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Love from the Machine: Technosexualities and the Desire for Machinic Bodies

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

LOVE FROM THE MACHINE:
TECHNOSEXUALITIES AND THE DESIRE FOR MACHINIC BODIES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

GLOBAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES

by

Ann-Renee Clark

2019

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Ann-Renee Clark, and entitled Love From the Machine: Technosexualities and the Desire for Machinic Bodies, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: June 25, 2019

The dissertation of Ann-Renee Clark is approved.

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Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2019

DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents for their unending love and support, and to Wynnie - my heart
and little love

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

LOVE FROM THE MACHINE: TECHNOSEXUALITIES AND THE DESIRE FOR
MACHINIC BODIES

by

Ann-Renee Clark

Florida International University, 2019

Miami, Florida

Professor Guillermo Grenier, Major Professor

This dissertation explores the dimensions and practices of technosexuality - human desires for machinic bodies. For the purposes of this project, technosexuality is defined as sexual and/or other intimate desires for technologically enhanced or constructed humanoid bodies (machinic bodies) or the desire to be such a machinic body. A machinic body may be mechanical (robotic) and/or digital, techno-biological (as per biological computing and/or a laboratory - grown or built body), or cyborg (cybernetic organism, a partially technologically-modified, partially biological body.) Rather than interpreting technosexuality as troubled or disturbed fetishists who are attracted to the unnatural, or imposing suppositions of feelings of impotence and desire for power as other sources have portrayed them, I explore technosexuality through the lens of “bodies and pleasures” (Foucault 1978.) As such, this project engages with literature on bodies and embodiment (including medical anthropology literature on the body,) gender, literatures of the burgeoning nonhuman turn in the social sciences that explores human/nonhuman bodily interactions, science and technology studies, stigmatization, and the pertinent literature on online communities.

Understanding the complication and fluidities of body/technology interactions with the nonhuman, especially surrounding desire, intimacies, and perceived bodily boundaries (particularly for individuals who want to *be* machinic bodies) is of increasing importance as new and emerging technologies become further integrated into contemporary life (and bodies, in the form of both medical and cosmetic surgical interventions) This project also explores this non-heteronormative, non-reproductive set of desires by looking at how those who engage in technosexualities of various types approach issues of stigmatization, secrecy, and the pressure of passing under compulsory heteronormativity. Although no attempt is made to discover some root cause of technosexualities per se (as this is not a medical investigation and technosexualities are not being treated here as a paraphilia - a fetish) a potential and partial explanation for technosexual desires is discussed.

Through a combination of structured online interviews, participant-observation at the online research site of "Fembot Central" and discourse analysis at the research site, I investigate the thoughts, affects, practices, and group interactions of those who desire machinic bodies.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On the (Non)Human Future

The collective future of humankind will involve a world populated by the nonhuman. But then again, our world has *always* included such entities. "Nature" as we call it (and as we frame it, separate from ourselves,) existed long before us, and will likely persevere long after our species is gone from this world. But, the nonhuman does not merely lurk "out there," beyond the borders of civilization. Such creatures are in our cities. They are in our homes. They are in very bodies.

Who are these nonhumans with whom we share our lives? Some are workmates - whether draft horses or drafting software. Some are family, in the form of furry, four-legged friends. Some are carriers of the viruses that infect us. Still others are infinitesimally tiny beings who live in our organs and cells, without whom, we could not survive. And, as computing technologies and artificial intelligence advances, increasingly, the nonhumans around us are the machine technologies of our own design.

As digital and computing technologies become ubiquitous in our everyday lives, the possibilities for attachment, new desires, and even love with such nonhuman entities develops. Just as we humans came to love the wild creatures who ate our scraps and alerted us to danger with their barks and howls in the night, so too exists the strong possibility that we will come to form attachments to our computer technologies. It is these technologies after all, that have become our new constant companions as we struggle to survive in a difficult world. It is these technologies who do our bidding and watch over us while we sleep.

We need not wait for some distant future however, to see a glimpse into a world in which humankind can desire, or even love, a machine. At this very moment, there are people who love, lust after, long for - and even long to *be* - machinic entities. Their desires for the machinic complicate the *perceived* boundaries between human bodies - with their various drives and emotions - and the nonhuman world. This burgeoning group often call their interests "technosexualities." Some of them wish for no label at all. A diverse group, they all have one common desire - they seek "love" from the machine.

Operational Definitions

This work explores the dimensions and practices of technosexualities - human desires for what I term machinic bodies. For the purposes of this project, **technosexualities** are defined as the sexual desire for technologically enhanced or constructed humanoid bodies (termed **machinic bodies**) or the desire to be such a body. A machinic body is conceived of as mechanical (robotic) and /or digital, biotechnological (as per biological computing, and/or a laboratory "grown" or built body) or "**cyborg**" (cybernetic organism, a partially technologically-modified, partially biological body; my own definitions, informed by Clynes and Kline 1960, Featherstone and Burrows 1995, Hables-Gray, Mentor, and Figueroa-Sarriera 1995, Haraway 1990, Kline 2009, and Tomas 1995.)

The terms technosexualities and **technosexual** (individuals who engage in or wish to engage in sexual and other intimate relationships with or as machinic bodies) are being defined here to describe a particular set of desires for machinic bodies. The term *excludes* individuals who use technology to interact sexually with another human, *as* a human.

“Sexting,” teledildonics, and similar practices, as well as other sexual technologies have been addressed elsewhere (Bardzell and Bardzell 2010, Bardzell and Bardzell 2011, Gordo Lopez and Cleminson 2004, Lunceford 2009) and will not be addressed in the project. This exclusion allows me to focus on those individuals who desire intimate and bodily interactions with (or as) the nonhuman. Additionally, rather than interpreting technosexuals as troubled or disturbed - imposing suppositions of feelings of impotence or misogyny on them as other academic publications and popular accounts have done – I am exploring technosexualities through the lens of “bodies and pleasures” (Foucault 1978.)

As such, this project contributes to changing academic understandings of desire, bodies and bodily practices. Its purpose is to explore an emerging phenomenon in sexual and emotional interactions as well as contribute to science and technology studies on our various bodily interactions with technology. This research looks at the variety of interests and practices complicating human *perceptions* of boundaries between human bodies and the technologies that are believed to exist outside of these bodies. Understanding the complication and fluidities of body/technology interactions with the nonhuman, especially surrounding desire, intimacies, and perceived bodily boundaries (particularly for individuals who want to *be* machinic bodies) is of increasing importance as new and emerging technologies become further integrated into contemporary life (and bodies, in the form of both medical and cosmetic surgical interventions; Casper and Koenig 1996, Casper and Morrison 2010, Edwards 2010, Hacking, 2007.) While a project falling under the purview of anthropology - as this is an investigation into the human itself - this study also seeks to make permeable and fluid the perceived boundaries between the social

sciences. As such, sociology and human geography both greatly influence the concepts found herein.

In terms of the stakes of research, this project touches upon important issues of stigmatization, isolation, and the pressure of “passing” under compulsory heteronormativity. For technosexuals, secrecy and isolation from a fear of sexuality-based stigmatization is a popular theme on forum pages. Frequently, technosexuals are isolated and made more potentially vulnerable by the way academics themselves discuss this group. The implications of stigmatization as concept and power relationship (Kaufman and Johnson 2004, Link and Phelan 2001, Manzo, 2004) and the increased level of stigmatization that “characterological” (perceived deficiencies of character) stigma markers carry (DeJong 1980, Goffman 1963, Gramling and Forsyth 1987) are of particular significance for sexual practices and desires perceived as outside of cultural norms. Sexual and other "invisible" stigma are very often branded as characterological in Western cultural contexts (Goffman 1963, Hatzenbueler, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Dovidio 2009, Ragins 2008), and is very often grounded in subject creation and medicalization, as well as lateral and norm-based power dynamics (Clarke et al. 2003, Foucault 1978, Herek 2010.)

The policy implications for a study of technosexualities extends from an impact upon the regulations and social implementation of biomedical, surgical, pharmacological, and computer technologies to the understanding and protection of a potentially discriminated population. Accordingly, the results of this project will be disseminated through interdisciplinary publication and conference presentations to ensure that the results reach a broad audience, including those outside of academia.

Additionally, for this project, whose primary site of research is found in the online environment - or **cyberspace** - at a web forum called "Fembot Central," I use the term "**physical world**" to represent offline interactions despite the difficulties this phrase presents; it is however preferable to terms such as "real world" which suggest that online interactions are somehow not real or significant (and avoiding what Jurgenson 2011 terms "digital dualism"). In addition to the research site at Fembot Central, various other media, such as other websites, and film and television features, are mentioned in this work, particularly when those media that are discussed by research participants.

I also frequently use the term "**affect**" in this discussion. By affect, I mean "an impersonal force, located in neither subject nor object [alone]" (Lim 2010) and a force of interactive potential, but a force that is different from emotion or intimacy in that affects are pre-cognitive bodily reactions (that may take the form of disgust, aversion, arousal, etc., even before the brain, the bodily organ that regulates and often originates our thoughts and emotions, has fully processed what has affected it; Ahmed 2010, Massumi 2002, Massumi 2015, Sedgwick and Frank 1995, Seigworth and Gregg 2010.) As Lim explains, affect is,

a measure of the changing power of action of a body, its ability to enter relations with other bodies [...] Massumi conceives of affect as a surface of both emergence and feedback between potential and actual [...that] once expressed, feed back into the virtual field [of potentiality] reshaping it, giving it an incipient kind of organisation (Lim 2010: 2398-2399.)

Although the term "affect" is interwoven in discussion with bodily emotion, intimacy, pleasure, desire, and practice at various times, it should be understood as distinct from these concepts (and thus able to be woven with them into a framing of bodies.)

The term "**assemblage**" is significant to this discussion as well, with assemblage indicating any interactive aggregate of beings, bodies, places, etc. (De Landa 2016, Deleuze and Guattari 1986, Dewsbury 2011.) The multiple meanings of assemblage in both anthropology and other social sciences - an aggregation of material culture, a composition of found objects, a collage or pastiche - provide nuances and movement for this term that are both happy coincidence and fully intended.

Why do I insist on studying bodies and desires when my site of research is in cyberspace and I will never meet my research participants in the "physical world"? It is precisely because it is *so* very easy to forget about bodies and their assemblages in online research that bodies underscore this entire project. Their presence needs to be further established in the online environment. A study such as this simply needs to be done.

Finally, this work is also informed by a linked set of theoretical frameworks in the social sciences that has been termed "the nonhuman turn" (Grusin 2015.) The emerging work in this new focus on nonhuman and human interactions with such entities claims the work of Haraway and Latour as foundational, and currently involves a suite of theories that includes Affect studies (Massumi 2002, Massumi 2015), Assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, DeLanda 2016), Animal studies (Haraway 1989), artificial intelligence (AI) and technology studies, and new and emerging media studies (Haraway 1990.) Since I am exploring human/nonhuman interactions and desires both with machinic technologies and in cyberspace, I'm not specifically engaging with scientific

and technical literature on artificial intelligence nor the hardware or software involved in AI or new media, but instead exploring through a lens of gendered experience and interaction in use of, and desires for, such technologies. This is where incorporating STS and other social science studies of gender, such as Fausto-Sterling 2000, Kendall 2002, and Wajcman 1991 are particularly productive.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were informed by my initial exploratory participant observation at Fembot Central:

Q1. What are the dimensions and characteristics of technosexual desires and practices?

- How clearly can this “group” be defined? Should these individuals be viewed as a group or (cyber) community at all, or as set of practices and discussions in an online environment?
- Are the majority of people engaging in this practice primarily interested in immediate sexual relationships? What about romantic or various types of long-lasting relationships with an artificial partner?
- Is sexual role-play with a human pretending to be a machinic body (“robot-play”) interchangeable with actual sex with a humanoid technology?
- What technologies are sexualized? What technologies are *not* sexualized?
- Which is more important in technosexual practices – the technology aspect or the ascribed gender of the technology?

Question 1 (Q1) addresses technosexualities and its practitioners, as discussed and expressed in the cyberspace environment of "Fembot Central." This line of investigation seeks to understand technosexualities as practice, technosexuals as group members of a potential (cyber) community, and the dimensions of technosexual desires surrounding sexualized technologies and desires for machinic bodies. This question explores the initial inquiry of "what is going on?" in online, technosexualities environments, particularly Fembot Central. This question, and its associated sub-questions are answered with participant observation and researcher evaluation of online interviews in which desires, technosexualities, machinic bodies, and the group itself (and group members' beliefs about whether or not they participate in and build a community with their interactions) was discussed with group members. The work of Baym 2010, Boellstorff 2008, Boelstorff, et al. 2012, Cherny 1998, Escobar 1994, Kendall 2002, Rheingold 1993, Wajcman 1991, and Wellman and Gulia 1997, inform this line of inquiry.

Exploratory research at the Fembot Central site indicated that the forum lacks several of the markers that facilitate a cybercommunity, such as synchronic communication, (Boellstorff 2008, Boelstorff, et al. 2012.) Although I certainly observed and experienced cohesive group interactions at the research site, the lack of immediate response in conversations (asynchronic communication) and constant addition and disappearance of registered users made Fembot Central seem more like a "club" or some other gathering of people with shared interests, rather than a community. As such, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Group members at the Fembot Central research site do not consider themselves a community.

This hypothesis will be tested against research participant opinions on whether or not Fembot Central is a community to them. Ultimately, it is up to participants to decide if their group and its associated site are a community or not.

Q2. What are the parameters of discourse around technosexual desires and practices within the group itself? What about from outside the group?

- Who creates these discourses? Who has a voice in it and who is silenced?
- How do discourses of stigmatization intersect with technosexual desires and practices?
- How does this group fit in to the larger picture of human interactions with technology, especially in the U.S.?
- Are discourses around women and feminized technologies different from discourses of male bodies and masculinized or non-gendered technologies?
- Is there gender-based stigmatization within the group? Is stigmatization from outside the group gender-based? Since fear of stigmatization is expressed on the forum pages, what kinds of stigmatization is this group afraid of and why? How does this impact their face-to-face relationships? Are their lifestyle and/or health ramifications of potential stigmatization in this context?

Question 2 (Q2) examines the majority and minority voices at Fembot Central, and the discourses surrounding stigmatization, gender, desire, bodies and technologies at

the site. Exploratory investigation suggests that the majority voices in online technosexual groups are associated with white, male, heterosexual and middle-class bodies - privileged bodies interacting along various lines of Western expectations for masculinities. The work of Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Guttman 1997, Kendall 2002, Kleif and Faulkner 2003, Massey 1995, Sedgwick 1985, and Wajcman 1991 informs understandings of the varying ways that gender, particularly masculinities, are expressed at the research site and the ways that non-hegemonic masculinities at the site (in tropes such as the non-athletic, tech-savvy engineer or programmer, discussed in Kleif and Faulkner 2003) interact with gender, race, and class in discourse. That privileged bodies are expressed in online/extended body interactions, through technological prostheses is informed by the work of Brians 2011, Colebrook 2011, Jain 1999, Lupton 1995, and Wilson 1995.

Discourses surrounding stigmatization in terms of sexual preferences around machinic bodies (discussed regularly on Fembot Central) as well as the potential for stigmatization for those bodies who do not (want to) or cannot conform to hegemonic masculinity, were also points of inquiry with research participants (with Kaufman and Johnson 2003, Kleif and Faulkner 2003, Link and Phelan 2001, and Massey 1995 underlying these aspects of the research.) Issues surrounding race, class and gender (Bray 2007, Gill and Grint 1995, Kendall 2002, Lim 2010, and Sardar 1996) and their interactions with the technologies that group members sexualize are considered in interviews and by looking at the discourse of both the majority group members (white, middle class, heterosexual male bodies) and minority group (non-white and/or female,

queer and/or transgender or transsexual bodies.) The primary hypothesis for Q2 is as follows:

H2: White, heterosexual male “voices” are dominant at Fembot Central, with these “voices” as the primary creators of discourse around bodies and sexuality.

In addition to interview data, this hypothesis will be tested against discourse analysis at the research site, Fembot Central.

Q3. What are the interactions present between technosexuals and the technologies they sexualize?

- What kinds of behaviors are currently present and what kinds of behaviors are technosexuals looking to engage in with sexual partners?
- Do most technosexuals desire intimate interactions with humanoid robots behaving like humans or humans behaving like humanoid robots (and if so, what types of humans in terms of sex, gender, race, etc.)?
- What kind of technologically modified bodies (if any) do these individuals want? What technologies? What modifications? Who wants to be a “robot” (as in the original meaning – from the Czech - of “slave,” passive, controlled) and why? Who wants to be modified technologically to augment power and control (perhaps even to control others?) Is there a gendered association with these desires?

- Do some technosexuals want cybernetic human partners? Do they want cybernetic human bodies of their own in which to engage sexually? Do they want bioengineered cyborg bodies or partners?

Question 3 (Q3) is designed to examine the scope of technosexual desires for machinic bodies. This line of inquiry addresses actual sexual behaviors and interactions, and desires for such interactions, rather than the discourses present at the research site. With this question, the focus shifts from the online environment and its discourses to technosexual desires and behaviors in and for the physical world. This question is explored through interviews with research participants in which technosexual behaviors are discussed. This section of the project is informed by the work of Balsamo 1996, Berlant 2012, de Fren 2009, Dixon and Straughan 2010, Massumi 2002, and Springer 1996.

Q3 and its associated hypothesis (H3, below) address not only the physical world desires of individuals at the Fembot Central research site who wish to have various intimate relationships with machinic bodies, but also those individuals who wish to *become* machinic bodies. This line of inquiry is particularly tied into discussions of human affect and desire within assemblages with the nonhuman by examining desires to be machinic bodies of various types. This part of the question is informed by the work of Allison 2001, Balsamo 1996, Colebrook 2011, Edmonds 2010, Haraway 1990, Johnston and Longhurst 2009, and Wakeford 1997.

Exploratory research for this project indicated that most technosexuals who desire to be machinic bodies are often female-identified (report themselves as female and/or

women at Fembot Central.) The reasons for this possible pattern is discussed briefly in the next chapter and was explored during the interview process with research participants who want to be machinic bodies.

The hypotheses for Q3 focus on the gender division surrounding technosexual desires that I observed at the site during my exploratory investigations.

H3a: The majority of male-identifying technosexuals are interested in primarily sexual relationships with machinic bodies rather than romantic or other kinds of intimate relationships.

H3b: The majority of female-identifying technosexuals are interested in being machinic bodies and having intimate relationships *as* machinic bodies.

These hypotheses will be examined via interview data from research participants primarily, although they will be at least partially informed by discourse analysis at the research site.

Q4. What were the initial experiences and media exposures that research participants had with machinic bodies? When did they first begin to feel desire for such bodies, and what did they desire of those bodies?

