Going Commando: Prosthetics and the Politics of Gender

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In light of cultural discourses that position femininity at odds with technology, I was inspired by the work of Donna Haraway to examine how women amputees experience and negotiate feminine embodiment with prosthetic limbs. In her germinal Manifesto for Cyborgs, Haraway theorised the cyborg as a feminist symbol of a utopian "post-gendered world," asserting that techno-hybridity has the potential to destabilise embodied gendered subjectivity—prompting a rethinking of sex, bodies, gender and humanity. In this paper, following a critical discussion of Haraway's work, I argue that the cyborg continues to be a provocative concept in feminist sociologies of the body, enabling us to explore the complex new subjectivities that are made possible through feminine techno-embodiment. Through an empirical exploration of women amputees' experiences of living with prosthetic limbs, I found that women can embody and incorporate prosthetic technologies into their feminine selves in multiple, complex, gendered ways. My findings indicate that cyborgian hybridity may have the potential to destabilise some aspects of gendered embodiment and performance for women with prosthetic limbs, which can be experienced as both limiting and liberating.

Introduction: Situating Haraway Thirty Years On

In 1985, Donna Haraway (1991, p. 150) theorised the cyborg as a feminist symbol of a utopian "post-gendered world," asserting that techno-hybridity offers possibilities for a rethinking and expanding of sex, bodies, gender and humanity. Influenced by Haraway, Kull (2002, p. 285) argues that "when technology intersects with the body, the basis of gendered subjectivity crumbles." Haraway's germinal cyborg manifesto sparked my interest in the ways in which technology can be experienced as gendered. Specifically, I questioned how women relate to and embody technologies traditionally associated with masculinity. How does this shape their construction and experience of embodied self when they come into close contact with these technologies? While representations of man-machine hybrids are commonplace in Western popular culture, from Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator to Robert Downey Jr. as Iron Man, woman-machine hybrids are less compatible with Western social constructions of gender and technology (Balsamo, 2000). In light of these cultural discourses around gender, bodies and technology, I was inspired to examine how women amputees experience and negotiate feminine embodiment with prosthetic limbs.

In this paper, I will explore Haraway's notion of the cyborg as post-gendered drawing on feminist, qualitative interviews with a small sample of Australian women amputees with prosthetic limbs. I ask: if "femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology" (Balsamo, 2000, p. 151; see also Cockburn, 1983; Wajcman, 2009), then how do women amputees construct and experience feminine selfhood with prosthetic limbs? And what does this mean for the significance of Haraway's concept today? In the first section, I contextualise my study through a critical review of Haraway's theory, followed by an analysis of existing empirical research into women's gendered experiences of disability, amputation and prosthetics. The latter part of the paper details the methodology, method and research findings, concluding with a discussion of the significance and contribution of Haraway's work in relation to my study. Throughout this paper, I approach Haraway in the spirit of the "faithful acts of disobedience" that Braidotti (2006, p. 203) suggests her work calls for: critical, yet also recognising the nuances and possibilities of her theory, as reflected through my findings.

Donna Haraway's work as a feminist historian of science not only aims to stretch the imagination beyond Western dualist ontologies, but, through the writing of her texts, she similarly critiques and subverts disciplinary boundaries between the natural and social sciences. A product of her Marxist feminist and poststructuralist influences, Haraway's work is political, emotional and irreverent, actively

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questioning the very framework in which her ideas are situated. With a background in biology, Haraway's work can be theoretically located within feminist science and technology studies (Gane, 2006, pp. 135-136; Hayles, 1999, p. 288). In congruence with Haraway's methodological commitments to complicating dualist boundaries, her work itself exists in a "monstrous discipline" between the "hard" sciences and the "soft" humanities (Lykke, 2000, p. 77). Like other feminist critics of science, Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox Keller and Carolyn Merchant, Haraway argues that "there is a relation among the desire for mastery, an objectivist account of science and the imperialist project of subduing nature" (Hayles, 1999, p. 288). The multifaceted nature of Haraway's writing style contributes greatly to the sociological significance of her work, as she not only subverts boundaries and de-centres humanist unity in the context of her writing on hybridity and post-humanism, but also in the linguistic innovations of her "distinctive and idiosyncratic style" that forces readers to "re-adjust or perish" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 204). While Haraway is not unique in this post-structuralist project, her incorporation of interdisciplinary thought has cemented her status as an influential cultural and feminist science studies scholar.

