a noise that indicates that like, yeah, this is what I want you to do. If I want something—I want them to stop [...] if I want attention, I can do that.”
- B) Pup Star Orion: “[When] I’m not just playing at the mosh, or I’m not just playing like, in scenes, I’m—I’m, y’know, eating out of my dog bowl with my partner, and maybe they put like, *so* much salad on my plate and I don’t wanna eat that. And so, I’m gonna like, make a sound to communicate my annoyance with that, right?”

Much like in the former examples, the participants in Quote 4 each describe themselves as utilizing NHVs to index a particular affective stance with indirect directive nuance situated within a particular environment. Pup Pear is explicit that NHVs are able to indicate that she wishes the interlocutor to either continue or stop that which they are doing. Pup Star Orion’s example, however, calls into focus the ways that the affective stances that NHVs can index can function as *indirect* illocutionary acts. He indicates that he can produce an annoyed sound to indicate displeasure at a recent action taken by his interlocutor—even outside the context of a particular scene. Without explicitly relying on semantically relevant lexical items, Pup Star Orion is able to indicate his annoyance, and subsequent lack of desire for further salad in his dog bowl, through the conscious utterance of an NHV that is perceived as sounding sufficiently ‘annoyed.’

Indicating a desire for the addressee to stop an ongoing action was mentioned as a particularly salient use case for NHVs as reaction-displaying devices. The indirect communication of ‘I dislike what you are doing; please stop,’ or other analogous sentiments, is

an important aspect of the practical use of NHVs in settings in which sexual interactions with parties previously unknown to participants may be common. Vocalic productions qualitatively likened to ‘growls’ were described as particularly likely to be put to this use. Oftentimes, the physical embodiment and body language that accompanies a given NHV production will be embellished to avoid any ambiguity that may come about solely from vocal rejection. Pup Fern stated that he will explicitly turn his body away from the individual with whom he is refusing to play to avoid any ambiguity.

NHVs During Play ‘Scenes’

Many pups actively participate in sexual activities *as* pups, either with long-term associates or with newly met play partners. 78% (n=85) of pup-identified survey respondents indicated ‘play parties’ (events in BDSM-related subcultures where people engage in BDSM or other-kink related activities) as a primary location where they utilize NHVs in their communicative repertoires. Some pups (10 survey respondents) indicated that NHVs serve as an effective way to signal interest in initiating a sexual encounter with the person being addressed. Additionally, many of the interview participants indicated that sexual encounters are either a primary site of NHV production or do substantial framing work in shaping interpretation of a given NHV. Some participants even framed NHVs as a ‘natural’ way to express eroticism in a way that aligns with other aspects of their identities, sometimes explicitly likened by masculine-presenting and -identifying participants to a way to perform ‘submissiveness’ in an acceptably ‘masculine’ way.

Quote 5: Sexual expression with NHVs. Excerpts from two interviews.
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- A) Pup Moss: “Honestly, I use [NHVs] to communicate that things in the scene are going the right way, that I’m enjoying it. [...] For me, it always signifies that I’m safe, I guess? And I’m like, enjoying what’s happening. So it’s usually like, to indicate ‘pleasure.’”
- B) Pup Cactus: “When I found myself attracted to [pup play], because when I wanted to think of how to express some of the ways I liked feeling in erotic moments, like, it came out as a pup sound.”

Quote 5 provides examples of pups describing the intersection of their NHV production with communicative goals in sexually framed situations. For Pup Moss, the affective display work that NHVs are perceived to possess allows him to signal his feelings towards the ongoing sexual encounter (often referred to as ‘scenes’ in BDSM-adjacent subcultures). Pup Cactus further asserts that, for him, NHVs are a natural way of articulating his desires relating to sexual encounters and his role therein.

These affect displays can be used to negotiate role-defining actions and indicate desires to take on specific positions within a sexual exchange. NHVs were noted to be useful in communicating if a pup wanted to perform either submission or dominance, depending on the specific context. Through the contextual use of a specific type of NHV, paired with body language, a pup can signal to their partner their disposition in the scene and assert their desire to take on a specific role.

Quote 6: Dominance and Submission indicating NHVs. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Apricot: “If [I was interacting] with someone who was like, more ‘capital D,’ I might lean towards making sounds that signal more of a submissive sort of energy.”
- B) Pup Moss: “I think that with growling, that usually comes up when I’m feeling in a pupspace that’s more a more like, dominant, sadistic type space, I guess? Okay, so it would be used to show aggression and kind of to induce obedience in the other partner, if that makes sense. Kind of like an intimidation kind of thing.”

In Quote 6, Pups Apricot and Moss describe using NHVs to index the opposing relational dispositions of submission and dominance. Pup Apricot specifically focuses on the directionality

of the NHV to index this stance by describing his partner as ‘capital D’: in other words, a highly dominant individual. Here, he describes himself utilizing the pre-understood notion of the dominant role of the interlocutor to help justify a ‘submissive sound’ to signal said submission. On the other hand, Pup Moss describes internal states as being motivators to affect a stance through his NHVs, specifically ‘growls.’ This dominant headspace is affected through his growling, with the intended illocutionary effect of performing dominance so as to induce submissive acts from his partner.

Pup Moss provides a highly structured, sexually framed example of the sort of affective indirect illocutionary acts described by Pups Grass and Honeysuckle. This indicates that, despite the variety of illocutionary goals, the same general process appears to be happening, whereby some sort of relational state is affected through NHV performances which allow interlocutors to understand the producer’s meaning, and perform the desired perlocutionary effect, communicated through indirect means and contextual implicature.

Greetings and Conventionalized Use

Occasionally, the context in which an NHV is uttered provides more explicit influence over the production and its use cases. This is most readily seen in some of the more community-grounded and conventionalized instances in which pups utilize NHVs. Certain pup communities, particularly in larger cities such as Toronto, organize social and play events (Pasoff et al., 2025). In these contexts, certain uses of NHVs become routinely cited and reproduced as conventionalized communicative acts. One of the most common conventional uses of NHVs is as simple greetings to other people within the community. In the closest case to my initial

hypothesis, many pups described utilizing NHVs as a way to greet another pup and to indicate that they are a participant in the scene.

Quote 7: NHVs as Greetings and Identity Flags.

Pup Berry: “I think like a greeting with like, a bark, and then if they bark back, like, you immediately understand, ‘Okay, this is a fellow pup. Like, this is someone who *gets it*.”

The phrasing in Pup Berry’s description of greetings in Quote 7 shows something interesting. Besides simply functioning as a rote, sociopragmatic greeting, the indexing of proper affiliation with the community allows greeting NHVs to display solidarity with the addressee. Many participants indicate a degree of shyness, or concern for stigma around their pup (or otherwise kinky) identities. As a result, the active flagging of affiliation with the community (a form of positive identity practice, per Bucholtz (1999)), can serve the pragmatic effect of reducing feelings of nervousness around engaging in behaviors associated with pup play or pup identity.

A fair number of the conventions surrounding NHVs are related to shared community engagement or solidarity display. A quintessentially subcultural practice, unshared by other CofPs, is the use of a ‘group howl’ following an announcement by a facilitator of a pup play-centric event. It is not always the case that an explicit frame of events is present for these group howls to begin. It is sometimes the case that they are initiated by a single individual, following which a good number of the pup-identified attendees at the event will join in unison.

Quote 8: Pup Grape on Group Howls.

Pup Grape: “[...] Where you howl with other people—other puppies. That’s like, y’know, if you hear a howl nearby, you join in, y’know? Or if you’re just like with another puppy and you get really excited, and you just start howling together. Then it’s like you’re trying to get the whole room to howl, y’know? Yeah, you’re kind of stuck, [...] it’s just like an expression of excitement.”

In Quote 8, Pup Grape explicitly discusses a convergence of the affective work that NHVs do within a ritualized, conventionalized subcultural framework. Active displays of excitement are broadcast to the addressee, which is met with a similar affect display that is then signaled with a specific form of NHV: a howl. This howl is then mirrored by surrounding participants, both as a matter of course, and with the explicit intention of having surrounding parties reproduce the vocalic display in a show of group affiliation performance.

These uses of NHVs are routinely produced to the point that they function similarly to the contextualization cues discussed by Gumperz (1992), wherein participants use non-verbal communicative behavior to highlight interactionally salient sequencing and framing responses. Rather than merely being an indication of excitement on the part of the producer, these group howls are an instance where subcultural convention allows participants to recognize a semi-ritualized interactional frame is occurring, and that they are welcome to howl in solidarity in response. Through these processes, as highlighted above, NHVs are useful both at the level of direct, one-to-one communication between individuals, as well as in broader, subculturally conventionalized use cases that can allow a given NHV to signal intended responses to multiple individuals at once.

Self-directed NHVs

Some pups stated that NHVs can be used with active intent in a self-directed manner. This was especially common among (although not specific to) pups who had identified with the label for quite some time, and who had a circle of associates who also engaged in pup play or who affiliated with other kink communities. Oftentimes, this was described as a broader

expansion of the affective display present in more socially oriented NHVs to the private sphere.

In these cases, participants would describe NHVs as a ‘natural’ display of emotion.

Quote 9: Pup Asparagus on Solitary Emotion Displays

Pup Asparagus: “I have noticed over the past 8 months or so, just like, out of hood, out of gear, not like in a pupspace or anything, I will like, start growling in frustration and stuff a little bit to myself.”

Following his gradual adoption of a pup identity and further engagement of play, Pup Asparagus describes in Quote 9 that his usage of NHVs to express emotions became common enough to the point that he began doing so alone. The primarily communicative function of NHVs broadened in use to encompass self-expressive functions.

It is not the case, however, that the self-directed NHVs some pups produce are simply mirrors of the uses of NHVs directed at others. It was very common for pups to liken NHVs produced alone to ‘stimming’—the reflexive, self-stimulating movements found among many autistic individuals (Kapp et al., 2019). Following research by Wignall et al. (2025), the high prevalence of autism-spectrum individuals in the pup community likely contributes to an understanding of NHVs being communicated using this specific, autism community-derived term. For pups who likened solitary NHV productions to stimming, and even among some who did not, NHVs were very useful when one ‘simply wanted to make noise’ to fill up a silence or a space. Additionally, outside of simply trying to fill a silence, this active and intentional self-directed NHV production would be used by an individual for a very distinct and personal reason, as can be seen in Quote 10.

Quote 10: NHVs as active vocalizations with self-directed intent. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Honeysuckle: “Like I said before, I’m really not a fan of my voice, and voice training is really fucking hard. So it’s like... it’s nice to not have to use my voice to communicate things [...] I think [I do use NHVs to help with dysphoria.]

B) Pup Pear: “I also just stim a lot. I’ll very regularly throughout the day, [...] could just be that I am sitting there by myself and my brain’s like, ‘It’s too quiet.’”

In both of these instances, NHVs are utilized with explicit, self-directed actions in mind.

In the former case, Pup Honeysuckle, a trans woman, will use NHVs as a communicative tool that helps her avoid vocal dysphoria, wherein she might feel her daily speaking voice may be too masculine. NHVs thus serve a self-directed purpose as well as a communicative one. Similarly, Pup Pear uses NHVs to fill uncomfortable silences, explicitly equating this use with autistic stimming. In both these examples, as well as in some responses to the survey, NHVs were more commonly described as being useful in self-directed actions when compartmentalizing and dealing with negative or uncomfortable situations or stimuli. When silence becomes uncomfortable, one’s voice becomes a source of discomfort, or one is dealing with a troublesome situation, NHVs are a vocalic resource to regulate one’s emotional responses and modify the state of affairs that led to that discomfort.

While NHVs may be contextually mediated, this level of self-directed use indicates a degree of stable volitional intent on the part of a given producer. NHVs in this context serve as something that, while ambiguous in interpersonal communication, are uttered with very real intents and goals on the part of the vocalizer. These intents become more easily seen when NHVs are used in a self-directed manner, and this seems especially fruitful when dealing with states of mind, such as when compartmentalizing or overcoming negative experiences.

NHVs and Accessing Pupspace

If NHVs can be utilized to show affect, and to deal with emotions and experiences, a question naturally arises about how NHVs can be used in tandem with or to initiate ‘pupspace.’

The notion of various types of ‘headspace’ is widespread across different BDSM-adjacent communities, including the pup subculture (Newmahr, 2010; Wignall and McCormack, 2017). Often defined as a ‘flow’-like space, pupspace is a subjective state of mind experienced by pups wherein the practitioner finds themselves grounded in complete absorption into the role of a pup. The intensity of focus required by serious leisure is argued by Wignall and McCormack (2017) to facilitate the experience, which some interview participants described as intense and all-encompassing of their state of mind during play.

Multiple interviewees found NHVs were either conducive to entering pupspace, important for keeping one engaged in that state of mind, or easier to produce while deep *in* pupspace. Contrariwise, pupspace was argued to in some capacity limit the subjective ease of producing more normative human speech, with access to pupspace in turn being limited when human speech was relied on. Even when discussing other use cases of NHVs, pups routinely indicated when pupspace was *not* present during a given use case, suggesting a degree of association between pupspace and more routine NHV production scenarios.

Out of 117 responses to the question, ‘Are NHVs important to maintaining, accessing, or otherwise facilitating pupspace?’ 89 individuals (76%) indicated that they were. Pupspace was also very commonly experienced by participants, with 103 individuals out of 118 respondents (87%) indicating that they enter pupspace when engaging in pup play. However, qualitatively, respondents’ descriptions of pupspace differed subjectively. Some practitioners also claimed to experience multiple distinct types of headspace, sometimes affiliated with a different animal species such as a hyena or a coyote. Different headspaces are often associated with different interactional dispositions. In Quote 6, Pup Moss describes a distinctly dominant headspace being present when he utilizes more dominant vocalization and interactional practices. Pup Star Orion

describes his accessing ‘hyena-space’ as facilitating a disposition better suited to ‘primal play,’ a distinct sexual activity that involves a higher degree of focus on intense, animalistic dispositions than the generally playful and obedience-focused pup play.

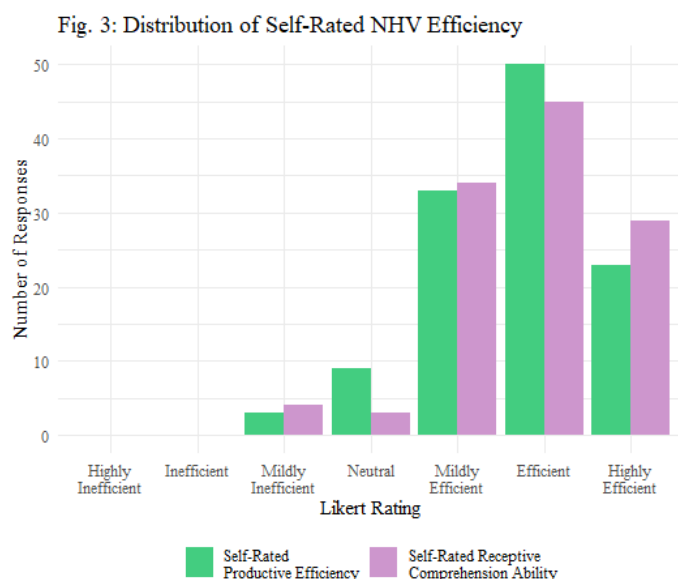
Much as NHVs are utilized to indicate wants and needs, NHVs to access pupspace rely on an indexical relationship between vocalic production and certain states of mind. The routine association of pupspace with NHV production allows the subjective flow-like state to be referenced and cited with NHV use. Just as specific NHVs can indicate a whining, needy disposition, NHV productions as a whole can be used to signify both to the interlocutor *and* the NHV producer themselves that the producer is behaving like a dog—something associated with the flow-like pupspace. This indexical signalling can be important to individuals who subjectively experience intense headspace shifts, as indicated by the prevalence of people who find pupspace being inhibited by the need to utilize normative human speech.

In sum, NHVs can be utilized to indicate a variety of dispositional and affective states, and thereby perform certain illocutionary acts. These acts can be directed towards others or towards oneself, and often rely on a degree of inference through indexical association of different sounds with different states to derive the indirectly communicated meaning.

Reported Efficacy and Ambiguity

The communicative range of NHVs manifests in a highly context-dependent framework. Being that NHVs don’t lexically clarify their intents in any real capacity, all communication of illocutionary intent must be done through inference. This indirectness leaves ample space for NHVs to be poor transmitters of communication, yet participants themselves were relatively uniform in their assessment that NHVs are practical and efficient communicative devices.

Survey participants were asked to rate the perceived effectiveness of NHVs, as well as their self-assessed ability to understand the NHVs of others. Among the 118 respondents to the question who identified as pups, including those who identified as both pups and handlers, 23 (19.5%) described NHVs as ‘very efficient,’ 50 (42.4%) described NHVs as ‘efficient,’ and 33 (28%) rated them as ‘mildly efficient’—all ratings above the neutral value of ‘neither efficient nor inefficient.’ This neutral rating received 9 individual ratings (7.6%). ‘Mildly inefficient,’



meanwhile, received 3 (2.5%). No votes below ‘mildly inefficient’ were cast. In total, only 12 out of the 118 responses (10.10%) rated NHVs at a neutral or inefficient rating, indicating a broad perception of NHVs as efficient among those that produce them.

When asked to self-assess their ability to understand the NHVs of others, participants rated themselves similarly to what one would expect based on their perceptions of NHVs’ productive communicative ability. With 115 recorded responses, 29 individuals (25.2%) rated themselves ‘very able,’ 45 (39.1%) ‘able,’ and 34 (29.6%) ‘more-or-less able.’ A further 3 respondents (2.6%) rated themselves ‘neither able nor unable,’ and 4 (3.5%) ‘more-or-less unable.’ When examining handlers, a similar picture emerged. Of the 42 respondents to the question who were either exclusive handlers or occupied the role alongside identifying as a pup, 11 (26.2%) rated themselves ‘very able,’ 19 (45.2%) rated themselves ‘able,’ and 12 (28.6%) rated themselves ‘more-or-less able’ to understand the meaning behind NHVs of pups they interacted with.

Despite the widespread opinion that NHVs are efficient, many interview respondents also made note of a general sense of ambiguity in the meaning of specific NHVs, especially when asked if they would be able to make meaning out of an NHV without an awareness of the context and environment of its utterance. A sense of efficiency was noted to be strongest when NHVs were used for one of the use cases mentioned above, specifically the indexing of needs, desires, and emotional or affective states. Additionally, subculturally mediated use cases such as greetings at pup or leather events were noted to lack ambiguity. Despite this affirmation that NHVs are communicatively efficient, many participants immediately hedged their assertion by describing frequently used repair strategies. These repair strategies, as well as discourses surrounding ‘who is efficient’ at using NHVs, will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Still, this indicates a tension—NHVs are described both as efficient communicators, specifically at indirectly communicating certain affective states of mind, while also being acknowledged as prone to ambiguity, and in some cases, a complete inability to express certain concepts.

The Limits of Illocutionary Force

Interview participants were adamant that, no matter the situational context, there were certain things that NHVs would be unable to communicate. While there was broad agreement among participants regarding where some of these difficulties may arise, in other cases there seemed to be considerable variation in what individuals said an NHV could or could not be used for.

Pups were particularly likely to indicate that NHVs were best suited to communicating concepts with a low degree of relational complexity. Thoughts that were deemed to be complex, contingent on a variety of factors outside the immediate environment, or otherwise outside the

scope of the given interactive framework were often specified as being difficult to communicate with NHVs.

Quote 11: Limits of NHVs. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Berry: “Yeah, I [don’t think they work well] when it’s something very specific that I want where it’s not like a choice being laid out to me, but it’s something very specific that I want, and I can’t obviously point at it or paw at it to indicate that’s something I want.”
- B) Pup Cactus: “I mean, there are a lot of things that would be difficult to communicate, but they’re largely the things that aren’t present in pupspace, right? So if I had to be like, ‘No, I’m not enjoying this, we should take a break.’ I think that would probably not be done using pup noises.”

Both Pups Berry and Cactus indicate in Quote 11 a degree of presence within the immediate context being a prerequisite for an NHV to carry usable communicative intent. Once the NHV is communicating something separate from either the environment or the embodiment of pupspace, it loses much of its illocutionary force. Interestingly, despite the attested efficiency of NHVs in communicating boundaries and consent in sexual encounters, Pup Cactus indicates that specifically breaking off an encounter would be difficult to achieve using NHVs alone, something echoed by other interviewees. ‘Safewords’—that is, lexical items used to stop a sexual encounter, allowing participants to reorient themselves or end a distressing moment—were described by multiple participants as being unable to be efficiently communicated using NHVs.