Q4 is informed by the work of Allison 2001, Balsamo 1996, Berlant 2012, Gordo-Lopez and Cleminson 2004, Haraway 1985, Springer 1996, and Stone 1995. The work of Allison and Haraway, are particularly salient as they bring to light the effects of late modernity and its media on those who have grown up within modernity's fragmentations,

potentialities, and uncertainties - its “deterritorializations and flux” (Allison 2001.) The hypothesis (H4) is informed by Allison and Haraway’s work on cyborg bodies as both metaphor and image, and how machinic and modified bodies have saturated the media of the contemporary modern world. It is also influenced by my exploratory research at the Fembot Central site. The Hypothesis here is as follows:

H4: The vast majority of research participants have grown up with the “deterritorializations and flux of modernity” (Allison 2001) specifically and explicitly expressed in the form of SF media (science fiction, science fantasy, and speculative fiction,) which may have normalized machinic bodies and made them – or being them – viable options for bodies, and for sexual and/or intimate partners.

This hypothesis will be tested via interview data, as participants were asked directly about their earliest memories of machinic bodies and their earliest technosexual experiences and desires. H4 will also be tested via purposively sampled discourse analysis at Fembot Central in those topic pages in which early technosexual experiences are discussed.

A Note on Participant Gender

Ten online interviews with self-identifying female group members at Fembot Central, and ten self-identifying male group members of the site were conducted. No research participants identified themselves to me as non-binary gendered, gender queer, or with any other designation that suggested a desire to be recognized beyond the two-

gender system. Additionally, for this project, no distinction is made between transgender females and cisgender females, or transgender males and cisgender males, as sex and gender are self-identified at the research site and tied to online group interactions (essentially, self-reporting as a gender in online interactions means you are treated as that gender by the other participants in a discussion.) I also made no attempt to verify that any research participant performed and expressed their self-reported gender in the same way in the physical world as they did in cyberspace. Identities expressed in online interactions are extensions of the embodied user in cyberspace (Boelstorff 2008, Lupton 1995, Rheingold 1993); there is always some truth to the masks we choose for ourselves.

The Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation begins with a discussion of the relevant literature that informed the research. It is followed, in Chapter III, by a discussion of the methods used for this project and the literature that supports the use of these methods. An autoethnography is presented in Chapter IV, to present researcher positionality and "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988) and to further explain the research site at the cyberspace forum Fembot Central. Chapters V-VIII present the findings from the research and also offer some explanation and discussion as to the data. Data from online interviews, discourse analysis and participant observation at the research site intertwine to address one research question (and its associated sub-questions) per chapter. The hypotheses associated with each research question will also be evaluated in each chapter. The dissertation concludes in Chapter IX with final thoughts and discussions, as well as the contributions and limitations of the research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Changing Bodies

In the last few decades, the way that the social sciences have conceptualized the body and bodies has changed from an almost immaterial, discursive understanding that centers on the body as text to one that explores the visceral, emotional and intimate (Buchholz 2003, Butler 1993, Grosz 1995, Johnston and Longhurst 2009, Lock 2002, Longhurst 2001, Richters 2009, Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987, Sharp 2000, Van Wollputte 2004.) In discussing bodies in this current era then it's necessary to address this recent past and to take with us the most productive elements of the discursive understandings of bodies - bringing them in to work with our emerging engagement with bodies as material - and as *materials* - with fluid "boundaries," and as/within intimate assemblages and networks.

The primary difference between understanding the body as "discursive" as opposed to "material" is that the "discursive" body of many post-structuralists and early post-modern scholars is a body that is steeped in social theory instead of lived action. It is a body that is created solely by social and cultural discourse - a body as text itself. While productive in many ways, this lens at times forgets that bodies must be lived in and felt, must eat and drink, must touch the world and in turn be touched by it. These felt and lived interactions happen even in the absence of other human beings and their social constructions (although, admittedly, we can never entirely escape our social and cultural learning; we carry these "texts" into our lived experiences.) Thinking of bodies as "material" is a (re)discovery out of embodiment theories and third-wave feminist

critiques. These strands of theory seek to remind us that we cannot rely on social or cultural discourse alone when speaking of bodies; we have to address the fact that bodies are more than just discourse, they're also material and "real." (Buchholz 2003, Butler 1993, Longhurst 2001, Turner 1994.)

Foucault heavily influenced both discursive and lived concepts of the body, especially as bodies relate to power and its negotiation. His presentation of "biopower" illustrated that modern bodies are wrapped within a dynamic and mutable

discourse of empire that designated eligibility for citizenship, class membership, and gendered assignment to race [... which joined] two distinct technologies of power operating at different levels; one addresses the *disciplining* of individual bodies, the other addresses the "global" *regulation* of the biological processes of human beings (Stoler 1995: 32-33, italics in the original.)

Although Foucault is often cited as a theorist of sex, Stoler points out that the stakes of body discourse (both for Foucault and the body itself) are higher than sexuality alone. Biopower bears on the species as a whole - its reproduction and its regulation under the state. Stoler writes,

technologies of sex are most fully mobilized around issues of race with the pseudo-scientific theory of degeneration at their core [... they] conferred abnormality on individual bodies, casting certain deviations as both internal dangers to the body politic and as inheritable legacies that threatened the well-being of race" (1995: 31.)

The co-construction of sex with race and bodies (and age, class, gender and citizenship Johnston and Longhurst 2009:26, Lim 2010) and with politics (and moral panics - Rubin, 1984) "allowed the "social enemy" to be defined at once by irregularities, departures from the norm, anomaly and criminal deviations" (Stoler 1995: 34.) Foucault's work established that any discussion of sexualities or sexual practices are invariably then a discussion of race, class, gender, citizenship, and discourses of biology and (*stigmatized* - social enemy) bodies - because the discursive body is created through, and at the site of, the intersections of these discourses under the modern project.

This multiply-constructed body also intersects with the creation of subjectivity and experience. Foucault's work brought to light "the understanding that the subject is constituted through discourse. Discourses [...] literally brought new subjects into being" (Pratt 2004: 14.) Foucault ultimately incites a move *away* from the discursive subject and the discourse-determined identity however, evident in his suggestion that our focus should be on "bodies and pleasures" instead of discourse-laden identities (Foucault 1978: 157.) It is in the final pages of his most influential text on sexualities and their discourses (1978) that Foucault himself calls for a turn to the study of material bodies, their intimacies and their physical practices. This call for the re-materialization of the body is echoed in Butler, who herself is often both hailed and criticized as a leading theorist of the body-as-text school.

Butler's work melds Lacanian psychoanalytics with the interpellated subject of Althusser and the power dynamics of Foucault to further theorize a discursive, socially constructed body. "The body image defines the boundaries of what Butler calls the bodily ego by uniting disconnected sensations that do not yet make up a body" but,

"instability [exists] and hence the incessant policing of the boundary of the body" (Pratt 2004: 18.) It is in the area of instabilities that she pulls in the idea of performativity. Identities - whether of gender, sex, race, class, or any other intersection - must manifest in behaviors, must be performed by bodies, then read as intelligible or unintelligible performances by the observer. Performance creates a subject and the performative acts which create relations between bodies (Butler 1990, Butler 1993, Colebrook 2011.) It is in liminal spaces between discourse and bodies, and in contradictory discourses, that resistance to normative power dynamics can be observed. For Butler, we cannot stand outside of discourse but we have the "possibility of reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled' [...] subverting norms through each performance" (Pratt 2004: 20, citing Butler.) Although Butler focuses on sex and gender as her points of analysis, her theory of the body can be applied to every aspect and performance of the discursive body.

Butler reminds us however that bodies - in their physical sense - *do* matter. Bodies *are* matter, and matter is "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we *call* matter" (Butler 1993: 9, entire phrase italicized in the original text.; my italics here.) Repeated performances create, not merely a subject constructed through discourse, but an illusion of boundary. The bounded body and its sense of fixed surfaces is citation and repetition. A bounded body is lived in a very real sense, just as sex, gender, and race are lived, "written" on the skin and seeming to be revealed in the body itself, but as with any discursive creation, it is subject to life, and it is *subject to change*.

This project is, at its heart, a discussion of the changing boundary perceptions of human bodies and desires. It makes use of Foucault and Butler's discursive concepts of

bodies, as both theorists extend bodies out of the discursive and into the realm of process and practice. Bodies are texts, in the sense that they are read, (un)intelligible, interpellated (Butler 1993), and their sociocultural markers performed - gender, race, class, etc. They are a process since they create the (illusion of) subjectivity and boundary. They are applicable to lived experience as body discourses are lived, with and through, the discourses that surround us, flow through our bodies and into other bodies through our intimacies and desires. But it is here, at this "call to arms" (so to speak) that this project moves to different ground.

Bodies are so much more than the discursive. Bodies are *felt, touched*, hurt, cold, and hungry. There is a pre-discursive element to bodies (though admittedly, perhaps not to sex and many other perceived "biological" elements of bodies, as Butler contends), and a non-discursive element to them. It is in questions of the pre- and non-discursive that social science has turned to the intimate and affective body - the material and the touched body - the body that is something *more* than text.

Grosz's framing of the body and bodies comes out of the discursive era, but consistently bridge the gap into the terrains of embodiment, and felt and lived experience, materiality and affect (Grosz 1995.) She understands bodies as wound up in the discursive terrains of power, but also the material, affective, emotional - established perhaps more through what they *do* as bodies (practice) as how they are read (through (un)intelligible performance.) She also critiques those merely discursive understandings of the body, as well as wholly psychoanalytic theories, as they have been unable to address what bodies do in practice; they fail to intersect relationships of desire, politics, "modes of production and regulation" and networks through which they circulate (1995:

218.) Bodies, like cities or other networks, are made of interrelated parts - they are assemblages of multiple elements. Bodies are "volatile" and dynamic in their practices and pleasures - they cannot be understood as fixed (1995: 218.)

As Grosz points out, bodies are also sexed. Grosz, like most theorists embracing embodiment and lived experience (coming from the intersected paths of feminisms and frameworks of "othered" bodies at least), stresses the recognition that embodiment and encounter is experienced in your own skin, at the site of your body - sexed, gendered, raced, classed, lived, etc. It is only in messy, fleshy, physicality, with all of its various social markings, that bodies are experienced. Bodies cannot be understood outside of time or place, or skin (with its varying discourses) or touch (Johnston and Longhurst 2010.) This concept of bodies joins embodiment theories with discursive ones. It grounds bodies in their own flesh and is productive for political moves in research itself. "Ignoring the messy body is not a harmless omission, rather, it contains a political imperative that helps keep masculinism [grounded in dualisms of male/female, mind/body] intact (Longhurst 2001: 23.)

Grosz's sexed, lived, and volatile bodies are bounded, however - at least in their perception by human subjects. "Grosz's volatile bodies were poised membranes or borders, ongoing productions of an interior in relation to an exterior... from which potentiality and motility might be thought" (Colebrook 2011: 15.) For Grosz, a bounded body is needed to *be* embodied. "[T]he body's borders were the result of relations, encounters and [...] morphologies; one can be a bounded body only with a sense, figure or image of one's limits" (Colebrook 2011: 15.) As Grosz herself writes,

By *body* I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality... The body becomes a *human* body, a body which coincides with a “shape” and space of a psyche, a body whose epidermic surface bounds a psychical unity, a body which thereby defines the limits of experience and subjectivity...” (Grosz 1995:104, italics in the original.)

Bounded bodies became subject to trauma or invasion when those boundaries are crossed, compromised, or found to be non-existent. The desire for encounter and touch leads to the risk of trauma, to the breaching of perceived boundaries. Bodies desire encounter but also "desire not to be exposed to contingency, risk or an influx of otherness so great that it would destroy all border and limit" (Colebrook 2011:17.) This is a paradox for bodies, and so physical and discursive work (around desire) must be done to maintain the illusion of body boundaries. The body is "amorphous" (and boundaries are perceptions) but boundaries require "administration" (Grosz 1995:104.) Bodies are "worked on" (Johnston and Longhurst 2009: 30) to maintain boundaries, and trauma is avoided, as is anything regarded as abject.

"[T]he abject provokes dread and disgust because it exposes the border between self and other. This border is tenuous. The abject threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border" (Johnston and Longhurst 2009: 27, discussing Kristeva.) Without the illusion of boundaries, the illusion of the subject cannot be maintained. Messy bodies whose borders are confusing, seeping or leaking are othered, abjected, denied. But messy

bodies are really *every* body, and so new understandings of bodies must come to recognize that a discussion of boundlessness and fluidity is necessary, and so too a move away from the singular, in our understanding of bodies.

In following this path of fluid bodies, of desire and intimacies, this project diverts from any concepts of embodiment that do not acknowledge fleshy, open and boundless bodies. While many theories of embodiment focus on "becoming a body in social space" (Buckholz 2003: 481) I would argue that a body in social space still frames bodies as things, as singular - reifying the subject, if not the object of "the body." I want to bring bodies away from this emphasis on the singular subject, to somewhere far messier and fleshier.

For this project, I am making the very deliberate move back to "bodies" rather than something called "embodiment" which contains the hauntings of masculinist phenomenology - which, at best, can recognize "two bodies" - a discursive one and that of the physical and lived (Idhe 2002) - still unmarked and having skin as its boundary. This move is not meant to return us to a fully discursive understanding of bodies, but instead to take what is most productive from the discussion of discourse and bodies, and from theories of "embodiment," and (re)introduce the elements of multiplicity and flow.

This move is specifically influenced by the works of Ahmed 2004, Ahmed 2010, Allison 2001, Colebrook 2011, Dixon and Straughan 2010, Lim 2010, and Longhurst 2001, a group of anthropologists, geographers and cultural theorists who have turned to the intimate and affective while acknowledging fleshy, touched bodies with their felt interactions and questionable border securities. The underscoring of this project of desiring bodies as "flows," - open, permeable, fluid, and *multiple* - as assemblages

themselves entering into other assemblages - twists the terrain of body understandings back onto itself, flooding our path with multiplicities and making murky this idea of a bounded subject-object that feels, touches, or encounters.

While this dissertation makes use of terms such as "individual" and "research participant" in the singular throughout the work, it must be noted that this is for the sake of clarity and simplicity. Even an "individual" body is inhabited by billions of creatures, has permeable skin, and intimate interactions that trouble the perceived barriers between one "individual" and the next. Touch requires an exchange of molecular material, smell requires the breathing in of bits of other entities and their products in the form of molecules; "individual" is a convenient term for an assemblage.

Intimate Assemblages

With bodies as assemblages themselves (in a very physical, biological way) the idea of the intimate is further expanded. Bodies are intimate landscapes for a multitude of creatures. Bodies interact in intimate ways with so much more than the human. Looking at bodies as assemblages that enter into other assemblages with both the human and the nonhuman, brings us to a more nuanced understanding of interactions, "the body as place of passage, moved through by desire and moved in return" (Probyn 1995: 6) - inhabited and inhabiting, assemblage and assembling. The real usefulness of this approach is that in thinking of bodies as fluid and multiple this project does not end up mired in discussions of disembodiment or other un-lived abstractions put forth by unmarked bodies who have forgotten the seeping mess of hormones, neurotransmitters, emotion and affect that they maintain in the realm of the (supposedly) strictly mental.

Disembodiment does not exist in cyberspace or anywhere else, as every body brings its assemblages of desires, discourses (race, gender, etc.) and intimate and emotional flows (penetrations if we persisted in maintaining the idea of body boundaries) with them into the spaces and places that exist in online environments.

Opening up the body and looking at it as unbounded is supported by both the more material-oriented post-structural body theorists and theorists of embodiment across a range of social sciences and sub-fields of philosophy. Dixon and Straughan, in discussing the "ocularcentrism" of most theories of both bodies and embodiment write about the way that touch permeates and dissolves boundary perceptions around the material body. "[T]ouching, destabilizes the boundaries between self and other [... t]ouching has the capacity to dissolve boundaries [...] but pose a danger to any and all systems of order that rely upon distinction and separation (Dixon and Straughan 2010: 454.) Discussing further, they write that Irigaray's work also supports touch as requiring examination. They write,

the notion of an interior/exterior, self/other binary is the product, to a large degree, of a prevailing ocularcentrism [...] if we prioritize touch then we must think of the body as actively, already being open to touching and being touched. This is a porous as well as visceral corporeality (Dixon and Straughan 2010: 454.)

In physical interaction, we exchange bodily materials (such as sweat, skin cells, and various other molecules and beings that are on and under our skin) with whatever and whomever we touch. Our bodies betray themselves as the open, permeable entities they

are. If, rather than privileging the illusions created by the eye - the illusion of bounded, impermeable bodies - we recognize how much bodily material is shared in touch, smell (which requires the molecules of whatever or whomever we smell to enter our noses), or even hearing (sound waves must enter our bodies through our ears to be interpreted,) we can begin to understand how our bodies are fully open to much of what our eye sees as “outside” of that body. Such awareness can provoke fear, even invite discourses of trauma and bad or uncomfortable feelings. Affective responses around bodies or spaces in which we feel we don’t “fit” (Ahmed 2004), in which we feel discomfort or fear, or simply feel too open or exposed, even permeable to another are visceral and haptic; affect itself quite literally registers as a skin response (Massumi 2002: 25.) Touch can make some bodies feel vulnerable and open; understanding bodies as already open or unbounded may feel traumatic.

Understanding bodies as already open, as assemblages and flows - neither bounded products nor discreet parts - need not be or *feel* traumatic, however. Intimacy begins "the questioning of multiple boundaries" (Price 2014: 518) and so it is to intimacy that this project and many other contemporary questionings of bodies turn.

Consider what needs to be excluded as long as we insist on life as that which is defined by self-maintenance [and closure, exclusively] [...] lines of life and time that are defined less through maintenance of a border in relation, and more in a form of rampant and unbounded mutation [are excluded] [...] how do these bodies that we are, with only a sense of processes in relation to our own living

systems, resist all recognition and interaction with the mindless? Why do we not have the strength or force to think of a world that is not our milieu?" (Colebrook 2011: 24-26.)

In dissolving our perceptions of bodily boundaries we invite the nonhuman into ourselves (and our selves.) Such invitations make new social assemblages, such as technosexualities, possible.

Bodies as flows and assemblages themselves, formed of desire – fluid and active in their lived and felt experiences of touch, scent, place, taste, movement, and even *non-haptic* interactions of the skin - are the very interactions that create our social assemblages, occurring at last "when flows of desire are given relative stability" (Colebrook 2011: 12.) Stability does not mean solidity though; desires and bodies continue to flow.

Human bodies as assemblages - integrating with machinic bodies, the recognition of our already extant integration with other nonhumans and the flows of unbounded bodies - brings the "influx of otherness" that destroys "all border and limit" (Colebrook 2011.) This is one reason why acknowledging human/nonhuman assemblages, particularly desires for, and intimacies with, machinic bodies, may be uncomfortable. With this research I mean to further destabilize the idea of the bounded, singular human body, highlight our human/nonhuman assemblages, and trouble our discomforts.