Haraway (1997, p. 52) seeks to "refigure provocatively the border relations among specific humans, other organisms, and machines" and, in doing so, open up the "leaky distinctions" between society, nature and culture (Turner, 1992, p. 46). Drawing upon the simultaneously science fiction and increasingly science *fact* of "cybernetic organisms," Haraway (1997, p. 51) creates a futuristic figure with which to question the boundaries of organisms and techno-bodies. For Haraway (1997), the implosion of boundaries between nature, culture, human and non-human, produces new possibilities for Western thought and mobilises technology as a potentially emancipatory source for women, animals and non-human actors traditionally oppressed by hierarchical dualist structures. In keeping with feminists who have claimed the locus of women's oppression can be found within the female body (e.g. De Beauvoir, 1949; Firestone, 1970), for Haraway (1991, p. 151) cyborgian hybridity allows possibilities for destabilising dichotomous patriarchal sex/gender subjectivities, complicating bodily boundaries and fundamentally reconfiguring humanity.

The Gendered Cyborg? A Brief Consideration Of Feminist Perspectives On Science And Technology

Haraway's work can be situated within a broader context of diverse and intersecting feminist perspectives on science and technology (Cockburn, 1983; Harding, 1991; Plant, 1998; Wajcman, 1991). There has been enduring feminist efforts to demonstrate that the Western association of masculinity with science and technology is not due to innate, biological, sexual differences, but is, instead, a social construct embedded in gendered power relations (see Cockburn, 1983; Harding, 1991). From the earliest foundations of Western thought, dichotomies have been established between men/women, mind/body, reason/emotion, with masculinity/mind/reason being valued over femininity/body/emotion in patriarchal cultures (see Spelman, 1999). Sherry Ortner (1974) argues that universal female subordination can be explained by women's historical association with nature and the body. For Ortner (1974, p. 75) the "woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, in contrast, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols." Men and masculinity have therefore been associated with culture and technology, due to their lack of childbearing capabilities (Ortner, 1974, p. 75). Following this, radical and socialist feminist perspectives have held that Western constructs of masculinity are strongly associated with science, reason and technical prowess, positioning technology as a site of patriarchal power over women (see Spender, 1995; Wajcman, 2009). Haraway's work, however, can be positioned alongside cyberfeminist approaches that are more optimistic, believing in the potential for new information and communication technologies to destabilise binary sex/gender subjectivities, creating a new techno-spaces for women (see Plant, 1998; Spender, 1995).

Radical feminists have critiqued Haraway's poststructuralist cyberfeminism, arguing that in an apparently uncritical optimism, Haraway ignores the importance of corporeality for feminist theory and politics (see Klein, 2000). Furthermore, some feminists have argued that Haraway's utopian "techno-fetishisation" obscures the fact that technology is a patriarchal social construct that is never neutral, and therefore cannot exist in a post-gendered sphere (e.g. Balsamo, 2000; Wajcman, 2009). Balsamo (2000, p.

150) argues that far from destabilising gender binaries, cyborgs reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, as "cyborgs and men are compatible images which mutually support cultural associations among masculinity, rationality, technology and science." However, for Balsamo techno-feminine hybrids are much more complex, as in Western culture "femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology" (2000, p. 151). Resulting cultural representations of the feminine cyborg depict a monstrous, dystopian boundary creature, either strictly conforming to traditional feminine stereotypes or radically subverting them by peeling back synthetic flesh to reveal the hard machine beneath. Contemporary theorists have been more nuanced in their engagements with Haraway, recognising the significance of her work, while simultaneously being critical of its shortcomings, for example, the extent to which sexism still exists in virtual worlds despite Haraway's visions of post-gendered potentialities in cyberspace (see Braidotti, 2006; du Preez, 2009; Kafer, 2013).

"Paraplegics And Other Severely Handicapped" Cyborgs: The Cyborg In Feminist Disability Studies

Like feminists, disability scholars have taken a range of perspectives on technologies and the politics of the body in their field (see Alper et al, 2015; Ellcessor, 2010; Kurzman, 2001; Moser, 2006; Sobchack, 2006). While Haraway only mentions disability once in her cyborg manifesto, some disability scholars have explored this direction of her theory, considering the cyborg as a useful lens for conceptualising the new subjectivities made possible through technology (see Apelmo, 2012; Carlson, 2013; Kafer, 2013; Norman and Moola, 2011). Haraway (1991, p. 170) argues that the proliferation of technoscience into everyday life has positioned anyone who engages with information technology and modern medicine as a cyborg, yet she specifically considers "perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridisation with other communication devices." Some feminist disability scholars have deployed the cyborg as an empowering symbol for women with disabilities, arguing that as "a female figure who questions the normal," Haraway's cyborg metaphor can facilitate the destabilising of sexist, ablest stereotypes of women with disabilities, using techno-hybridity as a "sock in the eye" of both the objectifying male gaze and the "ableist stare" (see Apelmo, 2012, p. 406; Carlson, 2013).