The illocutionary use cases of NHVs as described earlier in this chapter are largely focused on broadcasting specific orientations towards the environment and actors within it on the part of the producer. This is especially amplified when emotionally or experientially intense frames of mind, such as pupspace, are prevalent in the context of utterances. Because NHVs carry their communicative ability through contextually mediated indices, many of the limitations of NHVs could arise from a disconnect between the indexical resources utilized to broadcast

common states of mind or things in the immediate environment and more complex, disconnected concepts. If a whine could be used to indicate neediness or a desire, a whine that could indicate an unpleasant experience of pain could be ambiguous enough that a pup play practitioner would feel uncomfortable using an NHV when doing so could invite an interpretation that would be communicatively opposite to their goal. As a result, the indirect communication that NHVs are efficient at may preclude their use in more communicatively delicate circumstances. The very qualities that allow NHVs to serve as vehicles for efficient, affective, and indexical communication simultaneously limit their illocutionary force to highly contextually situated environments. Contextual information and affective display are often insufficient to communicate highly complex information, and as a result, NHVs lose much of their illocutionary ability when divorced from these contexts, a loss which is amplified when ambiguity could result in serious miscommunication, such as in intense erotic encounters.

Summary

NHVs are used with a degree of communicative efficiency by members of the pup play subculture. This is particularly the case when pups utilize them to indicate illocutionary force by indexically broadcasting affective states that are associated with certain desires or needs, which are then taken up by the addressee and achieve their perlocutionary effect. Basic desires, needs, and emotional states; reactions to immediately present actions, events, or objects; and relational states between participants in either a sexual or non-sexual interaction are among the most common use cases of NHVs among practitioners of pup play. NHVs can index these affective states well enough that pups will sometimes use them to perform self-directed acts, particularly when it comes to emotion and headspace management. Pupspace in particular is very important

to allow a cohesive stream of NHVs to reinforce each other's affective state display. Because so much of the communicative content of NHVs relies on indirect inference of the things indexed by the states an NHV broadcasts, NHVs become far less communicatively viable when divorced from those use cases, which can magnify into a complete dispreference for their use when communicating complex and important sentiments that would encounter issues in ambiguity. The following chapter will examine the social frameworks and discourses, identity narratives, and physical embodiment practices that allow pups to index affective states, community participation, and narratives of the self (both as a pup and outside the pup play scene). It will additionally discuss certain repair strategies that are used by pups to help their NHVs bear the socially mediated communicative content that makes them viable means of indirect, illocutionary force-bearing non-verbal communication.

V) NHVs and Community Practice, Indexicality, and Identity

As explored in the previous chapter, NHVs are described by members of pup CofPs as effective communicative tools. However, they remain ambiguous, and lack one-to-one correspondence between sign and meaning, as most of their communicative work is achieved through indirect inference. Despite this ambiguity, pups indicate that NHVs are efficient at communicating intentions. NHVs are mediated by indexical relations that are socialized through the CofP, which produces discourse on meaning-making strategies, narratives of identity, intersections with other identities held by a practitioner, and subcultural history and etiquette practices. This constitutive, indexical background information provides much of the skeleton that allows an NHV to be utilized productively in a variety of pragmatic use cases.

Bio-Dogs: The Iconic Heart of NHV Production

Pup play is, at its heart, a collection of practices that involves the conscious mimicry of dogs. Throughout play scenes, community jargon, and symbology, dogs remain a constant reference. So thoroughly embedded in practice is the iconic ideal of canines that the term ‘bio-dog,’ or ‘biological dog,’ is used by some members of pup and pet play (the collective term for all kink practices associated with the mimicry of animals, *e.g.*, pony play) communities to differentiate between actual biological members of the species *Canis familiaris* and members of the pup play community.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, some pups will discuss bio-dogs as an active indexical resource that they try to draw from in spontaneous production of an NHV. Pup Fern describes trying to think of ‘what a dog sounds like’ to express his exhaustion in a way that feels

appropriate and well-communicated. This is especially amplified by the notion of pupspace, the subjective experience of which is explicitly equated with certain dispositional qualities of bio-dogs. Sometimes, these are understood through states of mind associated with the desire to eschew the use of human language in and of itself, accessing a state of mind wherein the practitioner embodies the idealized qualities of a bio-dog. When human speech is framed in opposition to achieving that headspace, some pups begin to reproduce a sort of pragmatically usable language ideology towards human speech in opposition to the iconic notion of canine behavior.

Quote 12: Pup Grape on the Traits found in Pupspace and Language

Pup Grape: “The headspace is a way of thinking and feeling that’s very simple [...] where you kind of lose your sense of self a bit, and you kind of, um, think in terms of just like being happy and interactive and physical, not thinking about things in terms of *words* but in terms of *emotions*. [...] Y’know, be simple, be dumb, don’t think about things too hard, and it helps to get rid of all the human words in my head. [...] I’ll try my hardest to use as few words as possible.”

In Quote 12, Pup Grape explores something highly elucidating about the way some pups conceptualize their usage of NHVs. By tying the notion of the idealized ‘bio-dog’ to traits such as simplicity, happiness, and interactivity, pups are able to use these ideological narratives as indexical markers to the affective states that form much of the communicative force of NHVs. These narratives allow NHVs to be conceptualized as playful alternatives to more normative human speech that directly mirror the commonly propagated iconic reference point of the bio-dog. This indexical framework allows an interlocutor of an NHV to make an inference along the line of: ‘bio-dogs are often simple, and playful, so that pup’s whine and play-bow is probably communicating a simple, playful immediate desire or need.’

The icon of a bio-dog is useful enough that it often becomes a benchmark for an ‘ideal’ NHV. Many participants with an extensive history of affinity for and proximity to bio-dogs

would narrativize the beginning of their learning how to produce NHVs as mimicry of the canines in their lives. Additionally, some participants noted qualitative differences in the NHVs of pups with extensive interactions and exposure to bio-dogs and their sounds compared to those with less exposure. A commonly articulated notion was that those with ample experience with bio-dogs were better at clarifying ambiguous meanings and had a broader range of vocalizations with more direct indexical proximity to bio-dogs, rather than the mediation by the ‘idea of what they think a dog sounds like,’ required by those with less experience.

Quote 13: Pup Star Orion on Closeness to Him, and Closeness to Bio-Dogs

Pup Star Orion: “I think, if you’re getting to know me in a play scenario, I can see there’s like an ambiguity for some people I’ve noticed [...] Like either some sort of either check-in or stop. I often say it’s like the sound of a dog getting hit by a car. Like I do a yelp [...], And I’ve noticed that it’s hard, especially for non-dog people to differentiate. If you’re not used to being around a dog, I noticed that people will struggle with that. Yeah, I think, um also, like definitely people who are getting used to me don’t always know how to differentiate between the barks of what I want.”

In Quote 13, Pup Star Orion draws an explicit distinction between those with extensive experience around bio-dogs and those without. Experience with bio-dogs is discussed as something that explicitly affects comprehensibility. The ambiguity that is thought to be present in the NHV is mitigated by one’s prior exposure to the variety of sounds that bio-dogs make and a connection to and familiarity with the specific vocalic styles of the individual.

Whether a given NHV is communicating an immediate illocutionary act or broadcasting a disposition, headspace, or self-directed communication, bio-dogs serve as the primary iconic reference point. Although NHVs are ambiguous and lack explicit semantic content, their routine indexical associations with bio-dogs narrow their use cases sufficiently enough that a given NHV may be readily interpreted by its addressee. These indexical associations are explicitly mentioned by pups as being relevant to their affect display, especially within the context of traits associated with entering pupspace. Despite this shared, conventional framework for certain traits associated

with dogs, individual variation in conceptualization of bio-dogs, traits possessed by a given pup, and vocalic performances of canine sounds mean that NHVs require further clarification strategies.

Making NHVs Meaningful: Context, Intimacy, and Embodiment

One of the most recurrent themes that emerged throughout the interviews was the notion that NHVs are more efficacious when directed to someone with whom the producer has a pre-existing, close relationship, and particularly so when that relationship includes previous exposure to one another in pet play or kink contexts. Participants frequently noted that the illocutionary intent behind NHVs became less ambiguous the more prior experience one had with the NHVs of a particular pup. Additionally, due in large part to the stigma surrounding open expression of kink, some pups noted that they would only initiate NHVs in contexts with close friends, partners, or community members with whom they were familiar.

Quote 14: Notes on the relevance of closeness with NHV producers. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Lemon: “I mean, we’ve been together for like [...] years. So even if I don’t know exactly what [my partner] is trying to convey, I um, can usually guess pretty well based on how I know him and what he likes, and vice-versa. Where it’s like, he knows what I usually want based on context.”
- B) Pup Apricot: “I mean, the person I communicate most with as a pup is my partner, and um, we’ve definitely developed our ‘own language’ in like, how we communicate in a lot of things. So I would say that if it’s with somebody else in the community who I don’t ‘speak as much pup with’ [...] usually I’ll just reflect that and also bring [their] sort of energy to the table.”

Pups Lemon and Apricot describe in Quote 14 both sides of the impact of emotional closeness on NHV production and comprehension. Both Lemon and Apricot note that NHVs directed towards their respective romantic partners are easier to use efficiently. Apricot goes so

far as to label the mutual understanding of his partner's NHVs as being like their 'own language.' Routine exposure to NHVs made by the individual in question allows practitioners to use less contextual framing to determine the meaning of any given vocalization. Some interviewees who were private practitioners would exclusively use NHVs with their partners. Even some who attend community-facing events, especially those who experience deep flow when they are in pupspace, would focus most of their vocalization practices directly towards their partners. In one case, the bidirectional use of specific NHVs between partners became so routine that a codified meaning could be communicated with a specified NHV. Pup Jasmine described how she uses over-rhotacized mimicry of the pitch contours of the phrase 'I love you' to communicate that sentiment to her partners while in pupspace, wherein she would avoid more normative human speech.

Despite the emphasis on contextuality and prior familiarity, the embodiment of communicative intent through body language—especially in ways thought to mirror specific movements of bio-dogs—is held by many pups as being important in facilitating communication. Some pups went so far as to say that body language was *as* if not *more* important than the vocalic performance in actually allowing an NHV to be comprehended by the addressee.

Certain non-indexical forms of body language were among the most frequently described gestures used to clarify meaning. Among these is the use of one's hand, or the snout on one's pup hood, to point to a specific object when making requests if the direction of the request would be otherwise difficult to ascertain. Other forms of gesture that were more indexical and relied on bio-dogs as a reference point, such as shifting one's lower body from side to side while making a higher pitched vocalization to indicate a joyful emotional state, were also common. In general,

most, if not all, illocutionary intentions behind an NHV were described as being aided by multimodal communicative strategies.

Quote 15: Body Language to Clarify Communicative Intent. Excer

- A) Pup Asparagus: “Yeah, I think [body language is important]. Especially trying to communicate friendliness. [...] Like, [raising] paws [to the chest]? Um, or like an affectionate boop or something like that? Like a little shove to kind of like, accompany, like, playful growls and things that like, communicate that.”
- B) Pup Grass: “So [NHVs] might be accompanied by like, head movements. So making an excited vocalization and pointing the head towards object to indicate excitement about object. I love pawing at things.”
- C) Pup Jasmine: “I’m gonna be sitting there, like, at attention or wagging, making eye contact, barking at someone. [...] If I’m being playful, it’ll be a low, grumbly growl followed by a bark, which will be followed by mimicking that canine behavior of inviting play, of like, butt up, front down, and then kind of like, wagging. [...] And then, if someone seems receptive, kind of just start barking and being dogs from there.”

The three pups in Quote 15 demonstrate that gestures aid NHVs in overlapping ways.

Pup Grass describes using gestures as actively situating the production of an NHV in the physical world, helping tie a vocalization to a specific object in the environment. Due to the lack of semantic content in an NHV, this proves useful in allowing grounded, indexical, and deictic specifications of the physical embodiment of an utterance, somewhat similar to the more conventional use of pointing. An affectively needy whine with a point to a ball is not dissimilar to someone pointing while saying, ‘Go over *there*.’

On the other hand, Pup Asparagus mentions gesture as aiding in broadcasting the friendly affective display that a ‘playful growl’ is intended to communicate. In this case, raising one’s hands (or paws) to the chest is utilized to round out the affective image that the vocalization aims to index. Pup Jasmine takes it a step further, explicitly stating that she uses ‘canine behavior’ to connect the embodied performance of gesture to the complete communicative act of initiating play with a partner. The gestures used by these pups show a routine nod towards the notions of

playfulness or friendliness that are intended to amplify the intended communicative goal and reduce ambiguity.

NHVs are thus not solely iconic gestures towards the notion of canine vocalizations, but rather are embodied in the physical and social world of the practitioner, allowing the ambiguity to be managed (although certainly not removed) by a producer and interlocutor. Although bio-dogs remain an active reference point in narrativizing communicative strategies, NHVs become more meaningful when accompanied by explicit bodily performance or index-clarifying strategies as well as when framed by a deeper familiarity between practitioners.

Finding One's Bark: Entering the Community, Acquiring NHVs, and Becoming a Pup

The acquisition of NHVs and learning how to use them in a social context is a site of ideological work in the pup play community. This is underscored by narratives of 'becoming a pup player' that underlined many of the participants' understanding of their vocalic practices. Many interviewees and survey participants have identified with the labels of 'pup' or 'pup player' for quite some time, in some cases more than a decade. This gradual process of becoming a member of the community was subjectively quite transformative for a number of practitioners.

There was no unified narrative about the acquisition of NHVs, with participants arguing that they were either more-or-less natural and easily interpretable or that they required active practice to learn. Among participants who considered NHVs something naturally acquired over the course of their engagement with pup play, a fair number made an explicit connection between prior, non-pup community-affiliated canine mimicry and their current NHV production. For these individuals, the NHVs utilized by the pup community are not qualitatively different than a broader usage of canine mimicry that exists outside of the frameworks of the pup

subculture. This was especially emphasized among participants with long-term exposure to dogs and who understood their own NHV production as an outgrowth from their prior experience.

Quote 16: Pup Grass on Naturalness of NHV Acquisition

Pup Grass: “I think it all came very naturally. [...] I think a lot of human pets have formative experiences with dogs, like, y’know, growing up with a pet dog. [...] At least for me, there’s not really been a kind of discovery phase with it. It’s very much, y’know, I get into the pup mode, I’m feeling pup-like, and then I have some type of interaction and the noise just comes from me. That communicates that mental state that I’m trying to communicate in that moment.”

In Quote 19, Pup Grass emphasizes a continuity between prior experience having a pet and the performance of NHVs. He broadens this to show that he feels many pup players utilize prior experiences with pets as a motivating factor and resource in their active mimicry of canines. As a result, for Pup Grass, NHVs were not a completely novel semiotic system, but a natural outgrowth of prior experience grounded in the situational context of play.

The notion that NHVs are *solely* naturalistic was not universally shared by all participants and seemed to run against a competing narrative current that focused on NHVs as something to which one needs to acclimatize. While interviewees such as Pup Grass focused on a cohesive trajectory of experience that allows NHVs to be produced without the need for much social acclimatization, a similarly large number of interviewees indicated that it did in fact take deliberate effort and immersion in the pup community to attain the mechanisms and comfort level necessary to use NHVs productively, or in a way that mirrored something closer to what they saw as an ‘ideal’ production.

Quote 17: Narratives of Acquisition, Acclimatization and Socialization. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Jasmine: “I think there was a degree of learning to it. Okay, it was natural, but like, it was also embarrassing and humiliating as fuck. There were a lot of feelings of shame and other internal things I had to get through in order to get into the headspace. [...] There was a degree of learning not only in getting over the, like, emotional roadblocks,

but also in learning how to shape my voice to resemble dog noises. [...] There was a period in my puppy training, or familiarization, where my Alpha would workshop my bark with me. [...] There's like this weird crossover of like, 'Everybody has their own unique bark,' but there's also, y'know, in puppy play we are adopting canine behavior, and vocalizations provide a framework for communicating what you're feeling and thinking that we can reference and adapt for ourselves."

- B) Pup Fern: "I had to learn [NHVs] over like... well, I was producing barks before I became actively a part of the pup community. My previous relationship, I would call it Mutt4Mutt, T4T ['trans for trans'; a relationship between two or more transgender individuals]. And we would play together, and that's where I first started practicing vocalizations. [...] But when I started to go to moshes, to public kink events, that's when I was like, 'Oh! People bark like this! Should I be barking like that?' And so, I'll catch myself sometimes trying to mirror actions, ranges, timbres, because in some way I want to connect more intimately with them. [...] I'm only a few years, but sometimes I feel as though I am still... the sounds that I make are still what a human thinks a dog sounds like, instead of what a dog thinks a dog sounds like."

In Quote 17, Pups Jasmine and Fern complicate the notion that NHV acquisition is simply an easily learned outgrowth of prior exposure to canine sounds. Pup Jasmine provides perhaps the most meta-pragmatically aware and concise verbalization of the process of using the ideological construction of 'canine behavior' to provide a shared indexical inventory from which pup players can draw. Nonetheless, she still emphasizes the notion that each pup player has 'their own bark' that they need to learn how to embody. Central here is the notion of self-consciousness and feelings of shame and stigma at the notion of earnestly producing NHVs. On top of learning the actual phonetic production of NHVs, Jasmine had to work with her partner to help her overcome internalized stigma and discomfort that prohibited her production of canine mimicry.

Pup Fern also mentions feeling a need to bring his own personal vocalization practices more in line with community norms to feel more intimately connected to the community. Although bio-dogs remain the ideal reference point to which he wants to aspire, Pup Fern specifically attempts to model his bark off the practices routinely utilized by other pups around him. While he has this notion of a desire and ability to mimic the sounds of a canine, Pup Fern,

because of his extensive participation in the pup scene around him, actively conforms to and mirrors the NHV practices of a stable community.

In both cases, naturalness is used as a conceptual anchor for understanding how the speakers' vocalization practices fall in line with bio-dogs as an iconic reference point for their NHV productions. Despite this, that naturalness is qualified by the fact that NHVs are seen as both deeply personal, as highlighted by Pup Jasmine, and are made normative within the subculture to the extent that even these 'naturalistic' signs begin to conform around a semi-codified notion of 'how pups in the scene bark.' These intertwining and somewhat-competing narratives frame much of how individual pups understand their own identities within the pup community.

For many pups, being a member of the community is a point of great personal significance and pride. Many pups discussed 'finding a community' through their participation in the subculture, and being integrated into the social network of the pup community as an embodied CofP is important to many, to the point of being aspirational even to some who predominantly practice pup play alone or with only their partners. Participants described their entrance to the pup community or their adoption of a pup identity in a number of ways, including exposure to video pornography, interest from prior partners, and social media.

Affiliation with the embodied community of practice was held as being legitimizing by some interviewees, including those who did not feel connected to the community, with one participant worrying that his interview would be of less value due to his concern that he wasn't 'representative' of the broader norms of the subculture. As such, the notion of a stable 'community' or 'scene' is discursively a powerful mediator for many participants, indicating a degree of appeal in conforming to community practice that may influence NHV productions.

Additionally, the strong emphasis that many practitioners place on the importance of their pup identities may provide a space for individual pups to experiment with vocalization practices unique to them. If a practitioner has a strong conceptualization of their identity as a pup, they can narrativize idiosyncratic vocalizations as fitting their image of themselves, allowing those vocalizations to gain meaning in a narrative of self within the CofP.

The existence of these competing narratives indicates that practitioners do not only aim to acquire the ability to ‘accurately’ mimic canine vocalic behavior; rather, active acquisition of the social norms that dictate NHVs’ on-the-ground use becomes as relevant as being able to competently sound ‘canine.’ Once these competencies are established, NHVs become symbolic resources that can be utilized by practitioners to perform not only explicit illocutionary intents, but also performance of one’s identity and the ways that it dovetails with the framework of ‘being a pup’ shared with their interlocutors.

Pup and the Narrative of Self: Breed Identity and Self-Expression

Identity as a pup and affiliation with the surrounding community is neither stable nor unchanging. For many practitioners of pup play, pre-existing narratives about who they are as people, as well as emerging discourses about how they engage in pup play, become resources to use in narrativizing their own identities and performing them through non-verbal communicative work.

This development was most reported as accruing through the adoption of an identity with, or affiliation towards, a specific breed of bio-dog. Often chosen for traits thought to be shared between the pup play practitioner and the breed, such identities provide an additional exemplar upon which pups may model their NHVs and social behaviors. Degrees of affiliation between

individuals and breeds are highly variable, ranging from no sense of a personal breed whatsoever to a solidified reference breed upon which vocalization productions can actively be based, and with some pups even seeking out gear that resembles their breed.

Quote 18: Some Breed Identities. Excerpts from three interviews.