Affective Assemblages

Lim has begun the process of intersecting (lived and felt) discourses of power (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) with flows of desire in the creation of social “machines” (assemblages between humans and nonhumans, specifically technologies.) Social machines are the human and technological bodies, beings, emotions, spaces and places that interact, flowing together to create human-non-human, specifically human-technology, assemblages. The deployment of bodies as flows and fluid, links multiple human and nonhuman bodies and places into "machines (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, Deleuze and Guattari 2004[1984]) that provide the basis upon which bodies can have affects" (Lim 2010: 2393.) It is in connection itself - the assemblages that are formed - which allow affect to exist at all. Affect is a field of virtuality, emergence, and (cybernetic) feedback loops that moves within assemblages, between bodies and (other) places - "a field of potential" that allows for relation and interaction. "Machines [human/nonhuman/technology assemblages] are powered by desire" (Lim 2010) with affect as an *effect*.

The productive use of affect (both in general and to this project) is that it helps in understanding what a body can *do* (as opposed to just the discourses that surround and limit it.) Bodies are not constrained by their perceived boundaries but are infused with emerging multiplicities - multiple perceived selves, multiple points of creation, multiple entities that create them, and "the multiplicity of things that might happen" (Lim 2010, 2398) including human/technology intimate engagement.

Affect is productive for this project in that, like thought and emotion, affect is a part of the bodily experience of any human/nonhuman assemblage, even those assemblages that exist in cyberspace. I stress affect in this dissertation for the same reason that I stress bodies; we tend to forget bodies and affects when we talk about online interactions. Affect is a part of our online interactions as we are affected and affect others when we engage with cyberspace and its various human and nonhuman denizens. There is tremendous potentiality to enter into assemblages of various kinds in online terrains, and our bodies are affected by these online assemblages and interactions.

Affect also particularly comes into play in the Autoethnography, as pre-cognitive affects, post-cognitive emotions, and thoughts while interacting with research participants and other forum members are a part of the process for the researcher as fieldwork is done. Affect is also interpreted by the researcher in terms of understanding the research site and the group that interacts there. As affect is a field of potentiality, the research site, like most online sites of human interaction, is a fruitful landscape for examining what bodies (their thoughts, emotions, and typing fingers) can do, socially, in their various assemblages. The human-computer-online site is a perfect example of a “social machine” after all.

Assemblages such as social machines have tremendous affective potentiality around emotion and desire.

[Bodies are] always entering into a process of active combination with other bodies, organs, or collectives in order to do something [...] Every body desires, not because of some primary lack, but simply because a body must enter into

relations with other bodies in order to do things, in order for things to happen, or, in the case of living bodies, in order to live (Lim 2010: 2400-2401.)

This understanding of desire makes it clear why psychoanalytic conceptions of desire as “lack” are inadequate. Psychoanalysis often assumes a singular subject with solid body boundaries that desires because of what a singular subject is missing in itself. The idea of a singular subject and body that somehow is self-contained is ridiculous however. Bodies need to be open, multiple, and assembled of other beings - then entering into other assemblages with beings in order to live as physical, biological entities. Human bodies for example, cannot function without the billions of bacteria, yeasts, mites, symbiotic mitochondria, and various other bodies that exist within them; they cannot *do* anything such as acquire nourishment or reproduce with other bodies. A closed, uninhabited, singular human body that is nothing more than a Cartesian, humanist subject-thinker is, quite simply, a dead body.

Lim goes on to write that "the capacities for agency and subjectivity are often presumed to be defining properties of humans, but if the conditions of agency and subjectivity are an open question then being human is one of the many things at stake in how [social] machines operate." (2010: 2405.)

This is precisely why this project seeks to upset the idea of the bounded, closed autopoietic (human) body, with its subjectivity centered discourses. Not only do bodies need to be further recognized in social science and cultural theory as the open, fluid mess

they are, but the idea of "human" needs to be turned on its proverbial head. To miss this emerging opportunity to re-contextualize what we view as “human” is to miss the possibilities that arise with human assemblages with new technologies, and to ignore the essential presence of the nonhuman in our lives and bodies.

Cyborg Bodies

Haraway began such work decades ago, introducing her version of the cyborg into cultural theory (1990). Haraway's cyborg is multiple, and its boundaries are open to - even welcoming of - invasion, as new elements become subsumed into the cyborg identity instead of creating trauma. Haraway's cyborg maintains a fractured sense of self, and a reassembled body - composed of bits and pieces of patriarchal violence, war machines, biomedical modifications, and economic damage. It is a creature that is reconstituted from all the bodies, identities, and places that were destroyed in modernity, and now lie scattered, useful as they are reclaimed, welded and soldered back onto themselves in a new and unexpected order.

While bits of Haraway's cyborg can be found in this project and its concept of bodies, the idea of bodies as fluid and as multiple is not the same as a body that is fractured, as Haraway theorizes the cyborg body and its sense of identity. We are not brittle, solid bodies that fell apart. We are not sharp, aching pieces of human identity that are managing to survive modernity. Human (and nonhuman) bodies were assemblages from their beginnings. The potentiality of seeing them in this way, of thinking through bodies as fluid and multiple, is that new horizons of pleasure and desire can be explored that we hadn't considered possible before.

Springer (1996) and Balsamo (1996) both discuss the image of the cyborg (both as analogy/potentiality, as Haraway employed it, and as seen in media), ostensibly in an attempt to look at new potentials for desires and pleasures, intimacies and bodies. Their presentation of the cyborg, and bodies in general, revolve around discursive bodies, and fixate on the cyborg as deployment of gender. Springer argues that "popular culture plays out contemporary cultural conflicts over sexuality and gender roles in its representation of cyborgs" (1996: 10), and both theorists stress the masculinity and phallic nature of the cyborg in media representation. For Balsamo and Springer, cyborgs are impenetrable, *violent*, and aggressive - the very apex of the unaffected, un-invade-able, bounded masculine body that thrives under - even itself embodies - the military-industrial complex.

Allison (2001) strongly critiques such understandings, both for their masculine readings of cyborg bodies and their suppositions of hard, impermeable body boundaries. She illustrates how cyborg bodies queer boundaries and gender, how they are vulnerable and feminized in their various deconstructions – how they embody the "constructive potential" of beginnings. She stresses "ruptures, slippages, and excesses" with violence as productive (for this is how the cyborg is constructed - out of pieces that once belonged elsewhere) and a source of pleasure for those who grew up/are growing up under the "deterritorializations and flux" of late modernism (Allison 2001.) For Allison, cyborg "violence" can be seen as a source of pleasure, not in its carnage, but in its potential to queer and dissolve perceived boundaries among and between bodies and their various parts. As parts and pieces is what has become of bodies under the mechanical model of

biomedicine in late modernity (Hacking 2007), it stands to reason that pleasure can be found in their reassembly, and resistance can be found in their fluidity.

These kinds of pleasures are found in technosexualities. If Allison's version of the cyborg and its potentialities are allowed to flow into Deleuzian assemblages (particularly Lim's uses of these assemblages) into the idea of Grosz's volatile bodies, and Colebrook's nonhuman bodies in their "unbounded milieux" - then the lure of technosexualities and machinic bodies, and of bodies as flows (Longhurst 2001) as multiple and inhabited places finds its footing. New pleasures, desires and affects are formed at the intersections of new technologies that enter our (social) assemblages, expanding potentialities - for partners and intimacies. New bodies become possible in the pleasurable dissolution of human boundary perceptions, and reassembly with, the nonhuman. For those human bodies who have grown up in the "deterritorialization and flux" of the late modern age (Allison 2001) - who have had to submit to their bodies turned to (spare) parts by Western biomedicine's understanding of the body as, ironically enough, mechanical, with organs and tissues as interchangeable (Hacking 2007) rather than intimately tied into other (nonhuman) bodies and landscapes – the idea of bodies as assemblages that allow for the nonhuman to flow into human bodies and for human bodies to remain fluid to nonhuman desires and intimacies can be very attractive prospects.

If bodies can be (re)arranged, disorganized, disordered with affect (as per Lim, and Deleuze), then affect becomes a functional way to create the kind of cyborgs that enter into new bodies and pleasures. Lim, writing of Deleuze's work, reminds us that "desire is infinitely more polymorphous than all the images of both proper and improper desires found in representation" (Lim 2010: 2404.) The complication of desire, the

fluidity and flow of bodies and affects all invite us " to welcome the potential to do something different, to desire differently [...] to embrace a surprising and unpredictable future" (Lim 2010: 2405.) They invite us to transform our bodies, to experience the pleasure of reconstitution without boundaries.

One of the main hypotheses for this project (H4) involves such ideas, with their incredible possibility for intimate interaction and flow with the nonhuman – particularly with the technologies of the 21st century. For the unbounded, multiple, fluid bodies who grew up in the “deterritorialization and flux” of the late modern world – who pieced together their pastiche identities and frameworks of desire from the bits (and bytes) and pieces of digital computing, exponential technological advancement of the late 20th century, and equally exponential rise in the exposure to “SF” media (science fiction, science fantasy, speculative fiction) that “normalized” machinic beings, cyborg identities, rearranged bodies and technologies, and intimate interactions with the nonhuman – desire of and with the non-human is “normal” and full of infinite potentiality. Bodily transformations such as cyborg “identities” of various kinds and the incorporation of “new” parts, pieces, and pleasures (many of which already existed in our assemblages in our social worlds) might be titillating and enticing. Hypothesis 4 is predicated on this idea. The machinic bodies portrayed in the SF media of the late 20th and early 21st century have normalized human/nonhuman (particularly human/technology) interactions and intimacies. Coupled with the new sciences and technologies that have become expected companions in our everyday lives, particularly in the West, it is unsurprising that humans would begin to see technologies such as machinic bodies as viable and attractive intimate companions. It's also unsurprising if humans began to see such

machinic bodies as bodies that they themselves could resemble and seek to become over time.

This is the possibility of technosexualities. A future of undreamt-of "bodies and pleasures" (Foucault 1978: 157) is the productive potential of boundless bodies in assemblage with the nonhuman. We have always been assemblages, biologically. More than that, we have always been cyborgs. Human beings have been defined by our assemblages with the nonhuman, particularly technologies. Our species is marked by its technology use and creation.

It is for the incredible potential that this framing of bodies invites that this project sees bodies as multiple and open, cyborg assemblages. Skin is permeable - an organ of interaction (not barrier or boundary.) Bodies are channels and flows. They assemble and are assembled. They enter into assemblages of intimacies, desire and touch. Bodies are landscapes and technologies. They are in many ways created through cultural discourse, but they are also pre-linguistic and more-than-discursive. They are felt, seen, touched, tasted, raced, sexed, gendered, and classed - violated, sheltered, altered, purchased, fractured, reassembled, and symbiotic. They are cyborgs of technology and flesh. Made by creatures, disciplines, and technologies, bodies are desired and desiring machines.

Ideal (Female) Bodies

Potentiality is rich ground for discussing desires for machinic bodies, and this project is built on such concepts. But there are a lot of *different* potentialities in play at the research site for this project, and so, some specifics of the involved bodies must be addressed. If, as exploratory research suggested, female-identified technosexuals tend to

want to *be* machinic bodies, what other potentialities, assemblages, bodies and perceptions beyond the above discussed could be interacting in this (sub)group to create such desires?

Bodies in modernity are themselves exemplified by “a social morphology that inscribes ‘civilized’ and ‘modern’ controls over the natural body through industrialized modifications and manipulations onto the ‘natural body’” (Fluri, 2009.) The ideal form of such bodies is then constructed through the use of modification to a “natural body” (Fluri 2009: 242, 249) - ranging from cosmetics to surgery at the extreme (Edmonds 2010), to create an appropriate, normalized body under dominant discourses (that cut across race, gender, class, etc. “Ideal” bodies are white, young, healthy, and reproductive.) These are normalized expectations on bodies in modernity. A certain level of body work (technologies of the body) and technological modification is considered acceptable, even appropriate, in dominant Western discourses of bodies.

Women’s bodies in particular are subject to this type of modification, because women’s bodies “act as a spatial and social metaphor” for modernity (Fluri 2009: 242.) Women, as metaphors and indicators of modernity, are subject to social pressures for modification – both for the achievement of an ideal, and as a body that is civilized through modern technology. In many ways, women’s bodies are the ultimate “natural” bodies to be subjected to modification by technology, with body boundaries that exemplify Haraway’s ideas of “leaky distinctions” (1990: 193.) According to McDowell, women’s “experiences of menstruation, childbirth and lactation, all represent challenges

to bodily boundaries.” (1993: 306.) The modification – this taming – of the natural, female body represents the ultimate triumph of modernity and technology over the blurry boundaries of nature.

What's more, women's and female bodies are conceptualized as confusing and multiple, even under modern understandings of bodies as bounded and closed. Longhurst discusses these confusions and multiplicities when she discusses women's bodies - specifically pregnant bodies, as both place and multiple creature (2001.) That all bodies are both place and multiple creature is not a common admission in late modern social assemblages, so women's pregnant (and potentially pregnant) bodies are already dangerous, invaded, and marked - along with leaking, seeping, messy, and generally inappropriate for male (dominated) public spaces. Such bodies need to be controlled.

Domosh postulates that product consumption is used as taming and civilizing/controlling agent, producing bodies that are correct and desirable under the modern project (2004: 458.) For females who want to be machinic bodies, the attainment of a machinic/enhanced body may be an extension of the modified body that correctly consumes – a production of the idealized visual images of media through an extreme embrace of the physical modifications demanded of women's bodies as sites of consumption (and as objects for consumption.) This does not rework normativity but reinscribes it. Female technosexuals who want to be machinic bodies may voluntarily subscribe to these normative controls. Alternately, being a machinic body may be an attempt to wrestle control of bodies away from normative discourse - to "reclaim" the "stolen bodies" (Clare 2001) of women, the disabled, the different, and the othered.

These ideas underscore several questions in this dissertation surrounding female and women's bodies, desires for machinic bodies, race/gender/class/(dis)ability and how we can think about the way they intersect with technosexualities . Female technosexuals and othered bodies are less prevalent at the research site however than male-identified technosexuals who desire intimacies of various kinds with machinic bodies. It's to these male and majority-group technosexuals and previous framings of their technosexual desires that this discussion now turns.

Prior Framings of Technosexualities

This kind of attitude [negative and looking for the sensational] is also very common when media or "journalists" look at our community. I've noticed a pattern that they're really interested in a particular angle for a story - crazy and desperately lonely men who want to marry robots and pretend they're real women - but when they talk to us, their narrative falls apart because they realize that we're mostly normal people. The truth is we're just sexually aroused by certain things. That's not sensational or scandalous, so they lose interest. (Robotman, 2016, "This fetish Origins..." <http://www.fembotcentral.net/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=12693&p=85487&hilit=Fren#p85487>)

In addition to the popular media coverage that some types of technosexualities intermittently receive, there have been a few academic articles published on technosexualities. De Fren is one of the few researchers to date to approach the subject of (male) technosexualities groups online. She approaches technosexualities through a

Media Studies lens, using a primarily psychoanalytic framework coming out of literary studies. She makes heavy use of updated, but still literal, Freudian concepts of sexuality via a Lacanian framing. De Fren sees technosexuals as fetishists in the Freudian sense, with deep emotional, psychosexual, and social difficulties. She finds their sexual interests to be less about technology and more about power and control, unmasking, and about the sexual tensions that are possible in binaries and liminality (male/female, natural/artificial, animate/inanimate.) Although she claims to be working through an updated version of psychoanalysis, she nonetheless brings the entire practice of relationships with machinic bodies back to male castration anxiety on more than one occasion (de Fren 2009: 408, 417.)

From the perspective of this project, de Fren's portrayal of technosexualities is problematic on many levels. Her understanding of technosexualities is based in psychoanalysis, a theory that works within the constraints of a male/female sex binary, and imposes heterosexuality as both normative and invariant (Butler 1993:141). This understanding of sex, gender, sexuality, and bodies does not necessarily apply to most, or perhaps any, of the members of technosexualities groups nor to the practices of technosexualities in general. De Fren is also making use of psychoanalysis less in the manner of many Lacanian theorists - as linguistic and analogical device - and more in the manner of Freud himself, as if technosexualities were a pathology or problem that needs an explanation in abnormality. Again, in describing technosexual interests as fetish instead of desire, there is a need to find a root for the aberrant instead of engaging in a discussion of practice, discourse, and normative potential origins. Her language is that of

aberrance and abjection, framing desire as intelligible only by the biomedical/psychiatrist expert - a discourse that threatens to pathologize sexuality itself (Vance 1991: 880.)

In addition to her language being pathologizing and potentially stigmatizing, her view on technosexualities emphasizes particular types of sexualities and downplays the technological, a take on the practice that technosexuals themselves have argued against. Many members of Fembot Central have expressed frustration with both de Fren's work, and the lack of emphasis on the technological and the machinic in work meant to appeal to them. De Fren writes that "technofetism" (as she terms technosexualities) is

less about technology in general, or the artificial woman in particular [and more about experiencing] pleasure and agency through [...] hacking the system, the visual indicators of which often take the form of a female android who has run amok - an image that in Freudian terms emblemizes male castration anxiety [...] in its attempts to unmask the artificial body (through physical breakdown) (2009: 407–408)

Here, de Fren assumes a homogeneity in technosexual desires that does not seem to exist. While some technosexuals *do* want to see or reveal breakdown and malfunction, some do *not* want malfunction. Some want a machinic partner that passes as human, while others want to see the mechanical or artificial openly displayed. De Fren's description of technosexuals only speaks to one part of this group. It also ignores female technosexuals, technosexuals who want to be machinic bodies and those technosexuals, male or female, looking for a male, transsexual, or transgender machinic or technologically modified partner. Not only is the use of psychoanalysis an assumption of

heteronormativity in this group, but de Fren's analysis itself is intensely heteronormative. Her analysis is also extremely androcentric, though to be fair, the majority of technosexuals at online sites identify as males. Additionally, to conclude as she does that technosexual interest is “less about technology” than breakdown and unmasking is to suggest that technosexuals do not understand what they truly desire - an assumption that plays directly into 19th century-born psycho-medical discourses that Foucault has directly countered in his work (1978.)

In her writings, de Fren rarely discusses interactions of bodies and power. Since sexuality is co-constructed with other appellations that become “written” in the skin and on the material body itself, the lack of examination of bodies and what they do (either online or in the physical world) is problematic. And, in addition to the conspicuous absence of material bodies and the power discourses that surround them, de Fren's findings were not appreciated by her research participants. Although de Fren interviewed group members of Fembot Central, some of them have complained that de Fren never discussed her findings with them before publication or told them what she planned to do with the information she gathered from them (particularly, the film she later made.)

I remember how de Fren was the first "academic" to publish anything about this community, but she fell into a trap that so many social sciences do - she looked for data only to prop up her model and ignored anything that contradicted it. Her work on us has a tone of "I know this is what you think you feel, but let me tell you how you actually feel." ("Robotman," 2016, Fembot Central thread, "This Fetish Origins...")