In contrast, other disability theorists are critical of the reductionist ways in which women with disabilities have been represented in relation to technology, often being positioned as either the passive victims or beneficiaries of technological advancement, with little further analysis of their gendered embodied realities (see Kafer, 2013; Moser, 2006). The use of people with disabilities utilising and embodying assistive technologies as metaphors for "real life" cyborgs has prompted some disability theorists to critique Haraway's concept of the cyborg as ableist (see Betcher, 2001; Jain, 1999; Kurzman, 2001). This has been referred to as "metaphorical opportunism" (see Jain, 1999; Smith and Morra, 2006). The act of metaphorical opportunism assumes the "cyborg experience" of people with disabilities using assistive technologies, and in doing so, "others" their experiences, exoticises their impairments and fails to take their lived experiences into account (Kafer, 2013, pp. 105-106). While I sympathise with the emancipatory potentialities of Haraway's cyborg that are shared by some scholars, I believe it is important to recognise these criticisms voiced by disability scholars who live with impairments themselves and whose lived experiences of disability directly inform their scholarship (e.g. Betcher, 2001; Kurzman, 2001; Sobchack, 2006).

Queer feminist disability theorist, Alison Kafer (2013, p. 106) argues that "rather than abandon the cyborg because of its ableist rhetoric and manifestations, I [call] for a continued struggle with the figure." Taking Kafer's (2013, p. 106) project on board, in this article, I too struggle with Haraway's elusive figure. Approaching my own research, I deeply considered the extent to which exploring the relations between gender, bodies and technology through an analysis of women with prosthetic limbs' lived experiences could perpetuate metaphorical opportunism. Thinking reflexively, I considered my researcher standpoint as white, young, queer, feminist academic living without physical disability and what it meant for me to be conducting this research. In early attempts to reduce the potential for metaphorical opportunism, I prioritised an ethical and sensitive approach to the research. When I disclosed to the interviewees that I was not an amputee myself, all were enthusiastic about my interest in their experiences and found

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thinking about their prosthetics as gendered intriguing. Yet, in writing this paper I remain conscious of the use of Haraway's theoretical concept to consider complex lived experiences of people with disabilities, and question, as Kafer (2013, p. 105) does, whether the cyborg's usefulness is tied to its status as a metaphor or whether Haraway intended it to be approached more literally; a question I leave open for consideration. In the following section, I will provide a critical review of existing research on women's lived experiences of disability, amputation and prosthesis in order to provide a context and rationale for this study.

The Spoiled Body: Women's Gendered Experiences Of Disability, Amputation And Prosthetics

Despite evidence of gender-specific experiences among amputees, there is a dearth of qualitative sociological research specifically engaging with women's subjective experiences of amputation and prosthesis. Notably, there is no Australian qualitative sociological research on gender, amputation and prosthetics, with most of the literature being British or North American. The majority of existing research on amputees is quantitative and medical/psychological, often aggregating men and women's experiences (e.g. Legro et al, 1999; Katon and Reiber, 2013). The only current Australian social research on amputees is a survey conducted by advocacy organisation, Limbs 4 Life (2011). While this study garnered important results, its lack of attention to gendered experiences perpetuates the homogenisation of disabled people's subjectivities and continues trends of viewing people with disabilities, particularly women, as asexual and gender-less.

Most social research on amputees has studied war veterans' physical adjustments to prosthetics (e.g. Dougherty et al, 2010; Katon and Reiber, 2013). This research tends to be produced by North American scholars studying Vietnam veterans and returned military personnel from Afghanistan and Iraq, the majority of whom are men (for an exception, see Cater, 2012). While some quantitative research has indicated gender differences in experiences of prosthetic limbs, many studies have either not assessed these directly or employed little in-depth analysis of those findings (e.g. Dougherty et al, 2010; Holzer et al, 2014; Legro et al, 1999). Katon and Reiber's (2013) secondary data analysis of a clinical survey of key issues for returned US service members with traumatic limb-loss indicates clear gender differences among men and women amputees. They found that women amputees experienced higher rates of depression and body image issues, which translated to lower levels of prosthesis satisfaction (Katon and Reiber, 2013, p. 180). Legro et al's (1999) survey found similar gender differences, with women participants reporting significantly higher concerns about body image and prosthetic appearance. British studies have also found that women amputees experience higher levels of body-image anxiety and depression than male amputees, score lower on emotional adaptation to role changes, and are much more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction with their prostheses (see Gallagher and MacLachlan, 2001; Horgan and MacLachlan, 2004). Furthermore, while a number of studies have indicated that family and emotional support networks are crucial to physical, psychological and social rehabilitation post-amputation (see Horgan and MacLachlan, 2004), women amputees experience higher rates of relationship break-down post-amputation than male amputees (Mathias and Harcourt, 2014).