- A) Pup Honeysuckle: “So, [my breed] is mainly rough collie, but then an “aliwolf.” [...] [Our dog] is also a rough collie. So it’s easy to just like get an idea of the sort of sounds he makes. [...] So, if he wants food, he will paw at things. If he wants to go out for a walk, he’ll paw at the door. I’ll do the same thing! He’s very snuggly, and he will just like, flop on top of you. He thinks he’s a lapdog. So do I!”
- B) Pup Grass: “So, I know people have said like a papillon would be a good fit for me. Like, just kind of that, French aristocratic sort of thing. Again, it ties in largely because I am like, outside of the community, I am a fashion gay. [...] So, that’s why I’m a papillon. It’s because there’s like, a frilliness, I guess about me. I think that it’s very much a reflection of me as a person. Like, I think that’s almost like this authentication of ‘I am this way.’ And then, that’s translated over to my dog kind of persona.”

As demonstrated by Quote 18, breed identities are often formed through coherent narrativization of traits that emerge through pup play, or through narrativizing traits held to be ‘core’ to a person outside of their engagement with pup play into a cohesive whole. Pup Honeysuckle’s rationale for her breed is described as emergent through her adoption of canine behaviors that happen to mimic the breed of a specific bio-dog to which she has ample access. Pup Grass, on the other hand, introduces canine associations that dovetail with his broader, stable identity and extra-community life. Both he and, importantly, the people around him associate him with being a ‘frilly’ person, and as being someone with an interest in fashion. As he is a ‘fashion gay,’ he has come to utilize the icon of a breed that indexes similar traits of ‘fanciness’ or ‘frilliness’—in this case, a papillon.

Pup Grass is not the only participant to note that his breed identity was forged in conversation with others. A number of interviewees discussed having only fluid or vague perceptions of a breed identity (for instance, Pup Asparagus’ identity as a ‘smaller, long dog’)

that was specified and whittled down through active discussion with other members of the community, particularly with those who had extensive familiarity with different types of bio-dogs. Breed identities are thus shared narrative structures that bundle together affective traits, vocalic and physical performance, and aesthetics, and are circulated throughout the CofP. Being that not all pup players have breed identities, and many come to conclusions or ideas about their breeds through discussion with others, these narrative structures become routinely deployed as resources for practitioners to utilize in their communicative performances, their conceptualizations of themselves, and their pup play. These structures can in turn be used by pups, either explicitly or subconsciously, to inform the actual phonetic quality of their NHVs, and to narrow the specific sorts of affects that are felt to be ‘appropriate’ to display.

Some interviewees discussed actively practicing to make their NHVs ‘sound like’ their breeds, for instance through watching YouTube videos. For others, however, this narrowing of affective display would often be subconscious, and discovered only through commentary from play partners. Once a breed is identified with, it can narrow the range of expectations for how a specific individual should broadcast the affective displays that do much of the illocutionary work of NHVs. When one is routinely described as acting ‘like a pit bull,’ and then comes to identify and circulate their identity ‘as a pit bull,’ interlocutors are able to interpret their NHVs by narrowing the indexical image of a bio-dog specifically to ‘how a pit bull behaves,’ aiding interpretive options along the lines of the cohesive narrative.

Gender, Neurodivergence, and Therianthropy

Breed is not the only discursive stream through which narratives of the self can impact how one engages in pup play and shape social practice. Identity as a pup can be informed by and

inform ideas about the individual's relationship with their sexual and gender identities. This was especially true for, but not limited to, trans and gender-non-conforming participants. As we have seen in Pup Grass' identification as a 'fashion gay,' the intersection between sexual orientation or identity and narratives of the self is recognized and held by cisgender pup players as well. Trans and gender-non-conforming participants in both the survey and the interview, however, were more explicit in and aware of their demonstrations and articulations of this association.

Many of the gender-non-conforming participants verbalized their experiences of gender through language related to their pup identity. In the demographics section of the survey, gender was solicited with a free-entry text field. Of 138 individuals who indicated their gender, seven explicitly tied it to their experiences as a pup. Pup Fern said that the most appropriate term to describe his gender would be 'dogfag.' Some survey responses mirrored this sentiment, including one who identified as 'transmasc butch canine,' and another 'if a lesbian was a fucked up dog-fox thing, but as a boy.'

Pup Jasmine, a transfeminine non-binary pup, describes in Quote 19 her own experience of coming to an awareness of her gender identity through the social interactions in pup play.

Quote 19: Pup Jasmine on Pup play and Gender Exploration

Pup Jasmine: "I think puppy play was the first ability for me to explore being non-binary. [...] It was less in [my own] barking and more in how I was being referred to. It was... 'Boyfriend doesn't feel right... So could I be your pupfriend?' Six to twelve months later, I was like, 'Hmm... good boy doesn't sound right. Can we say good toy?'"

Despite not using explicitly pup-centered language to describe her gender identity, Pup Jasmine describes engaging in the social practices of pup play as facilitating her own self-discovery. Once this overlapping of gender and pup identity occurs, the desire for one's expression of pup identity to mirror one's gender performance becomes relevant. Pup Lavender, another transfeminine pup, described how the image of pup play as a traditionally 'masculine'

form of BDSM drives her to keep her NHVs sounding ‘feminine’ in line with her pup persona of a ‘silly alt girl’.

If a practitioner falls somewhere on the autism spectrum, or otherwise considers themselves neurodivergent, narratives about their subjective experience as a neurodivergent person are often used to frame and inform their social and play behavior as a pup. The non-lexical communication that is used in pup play is described by some individuals who identify as neurodivergent as being subjectively easier to produce than more normative verbal speech.

Quote 20: Pup Pear on Non-Verbal Communication

Pup Pear: “Sometimes, when I’m non-verbal, I don’t have the ability to use words, but I still can use barks, which lets me communicate. [...] I think it is more related to autism, and um, but it definitely also happens a lot in pupspace. If I am thrust very quickly into subspace or pupspace, I can go non-verbal very easily because it just starts to seem like a burden to talk and express myself through words when I could just use actions and intonations.”

In Quote 20, the experience of pupspace is directly equated to the experience of going ‘non-verbal’: that is, the sensation of speech production growing more difficult experienced by some autistic individuals. When Pup Pear experiences non-verbal moments, she describes maintaining access to NHVs, allowing her to continue to communicate. As discussed by Wignall et al. (2025), there is a high ratio of those on the autism spectrum within the pup community, likely facilitated by the prevalence of certain subcultural values and practices that provide communicative structure and reduce ambiguity. One interviewee described the pup play community as providing access to social spaces where the communicative performances expected by non-autistic social standards were less valued. Because of this subcultural framework, NHVs have been narrativized and understood through the autistic experience by some practitioners of pup play.

The notion of ‘ease’ and ‘naturalness’ of NHV production in comparison with human speech is further emphasized by those who identify as therians. Pup Pear, who is also a therian,

further describes how pup play and the practices that surround it (specifically the embodied gestural acts that accompany NHVs) allow her ways of existing in the physical and social world that feel subjectively ‘natural.’ A number of participants who did not explicitly identify as therian did mention that they felt somewhat similar to experiences articulated by therians due to the intensity and subjective ‘naturalness’ of their experiences of pupspace. Pup Honeysuckle draws an analogy between her experience as a trans woman and her feelings of adjacency to therianthropy through how ‘at home’ she feels in pupspace.

Identity as a pup, then, does not interact solely with the indexical images of a specific type of breed determined through emergent experience or narratives of self. Rather, pup identity can intersect with other stable identity categories, such as gender expression, neurodivergence, or therianthropy. Narratives can then be used either to understand one’s behavior as a pup, or to provide further avenues for indexical self-representation through pup play. If being a pup affirms someone’s sense of self as a man, that masculinity can inform his self-conceptualization as a pup, and be something tied into and performed through NHV productions. If a practitioner is neurodivergent, they can understand NHVs as methods of communication that are subjectively easier, more effective, or more comfortable to them than human language. Within the broader subcultural system, the various ways people conceptualize their understandings of themselves as pups allow the communicative systems to serve as a site of self-expression and performance of other identities.

Community Norms and Narratives of History

The pup CofP has developed a number of discourses about NHVs and the ways that they are utilized. These discourses have neither been static nor overtly enforced outside of social judgment. Nevertheless, some shared understandings about NHVs were reported by participants in the survey. These discourses often focus on the interplay between mutual respect for people in the space and awareness of the history of the practice of pup play, in dialogue with the general ‘live and let live’ ethos that some participants feel is at the heart of the CofP.

One prominent norm-centered discussion regarding NHVs is when they become disruptive to the communal space or otherwise begin to infringe on other people. Pup Lime discussed the volume of any given NHV production as being relevant to its acceptability in a given context. If someone were to attend a pup event, and they were found to be overly loud by other attendees, that was argued to be potentially inviting criticism. Despite this, Lime said that the practical limit was quite high, where as long as one was not ‘screaming at the top of their lungs,’ they would likely be left alone.

Many pups associate pup play with certain values: consent, proper communication, open-mindedness, and playfulness. Adherence to these values was discussed by some participants as being important to how they view the NHV production and community practice of other individuals. A sense of continuity with the past embodied through these values was important to some pups, especially those with longer histories of affiliation with the scene. Lawson and Langdridge (2020) discuss narratives of continuity and adherence to a sense of subcultural norms as a source of contention within the pup community, with arguments of authenticity occasionally cropping up.

Pup Star Orion was perhaps the most vocal participant when discussing the importance of awareness of community norms and their transmission. He argued that an awareness of the political and relational implicature of kink, as well as the roots of the pup play CofP, are important for proper engagement with the community. The ties between the pup and leather communities were important in this framing, and Orion's participation in the title circuit (a collection of events that involve competitions and the nomination of a titleholder) provided him with access to histories of the subculture and experiences of regional variation. Although outside the scope of this study, Orion mentioned that pups in Thailand did not produce NHVs as much as pups in the American and Canadian contexts. This variation in cultural expression was also discussed by Pup Lavender, who noted she felt her local area in New Zealand lacked a stable, public-facing pup play network.

The historical connection between the leather and the pup communities was discussed by several pups as being relevant to practices surrounding NHVs and self-expression. One interviewee, Pup Orchid, who has been involved in the pup scene for nearly two decades, described a shift in normative community expectations in his CofP as it gradually diverged from the leather scene. The leather community is often contrasted with pup play through the former's emphasis on the ritualized performance of distinctive roles. Pup Orchid noted that when the pup scene was more clearly seen as an outgrowth of leather, handlers were the ones who would actively initiate any NHV production, and pups who initiated NHVs without being asked to were seen as 'obnoxious.' Pup Orchid described *that* particular social norm fading away, and being replaced by more self-initiated NHV production. He tied this to the gradual expansion in popularity of pup play outside of the traditional, ritualized leather subculture. Many scholars who have done work on pup play have discussed its recent increase in popularity (Lawson and

Langdridge, 2020; Hammack and Wignall, 2024), which, together with the associated diversification of demographics, has been accompanied by the emergence of different narratives about how ‘different types of pups bark.’

One of the discourses encountered in the interviews was the notion that transgender pups produce more NHVs than cisgender pups. This notion was voiced by both transgender and cisgender participants. Pup Aspen, the coordinator of a pup retreat, mentioned anecdotally that he has noticed a massive increase in the number attendees who are not cisgender gay men, while asserting that ‘transfemme puppies are really loud.’ Outside of gender, length of affiliation with the community was associated by participants with an increased proclivity to produce, and better comprehension of, NHVs. Multiple participants articulated this was especially true regarding handlers—if one identified as a handler yet was perceived to have poor NHV comprehension skills, multiple interviewees noted they would likely assume these people lacked a long personal history in the scene. This is amplified by the notion that handlers perform a large amount of the interpretive work of an interaction directed to them in comparison to interactions directed at pups. Several participants noted an asymmetry between the type of communication directed at handlers, and how they expected the handler to take up the intent.

Despite variation, as well as the view that everyone has their ‘own individual bark,’ participants shared a quasi-universal notion that they would be able to distinguish between the canine mimicry of those affiliated with the CofP and those who were not. Specifically, there was a sense that the NHVs of a pup would be more likely to sound phonetically similar to a bio-dog, and that it would have ‘heart’ and ‘genuineness’—qualities that would be lacking from mimicry produced by non-pups. Although no participant stated that they would immediately be able to distinguish if someone was a pup or not solely based on their NHV production, nearly all

interviewees had a nebulous sense that they could detect a sense of irony or detachment from emotional affiliation and intent in the vocalic productions in non-pups. Considered with the 85% (n=100) of 118 survey respondents indicating that NHVs were important to their sense of identity as a pup, this suggests that pups construct an emic/etic distinction between NHVs produced by CofP members and those from the outside.

Despite interpersonal variation and discourses surrounding cross-demographic differences, NHVs are understood by many participants as being situated within a subcultural framework, with a history that has documented evolution and change. This indicates that, although the specific form of an NHV may differ, and the specific illocutionary intent could be contextually variable, members of the pup CofP have enough of a notion of NHVs as a semi-stabilized subcultural practice that ambiguity can be reduced. Productive access to and awareness of this framework is ideologically constructed as being important to identity as a pup, and those with less access are assumed to be newer to the subculture and sometimes lacking historical literacy. Despite its semi-universality, many pups see the way they interface with the icon of the bio-dog as distinct from those outside the pup scene and as a salient marker of community identity, wherein NHVs are used as productive, non-verbal communicative performances.

Limits, Breakdown, and Repair Strategies

The ambiguity present in NHVs, as well as their lack of formal semantic content, means that despite frameworks to facilitate the transmission of information, participants still readily acknowledge that they cannot communicate everything. Where social mediation and inference do not suffice, certain repair strategies can be employed.

As previously discussed, body language is seen by many pups as essential to the communicative work of NHVs. It is sometimes needed to clarify meanings or indexical relations. Body language is thus seen as a repair device.

Quote 21: Pup Tumbleweed on Body Language as Repair

Pup Tumbleweed: “There’s only so many sounds and intonations you can make, at least within this limited range of what I am trying to do in like, dog space. And so, then I’m also relying on like, am I, y’know, in the ways dogs use body language, am I, y’know, pressing into you?”

Body language is portrayed in Quote 21 as an addition to help facilitate affect display, when vocalic productions are considered insufficient at communicating the sorts of things Pup Tumbleweed intends. Although intended to aid a vocalic production that is limited in efficacy, the use of body language is still performed within the general framework of pups’ communicative style and with bio-dogs as a distinct reference point.

This communicative scaffolding does much of the work of preventing NHVs from being completely misinterpreted by an interlocutor. Repeated ties of NHV productions to the cultural understandings of how canines communicate provide a basic framework to prevent an NHV from being read as completely meaningless sounds. Furthermore, routine exposure to an individual’s vocalizations in pup play can build familiarity with the communicative strategies of a given partner, rendering them easier to interpret in context. Outside of this, embodied participation in subcultural networks can provide routine exposure to discourse and a variety of vocalizations that allow NHVs as a whole to lose their categorical ambiguity. As such, many pups describe mirroring or emphasizing certain aspects of their NHVs to reiterate an aspect of their illocutionary intents, and many view the process of familiarization with a given individual as important to provide the proper understanding of their communicative goals.

Despite these ambiguity-reducing strategies, there are times where they are insufficient. When the whole communicative venture of an NHV fails, and especially if that which one needs

to communicate is seen as important, participants describe defaulting to their native languages in normative speech. The use of human speech was especially frequently described as being preferable in the communicative contexts discussed as limits of the system in the previous chapter. Human speech would sometimes be framed as something to avoid, especially to those deeply engaged in pupspace; yet it largely remains available to clarify communicative intent, or signal matters of import that NHVs are deemed unable to properly express.

This broadly mirrors the limits of the communicative ability of analog codes discussed by Wharton (2009). While other types of analog codes can impart a surprisingly productive amount of information, they introduce enough ambiguity that falling back onto a semantically richer system (in this case, normative human speech) can become necessary. NHVs are described by pups as working similarly. Although the subcultural scaffolding creates enough indexical and iconic ties and socialized frameworks for understanding the broad set of illocutionary intents that can be communicated by an NHV, their lack of formal semantic content does not allow them to function as a pure linguistic system. When the indexical and identity work cannot carry the communicative load, participants fall back on normative human speech to communicate that which they intend.

VI) NHVs in Production

While participants described in great detail the ways that they socially used, and understood their usage of, NHVs, the scope of the project prohibited gathering data regarding *in situ* NHV production. Despite this, participants still provided information about how they conceptualized different aspects of the production of NHVs. Participants described certain ‘types’ of NHVs, labelled for and modeled after mimicry of specific types of dog sounds. These specific types gain further specific communicative meaning through iconic sound metaphors, which in turn allow any given NHV to be understood as a specific type of vocalization.

Qualitative Descriptors of Sounds

Many participants described the sounds that they make by likening them to specific types of vocalizations produced by bio-dogs. Interviewees discussed producing ‘barks,’ ‘whines,’ ‘yelps,’ ‘grumbles,’ and so on. Survey participants were provided a list of common dog sounds from which to select those that they felt reflected how they produced in their NHVs. If they had additional terms that they used to describe their sounds, they were able to indicate those as well.

The most common qualitative descriptors of canine sounds were used by nearly all survey respondents (see Fig. 4). ‘Barking,’ ‘woofing,’ and ‘whining’ were selected by over 90% of respondents, with ‘growling’ only slightly lower. Among the 20% of survey respondents who specified additional sounds, the descriptors provided were often simply other types of onomatopoeic descriptors of the sounds animals make. Included in this category were terms such as ‘yipping,’ ‘gekkering,’ ‘huffing,’ and ‘whimpering.’

The strong overlap of onomatopoetic descriptors indicate that pups consider their vocalic performances to be part of a broadly socially stabilized typology of vocalizations.

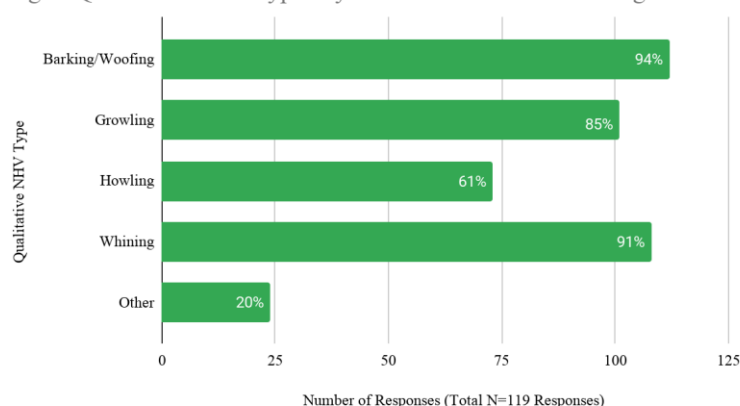
Individual variations in NHV

production may nonetheless be subsumed under an agreed-upon label such as ‘barking.’ When describing NHV production, the iconic ‘bio-dog’ thus continues to be used as a semiotic resource for framing descriptions of NHV production.

In the interviews, these broad categories were often modified with descriptive adjectives to further specify the qualities of whines, barks, growls, *etc.* These descriptors were often directly tied to the affective and emotional states intended to be communicated through the NHV. For example, an interviewee may describe a ‘happy yip.’ The number of emotional or affective descriptors used by interviewees was extensive, and included ‘happy,’ ‘playful,’ ‘pained,’ and ‘fun’. Although it wasn’t common for interviewees to elaborate on precisely what made these qualities apply to a given vocalization, there was some degree of association between productive features and these states.

One participant, Pup Grape, provided rough impressions of what he believed to be the phonetic qualities present in certain types of vocalizations. These descriptors, presented in Quote 22, are provided by only a single interviewee and remain highly impressionistic, yet they demonstrate that at least some pups maintain semi-standardized associations between sound and

Fig 4: Qualitative NHV-types by Rate of Self-described Usage



affective display outside of those that are solely concerned with prosody. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Quote 22: Pup Grape’s Impression of the Phonetic Qualities of Different NHVs

Pup Grape: “So, um, ‘yes’ would be more /əwu·wu·wu·wu·wu·wu·wu·/ where you’re like making ‘W-O’ sort of sounds? [...] If I’m being like really jokey, then I’ll do more of the... /ə..ɪə..ɪə..ɪə..ɪə..ɪə/ [...] If I’m like, going up to someone and I’m kind of just saying hello I tend to make more of this sound where I go like... /ʔf ʔf/. Where it’s sort of started with—I like to start off with ‘a’s a lot. Um, I feel like your more like, dominant puppies are more like—they start with ‘r’s. [...] I kind of use a lot of vowel sounds to sort of communicate I am more playful as a puppy.”

Pup Grape provides a relatively systematic approximation of the sorts of phonetic qualities associated with different performances and different personae of NHV producers. He specifies consonant–vowel combinations that are associated with particular codes (affirmation), affective displays (playfulness), and social performances (greetings). Especially of note is his equating rhotic-initial NHVs with a subjectively more ‘dominant’ social role and disposition, and vocalic-initial NHVs with a more submissive or, in his case, ‘playful’ orientation.