Another group member at Fembot Central wrote mentioned on a topic page,

[T]hey [an episode of “Anderson Live”] link to a new film by none other than the self proclaimed expert on the subject, PROFESSOR Alison de Fren. (I won't be linking to it here.) I fucking regret trying to help her understand us back when she was still a student working on her thesis.” (Keizo, 2012, “Love-doll-lovin' on Friday's "Anderson Live"” <http://www.fembotcentral.net/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=10264&p=60337&hilit=Fren#p60337>)

Ultimately, de Fren published several works that some of her own research participants, like the one above, claim is inaccurate, and followed these publications with a potentially damaging popular documentary in which a few extreme "doll fetishists" (individuals who have sexual and other intimate relationships with life-sized, stationary humanoid dolls, such as "Real Dolls," and are not self-identified technosexuals) appear to be portrayed in a sensationalist and exploitative manner for the sake of the film.

My exploratory research into technosexualities suggests that de Fren's publications represent an incomplete picture of technosexualities, and are, at this point, outdated. De Fren does not appear to be incorrect in one respect, however, and that is the considerable presence and influence of men on the Fembot Central site.

Of Machines and Men

A plethora of cultural and social discourses surrounding masculinities create fascinating complications at the primary research site, Fembot Central (which requires technological proficiency – often read as masculine - to visit.) Male- and female-

identified group members at the site both reinscribe and complicate Western cultural discourses of masculinities and respond to them in conversation, artwork, and stories. One of the aspects of both constructed and embodied masculinities that this project hopes to address is the way that female-identified members are incorporated at Fembot Central, both within and despite the construction of technoscientific masculinity (see below.) Since work on masculinities generally focuses only on men's activities, which "occludes the practices of women in the construction of gender among men" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848) this project aims to address this emerging and much-needed discussion in masculinities research.

Discourses and expressions of masculinities as enacted by men (both performances of masculinity as per Butler, and embodied practices of actual men, as per intimacies and assemblages) are positioned in the West against a modern ideal of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995.) This current ideal is one of physically strong and athletic, able-bodied men who are logical, rational, unemotional, procreative, and heterosexual (and, it can be argued, white, middle class, aggressive, and dominant, both over women and other men who do not embody this ideal.) These various reinforcements of hegemonic masculinity serve as social "backlash" to resistance to hegemonic masculinity (such as non-hegemonic masculinities and feminisms.)

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discuss the literature of hegemonic masculinity and corresponding investigations into men's sexual practices, full body-contact sports, discourses of homophobia, "playing hurt" (playing sports while injured), and even violence and criminality. They write that in this body of literature,

Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men could enact it. But it was certainly normative [...] it required all other men to position themselves in relation (2005: 832.)

For Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity subordinates all other expressions of masculinity beneath it and legitimates men's dominance of women.

Connell and Messerschmidt also address the problems however with the literature surrounding hegemonic masculinity, and the way it's deployed, showing that hegemonic masculinity is not a "fixed, transhistorical model" (2005: 838.) Like most bodily discourse, it is subject to change. Individual men interact with hegemonic masculinity, either by attempting to embody it (Guttman 1997) or resisting it with variations and alternative masculinities (and sometimes doing both at various times - as discourses of masculinity are subject to change, so too are individual men's attempts to contend with such discourses.) As with other sociocultural discourses, masculinity has moved out of the terrain of the strictly discursive and changed into a discussion of practice, embodiment, and the affective with the recent intimate and affective turn in the social

sciences. There is a recognized fluidity to both masculine discourses and bodies. Both hegemonic and alternative masculinities are literally embodied in physical strength (or its lack), (dis)abled bodies, and behaviors of dominance in its various social and vocational arenas.

Massey (1995) and Kleif and Faulkner (2003) discuss technological competence as an alternate discourse of masculinity available to those men who do not or cannot embody masculinity in its current hegemonic form. With rationality and logic seen as masculine traits (Massey 1995:489) (framed in the Western dualisms of male/female, logic/emotion, rational/irrational, public sphere/private sphere) coupled with scientific and technological "transcendence" of, and superiority over, the body, there is room for the establishment of an acceptable form of masculinity "against a feminine who 'merely' lives and reproduces" (Massey 1995: 490.) Writing of men who engage in technoscience as both vocation and pastime, Massey states that they have created a "construction/reinforcement of a particular kind of masculinity (that is, of characteristics which are socially coded masculine) around reason and scientificity, abstract thought and transcendence" (Massey 1995: 492.) This type of masculinity is very prominent at Fembot Central, and is practiced at the site as a different, but valid form of masculinity. Similar discussions of masculinities are seen in Kleif and Faulkner's work (2003.)

Technoscientific proficiency as basis for the construction of an alternative masculinity needs to disregard women's technological proficiencies in order to be valid however (Wajcman 1991); sex and gender are reinforced through technological use and proficiencies, with men "viewed as having a natural affinity with technology" (Bray

2007: 38.) An alternative, technology-based masculinity is built on the illusion of male/female dualities in which men are associated with the mind, the rational and the technological, and women are associated with the body and the irrational and emotional (Massey 1995.)

Connell and Messerschmidt also point out that alternative forms of masculinity (such as ones formed around technoscience that are often deployed at Fembot Central) exist within a hierarchy in which they, despite their validity, are perceived as subordinate to hegemonic masculinity. The trope of the tech-savvy ("computer nerd") man as skinny and physically (and socially) underdeveloped is assumed a reality for technosexuals in, for example, de Fren's work (2009.) For de Fren and the popular media representations of sites like Fembot Central, technosexuals are socially awkward men who, as they do not embody hegemonic masculinity, cannot have or understand emotional or sexual relationships with "real" women. The subordination of technoscientific constructs and embodiments of masculinity can create a sense of stigmatization for those men who do not – and perhaps do not *want* to - embody hegemonic masculinity. *If* the technoscientific, instead of being seen as a legitimate and alternative way to perform masculinity, is framed as a subordinate social space for men (privileging the requisite, near-constant participation in physical endeavors of hegemonic masculinity), then tech-savvy "computer nerds" aren't embodying an alternative form of masculinity and following their interests and passions in the process - they're just “failed” men.

Feelings of stigmatization around Western social assumptions about masculinity will be addressed by this project (see research questions and methods.) Exploratory research at the site suggested that some feelings of stigmatization and inadequacy exist

around group members' abilities to navigate hegemonic and alternative forms of masculinity. The type of stigmatization that is discussed far more however, is the "characterological" stigmatization that members feel around public perceptions of the desire for, and sexual interactions with, machinic bodies.

Goffman's 1963 definition of stigma, still used widely, "defined [stigma as] any physical or social attribute that devalues an individual's identity and hence disqualifies that individual from full social acceptance" (Kaufman and Johnson 2004: 807.) But Goffman also showed that stigma is not simple; it is something that needed to be examined on the level of relationship and interaction. As Link and Phelan point out, "it takes power to stigmatize" (2001: 375), specifically the power of cultural norms.

The extent to which a person or practice is stigmatized is based heavily the perceived deviation from cultural norms, and the reason behind such deviation. If a certain bodily element or practice is seen as beyond the stigmatized person's control, or if the stigmatized person cannot wholly take responsibility or be blamed for their situation, that person will generally experience less stigmatization because of their perceived blamelessness (DeJong 1980, Gramling and Forsyth 1987.) Particular behaviors or practices in which the individual being stigmatized is perceived as having *responsibility* for his or her actions or situation however is generally more strongly stigmatized. It is in these instances that the stigmatized person is seen as having a defect in character;

those with a so-called characterological stigma are often explicitly derogated, whereas those with a physical stigma typically are not [...] [t]he fact is that those who possess a characterological stigma typically have acquired their deviant status through the commission of deviant acts [...] those who possess a characterological stigma are almost always seen as having responsibility or of acquiring and controlling their deviant status (DeJong 1980: 76).

What's more, such "deviant acts" as sexual "perversity [as defined by experts...] emerges as a category of personhood" (Seitler 2004: 74.) In Seitler's research she found that images and discussions of homosexuality (and the supposedly abnormal body of the homosexual) in the 19th and early 20th century were bound up with every other kind of perceived-as-deviant body held up as examples of erosions of race, gender, and sexual boundaries. (2004: 77) Stigmatization of sexual practice become attached with "social and scientific anxieties" of boundaries - just as discussed by Foucault. These were neither discussed nor understood as discrete categories. This language of early sexology is carried into discussions of practice even to this day; sexual practice is all tied up in discourses of "degeneracy" of the (human) race and its populations.

By this inherited logic, practitioners of non-normative, non-reproductive sexual acts are degenerates, and they are infantile. (Seitler 2001: 84.) We evolve, mature, and civilize into reproductive heterosexuality according to standard social discourse. Those who don't are childlike - they must be disciplined by society. Stereotypes abound in media depictions of technosexualities of the socially and physically underdeveloped technosexual - creepy (degenerate), fat (feminine), unattractive (physically non-

normative), who lives in *his* parents' basement (and is thus, also immature.) It is little wonder that this research found that male-identified technosexuals are keen to keep technosexual groups online and out of the physical world (more on this in Chapter VI.)

III. METHODS

The methods employed for this project are designed to investigate technosexual desires and experiences in cyberspace and its reflection in the physical world. Twenty structured, online interviews with ten each female-identifying and male-identifying group members at the Fembot Central online research site, were used to investigate the possibility of Fembot Central as a cybercommunity, the types of machinic bodies desired by technosexuals, and their initial and early experiences with media that featured machinic bodies. Discourse at the research site and stigmatization, both within and without the group, were also discussed with research participants, and discourse analysis was employed to further investigate group dynamics at the site, and feelings of stigmatization (which exploratory research revealed to be a topic of discussion at Fembot Central.) Participant-Observation was conducted to address technosexual desires and experiences, and the discourses that surround them, in the cyberspace environment at the research site. An autoethnography was written to reflect on some of these participant observation experiences, my emotional and affective responses during participant observation, and to address my positionality as researcher.

Development of the Hypotheses

Boelstorff presents a fairly thorough history of virtual and online studies of "community" and other online social interactions in his work (Boelstorff 2008; Boelstorff et al. 2012.) Although Boellstroff does not particularly emphasize the work of Wellman and his various collaborators, it must be acknowledged that Wellman has been working on social relationships and online communities since the advent of the internet in

the late 1970s, establishing an extensive body of work on the existence of online communities, and their reciprocities and intimacies (reviewed in Wellman and Gulia, 1997.) Boelstorff does of course reference Wellman's work, but he approaches the history of Internet researcher in a more Foucauldian way - tracing the histories of various discourses of the Internet, including a personal history to situate himself as researcher.

Boelstorff begins one of his histories of social science discourse around cyberspace with Hiltz and Turoff's discussions of "electronic tribes" that were already developing in the early Internet of the late 1970s (2008: 53.) The first ethnographies of Internet communities and what Boelstorff calls "virtual worlds" begin to appear in the 1990s. Cherny 1998, Baym 2010, Kendall 2002, and Wellman and Gulia 1997 are all mentioned as foundational in Boelstorff's histories, and all inform this project with their various foci on discourse (Cherny 1998 in particular) and masculinities (Kendall 2002.) Boelstorff also mentions Stone's 1995 work on embodiment in cyberspace. Stone's work is fundamental to the way this project sees both community and embodiment online - and the affective and real extension of bodies into cyberspace (to which I would add Wakeford 1997 as a necessary discussion of queer bodies online, in which technosexualities, with its focus on non-normative, non-reproductive sexual encounters, could be included.) These various discussions of community, embodiment and affect in the online environment has assisted in created a hypothesis (H1, below) that does not see Fembot Central as a "true" cybercommunity, but as a gathering place.

Rheingold presents a similarly thorough history of virtual communities in his 1985 work about the WELL cybercommunity. Unlike Boelstorff's genealogical approach to the history of discourse, Rheingold focuses on the changes in technology that have

allowed for the rise of virtual communities, and thus, provides a perfect companion history to Boelstorff's look at virtual community and discourse. Early on in the work, Rheingold provides what he believes to be the reason that virtual communities developed from technologies that were originally meant only to link military computers and safeguard data (via decentralization),

I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon [virtual communities] is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives. I also suspect that these new media attract colonies of enthusiasts because CMC [computer mediated communication] enables people to do things with each other in new ways, and to do altogether new kinds of things--just as telegraphs, telephones, and televisions did." (1985: 5)

In terms of the specific genealogy of the research site at Fembot Central, the site sees its beginnings in the "Usenet" electronic bulletin board of the 1990s. Usenet and the early "MUDs" (Multi User Domains/Dungeons - and similar "Moos" such as "LambdaMoo" and "BlueSky" in which Cherny and Kendall did their research, respectively) are well documented online communities which, in the 2000s, gave way to the "virtual worlds" of MMORPGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, such as World of Warcraft), Internet 2.0 style forum pages, and graphic social virtual worlds such as Zwinky, IMVU, and Second Life (in which Boelstorff did his own virtual ethnographic work, 2008.)

Fembot Central and other forum sites however, don't fit the criteria and description of "virtual worlds" offered by Boellstorff. He writes that virtual worlds are "(1) places, (2) inhabited by persons, and (3) enabled by online technologies" (2008: 16.) Sites such as Fembot Central are less "inhabited" and more visited - an intersection between virtual worlds and earlier online telecommunication networks. As such, Fembot Central continues to bear a resemblance to its origins as a "Usenet" bulletin board. Asynchronous forum sites, in which users post messages to each other at various times, have a sense of place, as you go to the site and interact at the site, but they do not compare to virtual worlds such as Second Life that allow the creation of a mobile avatar with the building and involvement in a visual landscape. Asynchronic communication at Fembot Central creates less a sense of lived place and more a sense of shared interaction. Fembot Central is more (night)club than home base.

The "landscape" of Fembot Central is not three-dimensional or visual beyond the presence of text, still picture or "gif" (repetitive, moving graphic image,) but a landscape of interaction, intimacy and assemblage. Whether or not group members at Fembot Central consider themselves a part of a community, and how that community (or diverse assemblage, club-like group, or virtual meeting place - however members at the site view themselves) understand themselves as engaged in community-building, and/or in embodied and visceral activities will be answered ultimately by the primary research.

Community or not, the assemblages of technosexualities in the online environment is one of emotion, affect, and as mentioned, intimacy. Candid discussions of sex, emotional and sexual engagements, desires, and bodies are expressed openly and continuously at Fembot Central. The combination of anonymity and the emotional link of

shared (or at least similar enough) desires creates a sense of intimacy at the site, despite the lack of shared physical proximities. As Price reminds us, "physical proximity does not always go hand-in-hand with intimacy, nor does physical distance necessarily imply a lack of intimacy" (2014: 514.) Despite this intimacy however, the anonymity and lack of instantaneous response in conversation may very well prevent group members from creating a feeling of community in the cyberspace environment at Fembot Central.

As Fembot Central features both this asynchronous communication (meaning that group members must wait, sometimes indefinitely, for responses to their comments) and little to no negative social sanctions for a lack of involvement in group discussions, the following hypothesis is given:

H1: Group members at the Fembot Central research site do not consider themselves a community.

During the interviews, I directly asked research participants if they consider themselves a part of a community at Fembot Central. This hypothesis is tested against research participant opinions. Ultimately, it is up to participants to decide if their group and its associated site are a community or not.

Additionally, discussions of gender, masculinities, and stigmatization at Fembot Central (see Chapter II) must be addressed, and understood within interactions of power at the research site. Sardar discusses the association of cyberspace with other colonial/colonized frontiers, and the abuses and silences that will and are happening in

this space (1995.) Colonized by male voices of privileged white bodies - with their access to various new technologies - cyberspace, according to Sardar, is beginning to echo the geographies of imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sardar also argues that the discourse of cyberspace as new frontier, open to colonization is a re-emergence of the inherently Western, male desire to conquer, know the hidden, and to subjugate (1995.) This argument becomes problematic however in much the same way that de Fren's arguments surrounding technosexualities in cyberspace center on supposed male desires to unmask. Sardar conflates "Western man" and "white man" throughout his discussion, forgetting perhaps that a great deal of non-white bodies identify as Western, and the category of "man" is hardly stable.

Sardar, while reminding us that we must examine more than just gender and "community" in our investigations of cyberspace, nonetheless privileges the "real" world over online interactions, as if online interactions were imaginary instead of embodied, visceral, intimate, and affective. Even when Sardar was writing this argument however, Wellman and other researchers on cybercommunities and interactions in cyberspace had already established the short sidedness of not regarding online intimacies as "real." Carrying on this argument, Boellstorff 2008, Boelstorff et al. 2012, Escobar 1994, and Wilbur 1997 firmly establish the validity of cyberspace as research site with online interactions as "real," embodied, and much in need of study. The power dynamics of online spaces and places may echo those found in the physical world, or even in the "new frontiers" of imperialism and the American West, as Sardar claims, but this can't be taken for granted or assumed to mimic physical world histories.

Kendall 2002 provides a more nuanced look at discourses and power in her investigation into Blue Sky. Her work evidences the complexities and fragilities in performances of masculinities, and their extension into cyberspace and online discourse. Kendall's work – along with Massey's 1995 work on technoscientific knowledges as foundational for an acceptable, alternative (non-hegemonic) form of masculinity, and Wajcman's 1991 discussions of technological spheres as necessarily excluding women and female voices to claim those spheres as masculinized terrains – informs the analysis of discourse and men's "voices" at the Fembot Central site.

H2: White, heterosexual male "voices" are dominant at Fembot Central, with these "voices" as the primary creators of discourse around bodies and sexuality.

Interview data will be used to evaluate this hypothesis, and this hypothesis will also be tested against discourse analysis at the research site, Fembot Central.

In addition to the gender and power differentials that may exist in discourse, there is a gender difference in the technosexual desires of group members at Fembot Central. While group members at the research site express a wide variety of different technosexual interests, exploratory participant observation at the site suggests that male group members are more interested in intimate interactions, primarily sexual interactions, with machinic bodies while female group members are predominantly interested in becoming machinic bodies themselves. Based on exploratory participant observation, the following hypothesis is given for this research:

H3a: The majority of male-identifying technosexuals are interested in primarily sexual relationships with machinic bodies rather than romantic or other kinds of intimate relationships.

H3b: The majority of female-identifying technosexuals are interested in being machinic bodies and having sexual relationships *as* machinic bodies.

This hypothesis will be examined via interview data from research participants primarily, although it will be partially informed by discourse analysis at the research site.

Regardless of the types of desires and machinic bodies that group members at the Fembot Central site are interested in, exploratory participant observation at the research site suggests that most, if not all of group members have had significant exposure to SF (science fiction, science fantasy, and speculative fiction) media. Based on the work of Allison 2001 and Haraway 1984 and the proliferation of SF across various media starting in the second half of the 20th century, I believe that group members' exposure to SF media, and exposure to the machinic bodies that are often found therein, began in either late pre-pubescence or adolescence. It was, perhaps, early exposures to machinic bodies that presented such bodies as desirable – either as intimate partners or as attainable bodies in their own right. The following hypothesis is therefore presented:

H4: The vast majority of research participants have grown up with the “deterritorializations and flux of modernity” (Allison 2001) specifically and explicitly expressed in the form of SF media (science fiction, science fantasy, and speculative fiction,) which may have normalized machinic bodies and made them – or being them – viable options for bodies, and for sexual and/or intimate partners.