Western media representations of women with disabilities typically perpetuate stereotypes that their bodies are unattractive, abnormal and outside feminine beauty norms (see Kafer, 2003; Shildrick, 2007; Women with Disabilities Australia [WWDA], 2014). For instance, Wendell (1996, pp. 43-44) observes that "physical imperfection is more likely to be thought to 'spoil' a woman than a man by rendering her unattractive in a culture where her appearance is a large component of a woman's value." Previous research in North America and Britain has shown that body image and appearance are significant issues for many women with physical disabilities (Cater, 2012; Gallagher and MacLachlan, 2001; Horgan and MacLachlan, 2004; Murray, 2009), suggesting, as Wendell (1989, p. 113) does, that "disabled women suffer more than disabled men from the demand that people have ideal bodies, because in patriarchal culture people judge women more by their bodies than they do men."

Thus for many women amputees, the factors impacting on their recovery and life post-amputation are social: negotiating fashion practicalities linked to feminine identity, like wearing dresses and high-heels; navigating relationships; and re-imagining the feminine self (see Gallagher and MacLachlan, 2001;

Horgan and MacLachlan, 2004; Manderson, 1999; Mathias and Harcourt, 2014). Mathias and Harcourt's (2014) qualitative study of North American women amputees found that "creating a feminine body image [was] a priority for female amputees." This research is significant in its subversion of stereotypes that desexualise disabled women, exploring the gendered experiences, concerns and desires of young amputee women in the context of heterosexual dating. Participants expressed concerns about their ability to embody normative feminine sexuality as amputees, worrying that they could not physically perform sexiness while wearing prosthetics or that revealing their amputation and prosthetics might be a "turn off" for men (Mathias and Harcourt, 2014, p. 398). Participants reacted to perceived failures to conform to feminine beauty standards by compensating for their flaws in exaggerating other aspects of their appearance (Mathias and Harcourt, 2014, p. 397).

Fashion was a similarly important way of constructing and presenting feminine selfhood for both Gallagher and MacLachlan (2001) and Murray's (2009) female participants. Gallagher and MacLachlan (2001) used focus groups to explore Scottish amputees' adjustments to their prosthetics. Women expressed greater anxiety about maintaining femininity as amputees with prosthetic limbs, discussing both physical and perceived inabilities to wear dresses and high-heels (Gallagher and MacLachlan, 2001, p. 94). Murray's exploratory study of British amputees' experiences of prosthetic limbs garnered similar findings, with women placing a higher emphasis on "being normal," not wanting to "look disabled," and wanting to "maintain femininity, elegance and grace" (2009, p. 578). Murray (2009, p. 578) also found that, for some women amputees, the visible display of prosthetics was a politicised act of resistance against the stigmatisation of disability, while others found more empowerment in "passing" as "normal." In this paper I fill an important gap in the literature by extending qualitative sociological and feminist scholarship around gender, bodies, and technology through exploration of female amputees' gendered embodiments of prosthetic limbs.

A Feminist Approach To Researching Prosthetic Experiences

In empirically investigating women's lived experiences with prosthetic technologies, I reflect on the contribution of Haraway's cyborg manifesto to understanding gender, bodies and technology in contemporary societies. This research employed a qualitative feminist methodology to explore women's gendered experiences of prosthetic limbs. A qualitative approach allowed for addressing the predominance of quantitative medical approaches in existing research on amputees. Feminist methodologies aim to understand the subjective experiences of women and other oppressed groups whose voices are often marginalised, producing research that promotes social justice and change (see Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 115; Reinharz, 1992). Feminist researchers have traditionally taken a qualitative methodological approach, in conjunction with the feminist theme of viewing the "personal as political" (see Ezzy, 2002; 2010; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). A hallmark of feminist research is its commitment to challenging traditional power relations between the researcher and the "researched" in interview settings, empowering participants as active members of the research process (see Oakley, 1981). Investigating lived experiences was important for this study in order to challenge the tradition of metaphorical opportunism that has been employed when examining experiences of people with disabilities using assistive technologies in their daily lives (Moser, 2006). Instead, a feminist narrative approach was adopted in order to allow for the participants' voices to "speak" through the research (Riessman, 2008). By listening to the participants stories I was able to see how Haraway's concept of the cyborg as a metaphoric figure may be useful for conceptualising some individuals' experiences, but not all.