Although detailed phonetic analysis is outside the scope of this project, the shared qualitative descriptors for specific types of vocalizations indicate a semi-stabilized framework for understanding the NHVs produced within the pup community. This suggests that the phonetic content of an NHV may carry *some* amount of interpretable content independent of environmental and social context.

Prosody

Although phonemic content was not frequently discussed, one aspect of NHV production that *was* discussed at length by multiple interviewees was the use of prosodic modulation to impart a specific communicative disposition, with some interviewees describing ‘intonation’ as a core aspect of their NHV production.

For the purposes of this paper, the term prosody refers to certain suprasegmental qualities found in production, namely F_0 (henceforth simply referred to as ‘pitch’), intensity, and contour. Prosodic features such as pitch have additionally been examined alongside voice quality as productive avenues for the performance of emotional affect and attitude (Ní Chasaide and Gobl, 2004; Grichkovtsova et al., 2012). Due to this project’s focus on the metapragmatic discourse of participants rather than phonetic analysis, the term prosody was chosen as a catch-all term for these features. Furthermore, participants were not asked about metalinguistic knowledge of the prosody of their NHVs.

Participants often reported a strong association between pitch and different affective displays or relational stances. Higher pitch was universally associated with smaller, playful, friendly, or submissive dispositions. The active use of high pitch was described as a means initiating play as a submissive by some, especially when contrasted with lower-pitched productions, which were associated with assuming a more dominant relational role.

Quote 23: Discussion of Pitch and Affect. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Fern: “So I’ll try to go like and try the higher register for me, kind of the more playful. So it’s just like [produces relatively high-pitched barks] and trying to come off as friendly as I can. But yeah, that’s how I would initiate kind of playing with another pup on the mats in a mosh. [...] So the higher the pitch, the more playful. Which I’m sure could definitely be read into, in terms of gender performance.”
- B) Pup Grape: “And then I think another thing you do is make higher-pitched noises. I would say your barks tend to be more like whiny barks, more cutesy barks. And then you kind of shrink yourself a little bit. [...] I think it is important to communicate you are being submissive to them by shrinking yourself a bit. [...] If I want to play, or if something feels good, or if, y’know, the whole idea of being like, more high-pitched when you want to be submissive.”

In Quote 23, Pup Fern discusses how pitch helps him indicate that he wishes to begin play. Pup Fern further connects the indexical relationship of friendly disposition with higher pitch to other socially mediated indexical relationships between pitch and dispositional display

work, namely as relates to gender. Pup Grape ties high pitch to a display of submissiveness, amplified by co-occurring gestures. The modulation of pitch indicates a desire to take on a submissive role, which is further performed by modifying one's posture to appear 'small.' These two quotes indicate how the modulation of pitch is a productive element in doing the illocutionary work of a given NHV. Because these pitches are associated with and thereby index specific dispositional and affective states, addressees can use that phonetic content in tandem with the context of utterance to come to an understanding about the intended illocution of a given NHV.

Quote 24: Discussion of Imitation and Volume. Excerpts from two interviews.

- A) Pup Apricot: "I'd probably mirror at least the volume of the sounds. So if someone is suddenly barking really loudly, I might bark back really loudly back at them. If someone is— I'm trying to think. Yeah, I'd say if someone is coming up to me in kind of an inviting way, I might, you know, I might switch to a vocalization that is more, I guess, like inviting? Usually it's more a matter of me trying to signal my emotional reaction."
- B) Pup Star Orion: "I would say like, the context of the venue or the location changes. The biggest thing I would say changes is volume. I am a lot quieter when I'm like, surrounded by my friends, but we're in a public space, but I'm still gonna like, bark to get certain things across. [...] I have a pretty good bark, and it's honestly loud. And I have scared myself before, barking at something because I didn't understand what that loud sound was. Then it clicked—it was me!"

Pitch modulation was not the only prosodic feature discussed by participants as being relevant to NHV production and interpretation. In Quote 24, Pup Apricot discusses mirroring volume as a directional communicative practice. He ties the mirroring of his interlocutor's prosody to the broadcasting of an emotional reaction to their actions. The active mirroring of the NHV produced by the addressee is framed as important to the broadcasting of the illocutionary goal. Pup Star Orion, on the other hand, connects variation in volume with the context, mediated through a public/private distinction discussed by both Orion and other participants. Additionally,

Orion describes his bark as being ‘loud,’ with variation in volume being a way he tries to distinguish his idiolect from that of others.

Participants also discussed the notion that certain prosodic features align with a sense of how they want their ideal NHV productions to sound. Prosody was one of the main aspects that practitioners stated they could modulate in their NHV production. Actively trying to imitate the sounds of a specific type of dog required attention to certain features like pitch and volume. In Quote 25, Pup Jasmine describes her own journey with her breed identity as being largely influenced by the sounds of different breeds, with the prosody of a pharaoh hound held as an ideal to which she aspires, but feels she has not yet mastered.

Quote 25: Pup Jasmine and Breed Prosodic Indexicality

Pup Jasmine: “When I became a pup, my most, the breed I had most experience with was a basset hound. And I was able to like, because I had—my uncle had a dog and I was able to make that baying sound, which was really fun and just felt right that I could do it fairly realistically. [...] Which is fun, because then I get to howl like an air raid siren, and it’s totally a part of the breed. I would say, yes, my current breed is a pharaoh hound, but it wasn’t always. [...] I would say [I model my sounds off of pharaoh hounds]. I don’t have that much experience with it, and it’s something I’m still practicing at. I can’t quite get the tone of the bark because it’s like, a higher, mid- to higher-pitched bark. But, things like howling, I will very much try my best to emulate that.”

Prosody provides an embodied quality to the production of NHVs that allows them to do much of their indexical work. Immediate pragmatic stancetaking and orientation display, responding to the actions of another pup, indexing one’s ‘personal bark,’ and associating with a specific breed of bio-dog were all discussed as being achieved through prosodic modulation. As such, prosody is a productive element in the utterance of a given NHV, and is understood by practitioners to carry a sizable amount of the communicative content in any given instance of canine mimicry.

The notion of natural signals and codes (Ohala, 1984; Wharton, 2009) is especially relevant given many pups’ conscious modeling of their vocalization productions on their

impressions of bio-dogs. While NHVs are quite deliberately signals in the sense that they are produced volitionally and with communicative intent, they rely on indexical citation of the biological, natural co-occurrence of pitch, height, and other associations found in bio-dogs.

While much of the interpretive work necessary to productively understand NHVs in embodied contexts is scaffolded and understood through subcultural means, some is not. The proliferation of the frequency code (Ohala, 1984; Gussenhoven, 2002) in a variety of contexts means that the indexical resource of ‘high pitch for “small” meaning’ is available outside of the pup community. However, the code is given further clarification and meaning through subcultural discourses that establish bio-dogs as a semi-codified iconic reference point, allowing pup players’ assumptions regarding how dogs communicate to serve as productive tools in their own communicative practices.

Summary

While the pup CofP provides a specific framework for interpreting and performing NHVs, interviewees acknowledged qualities outside of the social context that allowed a given NHV to be interpreted as having a specific meaning. Although pups vary in their productive ability and metalinguistic awareness of NHVs, broadly circulated sound–metaphor associations serve as the starting point for interpretation. These associations are highly embodied, functioning in tandem with other aspects of production, such as environment and body language.

The embodiment of these associations dovetails with natural codes associated with narratives surrounding physical traits, namely through the frequency code (Ohala, 1984; Gussenhoven 2002). These are further grounded in situated subcultural and identity narratives that make meaning from different discourses surrounding bio-dogs, allowing individuals in the

pup play subculture to narrativize themselves in ways mediated by these discourses. These productive features then become a useful tool in pragmatic indexical self-expression, and as such become productive in interaction between members of the community.

The building blocks that allow members of the pup play CofP to make use of NHVs as a genre of non-verbal communication are not entirely manufactured *ex nihilo*. The broad agreement on productive qualities that signal specific orientations or interactional dispositions aligns with relevant discourses in non-pup circles. As such, despite the novelty of the communicative system, and its intense ambiguity and limitations in affective display and indirect illocutionary effect, pup NHVs are not understood by their users as random collections of noises. Rather, they exhibit some semblance of a semi-codified interpretive system.

VII) Discussion

Natural Signals, Natural Codes, Gesture, and Prosody

Despite my referring to the productions of pup players as ‘non-human vocalizations,’ all the sounds utilized by pups *are* produced by humans, and are shaped by the ways humans interpret and broadcast signals. The phonetic and prosodic features of any given NHV are understood not only in ways mediated by subculture-specific discourses, but also in conversation with broader features found throughout human communication.

The communicative ability of non-semantic vocalizations has been examined extensively in the literature, revealing that non-verbal communication can do much illocutionary, discursive, and indexical work (Poyatos, 1993; Clark and Fox Tree, 2002; Jefferson, 2004; Brown and Prieto, 2021; Pell and Kotz, 2021). Of the various features potentially present in an utterance, prosody (specifically pitch, but also to a lesser extent intensity) was discussed by participants as being particularly relevant to the communicative content of a given NHV.

Wharton (2009) discusses the prosodic features of an utterance as falling on a spectrum between purely natural meaning (on one end of the spectrum) to conventionalized and arbitrary linguistic meaning (on the other). On either end, he approaches these features as proper codes of an analog sort. To clarify how codified communicative signals can function, he introduces a distinction between *translational* and *procedural* meaning. Translational meanings encode a concept that can be *decoded* by an interlocuter; procedural meanings, in contrast, serve to effectively narrow the broad range of interpretative options available to the listener by highlighting the salience of some options over others (Wharton, 2009). Prosodic modulation can encode procedural meaning by highlighting certain aspects of vocal production, which are then interpreted by the listener through inference and the gradual reduction of opposing

interpretations. Prosody thus carries communicative function through procedural indexical highlighting, and has been shown to provide information regarding the speaker's stance (towards the addressee or the information being expressed), politeness, confidence, emotional state, and purposeful display of identity traits (Brown and Prieto, 2021; Pell and Kotz, 2021). When routine and widely circulated, these sorts of indices can become more-or-less standardized, as seen in Ohala's (1984) frequency code, discussed previously.

While achieving their communicative intents through codified means, these prosodic features are often seen to have some connection to natural signals. Wharton (2009) goes so far as to claim that some aspects of prosodic modulation, such as highly embellished articulation, are natural *signs* of speaker intent that are then interpreted through social inference. Increased articulatory effort is thus a naturally co-occurring feature of an intent to clearly get one's point across, but the speaker's primary point in utilizing this embellishment is *not* the broadcasting of that state of mind (Wharton, 2009). The frequency code is likewise explicitly described as a natural code of a biological facet of an organism—as in the smaller the articulatory apparatus, the higher the pitch—which is then interpretable in sociopragmatic contexts (Gussenhoven, 2016).

NHVs are conceptualized within the pup community as explicit mimicry of non-human animals and are thus understood by those who produce them as being 'natural' productions of one sort or another. They are, like prosodic modulation or laughter (or any other non-verbal communicative format, for that matter), analog codes that are interpreted through procedural means. Specific instances of NHV production are understood in tandem with the associative meanings read into the prosodic features that accompany them, forming the framework that allows NHVs to be interpreted subculturally and to carry illocutionary force.

Participants often discussed their NHVs as being in conversation with gesture and body language. Brown and Prieto (2021) examine gesture and prosody together as multimodal aspects of human communication, using McNeill's (1992) four-part classification system to examine the referential and pragmatic communication that gesture can encode. Gestures are segmented into iconics (that mirror that which they referentially accompany), metaphors (that non-naturally coincide with that to which they refer), beats (that highlight the prosodic features of an utterance), and deictics (that index physical space); these often accompany prosodic modulation, and can communicate much of the same sociopragmatic and discursive information as can prosody (Brown and Prieto, 2021). Wharton (2009) places gesture on a continuum, from the most natural sign to the most properly linguistic, as he does prosody, with such linguistic signs as are necessary to help clarify the speaker's meaning when performing a speech act in an utterance.

Scarantino's (2018; 2019) theory of affective pragmatics also discusses gesture as being able to procedurally broadcast pragmatic meaning. The theory's 'speech act analogues' are able to indirectly bring about much of the illocutionary acts—and their intended perlocutionary effects—as can speech acts proper (Scarantino, 2018). As with prosody, gesture cannot encode translational meaning (unless incorporated into a purely arbitrary, non-iconic, and fully linguistic system, as in a sign language), yet through the narrowing of acceptable alternatives it is able to affect and transmit communicative content through procedural means.

Body language was also described as important in facilitating communication through NHVs. This can range from deictic gestures that specify the object or location to which the speaker is reacting, or regarding which they are broadcasting their emotions, to more explicit mimicry of the gestural habits of bio-dogs. These gestures were stated by some participants to be

as important as the actual vocalic content of an NHV, if not more so. As such, the body language that often accompanies an NHV can be seen as mirroring and reinforcing the content indexed by the prosody of the utterance, allowing all these features of communicative behavior to function as a coherent whole.

The findings of this study suggest that the NHVs of pup play CofPs should be understood as a genre of procedural communication. The actual productive elements discussed by participants, as well as the specific types of illocutionary acts suggested to be particularly easily expressible using NHVs, indicate that gestural and prosody-like procedural information forms the cornerstone of the utterance of any given NHV. The foundational frameworks upon which further subcultural understandings are built are based on natural signals and codes that are associated more broadly with non-verbal communication that indirectly facilitates information transfer in contexts outside of the pup play community.

Indexicality: Bio-Dogs, Breed, and Affect

While the production of NHVs is based on the mimicry of natural signals produced by non-human animals, they still need to be understood and taken up by interlocutors in order for them to be productive, agential forms of communication. The pup play CofP provides the structures that mediate NHVs and allow them to be useful through active ideological tagging of the iconic, indexical notion of biological canines. The indexical associations read into canines are not invented *ex nihilo*, but rather are reappropriations of ways of thinking about dogs that exist in broader cultural discourse.

Dogs are utilized as a linguistic resource not only within the pup community. A common, less distinctly subcultural avenue for this can be seen in the proliferation of ‘doggy blogs,’ social

media accounts where individuals take on the perspectives of their own pets, narrating from constructed, first-person perspectives (Leppänen, 2015; Lind, 2024). This genre of Internet content actively utilizes discursive narratives surrounding canines and their relations with humans in order to create an authenticating text. Linguistic resources, namely the adoption of a ‘doggielect,’ as well as indexical notions of dogs as excitable, friendly creatures eager for human attention, are used to construct a familial relationship between the pet and their owner (Leppänen, 2015).

This conceptualization of dogs likewise forms a cornerstone of the creation of the pup subculture-specific utilization of ‘bio-dogs’ as an indexical resource. Pups tie their (para)linguistic performances to this image and create discourses around the notion of mimicking biological canines to the point that pups with greater histories of interaction with dogs are seen as more proficient users of NHVs. The production of a vocalization is thus understood as being in some way tied to the mirroring of the general behavior of a dog—the indexical association between the NHV and expected canine-like behaviors aids the procedural meaning-making of the NHV itself, further narrowing the expected range of meanings of any particular utterance.

‘Bio-dogs’ do not, however, remain a single, static category. Instead, a variety of understandings about ‘different types of dogs’ become usable resources in the performance of one’s self both as an individual and as a participant in a social interaction. Silverstein (2003) discusses the notion of orders of indexicality: that is, social meaning can be construed from the interaction of the direct implicature of the use of a specific linguistic form through its mediation by ideological associations with other categories. To give a concrete example, proper usage of the T/V distinction in, say, French or German can directly index politeness towards the specific

addressee, but can also be understood as indexing that the speaker is a ‘polite person’ with an understanding of the proper usage of social norms (Moore, 2020).

Specific biological codes, such as the frequency code, are examples of a productive aspect of NHVs that can be used as an order index to show a specific conceptualization of the self and the social role a pup wishes to take on. This can be used in an instantaneous interaction between pups, such as signaling one’s desire to take on the submissive or dominant role in a sexual encounter, or extrapolated into broader conceptualizations about the ‘type of pup’ the individual in question wishes to construct themselves *as*. To give an elaborated example, a pup can produce low-pitched, rhotic NHVs to immediately index a desire to act more dominant in a scene, and can, over time, utilize that routine to construct themselves as a ‘dominant-leaning pup player.’

These constructions of different types of dogs are further refined by conceptualizations of ‘breed.’ Not all pups have a breed, but among those who do, breeds help provide further refinement for any potential meaning of a given vocal production. They can also serve as more specific reference points from which pups may construct their NHVs. The natural signals produced by the specific breeds of actual, biological canines become iconic reference points for pups’ indexical productive use, as demonstrated by some pups explaining that they actively practice their vocalizations to mirror those of their particular breeds. These indexical readings can also further the projection of the specific ‘type of pup’ a given individual wants to embody. The indexical possibilities here can be very abstract, as can be seen in the cases of Pup Asparagus (who considers the closest thing to his breed identity to be a ‘smaller, long dog’) and Pup Lemon (who wants to broadcast a self-image of himself as a non-existent ‘alien dog’).

Narratives surrounding dogs, as well as those surrounding specific breeds, also provide associative scaffolding to allow direct emotional displays to be achieved through indirect, procedural broadcast. As mentioned previously, broader notions of dogs as excitable and eager to interact are widely circulated (Leppänen, 2015). These affective features become associated with the NHV performances of pups and lead to commonly assumed dispositional states of playfulness, friendliness, neediness for human interaction, and submissiveness to be widely held as easily communicable dispositional states. However, through embodied and vocalic performance mediated by the indexical field of canines, a variety of other dispositions can also be communicated, such as dominance, rejection, and impatience.

These indexical associations, both direct and higher-order, allow NHVs to be more readily interpreted in a social context than the pure mimicry of the natural signs of canines would lead one to assume. While the productions themselves are procedural, affective displays not too dissimilar from other forms of non-verbal illocution, and the narratives surrounding the behavior of canines and ‘different types of canines and pups’ allow practitioners to draw upon indexical resources to further narrow the intended speaker’s meaning during the production of any given utterance. Sometimes, these indexical associations are constructed directly from iconic reference to the vocalic performance of specific types of bio-dogs, but they are just as frequently instead shaped by purely discursively mediated understandings of the ‘type of pup’ one wants to perform as in an interaction or within the subculture more broadly. The pup CofP provides a framework for the socialization of these different indexical fields and associations, allowing broader culturally circulating discourses about the behavior of dogs to be embodied and semiotically accessible tools for communicative and identity practices.

Pup as Subculture and Narrative of Self

Newmahr's (2010) discussion of kink as serious leisure has provided a useful framework for the approach taken by much subsequent scholarship on the topic (Hughes and Hammack, 2019; Wignall and McCormack, 2024). Additionally, the notion of kink as serious leisure coexists with other narratives, such as 'essentialist' narratives, which highlight non-normative sexual desire as something present from a young age and a strong element of their conceptualization of self (Walker and Kuperberg, 2022). These two relatively affirming viewpoints are often contrasted with approaches that pathologize kink, constructing it as disordered, unhealthy, violent, and sometimes criminal (Hughes and Hammock, 2019).

Affirming narratives that view kinky desire and activity as non-pathological are diffused through engagement with community structures. Participants in Hughes and Hammock's (2019) study often related initial feelings of shame and discomfort with their kink identities being overcome through a journey situated in grounding in an in-person community. In Newmahr's (2010) ethnography of a major metropolitan BDSM community, those with extensive personal participation in the community described their entrance to that BDSM network as feeling as if they had come 'home.' The community became a site for strong personal affiliation, often becoming central to the participants' social lives and identities, sometimes completely eclipsing their 'vanilla' (non-kink-related) social relationships.

Many aspects that define a serious leisure pursuit also incline a community to function as a CofP. Persistent participation in the leisure pursuit in spite of difficulty, the pursuit of the leisure as a career, the acquisition of activity-bounded skills and the terminology around them, and the proliferation of a shared ethos and identity stemming from participation in that community all create avenues for routine co-mingling, thus developing narratives of belonging,

jargon, and beliefs about the world. As the framework of serious leisure has been applied both to BDSM more broadly and to pup play more specifically, I believe it establishes the latter as a productive site of analysis as a CofP.

Many interview participants established a deep degree of personal affiliation with the pup play community as being central to at least some part of their identities. Association with a broader collection of people who came together to ‘dog out,’ and who shared a history, an ethos, and community practices, informed many of the participants’ approaches to both their own personal practices and their notions of self. Affiliation with the pup play subculture was valued as a way to interact with people who ‘get it.’ As with many subcultures, this strong sense of affiliation with a central community also led to participation in discourses about people who adhered more, or less, to that which were constructed as the pillars of community practice. This manifested specifically in narratives around who has better access to and production of NHVs, namely those with ample prior experience both with bio-dogs and in-person pup play community participation.