This hypothesis will be tested via interview data, as participants were asked directly about their earliest memories of machinic bodies and their earliest technosexual experiences and desires. It will also be tested via purposively sampled discourse analysis of Fembot Central topic pages in which early technosexual experiences are discussed.

It must be noted at this point that all of these hypotheses were created to correspond to each research question so as better to clarify the core ideas that were under investigation. The language of the hypotheses is a conceit - formal for clarification purposes only - and not meant to indicate that the data obtained were from a large enough sample size to be subjected to statistical analyses. The quantitative data presented are from too small a sample size to be used to explore correlation in its strictest usage, while the qualitative data are an exploration with twenty members of a single technosexualities group, highlighting their lives and experiences. The final evaluations of these hypotheses therefore, are not being presented as the last word on this population, but instead as a glimpse into an emerging socio-cultural phenomenon.

Methodological Approach: Mixing the Methods

The methodological approach for this research involved primarily qualitative methods including structured interviews with twenty research participants who were purposively recruited based on self-reported gender, participant-observation over the course of two years at the online research site, and discourse analysis at the Fembot Central site. I also employed some quantitative analysis in the generation of word frequency query and the examination of that analysis in the context of the raw data from the forum pages. For the discourse analysis of the Fembot Central webpages, lines of discussion (called “topics” or “threads” at the site) for analysis were selected via random sample and purposive sample; distinctions between random and purposive selections are indicated in the following chapters, when each topic is discussed.

Technosexualities are, at present, largely virtual practices. Desire at technosexualities sites focuses around fantasy, discourse, and bodies in the virtual setting of the site, the image, and the imaginary. These discussions however involve extensions of discussant bodies into the virtual world, with those bodies experiencing affects and feeling emotions (titillation, arousal, excitement, frustration, anger and joy) through both the fantasy involvement - bodies in the imaginary - and the human-to-human interactions at the online site.

This corporality and materiality is addressed in the underlying theories of the project, particularly in the way that bodies are unbounded, fluid, and extensive - nodes in networks, parts of assemblages that include the biological and the technological. The computer as prosthetic for the senses is theorized in Jain 1999 and Tomas 1995, but the computer and the virtual environment can and should be considered as a part of the

assemblages in which bodies engaged in technosexualities move and feel. Each interaction in the virtual world is a "real" action in the assemblages of technosexualities. Each conversation, image, post, story, or (virtual) sexual interaction is accompanied by chemical and biological reactions in and of the bodies engaged in those reactions - at the computer or cell phone - laughing, getting irritated, pressing keys and/or interrupting electrical signals on the surface of a screen, imagining the feeling of a sexual partner (robotic or otherwise) touching skin. There is simply no such thing as the "disembodied" user (Lupton 1995.)

The methodological challenge then of this project is in researching intimacies and emotions in bodies that have been extended into cyberspace. This challenge is addressed in a variety of ways. First, desire, emotion and intimacy are addressed in interview questions. Exploratory participant observation indicated that Fembot Central group members would be interested (even excited) to discuss their technosexual interests and practices. The combination of anonymity in the online environment and fear of stigmatization potentially leading to feelings of emotional confinement in their physical world lives tends to leave participants at the site eager to converse on technosexualities. Group members are very open about these subjects in their online discussions and had been candid with me in casual, initial interactions.

Second, I made use of the researcher as device in this study, with "field" research as embodied and positioned - capable only of telling "specific kinds of stories" rather than claiming expert knowledge (Hyndman 2001: 262.) Acknowledging the researcher as field instrument destabilizes masculinist science and its claims to objectivity (Haraway

1988, Hyndman 2001.) As such, a chapter of this dissertation is devoted to an autoethnography, which also address the positionality of the researcher.

Additionally, this project is "insider" anthropology of a type. As an established, participating group member at Fembot Central, I too am a part of the assemblage that is this group. I experience emotions in discussions and sense affects in the various "topic" pages (virtual "rooms" in which affects can be felt.) Affect indeed can be sensed and can spread through topics, persisting in time and space in the constant "here" and "now" that an asynchronous, online site can offer. As a group member I have "entered" topic pages and felt - very viscerally - sexism in discourse, being welcome or unwelcome in a discussion for various reasons (my status as new member, my professed gender,) and even relief from members who felt marginalized and were thankful when I supported or validated their technosexual interests (for example, a male group member who wants to *be* a machinic body, in seeing my positive responses to his posts sent me a private message in which he described in detail the machinic modifications he desired. He later sent me a message thanking me for "listening.")

This use of my body/assemblage as device in the study is intended to augment the research tools (I understand the difficulties that some will have with this method, although anyone who does should stop and consider the absurdity of the illusion of objectivity in this type of endeavor, the "God-trick" of science via Haraway 1988, and the understanding that the researcher is indeed always a tool of research.) I frame this use of myself as device in this project as a reflective approach to anthropological research, much as Boellstorff uses his own reflexivity in his ethnography of Second Life (2008.) I also understand, and approach with reflexivity, the physical world body/assemblage that I am

extending into my own online research, and how this affects the research itself. The body that I perceive subjectively forms its identity as a white, working class, educationally privileged, heterosexual, able-bodied (though pharmacologically modified and monitored) woman. This perceived subject position that I hold as "me" interacts with multiply privileged males who routinely notice my communicated identity, reacting along lines of various gender expectations; comments I have received from Fembot Central members indicate that they find me feminine, calming, civilizing and diffusing during arguments, and intelligent, but in a way that "feels" soft and often sexualized from my affective perceptions and emotional reactions during interactions.

This project also stands on some interesting temporal and spatial ground. The online research site brings together both many places in space and many moments in time. Group members may physically be anywhere in the world when they participate in activities at the site (such as discussion, reading stories, viewing images, engaging in human-to-human technosexual fantasy/robot play.) They may also be removed in time from anyone reading or responding to a post, discussion, story, or sexual engagement. This complicated space/place and time interaction creates a machinic assemblage that is not bound by fixed points in space or time. Place is created multi-spatially at the research site, and time is only of marginal concern for group members. As such, Fembot Central (like so many other places online) is haunted by the ghosts of affect-past - still accessible in the present or future. Conversations once abandoned can be searched and found again - discussions restarted, passions re-ignited, ancient affects spilling out of dusty digital topic thread sending new chemicals coursing through a human body in the present or some future time when they are stumbled upon or sought out once more. Memory lives

fully engaged in such a place, touched by emotion, bodies experiencing and longings felt. As such, online environments such as Fembot Central are living parts of the machinic assemblages that envelope, create, and deploy human bodies. Affects are very much a part of the online environment - and bodies touch virtual *places* and landscapes so acutely that we simply cannot call these interactions disembodied.

Although I use ethnographic methods during the course of this project, I never intended to write a complete or traditional ethnography. I am not making the argument that a web forum is a "virtual world" in the same way that "Second Life" or "imvu" are virtual worlds. As Boelstorff's virtual worlds "are (1) places, (2) inhabited by persons, and (3) enabled by online technologies" (2008: 16.) I cannot claim to have "inhabited" the research site at any time. While Fembot Central can be argued to be a place, and it is indeed enabled by online technologies, it would be very difficult to support the site as "inhabited" by anyone as a community, as opposed to merely visited, given the lack of synchronic communication and social sanctions, and the anonymity that the site allows.

As in Boelstorff's ethnography of Second Life, no attempt was made to "verify" that avatars that identify as female (for example) are female or women in the physical world. The lived bodies of online participants are present in their online interactions, and their choices for online identifiers are coming out of some aspect of that lived body. If participants chose to volunteer information about being transsexual or transgender, or having a different understanding of their sex, gender or other bodily markers online than in the "physical world" then that information was included in the analysis and discussion.

The methods and phases of the study are as follows:

Phase 1: Participant Observation at the research site, Fembot Central (2015-2017)

Phase 2: Structured online interviews with 20, purposively sampled research participants (2016-2017)

Phase 3: Interview Analysis via NVivo 11 software (2017)

Phase 4: Discourse Analysis of randomly sampled topic threads at the Fembot Central site (2017)

Phases of the Project

Project Phase 1

The first phase of the project involved participant observation at the research site of Fembot Central. Exploratory participant observation, as a group member prior to the research for this dissertation, began at the site in August of 2012, and informed the research questions and selected methods for this investigation. Participant observation for this dissertation began in August of 2015 and lasted until July of 2017. During the exploratory research, I joined the Fembot Central site with the name “Miss Pris” – an allusion to the science fiction/cyberpunk film “Blade Runner.” The Miss Pris “username” (online pseudonym) and “avatar” (image representing the online user) and researcher positionality is described fully in the autoethnography that follows this chapter.

I continued to use the Miss Pris avatar during Phase 1 of this research as I felt it would be disingenuous, even misleading, to change my name and online “self” during the research. Not only did maintaining the Miss Pris avatar into the research – essentially, doing the research as “myself” – feel like the most ethical way to recruit participants and

to let the group members at Fembot Central know about my intentions, but it had the added practical benefit of giving me access to potential research participants (for Phase 2) in a way that an outsider might not have had.

During Phase 1 of the research for this dissertation, I interacted with group members at Fembot Central, participating in asynchronous online discussion at the public topic pages and asynchronous private messages through the in-site message system at Fembot Central. As I had been a group member at Fembot Central for three years prior to the start of participant observation for this dissertation, I consider my research at the site to be “insider anthropology” (Peirano 1998: 111) and I discuss my positionality and foundational technosexual exposure in the autoethnography chapter that follows this chapter on methods.

Project Phase 2

The second phase of the project consisted of structured, online interviews, with twenty research participants via private messaging at Fembot Central, or via personal email (at the choice of the research participant.) Participants were chosen for interview via purposive sampling, based on self-identified gender at the time of forum registration. Ten male-identifying Fembot Central members and ten female-identifying members were recruited at the Fembot Central site. I contacted prospective participants via private message, and nearly all of the Fembot Central group members asked to participate agreed to be a part of the project. Only one Fembot Central group member, a female, declined my request to be a part of the project.

Exploratory research at the Fembot Central site suggested that ten interviews with male-identifying technosexuals would provide sufficient saturation on the subject matter for a project of this size, (with no new themes emerging in the interview process that pertain to the questions involved; Corbin and Strauss 2008: 148-149.) Every attempt was made to recruit any and all female-identifying members of the Fembot Central community, as their numbers are small. It took several months to recruit the needed ten interviewees to correspond with the ten male-identifying interviewees. “Saturation” in the traditional methodological sense was not expected with female-identifying participants, as exploratory research suggested that they were the most varied group at the research site.

After an initial online discussion with each research participant, a sixteen question research instrument was sent to each participant (see Appendix 1.)

Project Phase 3

The third phase of the project involved the analysis of the interview data. This was accomplished with the help of NVivo 11 software, which was used to code, explore and analyze the interview responses from the 20 research participants. Prior to the data analysis, I assigned randomly generated pseudonyms from <http://www.springhole.net> and <https://www.behindthename.com> to ensure that any bias from personal affective or emotional response (generating from my online interactions and relationships with research participants) could not interfere with the analysis. I next coded the interview data with researcher-created codes, called “nodes” in NVivo 11. The decision about how the data was coded was entirely researcher determined. As I have been a group member

at Fembot Central since 2012 (for three years prior to the research for this dissertation, during the two years of research for this dissertation, and continuing now, after the research itself has come to a close) I have spent a considerable amount of time engaged with the group at Fembot Central and exploring technosexualities, as both researcher and group insider. My experience as group member at Fembot Central, and as body/assemblage that itself explores technosexualities reflexively and conceptually, legitimizes my interpretation of research data. My coding of the structured interviews in this phase is based on many years of experience contemplating and interacting with technosexualities and other human/nonhuman and body/technology boundary concepts.

Once the interview data was coded into researcher-generated “nodes” in the NVivo program, I explored the data by conducting “Comparison Diagrams” in NVivo, comparing nodes and selecting specific nodes to show their relationships with other nodes. I then exported the resulting Comparison Diagrams, including them, where useful, when I explore the concepts and research questions associated with the interview coding.

Finally, I created a “Hierarchy Chart” of the NVivo nodes that shows interview coding, particularly what codes were most frequent in the interview data (See Figure 15.)

Project Phase 4

The fourth phase of the project involved discourse analysis of threads and “topics” from the Fembot Central research site selected via simple random sample and purposive sample. In addition to purposive, researcher-chosen topics for general discourse analysis and discussion (Rapley 2007) pages and topics for coding and analysis via NVivo were chosen using an online random number generator at <https://www.random.org/> (see Table

1 and Table 2.) The “NVivo Capture” tool for NVivo 11 was then used to import Fembot Central topics into the NVivo program. Data was randomly selected from the “Discussion Board” and “Character Play” sections of the Fembot Central site.

Topics were chosen via simple random sample as this was a good way to get a random slice of the discourses found at the Fembot Central site. A full analysis of all of the topics at the site would be its own project. The site itself is fairly expansive, with topic pages and threads that include - among other things - areas for general discussion of subjects in technosexualities, "Character Play" areas for person to person technosexualities role play, sections for stories and other media created by group members, a line of threads devoted to technosexualities media (both mainstream media and content created for technosexuals by artists and adult media actors,) and an Off Topic section for non-technosexualities related discussions. Each section of the site contains thousands of discussion threads with hundreds of participants "moving" in and out of the topic "rooms" (pages and threads) - the record of their interactions there preserved in time. Attempting to capture the scope of so many years of interaction is beyond the scope of this dissertation, so a "slice of life" glimpse is given in the analyses of random selections in the "Character Play" and "Discussion" topic pages.

Certain lines of discourse were purposively chosen for analysis, however, as they directly pertained to the research questions. Some of these discussions were those associated with gender and technosexualities. Another major line of discourse that was explored purposively were those that involved group members reflecting on what they

thought to be the origin of their technosexual interests. As with the randomly sampled topics, "slices" of these discussions are presented in this dissertation, either directly quoted or informing the larger analysis.

I coded the topics with the same researcher-created codes - called "nodes" in NVivo - that I used during Phase 3 for the interview data. Like the interview data coding, decisions about how the online discourse was coded were made by the researcher. I then conducted a "Word Frequency Query" on Discussion Board samples to create a word cloud. I excluded all terms that were repeating features on each forum page, and had to do with the workings of the site itself (terms such as "user" or "guest") as they would have prevented the word cloud from revealing word frequencies in the actual discussions. I then created Cluster Analysis Diagrams for each word frequency query performed. "Explore Diagrams" were then done for Discussion Board topics and Character Play topics to see what nodes were associated with each topic, with these expanded by selected node to see how the discourse at Fembot Central related to the interview data.

Forum pages at the Fembot Central site and topics on those pages were, as described above, chosen via random numbers generated by <https://www.random.org/> and resulted in the following selections:

Table 1: Random Selections from "Discussion" Board

Page Number	"Topic" Number from Top	Title
16	15	"Becoming Overcommercialized?"
14	22	"Here we go again. True Robot."
4	18	"HUMANS"
10	15	"Damaged Fembot"
20	20	"French Clip on the FTP"
20	3	"Fembot Stories"
7	22	"Robots Could Be Having Sex for Reproduction"
1	7	"any techromantics?"
3	18	"A Vulcan in the streets, a Klingon in the sheets'..."
22	20	"My Ideal Fembot.....part 2.....appearance"

Table 1 shows the online pages and topics selected, via an online random number generator, from the "Discussion" board, for discourse analysis of the Fembot Central site. The first number chosen by the random number generator was applied to page selection, while the second was applied to topic number selection from the top of the page. The next set of numbers were applied according to the same pattern (first the page number was selected, then the topic number.) These page numbers and topic numbers however are specific to the time of creation (as new topics are added, positions for already-existent topics change) so the names of each topic are provided. Assigning the topics a set of numbers here was completely arbitrary for the purpose of creating a random sample, and have no other meaning beyond ensuring randomness; the fact that the topics will have changed positions by the time of my writing this description has no bearing on the discourse analysis, and the topics are not numbered this way on the Fembot Central site itself.

Table 2: Random Selections from "Character Play" Board

Page Number	"Topic" Number from Top (Thread)	Title
6	2	"The Fembot"
5	3	"Hi everyone :)"
5	2	"The New Job"
(1)	(16)	"Male bots needed"
4	2	"Malfunctioning fembot in need of repair"

Table 2 shows the online pages and topics selected, via an online random number generator, from the "Character Play" Board for discourse analysis of the Fembot Central site. (The "Character Play" Board is for online roleplaying with other group members, and is often sexual in nature.) As with the "Discussion" board selections, the first number chosen by the random number generator was applied to page selection, while the second was applied to topic number selection from the top of the page. Once again, these page numbers and topic numbers are specific to the time of creation, so the names of each topic are provided. These number designations are likewise completely arbitrary for the purpose of creating a random sample, and have no other meaning beyond ensuring randomness, and have changed since this writing. Five "Character Play" topics were chosen to provide a brief glimpse into the varieties of technosexualities that present at the site, but an analysis of online roleplaying was not a central area of exploration for this dissertation.

Participant Demographics

The average age of the female research participants was 33.7. If the age outlier, a 57-year-old female interviewee is excluded, the average age of the female research participants was 31 years old. The average age for Male participants was 37.5. The age range for all participants was between 21-57 years of age at the time the interviews were conducted.

Research participants were asked to self-report their sexual orientations. The table below describes the responses by gender to that interview question.

Table 3: Self-reported Sexual Orientations of Participants

Stated Sexual Orientation	F	M
Heterosexual	1	5
“Heteroflexible”	1	
Heterosexual but Bisexual in an online or fantasy environment		3
Heterosexual, but open to trans partner		1
“Pansexual” or Bisexual	5	
Bisexual with same sex preference	1	
Homosexual	1	
Asexual	1	
Unreported		1

Table 3 displays the self-reported sexual orientations of the research participants, in response to being asked for that information directly in the interview. Of the female research participants, one stated that she was heterosexual, one stated that she was heterosexual but recognized flexibility in here sexual orientation (“heteroflexible”), one responded that she was homosexual, and five participants indicated that they were

bisexual (sexually or romantically attracted to both sexes in a two-sex system) or pansexual (sexually or romantically attracted to any and all types of humanoids regardless of biological sex or gender, including transgender and intersex individuals.) Additionally, one female participant stated that she was bisexual, but that she had a strong preference towards the same sex, while one participant stated that she was entirely asexual. Two of the aforementioned female respondents also reported that they were demisexual (only sexually attracted to individuals they feel a strong romantic attachment to) along with their professed sexual orientation.

Nearly all of the male research participants reported that they were heterosexual in some fashion. Half of the male participants said they were heterosexual, while three of the ten male participants stated that they were heterosexual in the physical world, but bisexual in an online or (internal) fantasy environment. One male participant mentioned that he was heterosexual, but would be open to the idea of a transgender sexual or romantic partner, while one male participant chose not to answer the question.