Six participants self-selected into the study, responding to research advertisements on the Facebook page for Australian amputee advocacy organisation *Limbs 4 Life*. By inviting participants to self-select via social media, I connected with women who were actively interested in discussing and sharing their experiences. An in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted via telephone or Skype with each participant. Interviews lasted from 50 minutes to one hour. In keeping with a feminist approach to interviewing, open-ended questions were used to allow for participants to discuss their experiences freely (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Participants were asked about their experiences of growing up and daily life as amputees, body image, negotiating social situations and their relationship with their prosthetics.

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Interviews were audio recorded with the informed consent of participants. The university's Human Research Ethics Committee approved this study. This research was conducted in line with the committee's recommendations for protecting participants' confidentiality and anonymity in the collection and analysis of data. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants are used throughout this article.

As a result of the sampling strategy, participants were a small, non-representative, group of confident women who had been amputees for at least five years. Participants were between the ages of 37 and 57, with a mean age of 40.6 years. Four participants were born in Australia, one recently migrated from India and one migrated from Poland as a child. All participants were university educated and engaged in part-time or full-time paid employment in addition to receiving disability support pensions. Four participants identified as heterosexual, one lesbian and one pansexual. Half the participants were mothers, with an average of three children each. The majority of participants were lower-limb amputees (two bilateral [DBK], two unilateral [BK] and one upper and lower-limb transverse [AK/AE]). One unilateral upper-limb [BE] amputee also participated in the study. Half the participants were amputees from birth or a young age due to congenital limb loss, two lost their limbs as a result of motor-vehicle trauma, and one suffered a rare bacterial infection.

Following data collection and transcription, thematic data analysis was conducted. In the first stage of analysis I inductively surface read transcripts, highlighting striking words and phrases, locating possible themes in each transcript. In the second stage, I analysed the transcripts with specific themes in mind (Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 2008). Finally, individual stories were compared and thematic patterns across the entire data set were identified (Miller, 2014).

"It's Not The Skirt, It's Me": Body Image, Embodying And Performing Amputee Femininity

The embodiment and performance of normative femininity were priorities for all my participants. All the women discussed a wish to be "normal" or "like everyone else," which correlated with being a "normal woman" and being "feminine."

> I guess for women… We just want to be seen as *women*. As *normal*. (Lara, 43, DBK)

> Because I was born like this...This *is* my normal, but I'm aware 100 percent of the time how *abnormal* I am. (Kanga, 53, AK/AE)

Although normality held different meanings among participants, it centred on a stereotypical hyper-feminine identity, exemplified by Schippers' (2007) notion of "hegemonic femininity." In line with Murray's (2009) findings, part of being "like everyone else," for my participants, was being able to "pass" as "normal" by not "looking disabled." When discussing feminine body image, my results align with Mathias and Harcourt's (2014) study, finding that women amputees experience pressures to conform to social constructions of conventional femininity and beauty. For instance, two heterosexual lower-limb amputees acknowledged that having "good legs" was something perceived to be typically feminine and attractive to men, which was something they lacked and envied:

> I don't see [my body] as attractive. I definitely get a lot of *leg envy*. (laughs) Other people's legs, particularly during summer, when people wear sandals and shorts and things like that. (Lara)

> There were times where I did feel less attractive than other women with both legs. When my partner and I see a woman with a weeny skirt and great legs and heels, I'm actually the one being like 'Oh my god, check out her legs!' (laughs) (Anna, 37, BK)

Participants discussed having to reconcile their lived realities of living with disability with conventional femininities. One participant illustrated this, stating:

> There was this skirt that I bought and it was very nice and I wanted to wear… but it was very tight

> and I can't walk with it… and I just thought, 'oh well, the skirt is too tight and that's why I can't walk with it'. But then I saw somebody wearing it on TV and she was walking very nicely with it. So I realise it's… Not the skirt. It's me. (Saanvi, 43, DBK)

While participants strove to be "normal women" by attempting to conform to conventional femininity, as Saanvi indicated above, this was not always possible, suggesting that the participants performed "pariah femininities" rather than the hegemonic form of normative femininity (Schippers, 2007).