Given the discourses surrounding NHVs in the community, ranging from ‘who barks well’ to ‘when is it rude to bark,’ people who routinely participate in the community are exposed to these discourses through the socialization process. Despite the availability of canines as an iconic construction outside of the pup play community, and the view that NHVs are essentially mimicry of natural signals, pup play CofPs provide social frameworks that dictate and narrativize the usage of NHVs more productively. Even among participants who had some prior experience with the vocalic mimicry of canines in kink contexts, such as Pup Fern, routine participation in an in-person community led to an exposure to discourses and specific ways of understanding and producing NHVs in accordance with community norms and expectations.

Although within the CofP there was widespread acknowledgement of diversity of use cases for different types of NHVs, certain narratives about specific indexical features were circulated through the community. While everyone was thought to have their own unique bark, pups as a collective group were thought to bark in a way distinguishable from non-pups. The indexical associations regarding certain types of pups and bio-dogs have thus become resources for practitioners of pup play to use in broadcasting their own identities.

The indexical resources that aid in identity performance can affect a variety of affiliative and orientational categories, such as the affectation of a dominant or submissive personality or role, or the way a pup narrativizes their conceptualization of their breed. Because narratives of indexicality circulate throughout the community and are socialized into practitioners, pups learn to make conscious decisions to utilize the resources available to them. Actively raising the pitch of one's NHVs may be used to indicate one's role as a submissive, for example, or one may try to mirror the louder volume of barks expected of a breed such as a husky.

Breed identities can serve as a narrativized way of tying one's sense of self to narrowed indexical reference points that are able to be mediated by the CofP. Constructed, ideological associations between traits and certain types of dogs allow pups to mediate identities that they have outside of their affiliation with the kink community through a non-verbal communicative genre specific to the pup CofP. To use Pup Grass' breed as an example, ideologically constructed notions of papillons as 'French' point to a second-order indices of 'frilliness' and 'fanciness,' which in turn are understood as dovetailing with his identity as a gay man interested in the world of fashion. This breed identity laces together a collection of interrelated, indexical category associations to tie aspects of one's sense of self to one's identity as a pup.

Many pups come to an understanding of their breed identities through discussion with and solicitation of thoughts from those close to them. Many participants describe not initially having a breed until close friends, playmates, or partners suggest that they remind them of such-and-such breed of dog, with that breed being connected either with traits that emerge dynamically through play scenes or with other identities held by the pup in question. This serves to tie individuals' pup identities to broader discourses and ideological constructions of 'types of dogs' which circulate within a specific, embodied CofP. In turn, these breed identities become iconic references upon which individuals consciously (or subconsciously) model their communicative behavior, aiding in the reification of NHV practices with indexical associations within the CofP.

Narratives surrounding NHVs within the CofP also become avenues for the performance of gender or non-human (therian) identities held by a practitioner. This is especially true for pups who identify as transgender, some of whom described the social network surrounding pup play as an avenue for playing with and exploring their own gender presentations. With the explosion of popularity of pup play as a form of kink, and an increase in transgender-identified pups, narratives surrounding the 'ways trans pups bark' have created another avenue for identity performance within a framework tied specifically to the pup subculture. Additionally, those with therian identities display strong affiliations with the iconic references that form the basis of the indexical work, providing an avenue for self-expression through close productive similarity between those icons in one's NHVs.

Despite the procedural nature of NHVs, the strong affiliation with an embodied pup CofP as a stigmatized serious leisure practice provides ample socialization for indexical signs associated with different types of pup and bio-dog to gain currency. The centrality of the CofP in

the identities and social lives of practitioners increases their socialization into certain common use cases of NHVs and ideas about what social information those NHVs signify. The broad acceptance of different indexical associations of NHVs and the types of pups and bio-dogs that produce them allow pups to make references to other aspects of their senses of self through secondary orders of index. This allows NHVs to become a site of indirect identity performance, mediated by shared community ideologies about ‘who makes which types of sound.’

Illocutionary Force in Indirect Affective Display

As elaborated in the previous section, NHVs are thought to carry enough indexical information to communicate ways of understanding oneself both *as* a pup and outside of that identity. When questioned about their use in on-the-ground interactions, pups understand NHVs as efficacious communicators of certain types of content. Chapter IV discussed the various illocutionary goals NHVs are thought to be useful—or less useful—at conveying. In general, broad affective and emotional displays that were understood as being relevant to the environment of interaction were the main uses participants described having found for NHVs.

Traditionally, the principal examples of speech acts have been strictly conventionalized, almost ritualized, invocations. J. L. Austin (1975) provides as examples the use of ‘I do’ in a marriage ceremony and the formulaic christening of a ship. However, from very early on in the development of speech act theory, scholars have noted how commonplace it is to bring speech acts into fruition without relying on explicit phrasing. Searle (1979) argues that the widespread process of coming to understand the illocutionary intent of an indirect statement derives from context-situated inference. This relies largely on Grice’s (1975) Maxims, particularly those as they relate to the economy and relevance of speech. To paraphrase Searle’s example, when

someone responds to an invitation to see a film with, ‘I have to study for a test,’ one can deduce that the statement is a rejection of the invitation using the baseline assumption that the statement is relevant to the conversation in combination with knowledge about the world (earnestly studying for a test would take at least as much time as would seeing a film).

The primary mechanism at play in an example such as this is the inference that one type of illocutionary act is being used as a substitution for another. For instance, a speech act may be understood as felicitous by inferring the intent of its preparatory (‘Are you able to do X?’) or sincerity (‘It is the case that I would like if you did X’) conditions (Searle, 1979). Through inference as to the relevance and social propriety of these types of statements, the illocutionary intent—in this case, a request—can be performed, and the intended perlocutionary effect can be taken up. In the case of the indirect rejection highlighted above, the preparatory condition, being able to see the film, is pragmatically negated by the time constraints of studying, even if that negation isn’t explicitly stated.

At first glance, however, the illocutionary efficacy of NHVs does not seem to function in a way perfectly analogous to this understanding of indirect speech acts. The lack of semantic content in the production of any given NHV precludes it from being able to point at complex, translational meanings. However, an additional element that facilitates indirect illocutionary acts is the notion of intentionality. Bach (2006) elaborates on how the communication of a given proposition is often achieved by means of inducing in the addressee the idea that one *intends* to broadcast the meaning in question. A shared understanding that the producer of an utterance is likely trying to produce a specific meaning *in* their utterance allows the speech act to be taken up in the first place (Bach, 2006).

Within the interactional framework provided by pup play CofPs, NHVs can be understood as agentive vocalizations made for a distinct purpose of some kind or another. Working on the assumption that the signal produced by an individual is indeed intentional and purposeful, members of pup CofPs are then able to assume an NHV is a communicative act. In doing so, interlocutors are able to infer a speaker's intended meaning in a given utterance by following the assumptive steps laid out by Searle (1979) in his discussions of indirect speech acts.

Although NHVs communicate procedural meanings through analog codes, that does not preclude them from having meaningful content that is specifically intended to be broadcast. Scarantino's (2018; 2019) theory of affective pragmatics indicates how natural signals can be utilized to communicate illocutionary intents through displays of 'natural information,' which are then situated into an interactional context by an interlocutor. To use an example from Bjórnsdóttir and Rule (2017), a cold and guarded standoffish posture with an angry facial expression does genuine communicative work when performed by a straight man in a gay bar. It may communicate an immediate emotional state, or, through inference by means of the environment, indicate he is heterosexual. In either case, it signals a potential illocutionary intent to keep people in the environment from interacting with him (Bjórnsdóttir and Rule, 2017).

The indexical and ideological narratives read into different types of NHVs, as well as assumptions about purposeful communication, allow NHVs to be described as effective displays of illocutionary intent. Natural information broadcast by body language and gesture, read in tandem with sound–meaning metaphors mediated by biological codes, allows certain dispositional states to be associated with specific types of NHVs. The illocutionary intents can be inferred by interlocutors through chronic exposure to the producing individuals themselves, as

well as to the community frameworks and subculturally mediated iconic references to ‘how different types of bio-dog and pups act.’ Pawing at a specific object, for example, while raising the pitch of one’s repeated whines, allows a general disposition of ‘desire’ to be inferred, specifically deictically pointed to the object through body language.

NHVs may lack semantic content, but they are embedded in a CofP that narrativizes and makes ample use of them to such a point that NHVs become communicative. These narratives consistently make active use of iconic references to biological natural signs and signals that encode natural information. With that baseline, the indirect communication that NHVs provide related to specific states of mind or reactions to objects or events allows them to carry enough content about a speaker’s intended meaning that productive induction as to the illocutionary goal of any given NHV can be accomplished by those with exposure to the discourses that surround them.

The need for exposure to both community norms and the communicative strategies of specific individuals indicates how context-based inference allows participants to make meaning of NHVs. Participants’ recognition that the NHVs of close companions are easier to comprehend than those of newer acquaintances, and the understanding that such is in part the result of it being easier to read the intents and dispositions of someone with whom one has ample prior experience, point to contextuality being of prime importance. Likewise, discourses surrounding handlers being seemingly inexperienced when their abilities to comprehend NHVs were deemed to be poor shows that pups consistently understand their NHVs as communicative styles, the use whereof requires exposure and contextual framing.

The NHVs of the pup play CofP provide an example of how communicative strategies that are devoid of semantic content can nonetheless be used to effect illocutionary force. Pups

understand their vocalizations through natural signs and signals, which are indexically associated with different interactional dispositions and affective states. Understanding NHVs as conscious, speaker-initiated communication, interlocutors are able to use contextual inference (mediated by subcultural affiliation) to infer the intended speaker's meaning of an affective display broadcast by a specific NHV. Exposure to the contextual framing of NHVs allows the affective states to occasionally index the fulfillment of felicity conditions around desires, aversions, and immediate reactions, which can then be taken up to indirectly induce an addressee to perform some sort of perlocutionary act.

The Limits of the System

Despite assertions that they are efficacious, participants were also ready to acknowledge that NHVs have very clear limits. Understanding non-verbal communicative strategies as sorts of procedural information transfer—rather than translational ones—the meaning of a given NHV is directly tied to locally situated inference. The more removed the illocutionary intent of a given vocalization is from the immediate environment, the less effective that vocalization becomes. This holds whether the vocalization is indexing an affective state or deictically pointing to the world around the producer.

Pups were in near-universal agreement that NHVs could not readily communicate 'complex' thoughts. Complexity was described varyingly by different participants, but often entailed temporal or spatial distance from the place and time of the utterance, or large amounts of stipulation and qualification. To give a concrete example, an NHV would be more able to induce the listener to take up *I want that ball right next to you* than it would *I want you to go into the room on the left-hand side of the upstairs hallway and get the yellow chew toy*.

Wharton (2009), discussing the functions of interjections, describes accounts regarding the ability of interjections to communicate conceptual information. Arguing against the notion that purely conceptual information can be satisfactorily associated with a specific interjection, he notes that the immediacy of an interjection and its situation within an event structure cannot be properly analyzed by viewing it as a translational, conceptual communicative act. Wharton instead describes interjections as being better understood as communicating attitudinal or speech act-like information that is associated with different conceptual states, in a manner not dissimilar at all from how NHVs accomplish their indirect illocutionary signaling.

Working from the assumption that the attitudinal displays of interjections and NHVs function similarly, as well as the limitations of the communicative system described by participants, it is reasonable to assume that NHVs would lack the ability to broadcast conceptual information. This shifts a large amount of their ability to actually transmit information onto the inferential ability of the interlocutor in the specific context of utterance. If NHVs only encode procedural information, then inferences that fall outside of the realm of reasonability would be unlikely to be produced.

In the case that an NHV would be unable to communicate that which was intended, participants nearly universally described falling back on human speech. Some participants described an aversion to this practice, specifically because it would interfere with one's ability to remain in pupspace. On the other hand, other participants were adamant about the need to use human speech in certain high-intensity circumstances, such as the use of safewords to stop undesired sexual activity or particularly (and unpleasantly) intense play. In the mold of other BDSM and adjacent communities, discourses around safety and consent are particularly valorized and held as important by members of pup play CofPs (Newmahr, 2010). Building upon

the importance placed on safe communication by members of kink communities, safewords function as important delineators where maintaining healthy boundaries takes precedence over the performance of certain roles.

Despite pups' inclinations to describe their use of NHVs as efficacious, given the use cases described by interviewees and survey participants, it is likely that their efficacy is described specifically in relation to the sorts of things pups use them to communicate. To view NHVs as a complete communicative system, with no more ambiguity than conventional and fully linguistic forms of communication, would be incorrect. Rather, the limitations of the system indicate that they function as affective displays that are primarily effective at their intended communicative goals within a bounded and socialized CofP. The further one strays from the CofP, the embodied situation of utterance, or semi-codified sound–meaning associations, the less effective NHVs become at communicating illocutionary intent.

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

While this project does shine some light on an otherwise understudied phenomenon, there are many areas still left to explore. This major research paper focused on metapragmatic discourse regarding the vocalization practices of individuals in pup CofPs. As a result, the data provided can only discuss what pups say, and think, they do when they communicate using NHVs.

In order to more fully understand the usage of NHVs within pup play CofPs, inquiry into the *in situ* production of the communicative genre is necessary. This project did not examine on-the-ground communicative practices, which limits the degree to which it can properly analyze NHVs in productive use. Many of the community-facing events in which a group of pups would

be producing NHVs occur in environments in which erotic encounters between individuals are not uncommon, such as leather bars or BDSM play spaces. As a result, proper ethical procedures would be of the utmost importance. This may introduce logistical obstacles to potential research trying to examine *in situ*, grounded, and spontaneous uses of NHVs.

Additionally, while production data was collected at the Phonetics Laboratory at York University, due to time constraints, proper phonetic analyses of NHVs was not conducted. As both streams of collected data relied on participants' descriptions of their practices, issues related to their metalinguistic awareness of their productions may obscure some fruitful sites of inquiry. Participants may not be aware of, or may not have the terminology to describe, the phonetic features of their NHVs. Although many participants did express vague ideas regarding certain features of their productions, namely those relating to prosody, these often remained loose, qualitative impressions rather than systematized knowledge.

This reliance on self-reported data introduces a potential point of failure that is common to much qualitative work: accurate retelling and recollection of one's actual practices. As this project focused on applying metapragmatic narratives to mechanisms of use, this is particularly relevant. The inclusion of the survey portion was an attempt to see the broad circulation of specific trends as they appeared outside of the interviews; however, potential discrepancies should nonetheless be considered.

The study's decent sample size provides *some* protection against this concern but introduces additional limitations or concerns that ought to be addressed. As discussed in Chapter III, the reliance on snowball sampling may have inclined the data set towards over-representation of participants enmeshed in specific networks at the expense and to the exclusion of others. This may be amplified by the specific media channels through which participants shared the survey

with others. The large proportion of transgender-identified participants is likely in some way connected to this snowball sampling. Many of the organizations and community groups that I approached to help circulate the survey specifically identify as *queer*-centered groups, as opposed to *gay*-centered groups. Some, such as Toronto's Trans Unleashed, are exclusively composed of transgender pet players; others, such as the Southern California Creatures Collective, explicitly aim to foster a gender-diverse participant group. As such, individuals with social networks affiliated with these groups are disproportionately likely to be gender non-conforming or non-cisgender in comparison with the broader pup player population.

Some interview participants, such as Pup Aspen, mentioned noticing an increase in the number of transgender pup players over the last few years. This coincides with reports that pup play is 'exploding in popularity,' and that people outside the traditionally dominant demographic of cisgender gay men are beginning to participate in the community. Nonetheless, quantitative research consistently shows a majority of practitioners of pup play being gay or bisexual cisgender men (Wignall et al., 2022; 2025; Hammack and Wignall, 2024).

Certain demographic factors were also unexplored in this research. This notably includes race, which may have a significant impact on the narratives surrounding NHV production. Although race was discussed by some participants, being explored most thoroughly by Pup Star Orion, not enough data was provided by other interviewees or survey respondents to serve as a productive unit of analysis in comparison. Additionally, class affiliation may be a relevant factor in narratives of belonging to, and interaction with, pup CofPs. This would be particularly relevant to discourses surrounding the interface between gear, headspace, and resultant NHV productions. Further studies will be necessary to examine how narratives of race and class intersect with one's identity as a pup, and what impact they have on the communicative behavior

of pups. Geographic location was also not examined as thoroughly as it could have been. Among the participants were pups from large cities with dedicated kink scenes, such as Toronto and parts of Southern California, as well as those who live in places lacking strong institutionalized kink communities, such as rural Alberta and parts of New Zealand. Due to the role of socialization in the proliferation of certain indexical associations of NHVs, access (or lack thereof) to pup play communities likely plays an outsized role in one's acquisition of, and narratives surrounding, NHVs.

These limitations, however, show clear areas for further research. Examination of the demographic profiles under explored in this project could yield fruitful results, specifically as they relate to narratives of belonging and how pup CofPs circulate iconic and indexical frameworks. Certain off-hand mentions of variance in the communicative practices of different pup CofPs in different parts of the world—namely, Pup Star Orion's opinion that pups in Thailand bark less than do those in North America—indicate variation in subcultural practice as a valid avenue of study. Likewise, *in situ* production remains perhaps the most fruitful area for further research. Examining the on-the-ground productions of pups in specific, embodied contexts would more thoroughly elucidate uptake mechanisms that the metapragmatic discourses produced by participants in this research neglected to mention.

Furthermore, pups are not the sole CofP that utilizes heavily iconic indexical narratives for identity performance or communication. Pup play is one (particularly popular) subset of the broader family of kink activities included under the label of 'pet play.' One other large group under the pet play umbrella with a well-connected and embodied community is that of pony players, where participants mimic equines (Wilcox, 2011; Giannini, 2012). The similarities

between pups and ponies in terms of the adoption of a non-human persona within kink spaces leaves room for research comparing the vocalic practices of both communities.

Animals are also a reference point for two communities mentioned frequently by participants in this survey: furies and therians. Although sometimes confused for one another in popular discourse, these two subcultures approach interfacing with animals as communicative and intrapersonal icons in distinct ways. For participants in these communities, the ways their respective narratives of ‘fursona’ (stylized representations of oneself or a created character as an anthropomorphic animal) or ‘theriotype’ (conceptions of one’s (sometimes spiritualized) identity *as* an animal) interact with linguistic or extra-linguistic behavior could serve as an avenue to explore similar mechanisms in non-kink contexts. When the ideological construction of an ‘animal’ is deployed to understand one’s identity in semi-spiritualized discourses, in the case of therians, or in broader notions of creative expression in the case of furies, how do the mechanisms and use cases of NHVs differ from the kink-foregrounded context of pup players?

Finally, other kink and kink-adjacent communities may use ideological and indexical references to model their own linguistic behavior. Chambers’ (2019) analysis of corpus data on a gay male erotic hypnosis board shows how ideological constructions of ‘jocks’ and ‘coaches’ are associated with certain indexical performances utilized productively by participants in that site of practice. Another instance of a community that has been explored primarily in non-linguistic literature is that of age players, where participants adopt the role of someone either younger or older than their biological age (Tiidenberg and Paasonen, 2019). Some work has already been done examining how conceptualizations of gender performance are mediated and explored by practitioners of age play, in a way not too dissimilar to the narratives shared by participants in this survey (Bauer, 2018). While I am hesitant to directly extrapolate findings from pups to any

of the above communities, the similarity in community framing between pups and ponies, the shared reliance on iconic indices of animals in the case of therians and furies, and pups' and age players' shared use of circulated indexical frameworks to perform a role may prove fruitful areas of further research.

As demonstrated, other CofPs more broadly provide creative frameworks for their members to play with indexical associations of certain social groups or non-human entities to understand and interact with their own identities and relations to others. The NHVs of pup players are one instance of a potentially more malleable set of indexical and ideological resources. The limitations in this present study clearly demonstrate the need for further research involving both this specific CofP and those that may engage in similar indexical and ideological practices.

VIII) Conclusion

This paper has examined the canine mimicry of members of the pup play subculture using a qualitative framework influenced by speech act theory. Through semi-structured interviews and an anonymous survey, the present study investigated metapragmatic discourse about how NHVs function and are interpreted within this specific community of practice. The reported uses of NHVs and their efficacy and interpretation indicate that they serve as a genre of procedural information-encoding communication, not dissimilar to the ways other procedural information displays are used (*cf.* Wharton, 2009; Scarantino 2018, 2019). NHVs function predominantly through subculturally mediated discourses that tie into indexical associations held by and socialized into queer CofPs.