It is unsurprising that there was considerably more variety and flexibility in the sexual orientation of the female participants, once again given the nature of the research site – a forum that focuses on technosexual interests in female-form machinic entities. Since focus at the site is on the female machinic body, primarily heterosexual males with technosexual interests are drawn to the forum, while females at the site often express bisexual, pansexual, homosexual or fluid sexual identities. I was however surprised to find more variety in the sexual identities of the male participants than I had expected, with at least four of the ten male participants expressing fluidity in their heterosexual identities and interests. So, even though it is clear from the interview data and the

participant-observation I did at the site that most of the males at Fembot Central are heterosexual, there is at least some tendency away from the push toward hegemonically masculine performances of heteronormative sexuality that tends to dominate (in public and on the surface at least) most physical world, “Western” culture groups.

Table 4: Self-identified Races of Participants

Race	Count
Asian	1
Black/African-American	0
Caucasian/White	15
Hispanic	0
Indigenous/Native American	0
Other	4

Table 4 shows the self-reported “races” of the research participants, in answer to the demographic inquiries that preceded the interview questions. While the concept of “race” is itself problematic, as it is a socially- and culturally-constructed set of discourses rather than a biological reality it is nonetheless a commonly recognized cultural and social concept, is productive to consider for research purposes, and is generally a reported demographic for research. As such, I have included it here.

Most of the participants stated that they were either Caucasian or White, or indicated a more specific racial and cultural identity that is most often classified as “white.” I classified four of the research participants as “Other” as they expressed either a very regionally-specific understanding of the construct of “race” (responding either “Slavic” or “Central European”) or otherwise expressed a racial identity that did not necessarily correspond to single “race” (responding either “Mixed” or “European

Descent.”) Most likely, the individuals who answered “Slavic”, “Central European” and “European Descent” identify as white or Caucasian in some way, as those areas are historically “white,” but their responses are in no way definitive. Additionally, the participant who answered “Mixed” did not indicate what racial “mix” they identified as, and - as with the other participants I classified as “Other” - I made the decision not to press for a response that privileged my understandings of racial identity or fit into a neat and easy category.

One research participant stated that she was “Asian” but none of the participants identified specifically as “Black” or “African American”, “Hispanic”, “Native American” or in any other grouping of Indigenous peoples. Race rarely comes up in the Discussion or other forum pages at Fembot Central, and during participant observation at the site, I found only one community member who identified as a “technosexual of color.” From both participant observation data and interview responses, it is clear that Fembot Central is a place of considerable “whiteness” in cyberspace. No doubt, there are technosexuals of all “races” out in the world, but the anglophone center of online technosexualities appears dominated by white bodies exploring virtual spaces.

Table 5: Self-identified Nationalities of Participants

Country/Nation	Count
United States	11
Canada	1
Ireland	1
New Zealand	1
United Kingdom	1
Unreported	1
Other	4

Eleven of the research participants responded that their nationality was “American” or from the “United States”. One each participant responded that they were from “Canada”, “Ireland”, “New Zealand”, or the “United Kingdom”. One participant did not respond to the question.

Responses classified as “Other” were from participants who responded “German” “Poland” “Italian,” and “Multiple European countries”. These responses were grouped together as “Other” as the countries associated with these nationalities have languages other than English as their official or primary languages. Since this research is looking at the hub of anglophone technosexualities online (Fembot Central), non-anglophone nationalities are not highlighted in Table 5. The participants who identified as these nationalities however spoke English fluently, and were members of the anglophone technosexualities group at Fembot Central. (I also recognize that Ireland could be considered a non-anglophone country by some people, and recognize the legitimacy of Irish/Gaelic as one of traditional spoken languages of the Irish people. For the purposes of this study however, and due to the unique colonial history of Ireland, I have included it as an anglophone country, although certainly not an “English” one, speaking culturally. The same caveat can be given for New Zealand, as well – and indeed, for the U.S. and Canada – but none of the research participants reported identifying as belonging to the native peoples of any of these countries.)

Table 6: Self-reported Occupations of Participants

General Occupation	Count
Arts or Arts History	3
Engineering and/or Computing	6
Medicine	1
Public Service	1
Research	1
Student	2
Self-Employed	1
Teaching	1
Technician/Mapping	1
Unemployed	3

Table 6, above, shows the self-reported occupations of my research participants. Three of the research participants responded that they had a job in the arts or arts history, while six of the participants reported that they worked in technology-related jobs – engineering or computing. Two participants reported that they were students, while three participants reported that they were “Unemployed”. One each of the research participants stated that they had jobs in “Medicine”, “Public Service”, “Research”, “Teaching”, “Mapping”, and one stated that s/he was “Self-Employed.” Two of the participants (both male) who stated that they were unemployed mentioned that that they were disabled. Three of the six participants who mentioned engineering/computing jobs as their employment were female, while three were male.

Table 7: Current Relationship Status of Participants

Relationship Status	Count		Engages in Technosexual Roleplay with Partner		Partner has expressed a desire to be machinic
	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	
Married	0	4	0	0	
Domestic Partnership	0	0	0	0	
Significant Other	2	2	1	1	1 (Female partner)
Polyamorous/Non-Exclusive	1	0	1	0	
Single	6	4	0	1	
Chose not to answer	1	0	-	-	

Table 7 displays the relationship statuses of the research participants at the time of the interviews. When asked about their current relationships and relationship statuses, four of the male participants stated that they were married. Two each of the male and female research participants mentioned that they had some kind of significant other or were in a relationship of some kind with another human being. One additional participant, a female, mentioned that she was in a polyamorous relationship with three other people. Six of the female participants stated that they considered themselves single/not having a current, primary intimate relationship, while four of the male participants also identified as single. One female research participant chose not to answer the question.

Four of the participants, two each male and female, mentioned that they engage in technosexual roleplay and/or fantasy with a human partner, either in the physical world or

in online role play interactions. One of these, a male who also identified as “disabled” and stated that his interactions with his significant other were online only owing to his disability in the physical world, mentioned that his female significant other wished to be a machinic body herself.

A Note on Autoethnography

In order to explore my positionality as the researcher, my “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) and to describe and discuss my own personal history and engagements with technosexualities, body/technology boundaries, and my assemblages with the nonhuman, I have included an autoethnography in the chapter that follows this description of methods. My aim in including an autoethnography is to make transparent the necessary role of the researcher as research instrument and the role I occupy in particular as “insider” in the group that I have studied (Dumitrica and Gaden 2009.) My personal experiences, affects, thoughts, and feelings about technology/body boundaries and my personal assemblages with the nonhuman cannot be separated out from this research. I am as much a part of this dissertation as those bodies/assemblages I am writing about.

An Additional Note on Methods

A survey was strongly considered to augment the online interviews and discourse analysis, but it quickly became apparent that there would be a high level of overlap between interviewees and potential survey participants. This overlap is owing to both the small size of the Fembot Central group, and the even smaller pool of willing research

participants in that group. I have however, included informal, member-generated surveys from Fembot Central, where applicable, as additional to my own research at the site. These included surveys are meant as auxiliary glimpses into Fembot Central; I do not claim them as my own work nor can I attest to the methodology behind the surveys from the site. Nonetheless, these surveys are useful snapshots into the group at Fembot Central, and their own interests in self-reflection and self-exploration as an assemblage.

While every attempt at mixed methods triangulation has been made for this project, with multiple research methods used, including discourse analysis with some quantitative component, this project largely employed qualitative methods to answer the research questions and address the hypotheses. The reason for this heavily qualitative lens has to do with the degree of variation of technosexualities and the currently small population of technosexuals in cyberspace. Additionally, in-depth interviews and online participant observation with an autoethnography were decided early on as the best methods to spearhead this particular project, given the wide range of technosexual interests expressed at the research site. The chapters that follow therefore are an in-depth and intimate look at the current state of technosexualities in the online, anglophone world, through the research tool of the “cyborg” who conducted this research.

IV. THE CYBORG'S TALE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Early Encounters with the Machine

When I was child, I was terrified of the idea of technological interventions into my human body. I was particularly scared of losing an appendage, and the aftermath of such an event. I saw the way my society seemed to look at people it termed "disabled" - how they were framed as somehow "lesser" or "incomplete" - because their bodies were not strictly normative. I received mainstream America's media message loud and clear: no one will love you if you are different. I learned about how painful prosthetics can be for some people, and believed the media message that prosthetics limited people's lives, rather than augmented them. Technologically modified people were to be stared at, strange amalgams of the "natural" and "artificial" that they were. I had been programmed.

But, I also liked science fiction. I read within the genre - Bradbury's horrors of artificial intelligence and what happens when we love it more than our own flesh and blood ("The Veldt.") Ellison's "I Have No Mouth but I Must Scream" (read at far too young an age, I think) reinforced my fear of technological interventions into human lives and bodies. I was convinced, we must never trust or love machines; we must never let them "take over" our world or bodies. Other science fiction media had quite a different message, however.

I remember my earliest experiences watching machines on television, or in the movies. Often, they were cute - victims that had to be saved, or at least helped by humans who learned to care about them. Films geared towards children, such as "Batteries Not Included" and "Short Circuit" told me that machines were good. They

could feel, and proclaim sentience. They would be victimized by humans if we allowed it, so we had to fight for these creatures. It was just an analogy - an attempt to teach children empathy and to help others in need. I took it all too literally. Coupled with my belief in the sentience of my stuffed toys, and the inherent "goodness" of all animals, I began to add machines to my subconscious list of those nonhuman beings we were "allowed" to love.

There were corollaries to this list, though. Some machines still brought death - Terminators, Cyborgs, Robocops. Even when they were placed on the side of "right" and "good" they possessed the potential to malfunction, or misinterpret their mandates. These machinic beings were all humanoid, however. So, my child-mind learned that bit of code, too. Humanoid machines were bad, but nonhumanoid machines were good. Movies like "Blade Runner" in which the artificial humans were neither good nor evil, could have offered me a different, and more complex understanding of this dichotomy I had created, but they did not cross my path that early. It was not until I was an older teenager that I first saw "Blade Runner", "Ghost In the Shell" and the various "Star Trek" series - media that would make me realize that there were many ways to be machinic, and many ways to view bodies, human or otherwise.

My physical world interactions with machines, especially computers with this time was quite different of course than my media-molded understanding of machinic entities. I took computer classes in elementary and middle school, learning the most basic of Basic coding. I worked on Apple computers in high school, and had a computer graphics and arts class. I understood that the science fiction stories I watched and read were just that - stories - and my fears dimmed. Machine sentience, and its potential

dangers, were a long way in the future. By the time I was in middle and high school, I thought of the computers I used as mere tools. My fears of machines persisted, but found a more practical footing. I was convinced I would do something, like touch the wrong button or input the wrong line of code, and I would break them. I feared this could happen when someone else touched them, too. One day, a computer error or a broken part would mean I would get some wrong medication, or some surgeon would perform the wrong medical intervention. Despite first-hand experience learning their limitations, complex, digital machines remained something to be feared.

So, what happened to the love?

Sexy Machines

Although I would have to wait for the media experiences of my later teenage years to complicate my understanding of machinic beings, there are two bits of media that stand out as exceptional in my early memory quite clearly, and I am willing to call these my first "technosexual" experiences. Although I personally do not identify with that label, I believe that many of us who do not actually classify ourselves in this way have had technosexual interests or experiences at one time or another. I know I have had many.

The first memory I have of thinking that a machinic body might be something other than victim or threat, was watching the 1987 movie, "Making Mr. Right" on television. I do not remember how old I was when I saw this movie, but I know I was at least nine years old, if not ten. Making Mr. Right is about an inventor who creates a machinic replica of himself. The film follows a female protagonist who becomes the

inventor's love interest toward the end of the film. I really do not remember much about the film, but one scene has stayed in my memory. In this scene, the female protagonist takes the robot shopping, as she is determined that he cannot blend in with humans in the laboratory jumpsuit he was wearing. She chooses some items of clothing for him, and then directs him to go into the fitting room and try clothing on. Unexpectedly, he comes out of the fitting room completely naked; apparently, the inventor has never taught the robot the Western cultural norms that certain parts of the body are to be covered up in public spaces. It is clear from the female protagonist's reaction to the naked robot that he has male genitalia to match the rest of his human-appearing body. It is also clear from her reaction that his naked, machinic body is not unpleasant to her. This scene was the first time in my early media history in which I had encountered the idea that a machinic body could be a sexual or sexualized body, or that a humanoid machinic body might have genitals or be sexually functional with a human body.

The second early memory involves an episode of a science fiction television show I saw at roughly the same time in my life as I saw "Making Mr. Right." I have never been able to find what television show it was, but my memory of it is still quite vivid. One of the guest characters, a would-be villain, warranted no particular attention from me during the course of the episode, but at a certain point in the story, he opened up a panel in his arm to reveal pistons and hydraulic tubes with a bright, blue fluid. This character, now known to the audience to be a machinic body – a cyborg – was suddenly very interesting to me. What was more, after opening the panel on his arm to reveal his machinic status, he began to perform maintenance on himself.

My affective reaction at this self-repair was pronounced. I began moving towards the television screen before I even began to process what I was seeing. I remember being fascinated with his prosthetic arm. It looked so real - so human. He was not incomplete, nor was he some techno-human amalgamated horror as mainstream media had lead me to believe that bodies augmented or interfaced with machinic technology *must* be. He was fascinating. He was compelling. He was repairing *his own arm* in the scene his cyborg body was revealed. It was not the reveal itself that grabbed me, as I had seen such things in media before; it was the self-repair that had me enthralled. The act of self-repair showed not only his own intelligence and mechanical ability, but showed me, for the first time, the incredible potential of being a cyborg.

There is power and freedom in being able to repair your own machinic body. His prosthetic augmented him, and he could repair it without pain, without relying on a doctor. This machinic being was so much more than a fragile human body, with its intense capacity for damage and tendency toward decay. Young though I was, I was attracted on some level. I never forgot this scene, nor the images of self-repair.

Years later, for a game, I created a character that was a fully machinic being and artificial intelligence. Underneath the human-like skin of his arms were shiny silver pistons and hydraulic tubes filled with a cyan blue liquid. His human seeming body I created as a perfect reflection of the type of human male I found sexually attractive. He was my machinic ideal, and it was clear where his origins lay.

Becoming the Cyborg

At seventeen years of age, I got contact lenses. At the time, I did not realize that I was now a cyborg, albeit only a part-time one. I did not recognize the many medical interventions I had received in my life - the vaccines, the medications - as the integration of the "natural" and the technological. At twenty-seven however, I was forced to see myself as the cyborg I was; it was then that all my fears of surgical and technological intervention into my body would become a reality.

The year I turned twenty-seven, I broke my leg. I thought a cast and some crutches would suffice to heal the damage, but the sports medicine specialist I went to see made it quite clear, that surgery was required if I ever wanted to walk without a limp again, much less run or be physically active. I had broken my fibula, my little leg bone, very cleanly, but I had stretched the ligaments out beyond my body's ability to heal. I needed them tightened by a surgeon, and a metal plate and various other "gear" put into my leg.

I cried. I broke down in true abject terror and shock. I was affected by my fear of death, and of surgical intervention, at every level - from the pre-cognitive to the cerebral ruminations on and repetitions of every memory of techno-surgical science fiction horrors I had encountered in a variety of media throughout my life. But, I had to go through with the surgery all the same, or face life-long repercussions.

Waking up after surgery, I was in pain. It was a kind of pain I had never felt before. Someone had cut into my body, invading the boundaries of skin and self I had considered sacrosanct. A new and strange piece of technology, a foreign invader, was attached to my very bone, and sewn up under the skin I had once thought of as a barrier

to such outside “things.” I was a cyborg now; it could not be denied. I would never be "natural" again.

But had I ever been so?

In the days that followed, as the pain began to subside a bit, I thought back to the contact lenses in my eyes, and the fillings in my teeth. I remembered that I took vitamins and medication, and I had been vaccinated many times with little, attenuated or lifeless entities whose corpses taught my immune system valuable lessons it could not prepare for without technological intervention.

I had always been cyborg. The metal that now resided in my body was hardly my first modification.

When the cast was removed from my leg, I stared in shock at the site that was revealed. Staples that looked like coarse stitching, all in a row down my leg. I was a little Frankenstein's monster. The blood-encrusted metal that my skin had begun to grow INTO caused a wave of pre-cognitive horror. I had not yet begun to form thought, but I was affected. My body had been forever altered, not just inside, but out. The scar remains raised and angry to this day - a constant visual and tactile reminder that I cannot escape my cyborg nature.

What's more - I can feel the screws in my bone.

After endless months of healing, I could reach down and touch the tops of the bone screws with my fingertips. Just under the skin, I could feel the metal hardware that was now a part of me. I felt revulsion, but I could not stop touching those screws. I could even feel them when I moved my ankle, and my disgust began to turn to fascination.

Why did the metal in my body make me queasy? If not for the surgical and technological intervention, I would have never walked without limping again. My leg could not have healed correctly on its own. I was lucky to have such an augmentation. Technology, as it had many times in my life, had been there for me when I needed it most. It was neither victim nor threat, as I had been taught by media. It was complicated and interesting, and ultimately an augmentation to my life after injury.

Those metal screws I could feel with the tips of my fingers were my very own shiny silver pistons and turquoise blue hydraulic fluid. My "broken" ankle was now the stronger of the two. The technology in me was, and had always been, an ally.

Miss Pris Flips In

I started to become drawn to the very things I had once feared - cyborgs, prosthetics, (culturally) non-normative bodies and body-technology understandings, and at last, to technosexualities. I had seen sexualized images of machinic bodies and stories of encounters between human and nonhuman (particularly machinic) bodies in science fiction for many years, but I now began to read about what was termed “technosexualities” or, sometimes, “technofetishism” or “ASFR.” At first, I believed the sensationalized stories of technosexuals as a bunch of man-boys who could not find girlfriends in the "real" world. Surely the writers presenting technosexuals in such a way in their articles had done thorough research on the group, speaking with them directly, participating in their group discussions online, exploring concepts such as desire and bodies with these people before publishing their findings. Then I went to Fembot Central,

the hub of online, anglophone technosexualities in cyberspace, and found out that this was not in fact the case.

To begin, I discovered that most popular accounts of technosexualities were based on very little actual research with the group itself. Even academic depictions of the group were considered by technosexuals at Fembot Central to be largely inaccurate and poor representations. Fembot Central was instead a complex and variable group of human bodies creating assemblages in cyberspace around highly varied desires for machinic bodies. It was clear to me that some updated, thorough research needed to be done.