As in previous studies (e.g. Gallagher and MacLachlan, 2001; Horgan and MacLachlan, 2004; Mathias and Harcourt, 2014; Murray, 2009) the strategic use of clothing was important for my participants to cover their prostheses and "pass" as normal in public:

> I was never really a high-heels girl, but I do get dress envy! (laughs) I mean, my choices of clothing are very conservative now in that you wouldn't be able to see I have prosthetics unless you were to look very closely. (Lara)

> I made sure I was wearing trousers. I *would not*… I guess I was sensitive about it, I didn't want the world to see… But I want them to focus on what I'm doing with them, rather than what they're seeing… (Jill, 57, BK)

> If I'm going out in a social environment, if I'm having a really bad day, I just, I don't want people's attention that way, I just want people to leave me alone and let me be. I get sick and tired of people looking at me! (Anna)

Here, participants discuss feeling uncomfortable with the attention they received from people when their prosthetic legs were visible, preferring others to see them for themselves, rather than defining them by their disability. These common feelings of wanting to appear normal to avoid the gaze of others reflect the extent to which disabled bodies become a public spectacle and how people with disabilities are stigmatised as "other" in ableist societies (see Hannabach, 2007; Overboe, 1999; Shildrick, 2007; Smith, 2006; Wendell, 1996).

Participants' discussions of femininity and dress provide evidence for the ways in which some women experience their prostheses as being at odds with their femininity. Prostheses were described as being "not aesthetically attractive," "ugly," and even "horrific." While some lower-limb amputees had the "passing privilege" of being able to hide their disability by covering their prosthetics, this was difficult for Ando as an upper-limb amputee:

> I just can't pull off… like… a nice pretty dress…The arm…Just doesn't go. It ruins the look. Because no one's looking at the dress – It's the arm they're looking at. (Ando, 54, BE)

Ando had a difficult time reconciling her feminine identity with her prosthetic arm, recalling that, without the passing privileges of lower-limb amputees, as a child she was teased at school, being called a "one armed bandit" and "Captain Hook." These remarks are arguably gendered, disassociating prosthetic limbs from femininity, a trend reflected by the cultural association of technology with masculinity. In the following section I expand this exploration further through a discussion of participants' experiences and relationships with their prosthetic limbs and the impact embodying prosthetic technologies has had on their gendered subjectivities as women.

"Going Commando": Prosthetics And The Politics Of Gender

Beyond Murray's (2009) observation that women amputees were more likely to want prosthetics that looked realistic rather than mechanical, existing studies have not directly examined gendered relationships with prosthetics. In light of Haraway's (1991) suggestion that techno-human hybridity could complicate future gendered subjectivity, I was eager to investigate the validity of this claim in practice. Asking women

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about their relationships with prosthetic limbs, I was interested in their stories of reconciling embodied femininity with technologies often perceived as masculine.

For some participants, often depending on the cause and type of their amputation, the incorporation of their prosthesis into their feminine body image was difficult. The language they used to refer to their prostheses could gauge the participants' relationships with their prosthetics. The two participants who saw their prosthetic limbs as part of themselves referred to them as "my leg/s," whereas the four who distanced themselves from the prosthetics would refer to them more as "the leg/s," "the arm," or "it." Jill saw her leg merely as a "tool," "no different from putting on [her] glasses." Lara discussed how she "hate[d] putting the legs on in the morning," reflecting how she had not incorporated them into her sense of self:

> Lara: I mean I don't know, but I might not feel so… um… Self-conscious, if I had one real leg. One good leg. So I could sort of show that… This is what… This is what the *real me* looks like…
> Ruby: So you don't sort of see your prosthetics as the real you?
> L: Oh no, I don't think I do, no… no I don't… no… I think, I think I'm still kind of clinging on to the… Me before this happened.

Lara experienced prosthetics as a "veil over [her] embodied suffering," merely creating a façade of her former self (see Betcher, 2001, p. 41). Much of Lara's difficulty adjusting to her prosthetics drew from viewing them as "ugly," masculine, medical tools that did not fit with her day-to-day feminine self-concept. For these reasons, Lara often chose to conceal her prosthetics with strategic clothing choices to pass as "normal."