Kink communities remain both stigmatized and underexplored in the linguistics literature. This study provides one example of how a kinky, queer CofP has socialized to communicative effect the indexical readings of signs not typically associated with productive communication. Not existing in a vacuum, the pup play subculture provides an example of how ideological notions associated with non-human animals can be reinterpreted and used to productive expressive effect. The means by which this occurs provides ample opportunity for a given CofP to narrativize traditionally non-linguistic vocalization phenomena to allow interlocutors to contextually infer indirect illocutionary intent.

These findings indicate that contextual information provided by and socialized into a specific CofP can allow even extremely non-semantic signals to bear illocutionary force. Shared indexical narratives can be circulated so thoroughly within an embodied CofP that indexical associations can bear enough communicative information to allow speech act-like indirect

illocutionary force display, identity performance, and affective display to become viable and understandable despite NHVs' lack of explicit semantic content.

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X) Appendices

Appendix I: Codebook

Included are the primary codes as well as subcodes used in the coding of transcribed interviews. Primary codes are underlined, with subcodes being listed with dashes following them.

Identity:

- Sexuality
- Gender
- Entrance to pup community
- Length of time
- Kink roles
- Leatherqueer status
- Centrality of pup identity
- Understanding gender through pup identity
- Understanding community role through practices
- Breed
- Breed identity acquired through discussion with others
- Affinity with bio-dogs
- Narrative of self
- Lifestyle kink
- Curated social networks.
- Breed being understood through a narrative of self
- Intersectionality
- Disability
- Sex worker career
- Therianthropy
- “Puppygirls”
- Understanding sexuality as dovetailing with pup identity
- Pup as cohesive with narrative of self
- Sense of “becoming a different person”
- Intersection of pup and furry identities
- Initial feelings of shame, discomfort, or oddness
- Sense of a personal bark
- Relationships
- Solo practitioner
- Breed as emergent through practice
- Emphasis on dehumanization
- Variety of kink identities competing with one another in self-perception
- non-dog species
- Strong identity with gear
- Separation of pup and non-pup identities
- Evolution of pup identity

Illocution:

- Attention requests
- Basic needs
- Basic desires
- Emotional display
- Reactions to events
- Kinky communication
- Self-directed communication
- situation-directed responses
- NHV just for the sake of making sound
- Responding in a way that feels 'natural'
- Lack of clear intent on the part of the pup
- Greetings
- (Of body language) showing enjoyment of something or an action
- Initiating puppy headspace
- Initiating play
- Basic positives and negatives
- Affirmations and denials
- Subcultural belonging flagging
- Self expression and compartmentalizing experiences
- Acknowledgement of a statement
- Meta level joking barks

Community Practices:

- Mutual engagement and free association
- Hierarchy practices
- Chosen family
- Subcultural history
- Cross regional variance
- Scene name
- Positive experience in kink community
- Shared etiquette practices.
- Spaces
- Demographic shift
- Increase in popularity
- Concern for transmission of traditional community norms
- Political elements of kink
- Focus on communication
- 'Live-and-let-live ethos'
- Sanitization and desexualisation narratives
- Importance of community networks
- Comparison of kink practice with LGBTQ liberation
- Ethics of consensual dehumanization
- Feeling new players don't respect community norms
- Shift in norms

- Old guard leather protocol expectations
- Leather culture
- Titles and title circuit
- Variation between protocol and leather scenes
- Lack of access to community spaces
- Online practice
- Lack of access to human speech in pup space
- sense of being able to tell between pup vs non-pup NHVs
- Gear meanings
- 24/7 dynamics
- Acquisition facilitated by participation in community
- Community Events
- Laughing at bad barkers
- Judging very loud barks.
- Differences between trans and cis pups in culture
- Feeling of strong community bonds
- Dichotomy between people who access headspace vs those who don't
- Tendency towards more realistic barks
- Increased awareness of pup play in outside cultures
- Centrality of communication in producing a pup space.
- Historical transition from leather to pup norms
- Sense that pup and furry overlaps
- Leather differentiated through being seen as more strictly regimented than pup play
- Diversity of practice
- Sense of difference between kinksters who consider themselves dogs vs pups
- Differences between other kink communities and pup
- Differences between furry and pup
- Community NHV practices
- Stigma against pups who lack gear
- Accidental NHV production
- Sense there is more gender and sexuality diversity in non-pup kink communities
- Codified gestures (paw mimicking wave)
- Sense of outside judgment

Meaning Making Strategies:

- Contextual situation of NHV production
- Spectrum of realism
- Body language
- Qualitative descriptors
- Conscious/Unconscious Distinction
- Sense of ambiguity
- Relevance of closeness with NHV producer
- Relevance of prior experience with bio-dogs
- Multi-optionality
- Handler-centric meaning derivation practices
- Mismatch between clarity of meaning for pup vs handler

- Relevance of pup-space in producing NHVs
- Relevance of kink roles in when certain communicative styles become relevant
- Use of human language as a fall back
- Burden of communication on handler
- Eschewing human communication
- Prosodics
- Asymmetry between pup- and handler-directed NHVs
- Subconsciousness of breed
- Gear as relevant to headspace
- Sense of efficiency
- Using specific objects.
- Sense of lacking nuance.
- Universality of practice
- Pup-space as inhibiting human speech production
- Pup-space as being disrupted by human speech
- Intentionally modelling NHVs off of breed
- Reciprocity
- sensing a vibe to warrant NHV
- NSFW/SFW dichotomy.
- Direction of communication irrelevant
- Sense of awareness of NHV functions being relevant
- Lack of understanding tied with lack of experience in the scene
- Gear as relevant to NHV comprehension
- Acquisition
- Interpersonal variation of repertoire
- Relevance of nonverbal communication skills
- Headspace as not entirely grounded in NHVs
- Relevance of furry or therian status
- Sense of bio-dogs as meaning making tool
- Adhering to community ethos
- Sense of naturalness
- Community status as prerequisite to NHV production comfort
- Lack of standardisation
- Sense of limitation based on pure vocalization alone
- sense of vulnerability in pup
- Mirroring
- Headspace as interrupted by major distractions
- Variance of headspace from individual to individual
- An ideal one wants to sound like.
- Sense of “negotiating” in an exchange
- Sense the partner needs to be committed to their role for ease of NHV
- Human speech as accessible regardless of headspace
- Body language not being totally necessary if negotiation occurred prior
- NHVs not coming out as intended
- Sense of ease transitioning from pup space to non-pup space

- NHVs as being able to communicate something that's more accessible without human speech
- Hyper embellishment
- Relevance of frequent pup-interactions with communication partner.
- Mutual understanding established through each other's codes
- Differentiation between dominant communications (more human) and submissive ones (more NHVs)

Limits:

- Complex thoughts
- Trauma communication
- Location
- Immediate, important requests or need
- Rationales
- Safewords
- Multi-optionality
- Specific, hard to express emotions
- Sexual consent

Appendix II: Survey Questions

Question 1: Consent Form and Email

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey!

This research project aims to provide linguistic description of non-human vocalizations (ie, barking, growling, woofing, whining, etc.) as they are used amongst members of the pup play community. The data is being collected as part of the course LAL6600 – Research Seminar in Theoretical Linguistics to later be used in the researcher's Major Research Paper as part of the culmination of their graduate studies. Your information will be retained in confidence, and your real names will not be included in any work (such as presentations or papers) produced through data collected through this project. A pseudonym with no connection to any name provided to the researcher will be used in its stead.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

After consenting to participate in the research, you will be directed to a brief survey asking about your use of non-human vocalizations, or other individuals' use of such that you have noticed. It is anticipated that the survey will take roughly 30 minutes to complete. The length of the survey is determined by the role(s) in pup play dynamics that you indicate in the survey. All data will be anonymous, and you are free to skip any question that you do not want to answer, unless otherwise marked in the survey.

Risks and Discomforts:

The nature of this research involves questions as to your participation in a kink subculture. As a result, some of the topics broached through the survey may be personal and have the potential to

bring up feelings of discomfort or embarrassment. Any question is freely skippable at any time with no repercussions to your ability to participate in the research, nor on your relationship with the researcher or York University staff.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

Non-pathologizing academic research on kink helps to broaden the scientific community's understanding of practices that may be unknown to them, and therefore seen as odd, strange, or otherwise bizarre. Linguistic research on kink identity performance helps us to look at these practices as rule-governed and grounded in broader ways that all people communicate. Additionally, through participation in this research, you may have the opportunity to reflect on and think about your own use of non-human vocalizations as a pup. This may give you the opportunity to be more aware as to how you use non-human vocalizations with other pups, handlers, or other community members in general.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study:

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer any particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality:

All data produced through this research will be anonymous prior to the sharing of the data with any persons or the use of the data in papers, presentations, etc. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence, and your name will not appear in any report or any publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored on the researcher's password-locked, encrypted computer and on their advisor's, in a password-locked, encrypted folder. Only the researcher who directly collects the data will have access to any identifying information that you provide (ie: contact information). Anonymized data and anonymized audio/video recordings may be retained by the student enrolled in the course for use in their Major Research Project. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Your data may be collected by asking demographic information, such as your sexual orientation, gender identity, years of experience in the pup community, role in the pup community, and so on. Because this project may employ e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries, and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

Lottery Draw:

You have the option of enrolling yourself in the opportunity to be selected to win a \$50 CAD gift card to the Toronto-based retailer 'The Men's Room'. If you wish to enter the draw, we ask that you enter a means of contact in the field below to aid in the selection process and to inform you

following the draw. The winner will be announced following the collection of all data. Entry into the lottery draw is completely voluntary and has no effect on your relationship with the researcher, York University staff or ability to participate in this research.

Questions About the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the principle researcher (mck73@yorku.ca) or the course organizer, Professor Thomas Kettig by email (tkettig@yorku.ca). This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca)

By selecting either of the top two options below, you indicate that you have read the above and freely and knowingly give your consent to participate in this anonymous survey.

- I consent and wish to participate in this survey. I wish to participate in the lottery draw. (Please enter an email address in the empty field/box below so that you may be contacted):
- I consent and wish to participate in this survey. I do NOT wish to participate in the lottery draw.
- I do not consent, and will not participate in this survey.

Question 2 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to all participants

Do you engage in pup play, puppy play, or canine pet-play or otherwise consider yourself a member of the pup community?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

Question 3 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to all participants

Do you engage in pup play primarily as a pup, a handler, or occupy both roles?

- Pup
- Handler
- I am both a pup and a handler
- Something else:

Question 4 : Free response, asked to all participants

How much experience do you have engaging in pet play?

Question 5 : Free response, asked to all participants

How would you describe your gender?

Question 6 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to all participants

Would you describe yourself as transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Other/unsure (please describe):
- Prefer not to say

Question 7 : Free response, asked to all participants

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Question 8 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

Do you currently have any pups that you are in a relationship with/own? Please specify the number of pups you have if you answer 'Yes'.

- Yes:
- No
- Other (please describe):

Question 9 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Do you currently have any handlers that you are in a relationship with/are owned by? Please specify the number of handlers that you are in a relationship with if you answer 'Yes'.

- Yes:
- No
- Other (please describe):

Question 10 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Are you currently a part of a pack? Please specify the number of members of your pack if you answer 'Yes'.

- Yes:
- No
- Other (please describe):

Question 11 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Do you use non-human vocalizations. mimicry of dog sounds, or other such vocal productions in your pup play?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/other (please describe):

Question 12 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

What non-human vocalizations do you produce during your play?

- Barking/Woofing
- Growling
- Howling
- Whining
- Other (please describe):

Question 13 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Do you use non-human vocalizations solely in private, solely in public, or in both private and public scenarios?

- Both private scenarios
- Both private and public scenarios
- Only public scenarios

Question 14 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

If you produce non-human vocalizations in public, which of the following scenarios would you be likely to produce them in?

- Play parties
- Pups socials/Pup moshes
- Bars
- Any place where there are other pup players
- Munches
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe):

Question 15 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Who do you use non-human vocalizations with?

- Other pups
- Handlers
- Other (please describe):

Question 16 : Single-selection Likert scale, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

How efficient are non-human vocalizations at communicating what you want them to?

- Very efficient
- Efficient
- Mildly efficient
- Neither efficient nor inefficient
- Mildly inefficient
- Inefficient
- Very inefficient

Question 17 : Free response, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

What sort of things do you use non-human vocalizations to communicate?

Question 18 : Single-selection Likert scale, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

How able would you say you are at understanding the non-human vocalizations of other pups?

- Very able
- Able
- More-or-less able
- Neither able nor unable
- More-or-less unable
- Unable
- Very unable

Question 19 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Would you say you can enter, embody, or otherwise interact with 'pup space' when you engage in pup play?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 20 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles who additionally indicated that they enter pupspace

In your view/experience, are non-human vocalizations important to maintaining, accessing, or otherwise facilitating 'pup space'?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/other (please describe):

Question 21 : : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles who additionally indicated that they enter pupspace

In your view/experience, do your non-human vocalizations change depending on whether or not you are in pup space?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/other (please describe):

Question 22: : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

Are non-human vocalizations important to your identity as a pup or your performance thereof?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/other (please describe):

Question 23: Single-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

Do you prefer pups that you interact with to communicate with you using non-human vocalizations, mimicry of dogs, or other such vocal interactions when you in a pup play context?

- Yes
- No
- No preference
- Unsure/other (please describe):

Question 24 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

What types of non-human vocalizations have you heard from pups you have interacted with?\

- Barking/Woofing
- Growling
- Howling

- Whining
- Other (please describe):

Question 25: Single-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

Do you find pups you interact with use non-human vocalizations more in private contexts, public contexts, or about the same in either?

- More frequently in private
- About equally in public and private
- More frequently in public

Question 26 : Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

What public spaces are you likely to hear pups making non-human vocalizations?

- Play parties
- Pups socials/Pup moshes
- Bars
- Any place where there are other pup players
- Munches
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe):

Question 27: Multiple-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

Do you find pups use non-human vocalizations more with other pups, handlers, or about the same amount with either?

- More with pups
- More with handlers
- About the same amount

Question 28: Free response, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

What sort of things are you easily able to pick up on that a pup is communicating through their non-human vocalizations?

Question 29 : Single-choice Likert scale, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

How able would you say you are at understanding the intent behind the non-human vocalizations of pups?

- Very able
- Able
- More-or-less able
- Neither able nor unable
- More-or-less unable
- Unable
- Very unable

Question 30 : Single-selection multiple choice, asked to handlers and those who take on both roles

Do you find your relationship with a pup impacts how easy it is to understand the intent behind their non-human vocalizations?

- Yes, I have an easier time understanding pups I own/have a relationship with
- No, I don't think it has much of an effect
- Unsure
- Other (Please describe):

Appendix III: Survey Responses

Included are the responses to the above set of survey questions. Free-entry responses were included only if they A) were elaborations on an “other” option; or B) had less than 20 unique answers. Due to numbering issues on the part of the exporting of the datasets, questions have different labels in the images. Accurate question numbering in line with Appendix III is provided. Some questions regarding demographics were not included due to the either not aligning with either of the above two criteria or being potentially personally-identifying to participants. Despite not falling into either of the above criteria, answers for Questions 17 and 28 were included, as those questions were major analytic resources in understanding the illocutionary goals pups use their NHVs to achieve.

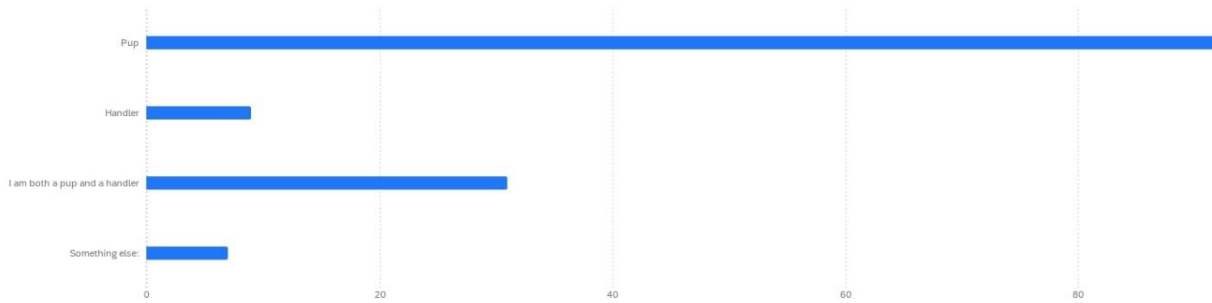
Question 2:

Q1: Do you engage in pup-play, puppy play, or canine pet-play or otherwise consider yourself a member of the pup community? 147 ⓘ



Question 3:

Q2: Do you engage in pup play primarily as a pup, a handler, or occupy both roles? 139 ⓘ

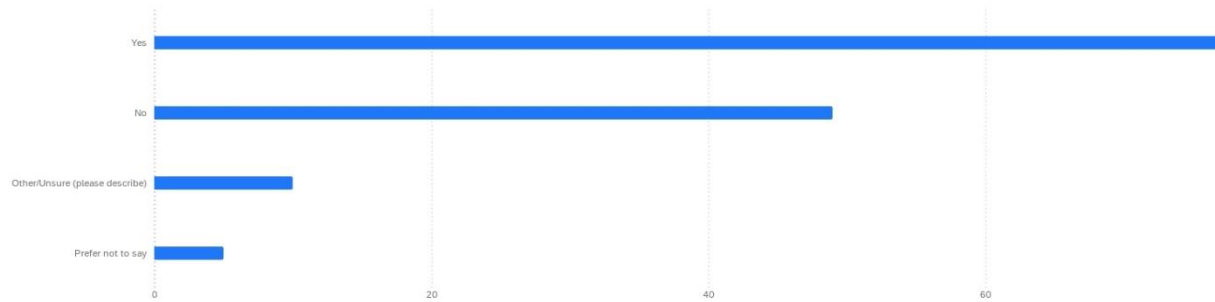


‘Something else’ responses:

- “Alpha pup meaning I act as a pup and handle but when I handle I handle as a fellow pup.”
- “Criticter”
- “I’d consider myself more of a fox.”
- “More of a foxdog. I do fall into the roll of handler when playing with my packmate sometimes.”
- “Mostly pup, am interested in handling but havent found someone to.”
- “Wolfdog”
- “Chew toy/handler?”