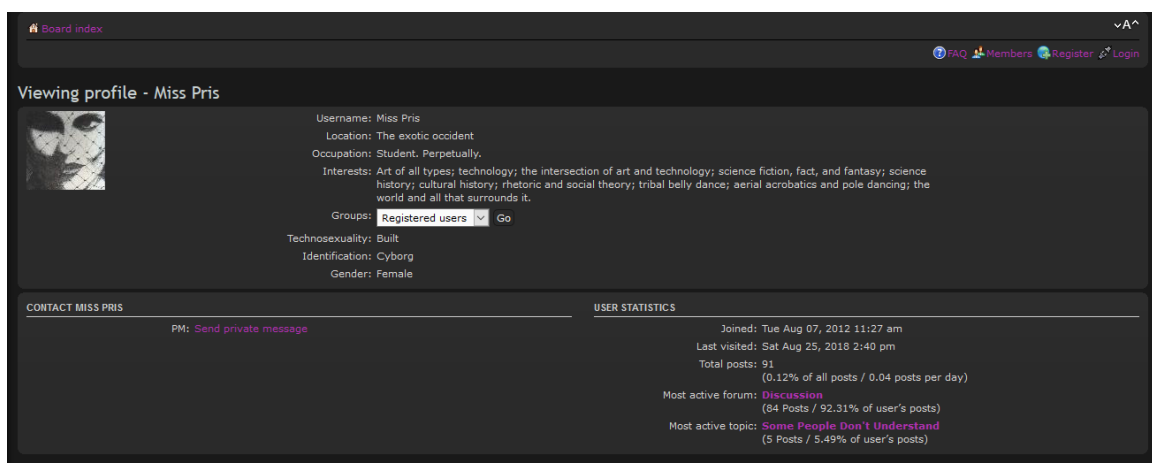
In the summer of 2012, I began exploratory participant observation at what would later become the research site for this dissertation – Fembot Central. For my username at the site, I choose “Miss Pris” – an allusion to a science fiction/cyberpunk film with machinic bodies. Pris is a female character in the 1982, Ridley Scott film, “Blade Runner.” Portrayed by Daryl Hannah, she is an artificial being called a "replicant" - a fully organic, artificial human, created through biotechnology, specifically genetic engineering. She is referred to as a pleasure model in the film and was apparently created for the sexual gratification of military personnel.

Pris has an iconic fight scene with the main character, Deckard (played by Harrison Ford) in which she pretends to be a life-sized doll in a group of other dolls and mannequins, and then reveals herself by attacking him. She literally flips in to a fray with Deckard, combining acrobatics with martial arts to attack him. In the book *Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human* by K.W. Jeter, it is revealed that Pris was actually a human

woman who believed herself to be a replicant. It could certainly be argued that this idea of Pris as a human woman clashes with some of the events in the film, but it makes a nice metaphor for an anthropologist looking to do participant observation at a site such as Fembot Central.

"Pris" seemed to be a perfect pseudonym for my exploratory research at the site. I wanted a name that reflected my interest in technosexualities and also my own origins (as a techno-obsessent) in SF media. And, like Pris, in many ways I was not what I seemed; I was joining the group out of personal interest, but fully well knowing I intended to do research at the site. For a while, I hid in plain sight, waiting until the time was right to "flip in" suddenly with my plans to do research. I had no intention of (symbolic) attack or deception, but hoping to engage in research at a site while presenting as a group member is a bit like a human woman convincing herself she is a replicant, and joining their group. Like Pris in the Jeter work however, I believed in my own machinic/cyborg identity.

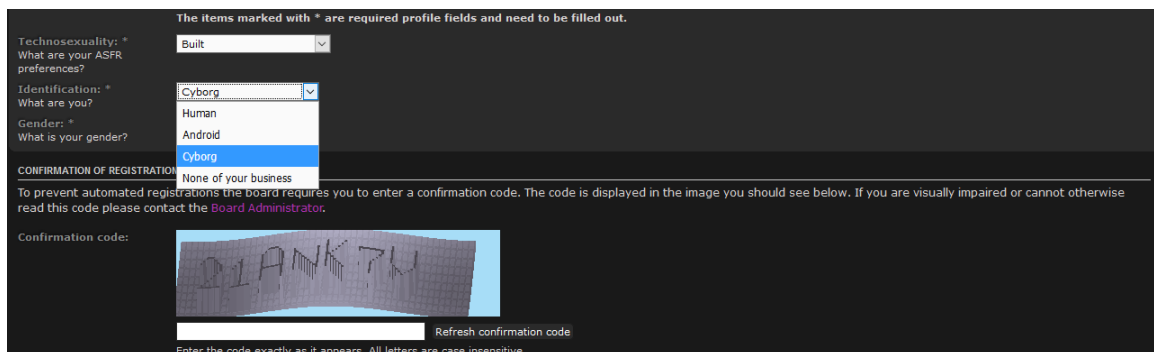
Figure 1: Profile Page for "Miss Pris"



The image is a screenshot of a forum profile page for a user named "Miss Pris". The page has a dark theme. At the top left, there is a "Board index" link. At the top right, there are links for "FAQ", "Members", "Register", and "Login". The main heading is "Viewing profile - Miss Pris". To the left of the profile information is a small profile picture of a woman's face. The profile information includes: Username: Miss Pris; Location: The exotic occident; Occupation: Student, Perpetually; Interests: Art of all types; technology; the intersection of art and technology; science fiction, fact, and fantasy; science history; cultural history; rhetoric and social theory; tribal belly dance; aerial acrobatics and pole dancing; the world and all that surrounds it. Below this is a "Groups" section with a dropdown menu set to "Registered users" and a "Go" button. Further down, it lists "Technosexuality: Built", "Identification: Cyborg", and "Gender: Female". At the bottom left, there is a "CONTACT MISS PRIS" section with a link "PM: Send private message". At the bottom right, there is a "USER STATISTICS" section with the following data: Joined: Tue Aug 07, 2012 11:27 am; Last visited: Sat Aug 25, 2018 2:40 pm; Total posts: 91 (0.12% of all posts / 0.04 posts per day); Most active forum: Discussion (84 Posts / 92.31% of user's posts); Most active topic: Some People Don't Understand (5 Posts / 5.49% of user's posts).

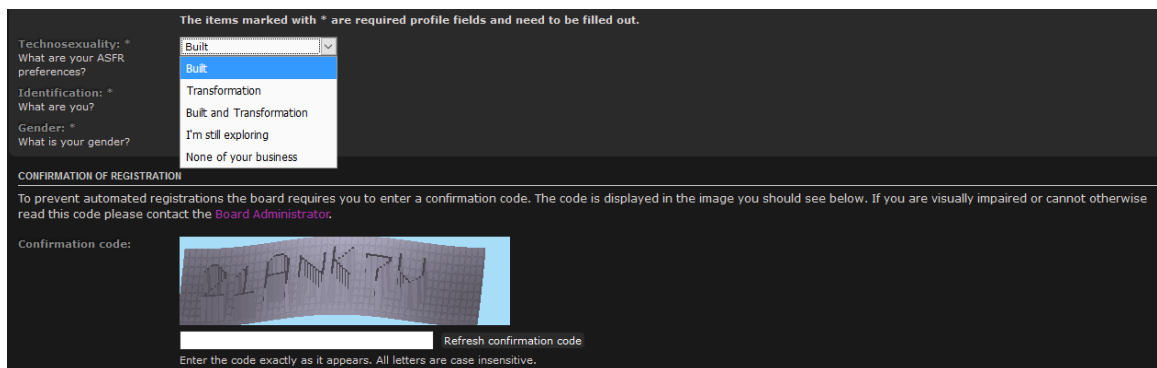
Figure 1 is the profile page for the “Miss Pris” avatar. Miss Pris lists her occupation as “Student” and her gender as “Female.” I wanted to be open and honest with the group at Fembot Central from the beginning, so I made no attempt to obscure my identity, “hiding” only as much as was conventional on the site. Fembot Central members all use pseudonyms and avatar pictures to represent themselves online, a nearly ubiquitous convention at internet sites. I also listed my actual interests, location (“The exotic occident” – true, but vague enough to keep from revealing my physical location to any strangers who might happen upon this public profile,) and essentially my true technosexual identities and preferences (see Figure 2.) I do in fact identify as a “cyborg” as per one of the identity selections at the site; as mentioned, I wear contact lenses, have a metal plate and screws in one of my ankles, take vitamins produced in a laboratory, and even occasionally eat genetically modified organisms. I am an amalgamation of the assemblage of beings that grew my body (“naturally”) and human technological interventions that created something new with that physical body. My cyborg modifications include enhanced vision, repaired and unimpeded gait, and nutritional adequacy.

Figure 2: Registration Page for Fembot Central, Selections for “Identification”



I listed my “Technosexuality” as “Built,” one of a small number of choices that include “Transformation” and “I’m still exploring.” Describing my interest as “Built” indicates that I am interested in machinic beings that have either never been anything but machinic or have been “built on” an already extent (biological or machinic) being such as in one possible understanding of the cyborg (particularly, the concept of cyborg bodies as augmentations on a once-fully biological, normative human body.) The choice “Transformation” indicates that an entirely flesh and blood being is turned into a machinic body in some way. This can include the idea of a "magical"/fantasy transformation into a machinic being, a scientific and technological transformation into a cyborg, biotechnological augmentations such as pharmacological manipulations, and various other slow, fast, or sudden movements from the flesh and blood body to a machinic state.

Figure 3: Registration Page for Fembot Central, Selections for “Technosexuality”



As Miss Pris, I was actively involved in the technosexualities group at Fembot Central. I participated in group interactions, helped to shape discourse at the site as a group member, and brought my own, embodied/bodily affects and thoughts into my online interactions – being affected and affecting others as a part of the assemblage that is Fembot Central.

It is interesting to note that the registration page for Fembot Central – a technosexualities site - contains a confirmation code designed to prevent machines from registering for accounts (see Figure 3.) This type of code as of yet cannot be “read” or otherwise interpreted by “bots” (machinic entities who roam the internet frontier like random, wild buffalo or even purposive, hungry coyote) or other programs who may be the emerging, nonhuman consciousnesses of cyberspace. This restriction is no doubt for practical reasons, specifically to keep advertisements and other random cyber-litter from cluttering the Fembot Central forum pages. It is however somewhat ironic that a site existing for the expressed purpose of exploring sexual, romantic and other relationships with machinic entities excludes them from involvement.

Jude Law in AI? I'd hit that

When I started my exploratory participant observation at Fembot Central in 2012, I was simply looking around the site, thinking about possible research questions I might develop, and what theoretical perspectives might apply to technosexualities in general. I did not think initially about whether or not I had ever had technosexual experiences or if I could be considered a “technosexual” prior to joining this group. As I explored the media at the Fembot Central site however, and I began to think back on my own experiences

with machinic bodies and my new cyborg identity, I realized that technosexualities were not so strange to me as I initially thought they would be. In fact, I had had technosexual experiences myself in both my early life, and as an adult.

In the early 2000s, I saw the Stanley Kubrick/Steven Spielberg film, “AI Artificial Intelligence” which features the actor, Jude Law. In the film, Law - pictured in Figure 4 - plays an android prostitute named “Gigolo Joe.” His character can change attributes around his appearance, such as his hair color, to suit the desires of his clients. Law's appearance is slightly artificial, achieved primarily through make-up techniques, to let the audience know that he is not human. But despite his artificial appearance, and other clues from his dialogue and movement that he is a nonhuman, I still found him attractive. I pressed myself on this. Was it just because he was Jude Law, an attractive actor? Was I failing to suspend my disbelief? That did *not* seem like me. If anything, I have always been far too good at suspending my disbelief when consuming media. Fully accepting this being, Gigolo Joe as a machinic body, I still found him sexually attractive. I understood why his clients would employ him.

Figure 4: “Gigolo Joe” in AI: Artificial Intelligence, played by actor Jude Law



Things do not go well for Joe during the course of the film, and I felt bad about that. I became attached to the machinic characters in the film, and I did *not* feel bad about that. I wanted to see these machinic beings come to good ends, and felt empathy for them when they were used and abused by humans. And, for Law’s character, even with the artificial look and mechanical dialogue he has in the film, I still identified with him on a personal level, and found him attractive. I *would* have had sex with that robot if he were a real machine and available to me, without me even identifying as a technosexual. What did that mean when it came to machinic desires and us “normal,” non-technosexual people?

What was more, I also saw how *normal* the people on the Fembot Central site were. These people were not raving sexual deviants as popular media accounts had suggested of technosexuals, but regular people who, like me, had various interests in machinic bodies. Some of them wanted to be machinic bodies, and some of them wanted to be wrapped around them in the throes of coital bliss. I thought back to my game character with the pistons and blue hydraulic fluid inside him, and to Deckard from "Blade Runner" - a young and handsome Harrison Ford – possibly a machinic body himself, from clues in several versions of the film. I reflected on my attraction to "Gigolo Joe" and thought, "Jude Law in AI? I'd hit that."

An argument could of course be made that I was a technosexual without realizing it. The problem with this argument is that, not only do I not identify as a technosexual, I also do not seek out machinic bodies for sexual and/or visual pleasure. I have had technosexual experiences through media, but this hardly qualifies technosexualities as being a major part of my sexuality, sexual orientation, or sexual identity. And, if I was a non-technosexual having technosexual experiences via media, it stands to reason that I was not alone. Maybe we should not even frame desires for machinic bodies in terms of "technosexuals" (other than when people, such as my research participants, wish to identify as such.) Maybe we should be thinking about these phenomena in terms of "technosexualities" - a set of practices and changing desires for machinic bodies, that we all can, and do, engage with in various ways during the course of our sexual, emotional and affective experiences and lives. As a fairly common, everyday American cyborg who interacts with machinic and computing technologies daily, I know I found it very easy to relate to the "technosexuals" I met in cyberspace; I see something of myself in them,

without feeling the need to narrow my sexual identity to one single point in an otherwise multifaceted sexuality.

And maybe *I* am not alone in finding some common ground with “technosexuals.” Maybe there is a little techno-curious cyborg in all of us.

V. WE'VE GOT A THING THAT'S CALLED ROBOT LOVE

This chapter begins with a presentation of the research findings and some discussion on technosexualities groups in the cyberspace environment at the research site of Fembot Central. The question of how distinctly this group can be defined, how group members identify in terms of their desires for machinic bodies, and whether this group considers themselves a cybercommunity is addressed initially, followed by an evaluation of Hypothesis 1 (H1.) The chapter concludes by exploring the types of intimate interactions with machinic bodies in which technosexuals wish to engage.

As this chapter addresses desires for machinic bodies, a word about desire itself is required here. Berlant's definition of desire has been particularly influential in this dissertation research. Her presentation of what desire *is* resonates with the idea of affective assemblages, and with affect itself, as she presents desire as so much more than finite feeling – as potentiality, as shifting construct – as virtuality.

Desire describes a state of attachment to something or someone, and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object's specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it [...] Desire visits you as an impact from the outside, and yet, inducing an encounter with your affects, makes it feel as though it comes from within you (Berlant 2012: 6.)

Although Berlant makes use of (familial) psychoanalytic models and analogies in her work on desire (something she herself mentions she would not do if she had to write it all again, 2012:2) she nonetheless explores the multifaceted terrain of desire in productive

ways that provide clear sign posts for fellow travelers. Berlant points out that “norms produce attachments to living through certain fantasies” (2012: 7.) Desire, of whatever kind, finds its roots in cultural norms and the familiar.

Before the dimensions and characteristics of the particular *set* of desires I term “technosexualities” is discussed however, the question of whether this group is a “community” needs to be resolved. Harkening back to the research questions listed in the Introduction, the above concerns align with research question one (Q1).

Q1. What are the dimensions and characteristics of technosexual desires and practices?

- How clearly can this “group” be defined?
- Should these individuals be viewed as a group or (cyber) community at all, or as set of practices and discussions in an online environment?
- Are the majority of people engaging in this practice interested in immediate sexual gratification? What about long-lasting relationships with an artificial partner? Is sexual role-playing with a human pretending to be a machinic body (“robot-play”) interchangeable with actual sex with a humanoid technology? What technologies are sexualized? What technologies are *not* sexualized? Which is more important in technosexual practices – the technology aspect or the ascribed gender of the technology?

The terms “machinic bodies”, “machinic being” or “artificial partner” all refer to human form/humanoid machinic bodies and beings throughout this work, except where indicated in this paragraph. None of the participants indicated a desire for, or to be,

anything other than a machinic humanoid of some kind and none of the research participants expressed a sexual, romantic, or body-identity desire for non-humanoid machinic beings. One participant mentioned that he had tried to get involved with "furry technosexuality" but was not engaged by it. ("Furry/Furries" is a sexual interest that sexualizes anthropomorphic animal bodies; technosexual "furries" or "furry technosexuality" would then sexualize *machinic* anthropomorphic animal bodies, such as the "Chuck E. Cheese" robots. This would be a very niche, and likely very small, group of technosexuals, and not one I studied during the course of this project.)

Humanoid/human shaped machinic bodies appear to be the primary technologies that are sexualized in the majority of technosexual spaces and places in cyberspace. While small groups (such as the technosexual "furries") *do* exist in a few online spaces and places, humanoid machinic bodies are the primary focus of technosexualities in cyberspace. When asked directly if they sexualized any technologies other than humanoid machinic bodies, research participants nearly unanimously said that they did not. Speaking generally, only humanoid technologies are sexualized by the research participants, and they appear to be representative of the group at Fembot Central as a whole. Two participants, including the one mentioned above who had visited a technosexualities "furries" site, suggested that they *could* be open to the idea of intimacy with a non-anthropomorphic machinic body, but both of these participants mentioned that they were not interested in intimacy with any non-anthropomorphic machinic bodies at this time in their lives.

Group and Identity

In terms of defining technosexuals as a group in and of itself, somehow marked (in multiple senses of the word) from the rest of humanity, this can be easily done from the outside by citing engagement with either technosexual practices or technosexual organizations as definitive of a technosexual; this is similar to the way that many groups and its members can be identified. There is something very artificial about defining technosexuals as a group in this way however, in that in so defining, a group is then created and separated from the general population with their more “normative” (read: reproductive) practices and desires. The “technosexual” identity is created and the technosexual interpellated (Althusser 1970; Butler 1993) if terms and group designations are deployed, much the same as “homosexual” became a designation and identity in the 19th century, when it had once been a set of desires and practices (Seitler 2004.)

Currently however, technosexuals define *themselves* as a distinct group, both in discourse and in creating virtual locations to share and discuss their desires and practices. At Fembot Central, the administrators ask for a type of technosexuality when you register as a user of the site (see Figure 5.) For members of this site, the term “technosexual” is often a self-designation. Similar terms, such as ASFR, technofetistist, and technoromantic are also used on occasion as terms of self-identification – the first two being most often used by individuals who either were once on the Usenet site alt.sex.fetish.robots or who understand their interests as similar to other “fetishes” (paraphilias.)