Participants all referred to wearing prosthetics without cosmetic covers as "going commando," perhaps a cultural reference to being naked or exposed. For Betcher (2001, p. 43), while conventionally beautiful women with cosmetically realistic prosthetics leave "nothing jarred loose in the social psyche," she argues that "there is a point at which the machine/female interface may be transgressive—namely, showing my thighs of steel, revealing the black reptilian carbon-fibre endoskeletal frame as opposed to veiling the machine with a cosmetic cover." Most participants were opposed to "going commando," preferring to maintain cosmetic covers to conceal the mechanical componentry of their prosthetics. When asked about this, they stated that the "Terminator look" was "shocking," "confronting," and, significantly, "*not very feminine*" or "attractive." Thus, participants' remarks were in line with Betcher's (2001, p. 43) observation that techno-feminine hybridity is culturally positioned as "transgressive." When asked to elaborate on why she thought men might be more comfortable with this "Terminator look," Lara explained that:

> With a lot of the men [amputees] I met there was this kind of a need to show that they were still a real man, and for them the toughness of an exposed, metallic limb demonstrates strength. Whereas I think in general women are looking for the next best thing to a real leg. You know, softness, soft covers, rounded edges, um… create that sense of femininity.

Here, Lara's comments reflect gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity as binary opposites, with masculinity defined by "hardness," strength, and stoicism, and femininity associated with "softness," emotionality, and the beautiful body. Lara also illustrates the notion that female amputees with realistic cosmetic covers on their prosthetics can perform normative femininities by veiling the machine and conforming to cultural ideals that disassociate techno-hybridity from femininity. I argue that Lara's discomfort with her prosthetics as "not very feminine" illustrates the extent to which Haraway's notion of cyborgian techno-hybridity may trouble binary notions of masculinity and femininity, natural and artificial, self and other, as Lara experienced her prosthetic limbs as at odds with, and hence troubling, her "authentic" feminine identity.

Like some participants in Murray (2009) and Cater's (2012) studies, who deliberately chose not to conceal their prosthetics as a conscious act of subverting gendered and ableist stereotypes of women with disabilities, Kanga was the only woman in my study who went "commando." Unlike other participants, Kanga did report experiencing her embodiment of prosthetic technology as a "cyborgian interface." Kanga often employed the posthumanist language of cyborgs throughout our interview, reporting that she saw

her prosthetic as "an extension of [her] self," and that she had "expanded [her] neural network to incorporate non-human technology." Thus Kanga's relationship with her prosthetic leg hints at posthuman experience in her "extension of her self" to include the prosthetic as part of her identity. In line with Haraway's (1997) understandings of hybridity and kinship, Kanga discussed this as a process that involved a rethinking and expansion of, not only the boundaries of herself and the prosthetic as "other," but between the masculine and feminine.

Because of the cultural association of mechanical prosthetics with masculinity and the remaining stigma around physical disability, especially for women, being able to "go commando" involved a "journey" of self-acceptance for Kanga, as a woman amputee:

> I wasn't really comfortable with it until I went up to the Northern Territory. And this group of Aboriginal kids were kind of dealing with my arm, and they were really shocked by it at first it… I had to get access to this community… I was in there as a journalist, so I had to get people to talk to me, so I had to really work the kids, you know, establish something there. So I built a relationship with these kids really quickly, and they got used to my arm, but I had to show them my leg, and I was just thinking 'Oh my God! I've got to show them my leg! If they find out they're just going to be really freaked!' but so, I went 'oh, look, I've got something I've got to show you' and I lifted up my pants and…. This kid just looks at my leg and he just goes *"Cool!! Terminator!"* And it was then… My life changed at that moment…

Kanga's anecdote closely mirrors amputee academic, Vivian Sobchack's (2006, p. 30) experience wherein "before the cosmetic cover was added [to her prosthetic leg] I remember an eleven year old boy coming over to me to admire it and crow: 'Cool… Terminator!!'" In both cases, it was children, not yet fully socialised into hetero-patriarchal gender norms, who assisted Sobchack and Kanga to move beyond gender (and perhaps nature-artifice) binaries and accept their visible prosthetics as "cool" or positive, a conclusion of which Haraway would arguably approve.