Question 6:

Q28: Would you describe yourself as transgender? 138 ⓘ



‘Other’ responses:

- “Because my gender at times does not match my defined “sex” I would say I’m sorta transgender”
- “Exploring”
- “Genderqueer”
- “I fall under the Trans umbrella but feel like trans masc doesn’t describe me properly, but i’m not averse to the term”
- “I prefer transsexual but in spaces where understanding of gender identity is limited I use transgender as an umbrella label for my transition and gender identity.”
- “I prefer transsexual over transgender.”
- “If people want clarification, I usually say yes as I am on the medication for it.”
- “Non-binary” (x2 responses)
- “Unsure”

Question 8:

Q29: Do you currently have any pups that you are in a relationship with/own? Please... 46 ⓘ



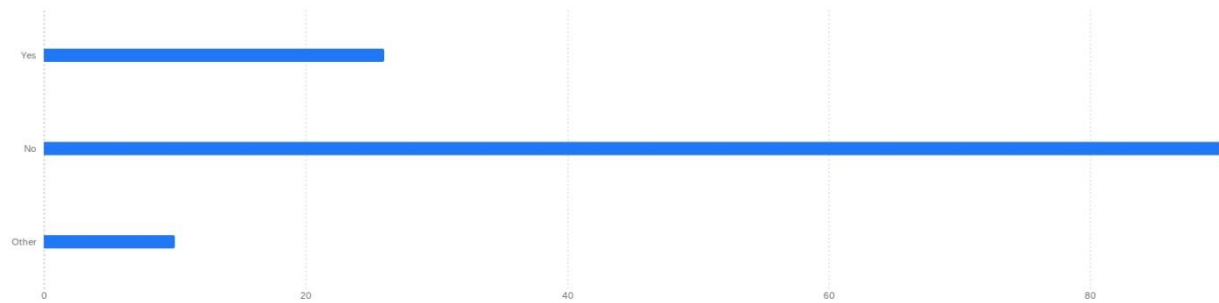
Question 9:

Q30: Do you currently have any handlers that you are in a relationship with/are... 128 ⓘ



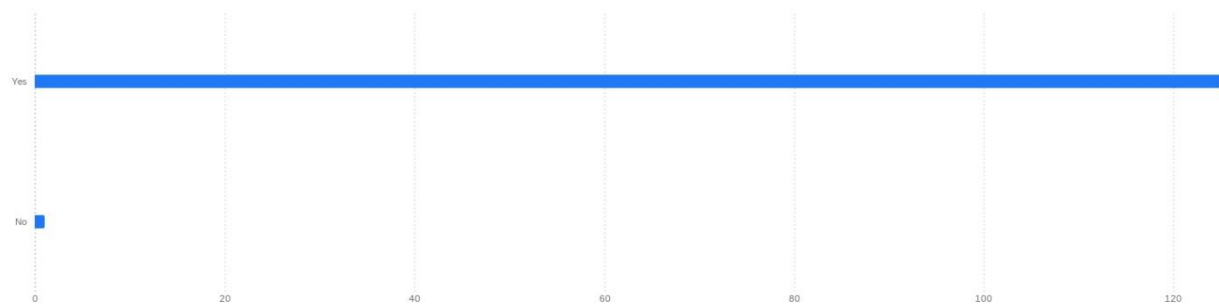
Question 10:

Q36: Are you currently a part of a pack? Please specify the number of members of... 126 ⓘ



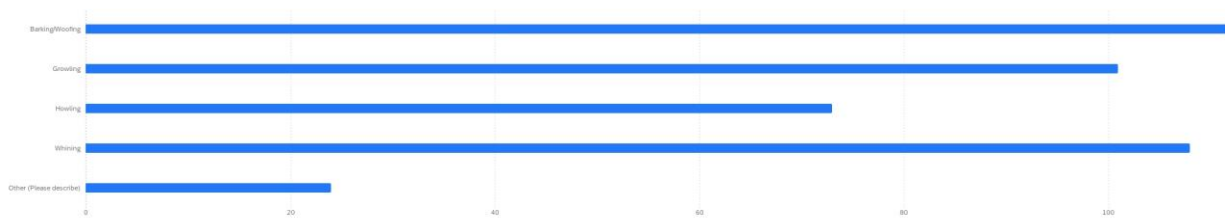
Question 11 :

Q10: Do you use non-human vocalizations. mimicry of dog sounds, or other such vo... 126 ⓘ



Question 12:

Q9: What non-human vocalizations do you produce during your play? 33% 🔍 🗲



‘Other’ responses:

- “A sound I’d best describe as Puppy grumbles”
- “Arrffing”
- “Excited sneezing!”
- “Gekkering”
- “Have you ever heard of a "boof" noise? Like a short bark/woof sound”
- “Hissing”
- “Huffing”
- “Huffing/Grumbling”
- “I huff, whimper, yip, & scream like a bitework dog”
- “I make a few other sounds. Like a rarawraw sound when meeting others or being sketched and petted sometimes a growl during sexual activity”
- “I would growl if I was able to”
- “Kekering”
- “Kneeling”
- “Loud panting”
- “Murring, growl purring?”
- “Panting”
- “Rawring my pup sona is complicated”
- “Sniffing, panting”
- “Whimpering”
- “Yipping” (x2 responses)
- “Yipping, huffing, “dog sneezes” (a form of play communication amongst dogs), general non-descriptive noises like “chirps” of satisfaction, etc, (dog-like) grumbling, breath noises of dog play (sounds like gasping almost)”
- “Yips, Vixen scream, gekkering”

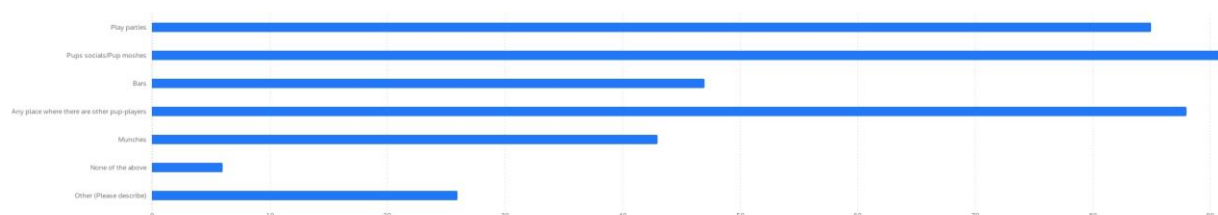
Question 13:

Q11: Do you use non-human vocalizations solely in private, solely in public, or in both private and public scenarios? 338 ①



Question 14:

Q12: If you produce non-human vocalizations in public, which of the following scenarios... 398 ①

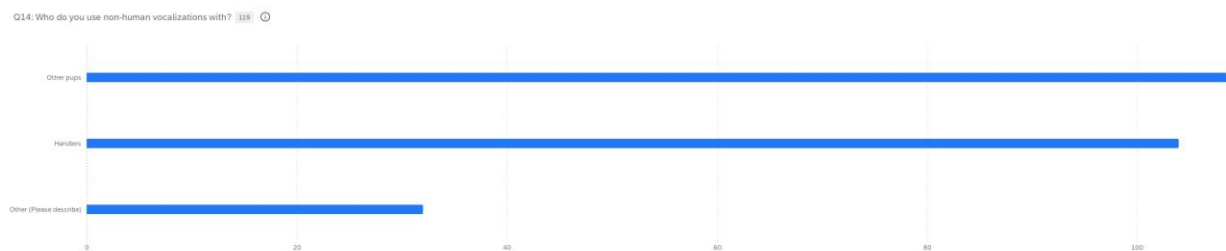


‘Other’ Responses :

- “Amongst Friends”
- “Clubs, Parties, Casual conversation”
- “Everywhere, like Walmart or just being out and about”
- “I find it difficult to find opportunities for engaging in public scenarios. Another challenge is the fact that I wouldn't go to any of these events without my owner present and I'm currently long distance with him.”
- “I haven't been to a public event but I imagine I would bark/whine at an event if I ever go to one.”
- “I produce these vocalizations normally throughout my day-to-day life as a means of processing anxiety and excitement”
- “I whine for my owner’s attention”
- “It does depend on my energy level, who I’m with, the crowd, etc. If I engage, and sometimes I engage more than others. Typically even at my lowest energy moments I’ll be communicating this way with my Owner in those spaces.”
- “Kink/fetish events & parks”
- “Leather club”
- “No sexual headspace like cuddles time or my own self soothing”
- “Online pup meetups, socials”
- “Pride Events”
- “Prides, Large Events”
- “Scenes at kink “dens” or private clubs”

- “Soft growls when something is inconvenient in day to day life”
- “Sometimes it slips out in everyday scenarios. Possible a form of echolalia, possible just a form non-lexical utterance”
- “When I’m with my partner”
- “While out with other players in vanilla settings where it’s fairly easy to not be over heard”
- “any event/space where I am in pup gear or pup headspace”
- “any time i feel comfortable around queer people basically”
- “autism vocal stim, could happen anywhere”
- “furry cons, just hanging out with my friends :3”
- “howling echolocation to find my owner”
- “sometimes very quietly in general public especially if im with someone i feel safe with”
- “unsure”

Question 15:



‘Other’ Responses:

- “Anyone”
- “Anyone who I’m comfortable doing it around, and who is comfortable with me doing it.”
- “Community Members in kink spaces that are aware and consenting of pupplay behaviour (or friends with same structure)”
- “Everyone”
- “Fellow kinksters”
- “Fellow kinksters who are open and welcoming to that part of my identity”
- “Friends and my owner”
- “Friends outside the community who are aware I’m a dog!”
- “Friends who are comfortable and aware with my engagement with non sexual pup space around them”
- “Friends!”
- “Friends, play partners, and adult NSFW social environments”
- “In public if appropriate, socials”

- “My boyfriend”
- “My owner & also with my dog(I study dog behavior/training)”
- “My partner and some friends”
- “Myself?”
- “Other (non-canine) petplayers”
- “Other kink players/friends that know I am a pup. Also on hookup apps (Grindr/scruff/sniffies). I will occasionally answer with Awoo or Awruff in a flirtatious way”
- “Other pets/critters!”
- “People I'm comfortable with.”
- “Randomly in public (sometimes by habit)”
- “So far only used non-human vocalizations with my owner, but would bark or "fist bump" with a paw as a friendly gesture towards someone if he allowed it or commanded me to greet.”
- “Sometimes with furies and even vanilla patrons at events that aren't in the pup or furry community when they treat me like a puppy”
- “anyone in wider kink community”
- “everyone tbhhh i don't care if they're into pup play, if u can't handle me at my pup how am i supposed to feel like your a close friend who can accept all of me 😊 tho also i just hang out with alot of furies in circumstances where these labels don't apply”
- “friends, even outside a pup play setting”
- “just to myself, as my reactions to the world”
- “literally anyone”
- “only my pup”
- “partners”
- “random people who give me a weird look”

Question 16:



Question 17 : Free response, asked to pups and those who take on both roles

What sort of things do you use non-human vocalizations to communicate?

Responses:

- "'woof' is shorthand for 'Every living being contains within them a seed of truth, but this seed of truth must be experienced by others and cannot be written down or otherwise made part of the greater Truth without our togetherness right here, right now. I'm excited to share this togetherness with you.'"
- "- 'Howl of despair' - something has gone wrong and I'm going to be dramatic about it (with friends, partner, other pups); Whining - I want something/I want attention (with partner, or in pupspace (won't do around other pups unless I'm in pupspace)); Inquisitive arf (often accompanied by head tilt) - I'm confused, or please explain further (friends, partner, other pups); Happy bow-wows - express contentment (used with partner or other pups); Growling - I'm annoyed/frustrated (usually only used when I'm alone, sometimes with partner, or with friends if it's funny); Barking - General communication with tonal changes (only in pupspace)"
- "Attention, emotions"
- "Bark = joy, whine = distress, growling = hatefuck noise (very rare)"
- "Bark, whine, and howl for sounds Paws (hands) to pat others or playing, Head for headbutts, Rubbing body against another as affection"
- "Basic needs, pleasure, displeasure, sexual needs."
- "Basic wants and my feelings on things. Ie. if I want to play with others, to playfully be angry or grumpy, turn away anothers interest, ect."
- "Basic wants."
- "Begging (whimpering/whining), 'No' (whimpering), 'Yes' (barking); if with other pups/therians, barking back and forth can be kind of like a small talk It also helps to reaffirm and communicate the fact that you're in pupspace"
- "Body language both human and typically exaggerated animal/dog body language."
- "Body language, mostly. if I don't like something I get a bit more tense."
- "Comfort level, Excitement level, Needs, Wants, Aggression towards others, Playfulness towards others"
- "Comfort level with other pups, saying hi, being playful. When engaging in sexual activity I will use non-human vocalizations to express pleasure and playfulness"
- "Common greeting, signal pain caused, cathartic howl of emotional anxiety release"
- "Contentedness, Sadness, Anxiety, laughter, 'no im not a baby but yes keep babying me'"
- "Desire to play"
- "Disappointment, excitement, acknowledgement, desire for attention, affection"
- "Discomfort, happiness, most moods and if I want attention"
- "Discomfort, needs, when I want something, be the center of attention, communicate with other pups"
- "Dog toys"
- "Emotion, needs / wants, pleasure and discomfort"

- “Emotions, like happiness or sadness. To answer yes or no questions. To express what I want or don't want from a handler or other pup”
- “Emotions. Begging, hesitation, embarrassed, excited.”
- “Encouragement, pleasure, comfort, joy”
- “Enjoyment”
- “Enjoyment, happiness/didcontent, excitement, approval/denial, reaffirmation of bonds, attention seeking”
- “Enjoyment; enthusiasm; affection; appreciation; the current level of intensity; how dominant or submissive I'm feeling (growls vs. yips); enthusiastic consent”
- “Excitedness, curiosity, alarm, requests - basically expressing needs or emotional state”
- “Excitement, begging (for treats/pets), possessiveness over toys”
- “Excitement, confusion/need for clarification, agreement, disagreement, disappointment, wanting/encouragement/interest”
- “Excitement, displeasure, pleasure, frustration, arousal”
- “Excitement, interest, and consent during scenes.”
- “Excitement, playfulness, some boundaries, and if I want something like a toy or my packmate”
- “Express emotions, simple wants, simple “yes” or “no””
- “Fear, not wanting to interact, joy”
- “Fear, pain, hunger, stress, excitement, etc.(basically anything)”
- “Getting someone's attention, asking to play, curiosity, dissatisfaction, being tired”
- “Greeting (awruuu!), frustration (awruffff), connectedness (awrrrrrrrr), confusion (wruuu?), assertion & negation (awruff! & awrrr.)”
- “Greetings, comfort/discomfort, as a means of checking in during scenes, sometimes as a form of submission or domination”
- “Greetings, requests to play with dogtoys, warnings”
- “Growling to show possession over a toy or that I'm not interested in playing with the pup interacting with me, barking to say hello and introduce myself and whining as if to say “please?””
- “Happiness, comfort, consent, playfulness. On the flip side, some can be used to revoke consent and show discomfort. This second one is helpful as its often uncomfortable for me to verbally (english) set boundaries with others (especially strangers)”
- “Happy / excited - wanting to play / playtime - asking for treats - wanting to be pet / scratches”
- “Happy, Sad, Upset, begging, greetings, goodbyes, silliness”
- “Happy, angry, safe words/noises, affirmation, flirting”
- “Head movement and sounds tend to give the other the general feel of what I'm trying to get across. The more connection a pup has with someone the easier it is to understand”
- “Head tilts, pawing motions, wags and puppy dog eyes”
- “How I'm feeling , wants and needs such as drinks, bathroom breaks , to fill space”

- "I can communicate my discomfort at something, the way I want to play, what I want exactly, my mood, if I'm okay with something, etc."
- "I can't count the number of times it was drilled into me that communication is 60% body Language, 30% tone and 10% words, you can communicate damn near anything you want with a little imagination."
- "I mainly use barks and whines to communicate happiness, excitement, or to agree with a command my handler gives."
- "I mostly have "positive" barks and "negative" barks, or yes and no barks, i feel like those are the easiest to differentiate."
- "I use body language alongside vocalizations, facial expressions, as well as actions such as biting, licking, and nuzzling."
- "I use non-human sounds to communicate my needs while acting as a pup - affirmative/negatives, "more/harder", preferences of a toy or type of play we are engaging in, and even if I need something like water or a snack. However, I use human vocalizations for things like safewords or red/yellow when needed."
- "I use non-human vocalizations to communicate basic greetings, initiate pup play, and sometimes to express basic emotions."
- "I use them to communicate playfulness/excitement, discomfort, upset, and arousal"
- "I want something. Ouch/check-in. Hello. I'm worried. I'm excited. I want to play. That feels good."
- "If I want or need something. If I'd like affection or attention. If somethings bothering me I may use whimpers to initiate a conversation. I may growl or yelp if a form of play is a bit much or I don't like something. I may whimper watching something emotional on tv to communicate how the media is affecting me."
- "It is very efficient with my owner, he knows it's always I want something. With other pups my vocalization are often "I'm here" and don't require a response to know if communication was clear or use body language."
- "Just casual interaction and to show pleasure/pain and enjoyment"
- "Like pointing at something. I need something. Give me this. Give me attention. Don't touch me/I'm uncomfortable."
- "Lust, appreciation, friendship, friendliness. Saying hi, affirmation"
- "Lust/arousal; barking, whining, and growling can be used to express arousal. Often I use it in nsfw scenarios to vocalize if someone is getting closer to something I want them to do (whining impatiently), if someone is getting closer to something I *don't* want them to do (growling), or if I am being particularly intensely stimulated or overstimulating (barking/yipping); Playfulness; barking and growling can be used to express playfulness. Often I use it in sfw scenarios where I want to get the attention of other pups or handlers, usually to play with toys, to wrestle/roughhouse, or to get pets (can be combined with pawing at or snout booping people to make desires or who i'm directing myself at clearer)"

- “Mainly acknowledgments, approvals, disapprovals, like and dislikes during sex”
- “Mood, in whining, happy barks, moopy barks ect”
- “Most commonly to express mental states such as excitement, frustration, surprise. It's also common for me an others to simply engaging them for no specific reason”
- “Mostly just a noise, or a sound to convey a response. But not necessarily trying to get a point across”
- “Mostly to express feelings”
- “My use of non-human vocalizations is used to communicate excitement to see someone, a way to respond to being called by someone, a way to howl in unison with friends when asked how we’re doing by an emcee, whines or whimpers are sometimes used to denote a desire for attention from someone else, and playful growls sometimes when you say hi to a friend and are feeling like being playful and energetic.”
- “My use of such vocalizations is, embarrassingly, almost exclusive to sexual activities. Of all such uses, my most common experience is howling when I achieve climax; my use of whining, meanwhile, may not even be specifically 'non-human': I've heard plenty enough whining from excited women who aren't identifying with or as any animal to know my own use isn't exactly unique there. Growling, meanwhile, I'm pretty sure I've only used in the rare cases where I've dommed—it's... remarkably effective at maintaining control over those who are normally the ones doing the controlling~”
- “Needs, mood, emotion”
- “Needs, or desires during scenes. Expressing emotions (pleasure, pain, etc.)”
- “Obedience (barking when told to speak), Desire (whimpering), Discomfort (whimpering), Differences in growling more or whimpering more may be able to help me describe the type of state I'm in, what kind of sex I'm initiating, Etc.”
- “Often coupled with non-verbal pup specific body language. I usually use vocalizations to communicate excitement, pleasure, begging/desire, or my current mood. Also to get the attention of someone so I can show them what I need or want. Sometimes vocalizations are non-sensical, just for fun and there isn't intent to communicate just to get in the headspace”
- “Pleasure and distress.”
- “Pleasure, being playful, affection, being humorous, confusion, part of group (howling), entertaining, with public, sexual pleasure”
- “Pleasure, displeasure, comrodory, playfulness”
- “Pleasure/displeasure, combining with body language to communicate basic wants/needs”
- “Primarily to communicate my needs, moods, wants, feelings, boundaries, specifically to my Owner, but to others around me as well, and to engage in social (non-sexual play). I do also use these vocalizations in sexual play, but typically only in private, my public expressions are mainly non-sexual and to engage in easy non-verbal social culture with like-minded people. However I am extremely vocal and my Owner and I in our private

shared daily life also use these vocalizations near constantly so I have non-verbal ways to communicate myself, and that does typically show most in our home, even when other trusted friends are present. The more comfortable I am with a person and space the more vocalization in this form I'll use."

- "Sadness/disappointment, excitement, just general "chatting""
- "Sexual arousal, excitement, yes's and no's, enjoyment of a certain type of touch"
- "Submission, guilt, embarrassment, pleasure"
- "Tired, fear, anger, happiness, frustration"
- "Touch, food, play."
- "Usually emotions, or to emphasize emotions. Things such as discomfort, comfort, contentment, excitedness, enthusiasm, anxiety, irritation, etc."
- "Usually if I'm engaged in some sort of sex act in my pup hood I'll use dog noises to indicate my enjoyment. I also just have fun with it if I'm at a bar or socializing. I don't usually bark if I'm not in the hood."
- "Wanting attention, Playfulness, bored, I mostly use them to get attention.."
- "Wanting physical attention, certain types of touch, excitement etc"
- "When I need something, when I want to play, when I'm sorry for bumping into someone, when I'm trying to say "excuse me" honestly it's hard to think of what I don't use non human vocalizations for. When I'm in gear/pup space I almost exclusively rely on non human vocalizations to communicate my wants and needs paired with body language and gesturing when possible."
- "When I need to access resources (food, water, toys, ppl etc), when I'm displeased with something (a stranger gets too close, someone steals my toy or steps on my paw), when I need alert someone of an urgent matter (someone got hurt on the mats playing), affection"
- "When I want something or attention. Most commonly when I am trying to get someone's attention (such as getting them to come closer). When trying to establish dominance. Often as a greeting. I find myself often growling under my breath in stressful/unpleasant situations."
- "Which toy I want, yes, no, excitement, sadness, brattiness"
- "Whining during a scene and growling/barking during moshes"
- "Yes, no, desire, shyness, want to be touched, eagerness, joy, interest, disinterest."
- "Yes/no, confusion, give me headpats, excitement/curiosity"
- "barking to communicate happiness or when my handler specifically asks me to"
- "enjoyment, approval, playfulness, discomfort, yes/no, excitedness"
- "excitement, dissatisfaction, arousal, sadness, most general emotions"
- "feeling/emotions, such as happiness (woofing), feeling shy (whimpering), and getting attention (barking)"
- "how I feel about what someone is doing"

- “if i want something, like food or pets and attention, if i need something like a bathroom break or walkies, if something feels good or bad.”
- mainly feelings - happy, sad, excited, scared, confused, curious, playful, desperate/horny, embarrassed, anything really sometimes its a “give me attention”
- “my feelings towards things, when i want something, excitement, sometimes just because i want to make a noise”
- “pain, frustration, comradery, alikeness with other pups, sometime I bark meaninglessly because its fun, affection, affirmation,”
- “usually pleasure, assertion of dominance and submission, and as an emphasis with head movements”
- “wanting/needing something and enjoying being pet”
- “wants, needs, asking for attention, showing affection”
- “when I am happy, playful, or curious”

Question 18:

Q16: How able would you say you are at understanding the intent behind the non-human vocalizations of other pups? 115 ①



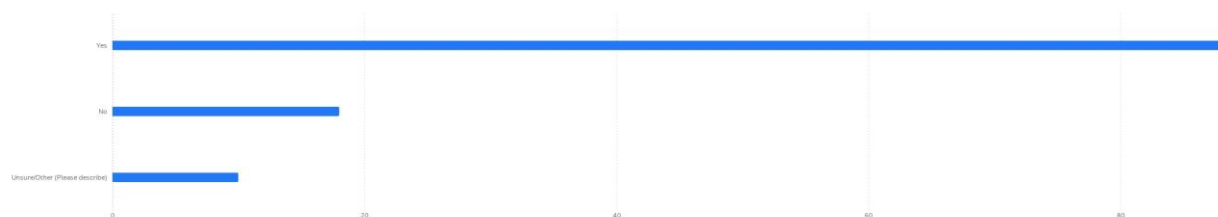
Question 19:

Q17: Would you say you can enter, embody, or otherwise interact with 'pup space' when you engage in pup-play? 118 ①



Question 20:

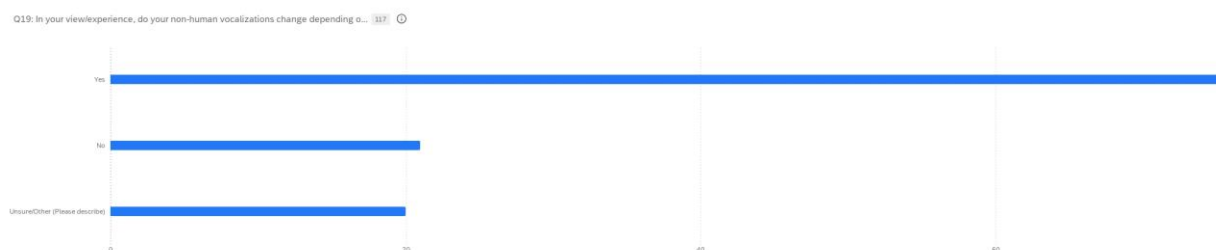
Q18: In your view/experience, are non-human vocalizations important to maintain... 117 ①



‘Other’ Responses:

- “For some, yes. It can be helpful at times, but occasionally detrimental when playing with inexperienced handlers.”
- “It is not a required element in those spaces, as everyone has a range of comfort and level to their own pup headspace and “pup-sona” For example, some pups are non verbal and express through physical animalistic traits.”
- “Not necessarily for me, but i have found it helpful for others!”
- “Not required to enter pup space, but often happens without thought in pup space & can deepen the connection with/immersion in pup space”
- “Partially”
- “Sometimes headspace can be rather quiet for me/no vocalizations are being made”
- “They can be! Sometimes I just speak with words too”
- “Yes and no, it is a part of it but not everyone might want to do it.I like to express myself this way but others might not”
- “Yes and no. It’s important and helps me get into a pup headspace if the other players are using them but I am able to maintain pup space with other pups if they are not using them.”
- “gatekeeping is bullshit always”

Question 21:

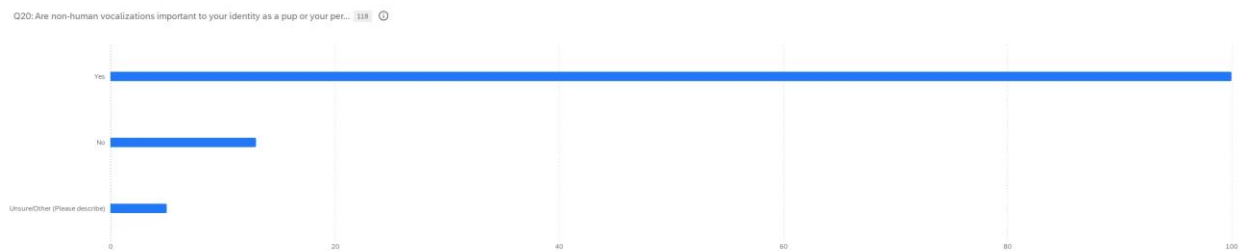


“Other” responses:

- “I am always in some sort of non-human shift as a therian, so I am always in a sort of “pup-space”.”
- “I am autistic so sometimes my non vocal communication can mirror my pup communication outside of play, but i feel they are slightly different.”
- “I have other canine identities (coyote theriotype) so some vocalizations are less puppy, and more coyote”
- “It's easier to use some vocalizations in headspace, but sometimes they slip out outside of headspace anyways.”
- “It’s always prevalent, but increases by a LOT in pup space”
- “I’m always somewhat engaged with my pup side, all the time!”

- “No, but im always a dog so”
- “Pup sounds are basically coextensive with being in the pup headspace, so I wouldn't use them outside of that setting”
- “Situational”
- “Sometimes my tone of vocalizations don't come out how I intended”
- “They change in their variety/frequency”
- “Unsure”
- “a bit. they're more exaggerated and consistent in pup space”
- “i occasionally have a hard time speaking, in those instances if i am not in pup space i will groan or grunt or just make noise”
- “idk I'm a therian what do you want from me”
- “sometimes”
- “they get more intense when i'm in pup space”

Question 22:



‘Other’ responses:

- “I do them because im a pup. But its not necessary or important to my identity as a pup”
- “I'd say they are sometimes important and other times, not so much. Sometimes I find that I'm more reliant on body language than vocalizations”
- “I'm not sure... I'm inclined to say they're not, because as I've said, I don't regularly make them except in the... permissive atmosphere, I guess, provided by sex. On the other hand, my animalistic identity (if one wants to call it that—I'm what I guess people call a therianthrope?) very much IS an integral part of my identity, and having those sorts of vocalizations as part of my vocabulary just sort of comes with the territory; I don't think I could be who I am without being being able or inclined to make them. So it's sort of a grey area!”
- “Sometimes I feel like they are and if other people are using them I feel more pressure to but I am able to maintain my pup performance without using them”
- “Yes, but it's contextual”
-

Question 23:

Q22: Do you prefer pups that you interact with to communicate with you using non-human vocalizations, mimicry of dogs, or other such vocal interactions when you interact with them in a pup-play context? (42) ⓘ



Question 24:

Q23: What types of non-human vocalizations have you heard from pups that you have... (41) ⓘ

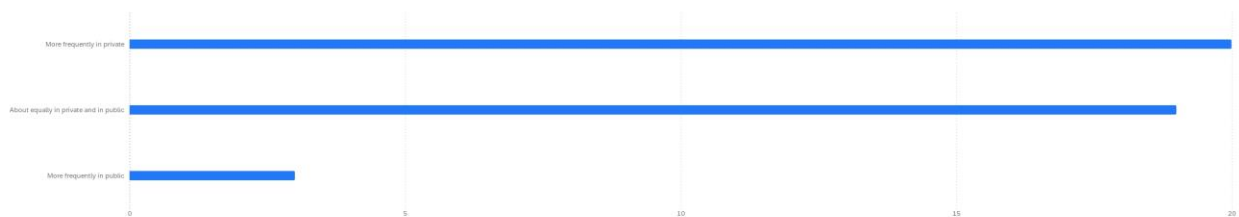


‘Other’ responses:

- “Arf”
- “Boofing, as described earlier”
- “Fox that screams and...chirps? It sounds almost like a horse winy. Also a bird cawing, rabbit thumping, and cat meowing/hissing”
- “Huffing!!!”
- “Pining”
- “Whimpering, distinct from whining”
- “Yelping/yipping to express an "ouch!" or "too rough", sniffing/snorting to indicate curiosity or satisfaction, muffled "boof/woof" sound to indicate alertness, surprise, or "back off", sometimes I hear the dog "talking" sounds- I don't know how to describe this but its like when bio dogs "talk" usually huskies are the culprit, they kind of go "wahwahwah" and it sounds like they are trying to mimic human speak. Or other species such as fox chattering/vocal mimicry. Additionally there is this other kind of half-human half-dog type vocalization that kind of sounds like baby babbling but with doglike sounds, the closest example to this I can think of right now is the old meme video "Dog of Wisdom" posted by youtuber user Joe.”

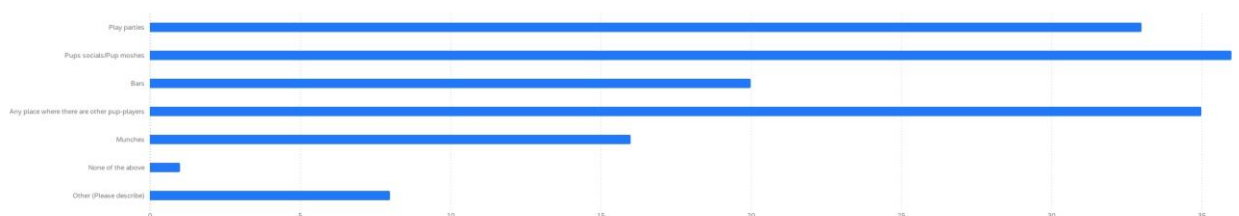
Question 25:

Q24: Do you find pups you interact with use non-human vocalizations more in private contexts, public contexts, or about the same amount in either? 42



Question 26:

Q25: What public spaces are you likely to hear pups making non-human vocalization... 46



‘Other’ responses:

- “Anywhere I make them 🐶”
- “Furry conventions!”
- “Meetups/picnics”
- “One of my pups does it everywhere”
- “Prides and Large Events”
- “When hanging out 1 on 1”
- “anywhere where it is explicitly said we are welcome”
- “have never attended any”

Question 27:

Q26: Do you find pups use non-human vocalizations more with other pups, handlers, or about the same amount with either? 42



Question 28:

Responses:

- “Acknowledgements, approvals, disapprovals”
- “Affection, excitement, joy”

- “Any non-human vocalization indicates they are interested in me. The type of vocalization indicates the nature of that vocalization. Growls tend to be a more physical interest, while howls are more social, compared to barks.”
- “Attention, emotion, desperation”
- “Barking to get attention or asking to play, yelping to express an "ouch" or to "play softer", whining when something isn't going their way (or with the hopes to make something go their way) for example, a toy out of reach, or begging for food”
- “Desire to communicate and interact with other pups”
- “Dominance/submission. Confidence. Comfort/ discomfort.”
- “Emotions”
- “Emotions and intent/interest”
- “Emotions, confirmations, wants”
- “Emotions, how the pup is feeling. Wants or needs”
- “Emotions, needs, enjoyment”
- “Excitement it friendliness is the most common but sometimes you can pickup submissiveness or nervousness as well.”
- “Excitement, greetings”
- “Excitement, shyness, enthusiasm, eagerness, pain, sadness, desire, arousal, fear, boundaries, discomfort, playfulness, questioning/curiosity, bids for affection / tenderness, limits being reached, comfort and contentment, alerting/needling attention, group engagement and acknowledgement.”
- “Getting attention, base emotional needs, pleasure”
- “Hey!. I want that. I'm not sure about that. That feels good. That doesn't feel good”
- “If they are happy or enjoying something, or sad or upset by a specific act. You can very much tell a lot from the tone of their barks/whines/whimpers/growls.”
- “If they’re happy, scared, nervous, etc.”
- “Interest, curiosity, safe word/noises, affirmation, flirting”
- “It's fairly easy for me to pick up on whether or not another pup is excited, interested or disinterested in playing, if they are upset by something, or if they're intimidated.”
- “Mostly hello and stop”
- “My rule for my pup is that once the collar is on, no human words are allowed. He communicates through our non-verbal signals and I check in periodically. without the collar He whines, huffs, or sighs sometimes sticks his tongue out to pant or lick his lips. no words, mostly sounds or babbling when excited.”
- “Pleasure and distress”
- “Rough positive / negative intent, confusion, frustration, playfulness, desire (to some extent)”
- “That a need of some kind is going unmet wether thats a need to play, attention, wanting a treat, needing help with something.”

- “The things I described before that I use myself. Other things tend to be more murkier and context dependant.”
- “Their emotions, mostly. Such as their excitement, their curiosity. Their desires too.”
- “Through a combination of body language and vocalizations, much like biological canines, I can effectively understand clear consent, initiating play, or asking for space.”
- “Tone of reaction”
- “Wanting to play, wanting attention, being aggressive/scared”
- “What is wanted and simple feelings.”
- “When I am a handler, I am able to pick up on my pup's affirmations/negatives, and if she wants things done harder or differently.”
- “bark, body language, clinginess”
- “excitement, frustration, arousal, apprehension, fear. wants (vocalizing for play, food, rest time, etc)”
- “excitement? I think part of the appeal is the loss of resolution in communication. I dont always know what someone is "saying" but with context its usually easy to figure out”
- “mood and intent”
- “neediness/wanting attention, and happiness”

Question 29:

Q28: How able would you say you are at understanding the intent behind the non-human vocalizations of pups? 



Question 30:

Q29: Do you find your relationship with a pup impacts how easy it is to understand... 



Appendix IV: Baseline Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Included are the baseline questions that interviewees were asked over the course of the semi-structured interviews. The specific content of discussion would be modified on a case-by-case basis.

Category 1: Introductory Questions

- How long have you been engaged in pup play?
- How would you describe your gender identity and sexual orientation?
- Are you exclusively a pup, or a handler as well?
- Do you consider yourself a member of a pack?

Category 2: Barks situated within the community

- In what environments do you find yourself most likely to use NHV? Solely with a handler or another pup in a play scene? At pup events in more public spaces like bars?
 - Do NHVs take on different meanings in different physical/social spaces?
- Is the way that you use NHVs with pups different from the way you use NHVs with handlers?
 - Is there a difference in what you are trying to accomplish through NHVs between groups? How you expect the different roles to respond?
- Do you believe that people in the pup play community use NHVs differently than people who are not affiliated with it?
- How efficient are NHVs at expressing your wants, needs or desires? What kind of things are you able to express through NHVs? When do NHVs not get your message across?
- How able are you to understand the NHVs of another pup? Does this depend on headspace?
 - Are there any social, gestural or physical cues that can help you make sense of another pup's NHVs?
- Do you believe NHVs are important to a pup's identity or ability to behave as a pup?
- Are there widespread norms for what different types of NHVs represent?
- What do you think the role of NHVs is in producing and maintaining access to 'pup space'?
 - Are NHVs vital to being in pup space? Can you be in pup space without barking?

- Are there any aspects of NHVs in pup play that you think are misunderstood by non-participants that you would like people to know about?
- Can you provide examples of the sorts of NHVs you make as a pup?
- For older pups: has there been any change in how NHVs are performed/interpreted/etc.

Appendix V: Consent Form for the Semi-Structured Interview

Purpose of the Research:

This research project aims to provide linguistic description of non-human vocalizations (ie: barking, growling, woofing, whining, etc.) as they are used amongst members of the pup play community in Toronto. The data is being collected as part of the course LAL6600 – Research Seminar in Theoretical Linguistics to later be used in the researcher’s Major Research Paper as part of the culmination of their graduate studies. Your information will be retained in confidence, and your real names will not be included in any work (such as presentations or papers) produced through data collected through this project. A pseudonym with no connection to any name provided to the researcher will be used in its stead.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

After consenting to participate in this research, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule a semi-structured interview asking questions related to your use, production, and understanding of non-human vocalizations, and attitudes towards non-human vocalizations as a member of the puppy play community. Some questions will involve demographic qualities such as sexual orientation, gender identity, role in pup play dynamics, and years of experience as a pup. All questions are freely skippable at any time, for any reason. The data will be collected through either audio or video recordings which will be used by the researcher for analysis. It is estimated that the interview will take between 60-90 minutes to complete. Depending on the circumstance, the interview may take place either online, or in-person, with the location decided by you—the participant. If you consent to a video recording, you have the option of bringing or wearing pup gear (hoods, harnesses, paw mitts, tails, etc), to help the researcher collect further data examining the pup community as a socio-linguistic community of practice and understanding the role of ‘pup-space’ as a phenomenon in linguistic production. Even if you do consent to video recording, this is entirely optional and has no bearing on participation.

Risks and Discomforts:

The nature of this research involves questions as to your participation in a kink subculture. As a result, some of the topics broached through the interview process may be personal and have the potential to bring up feelings of discomfort or embarrassment. Any question is freely skippable at any time with no repercussions to your ability to participate in the research, nor on your relationship with the researcher or York University staff. To minimize any social risk to the participants, all data will be thoroughly anonymized through methods involving: not retaining

identifiers of participants, use of pseudonyms, non-dissemination of recorded material, and so on.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

Non-pathologizing academic research on kink helps to broaden the scientific community's understandings of practices that may be unknown to them, and therefore seen as odd, strange, or otherwise bizarre. Linguistic research on kink identity performance helps us to look at these practices as rule-governed and grounded in broader ways that all people communicate. Additionally, through participation in this research, you may have the opportunity to reflect on and think about your own use of non-human vocalizations as a pup. This may give you the opportunity to be more aware as to how you use non-human vocalizations with other pups, handlers, or other community members in general.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study:

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer any particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality:

All data and recordings produced through this research will be anonymized (particularly, the use of pseudonyms with no connection to either your legal name, or any other names provided to the researcher) prior to the sharing of the data with any persons or the use of the data in papers, presentations, etc. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence, and your name will not appear in any report or any publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored on the researcher's password-locked, encrypted computer and on their advisor's, in a password-locked, encrypted folder. Only the researcher who directly collects the data will have access to any identifying information that you provide (ie: names, contact information). Anonymized data and anonymized audio/video recordings may be retained by the student enrolled in the course for use in their Major Research Project. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Your data may be collected verbally by asking demographic information, such as name(s), sexual orientation, gender identity, years of experience in the pup community, role in the pup community, and so on.

Because this project may employ e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries, and thus

the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission. This study involves interviews conducted either in-person, or over online recording platforms such as Zoom to collect data. Online recording platforms such as Zoom are hosted on external cloud-based services. When information is transmitted over the internet, privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link you to your computer or other device you use to participate, there is a small risk present with any cloud-based platform that data collected on external services that your data may fall outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we are happy to make alternative arrangements (ie: telephone) for you to participate. Please contact the instructor, Prof. Thomas Kettig, at tkettig@yorku.ca for further information.

All recordings, video or audio will be saved in a password-protected folder, locally stored on the password-protected personal computer owned by the researcher and will not be held on any cloud based storage system.

Questions About the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Professor Thomas Kettig by email (tkettig@yorku.ca). This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr.

Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project conducted by _____, a graduate student at York University. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Additional consent:

1. Audio recording

☐ By checking this box, I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. Video recording

☐ By checking this box, I consent to the video-recording of my interview(s).

☐ IF you have consented to the above: By checking this box, I indicate that I consent and am willing to bring my own pup gear to the recording for data collection purposes.

3. Retention of anonymized audio and/or video recordings and non-identifiable information for future use

☐ By checking this box, I consent to the retention of the anonymized versions of the audio or visual recordings by the student researcher enrolled in LAL6600 W2026 for future research purposes, including further studies, papers and presentations.

4. Use of retained data in future research with other researchers

☐ By checking this box, I consent to the use of data (including audio and/or video recordings) in research conducted with other scholars. All data used in research will be anonymized through the methods detailed in this document, and no identifying information or data will be shared to any researcher.

5. Entry into Draw Lottery

☐ By checking this box, I indicate that I am interested in being entered into a draw lottery for a \$50 The Men's Room gift card. Participation in this lottery is entirely optional and there are no repercussions for not entering. The winner will be emailed after the collection of all data for use in the project.

Signature Date

Participant Name

Appendix VI: Optional Handler Assent Form for the Semi-Structured Interview

Purpose of the Research:

This research project aims to provide linguistic description of non-human vocalizations (ie: barking, growling, woofing, whining, etc.) as they are used amongst members of the pup play community in Toronto. The data is being collected as part of the course LAL6600 – Research Seminar in Theoretical Linguistics to later be used in the researcher's Major Research Paper as part of the culmination of their graduate studies. Your pup's information will be retained in confidence, and their real names will not be included in any work (such as presentations or papers) produced through data collected through this project. A pseudonym with no connection to any name provided to the researcher will be used in its stead.

Purpose of this Document:

This document is for the use of participants who are participants in a dynamic in which case they feel that it is necessary to provide written documentation of the assent of their handler, owner, or

other dominant partner before participation in the research. This is not legally binding, and if at any point you and your pup come to the conclusion that you do not want to continue further participation on the project, the entirety of the withdrawal from this project must be vocalized to the research team by the pup/participant. Details about the nature of the study are provided in-depth on the legally-binding complete informed consent form given to the participant. This document is solely an optional provision if the participating party (ie: the pup) decides that it is relevant due to subcultural norms. Not completing or handing in this form has absolutely no bearing on participation in the survey, and is a completely optional piece of assent-gathering for participants who wish to do so.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read the above as well as the informed consent form given to your pup, understand the non-binding and totally optional nature of this document, and wish to give written assent to the participation of your pup in this research project.

Signature of Handler/Owner/Dominant

Date

Signature of Participant/Pup