Kanga's terminator anecdote reflected a positive development in her "prosthetic journey" towards self-acceptance and body positivity. Garland-Thomson (1997, p. 29) argues that women with disabilities have been negatively positioned as the "opposite of the masculine figure, but also imagined as the antithesis of the normal woman, the figure of the disabled female is thus ambiguously positioned both inside and outside the category of woman." By appropriating masculine technology and the "Terminator" label as a symbol of strength, Kanga's prosthetic experience subverts these cultural positionings of women with disabilities as weak, vulnerable and broken: inside, yet outside normative gender expressions. By "going commando," a prosthetic style popular among young male war veterans (see Cater, 2012), Kanga could be seen as performing a form of, what Halberstam (1998) refers to as "female masculinity," a subversive feminine appropriation and performance of the typically "masculine" qualities of strength, "hardness," and aggression. Therefore, while "going commando" primarily refers to being naked or exposed, it could also be interpreted as a reference to a possibility for military-grade strength and resilience for female amputees. Kanga's "prosthetic journey," then, may illustrate Haraway's intentions for the potentiality of the cyborg as a subversive feminine boundary figure that questions and expands the normal.

Concluding Discussion

Nearly twenty years ago, Brasher (1996, p. 811) claimed that Haraway's cyborg was "a term of and for our times." Since then, the infiltration of technology into daily life has only advanced, with even more technoscientific developments being made. When Haraway was writing at the denouement of the twentieth-century, posthumanity seemed a clear direction for social theory to take, as the "exhilarating cyborg experiences" of cyberspace promised a "technological purification of dirty materiality" (Becker, 2000, p. 362). However, in the decades since the vitalisation of Haraway's cyborg there has arguably been a shift away from the use of cyborg theory in mainstream sociology. It seems contradictory that at a time when techno-human hybridity should be at its peak, Haraway's theory can be read as retro-futuristic; a

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result of the fact that the future in which Haraway's cyborg was situated either never eventuated, or has been and gone.

I was conscious about the potential for metaphorical opportunism in drawing influence from Haraway's theoretical figure while examining the lived experiences of women with disabilities. I agree with Kafer's (2013, p. 118) claim that "a non-ableist cyborg politics refuses to isolate those of us cyborged through illness or disability from other cyborgs. Disabled people can no longer be cast as modelling a cyborg experience non-disabled people are yet to achieve." Reflecting on Haraway's later works (1997; 2003), in this paper I consider the cyborg metaphor to be more of a starting point for reconfiguring our ontologies than a literal figure in the social world. By shifting focus from hybridity to kinship, most notably in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium* (1997), Haraway arguably seeks to no longer perpetuate the previous reductionism and fragmentation through the concept of cyborgs. Instead, Haraway allows both aspects of "mixed beings" their own subjectivity and agency within affectionate relations, as "*affinity is precisely not identity*" (2004, p. 92, italics added). Thus rather than reduce participants' experiences to "prove" or act as metaphors for cyborgian realities, through this research I have found that while Haraway's concept may suggest nuanced ways of articulating gendered experiences of techno-human hybridity, it is important to allow the lived experiences of women with disabilities to speak.

By exploring participants' embodied relationships with their prosthetics, it became apparent that their gendered experiences as women with disabilities simultaneously complicated and reinforced Haraway's (1991, p. 150) understanding of cyborgs as symbols of a "post-gendered world." While Kull (2002, p. 285) argues that "when technology intersects with the body, the basis of gendered subjectivity crumbles," my research found that, in reality, this is not always the case. The prosthetic technologies intersecting with participants' bodies did not completely crumble their gendered subjectivities. Rather, participants constructed and performed alternative femininities despite the ableist desexualisation of women with disabilities and masculine cultural perceptions of prosthetic technologies. However, as the majority of participants discussed prosthetics as being at odds with their perceptions of normative femininities, all were forced to rethink and expand their conceptualisations and embodiment of gendered identity, with some deconstructing the boundaries between masculine and feminine, self and other, through their own experiences and using the language of cyborgs to articulate them.

In using the language of cyborgs and techno-hybridity to describe her personal experiences, one participant demonstrated how Haraway's cyborg could be a meaningful way for some to understand and theorise hybridised experience. Kanga's discussion of her own empowering "cyborgian" experience of "going commando" reflects the potential that Haraway (1997) imagined for hybridity to be more than a cobbling of two separate parts into a new entity, but a friendly accumulation of difference and an expansion of dualist boundaries. The participants' experiences with prosthetics raised important questions around the performance and embodiment of gender for women with disabilities that, while beyond the scope of this paper, will be important to consider in future research. In light of the dearth of qualitative Australian sociological literature on this topic, I encourage future empirical research in this area to further explore the complex relations between disability, gender, technology and the body, while inhabiting the spirit of the "faithful acts of disobedience" that Haraway's work calls for (Braidotti, 2006, p. 203).

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