Figure 5: Technosexuality Designations at Fembot Central

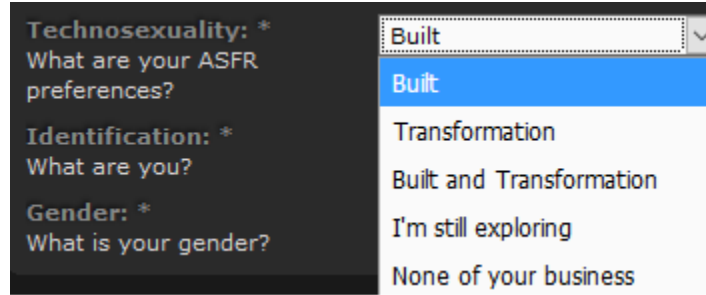


Figure 5 is a screen image of one of the pull down menus that a potential registrant at Fembot Central encounters when registering at the site. Here, the potential registrant is asked what type of technosexuality s/he or they prefer. “ASFR” stands for alt.sex.fetish.robots, one of the original terms for technosexualities, referring to the Usenet group alt.sex.fetish.robots. An asterisk next a term indicates that a response is mandatory for successful registration. Potential selections include "Built", "Transformation", "Built and Transformation", "I'm still exploring", and "None of your business". “Built” is a designation meant to indicate that a machinic entity is created from raw materials and/or disconnected (and generally unconscious) parts while “Transformation” indicates that an already extant body (generally a living, conscious, body) is *changed* to make it machinic. “Built and Transformation” indicates a preference for both forms of technosexuality, while “I’m still exploring” and “None of your business” gives the potential registrant the option of not answering the question definitively - either because they themselves do not know the answer to the question, or they simply don’t wish to share it.

Anyone visiting Fembot Central can see the answer to this question of technosexualities preference, as well as other demographic data (body identification – machinic or otherwise – gender, reported location, and interests) when they visit the member’s profile page at the site. While most members choose to answer these questions in response to the terms “technosexuality” and “ASFR,” I decided that it was important to ask my own research participants during the course of the interviews to tell me their self-identifications by term before we even began to discuss their specific preferences for type. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Self-Identifications by Term

Identification	Female	Male	Totals
Technosexual	1	3	4
Technofetishist	2	0	2
Both Technosexual and Technofetishist	1	5	6
Other, no explanation	1	0	1
Does not Identify with Any terms	3	2	5
Did not answer	2	0	2

Four out of twenty research participants, one female and three male, described themselves with the designation “technosexual” while two female participants preferred the term “technofetisist.” Six participants, five of whom identified as males, stated that both or either term was acceptable to them. Five participants, three female and two male, did not identify with any particular term in regards to their interest in machinic beings,

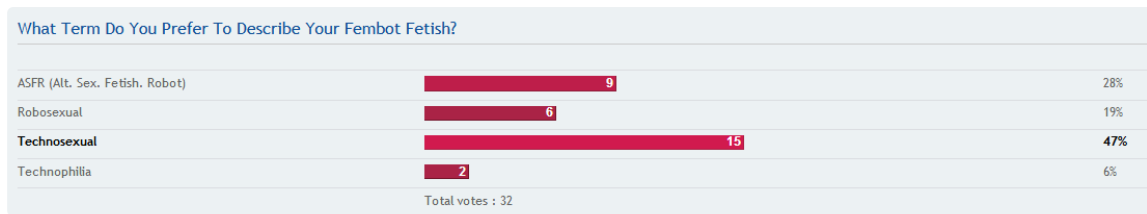
while three participants, all female, either did not answer or simply answered “Other.” No one specifically volunteered that they preferred the term “ASFR.” (a term that came out of “alt.sex.fetish.robot” the Usenet site from an earlier incarnation of the internet. Research participants were not asked specifically about the term, ASFR, nor did they insist upon being referred to with that designation.)

It is clear from their self-identifications that the female research participants were not as likely to refer to themselves as “technosexual” as male participants were. Additionally, more than half of the female participants either did not wish to engage with the question or the terminology at all, either not answering the questions, or simply stating that they self-identified differently than “technosexual” or “technofetishist.” Male participants appeared considerably more comfortable with the designations “technosexual” and “technofetishist.”

The differences in self-identifying terminology may have to do with the Fembot Central site itself. The research site is expressly to celebrate the female-form, humanoid machinic, so males at the site are often comfortably heterosexual, while the females at the site often identify as bisexual, “heteroflexible,” fluid in sexual orientation, or lesbian - often asexual or demisexual lesbians. The females at the site are more likely to occupy and embrace more liminal, or even transitory sexual categories. Time spent defining yourself in and as the “in-between” may lead to affective pulls and comfort with more “grey area” identities. Forcing a fluid and liminal sense of self into a single, hard identity category is often met with resistance. If you self-identify however, with a firm and invariant sexual orientation for most of your life, choosing a single category for your particular “kink” is normalized.

It is interesting to compare the data from my research participants with a member-created poll on the Fembot Central site.

Figure 6: Member-Created Poll on Terminology from Fembot Central



Thirty-two Fembot Central members participated in the poll shown in Figure 6. Nearly half of them, fifteen respondents, choose the designation "technosexual" to describe themselves and their interest in machinic bodies - termed "fembot fetish" in the poll; terming intimate interests in machinic bodies as "fetish" however is not always popular, however.

An acronym that doesn't really spell anything doesn't really roll of the tongue too well to me! I went with Technosexual because it sounds more like an orientation than a fetish (which I would say suits me) although it can include other technology such as holograms. Also, I doubt the rest of the world, especially the non-English speaking, can identify with a long defunct news group but may be able to have a similar term for such an orientation. I'm just sayin' (Robot Devil, Fembot Central, "A Poll on Terminology", August 5, 2013.)

Despite the potential for differences in terminology, there is currently a distinct online presence for technosexualities. Fembot Central, its associated Fembotwiki, and

some niche areas of Reddit, 4chan, and similar online gathering places host discussions and media content for this self-defined group. Fembot Central is however, the current hub of technosexualities online, and, to my knowledge, the only site *strictly* devoted to general technosexualities discussion and group interaction at the time of this writing. From both research participant responses and discourse analysis, it's clear that Fembot Central members *do* think of themselves as distinct from the other, non-technosexual groups with strict human-to-human sexual preferences. Technosexuals believe their interests to be socially non-normative and believe that non-technosexuals also view a desire for machinic bodies to be non-normative.

I'd say half of people go through life expressing their sexuality like they think they should without considering any other possibility. And of the other half, 90% engage in "socially acceptable" deviation like bondage or conventional power-dynamic-based role-playing like student/teacher or boss/worker. (Allen)

Such views may change significantly however in the coming decades, as machinic entities become further incorporated into human lives. If human sexual encounters with machinic bodies become more commonplace, as some researchers theorize (Yeoman and Mars 2012, for example) then the identity of the “technosexual” – and its associated online sites – may disappear, subsumed into the spectrum of normative human sexual interactions. For now however, technosexuals should be viewed as a distinct online population - a “group” of people sharing with each other their related interests and desires in machinic bodies – if for no other reason than self-identification as distinct from the rest of a flesh-and-blood-desiring humanity.

A Community in Cyberspace?

So - is the group at Fembot Central a community? Again, the answer is best found in the opinion of group members themselves. In Chapter 1, I briefly discussed some of social sciences' defining concepts of virtual communities, but these are outsider concepts and designations when one is not a part of the group or potential community in question. If Fembot Central members consider themselves a part of an online technosexual community, then that self-identification needs to be respected.

I asked research participants directly if they considered Fembot Central to be a community, and if they felt the site hosted community-building activities. The responses are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Is Fembot Central a Community?

Community?	Female	Male	Total
Yes	9	6	15
No	1	1	2
Other	0	3	3

Out of twenty research participants, fifteen (nine female and six male) felt that Fembot Central was a community. Two participants (one female and one male) did not feel that Fembot Central was a community, and three participants had answers that I have classified as "Other." Of those classified as "Other" one male answered "Partially", one responded "Yes and no" and one simply stated that his ambivalence was more about his own feelings than the group itself.

I find my particular variety of this fetish a bit too much underrepresented and thus I skip so much content that I feel like not part of a community [sic][...] There are several pushes to building an online community. From feedback to contests, to polls and several other items in trying to make us feel part of a whole. (Trevor)

Despite some ambivalence, most of the research participants felt that Fembot Central was a community, and moreover, many cited it as a place in which they felt accepted and less alone or less aberrant. One participant mentioned, “They [the community] do make me feel a little less strange. I wouldn't consider technosexuality to be a 'normal' thing but being able to talk about it with others does help and knowing others feel the same way makes it a bit less scary.” (Sam)

I find comfort in the fact that after spending many years thinking myself an anomaly in having a predilection for technosexuality, seeing and participating in regular correspondence at these sites reinforce the fact that this is a community, that people think either like me or in some variation thereof, and therefore I am not alone. (Steven)

The data from the interviews allows me to evaluate the first hypothesis of this project, H1, which was as follows:

H1: Group members at the Fembot Central research site do not consider themselves a community.

H1 is rejected, based upon the responses of research participants. Even those participants whose responses I classified as “Other” seemed to be more ambivalent about the status of Fembot Central as a community, rather than outright negating this classification. The most common reasons cited for this ambivalence was anonymity due to the sexual nature of the forum. This response was unsurprising, but I had expected asynchronous communication, group member turnover, and a lack of social consequence for “lurking” to be cited as prohibitive to community. None of these were particularly emphasized by research participants, and were apparently not considered prohibitive to community.

Even though most visitors to Fembot Central and FembotWiki are “lurkers”, I think we constitute a community by virtue of our continued involvement and interaction with each other. We share our creative work, discuss ideas, and share media finds with one another. (Todd)

One of the male research participants who was researcher-classified here as “Other” stated that it was his *own* lack of involvement that affected his view of the Fembot Central community.

I'm also not much of a 'joiner' when it comes to tribes / communities. I'm more of an introvert who occasionally pops in for social time, but spend most of my time and work solo. The activity at FC [Fembot Central] does make me feel like I do have a community, if I were to want to be more of a part of it...I do feel that some of the people there are trying to make it a vibrant community. I don't think it's

particularly cohesive or active compared to other interest-based forums. But again, I think that's likely due to the sensitivity of the topic. Sex seems to make a lot of people uncomfortable... (Matt)

One participant who said “No” to the idea of community at the site stated that Fembot Central isn't a community only because it's “fragmented by individual preferences.” He nonetheless stated that belonging to the group was significant. “My early experiences led me to believe my fetish was completely unique, so to know that others have had somewhat similar urges makes it seem less lonely.” (Allen)

Despite the ambivalence from a minority of research participants, more than half of males, and nearly all of the female research participants felt that Fembot Central is more of a community than I had anticipated. The wide range of desires and interests in the machinic that are expressed at the Fembot Central does not apparently deter from a sense of community, and the majority of research participants felt that they were a part of a community when engaged at the site, and that the community was bound by their shared general interest, despite its many incarnations.

People have even spent large sums of money to create their own media 'for the benefit of the group.' So that seems like a community to me, but there are strong divisions between different 'flavors' of ASFR and sometimes people can get a bit testy. However I guess that's probably a situation in any community. (Sam)

One female participant wrote, “I generally consider any group of people that encourages, supports, and provides content to another specific group of people to be a community” (Mackenzie.) This focus on encouragement and support as definitive of a community was similar to the responses of many of the female research participants. When asked if she felt that forum members at Fembot Central were engaged in community-building activities, this participant replied, “Yes, Particularly in the story forum. There is a lot of encouragement and feed back about likes and dislikes. Many of the content creators take this sort of feed back into account and write or manipulate images to suit others tastes.”

Another female research participant who felt that Fembot Central was a community nonetheless hinted at possible technosexuality-specific hierarchies in that community.

[I]ts [sic] an eclectic community, given all the differences in tastes, and styles, but a community, all the same. Not sure about the community building at times, given that we transformation lovers, are at times pretty much shunned by the creation lovers, but we get by. (Farah)

While personally I have not observed community members who are interested in “transformation” (from human into machinic bodies) being “shunned” by other community members, it certainly appears to be the case that “built” technosexual interests (an interest in the creation of new machinic beings and bodies) are in the

majority at the site (see Figure 16, Chapter VI for specifics.) Farah’s feeling of being “shunned” by the community however is, of course, very valid as her emotional response to interactions on the forum pages, and there may be something of an affective thread of discourse in the Fembot Central assemblage underscoring her impressions.

The idea of transformation carries with it the discourses of technosexualities past. When the ASFR Usenet group was in existence, technosexualities were often grouped with mind-control, agalmatophilia (statue and doll fetishes) and hypnotism fetishes; the stories and expressions around these fetishes often involve bodily control or “mind control” being deployed on the “object” of the subject’s desire, against their will or consent. (de Fren 2009.) While these fetish interests tend to involve more fantasy and role-playing with other humans (or in the case of some fetishists, inanimate life-sized dolls,) the implication of these interests is that the will and agency of a “real” human being is ignored or eclipsed to indulge the desire of the fetishist. There is no consent from the subject of desire whose will is ignored or even erased, and the fetish often explicitly involves the fantasy of proceeding with bodily control *despite* the subject’s will not to be controlled (de Fren 2009.) The expression of such fantasies can provoke affects of pre-cognitive revulsion and feelings of disgust in those without such sexual interests. The idea of proceeding in a sexual act without consent, or even in spite of the expressed desire of another being, can spark particular revulsion in many people. But, as with many fetishes, most mind-control or hypnotism fetishes, or agalmatophilia itself, are largely based on fantasy, and often involve role-play with a consenting human partner.

Ultimately, humans are social animals, and we like to feel like we belong, despite our differences and occasional misunderstandings. Many research participants reported

that their technosexual desires, and their decisions to keep these desires a secret, made them feel isolated. Finding Fembot Central (or, for many, its predecessor, the ASFR Usenet group) made them feel as though they finally had a place they and their desires for machinic bodies would be accepted. The desires expressed at this online forum are varied, it is true, but they all revolve around a desire for something other than human – for the machinic of some kind and the possibilities that the machinic opens up for the human world.

Technosexual Desires

In addition to the sense of community that Fembot Central gives to many technosexuals, the site gives this group a location to discuss the myriad types of technosexual interests.

The types of technosexual interests and desires that research participants expressed in the online interviews are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Type of Machinic Relationship Desired

Relationship	Female	Male	Total
Sexual/Physical Only	1	3	4
Romantic/Emotional Only	0	0	0
Both Sexual and Romantic	6	5	11
Other	2	1	3
Unspecified	1	1	2

Of the twenty research participants, only four respondents expressed a strictly sexual and/or physical interest in the machinic (either a sexual and/or physical relationship with or as a machinic humanoid.) Three of these respondents identified as male, and one as

female. Eleven of the twenty respondents wanted both a sexual and romantic relationship with or as a machinic humanoid. These responses were split five and five between female and male research participants. None of the participants expressed an interest in a solely romantic or emotional relationship with a machinic entity of any kind, although one respondent described herself as “asexual” (this respondent also expressed a desire to be programmed for sexual activity however, so her desires were not strictly emotional or romantic. Her response was grouped as “Other.”)

I classified two female-identifying and one male-identifying responses as “Other.” “Other” responses included the above-mentioned female-identifying interviewee who described herself as asexual, and stated that she wanted a non-sexual relationship unless “programmed” to be sexual and a female participant who stated the following:

I don't have a real life partner any more and don't want another. Romantic relationships have failed on me too often so they don't play a major role in my fantasies. But from time to time I imagine a real nice (often cyborg or robot) man who teams up with me reaching short-term goals, and this involves a lot of dedication, both mentally and physically. So, I'm not attracted to the physical attributes of that man but how he treats me as strong and equipotent. (Hailey)

Another female participant wrote, “Having a romantic partner, that also is a machine would be a nice experience, mostly because machines are incapable of betrayal.” (Nora) It is interesting to note that these particular participants have apparently been disappointed by intimate relationships in the past, but this does not however mean that we can assume that this is the reason for their technosexual interests. The interview data

suggest that their interests are more complicated than that. It can be said however that these participants seem to feel that a machinic partner or machinic intimacies have additional advantages over intimate relationships with human beings than just the possibilities of machinic bodies.

One of the research participants who responded that she wanted both romantic and sexual intimacies with a machinic body replied,

Honestly it's always just me and a female romantic partner being romantic and sometimes being sexual while both of us wear metal fembot suits that we have control over. It makes me feel less lonely and allows me to pretend that I could find someone who would be like me in that regard. (Suzanne)

When asked what was more important in technosexual practices and desires for them – the technological or machinic aspect of the body or the ascribed gender of the machinic body, research participant responses were varied.

Table 11: Importance of gender vs. Machinic and/or technological aspects in research participant technosexual interests and desires

	Ascribed gender most important to me	Machinic or Technological aspect most important to me	Both	Did not Answer
Female	2	5	2	1
Male	5	3	2	
Total	7	8	4	1

Table 11 shows the distribution by gender for research participant technosexual desires when asked, while discussing their technosexual interests, which aspect of a body was more important to them, the gender or the machinic attributes. Seven of the research

participants, five males and two females, felt that gender was more important to them than the machinic attributes, while eight of the participants, five females and three males, felt that the machinic or technological aspect of a body was more important to them. Four participants, two each male and female, reported that both of these aspects were more important, while one participant did not answer this question.

For the male participants, it is perhaps unsurprising that half of them would cite gender as primary for their intimate interests. As Fembot Central is a site for the discussion of and appreciation of female-form machinic bodies, most of the male research participants reported that they heterosexual. As heterosexual males in anglophone Western cultures, the importance of heterosexuality to mainstream masculinities is paramount (Pascoe 2007; Connell 1995; Sedgwick 1985.) I was surprised therefore by the number of male participants who identified as heterosexual but admitted that the machinic aspect eclipsed the gender of the body for their technosexual interests.

One male participant, Todd, wrote, “I consider myself “straight” but I am as equally turned on by android women with vaginas as I am by android women with penises. This sexual interest in transsexual women is limited to my technosexuality.” Aidan, a male interviewee who also has some interest in being a machinic body himself (see Chapter VII) described his sexual interests as follows:

I would describe myself as heterosexual in real life, but 100% bisexual online. In the sense that I find that I can share my sexuality with other men online, and even have in person once or twice. However, I do not get aroused by men in real life. Although, if they were robotic, then I am uncertain how that would fall.

Machinic Fantasies

It's fun when a woman indulges my fetish and plays my robot girlfriend. But she's still a human, and she has limits to her endurance and strength, both physically and emotionally. And the wilder fantasies— of, say, having sex with the bottom half of a woman whose connected to two female robot tops, both of whom experience sexual pleasure—well, that's just impossible. (Allen)

When asked “Is sexual and/or romantic role-play with a human pretending to be a robot or cyborg interchangeable, preferred, or inferior to actual sexual and/or romantic activities with an actual robot or cyborg body for you? Why?” Most of the research participants stated that they would prefer intimacies with an actual machinic being over roleplaying that experience with a human. Only one female and one male participant stated that they would prefer roleplaying or “robot play” to actual intimate interactions with a machinic body. The female participant wrote, “Yes. I often roleplay as an android.[...] I have a partner that helps me explore different faucets [sic] of my android persona. [...] I can shut off other thinking and anxiety or worries.” (Paige)

Another female research participant (Mackenzie) however, stated that role-playing with humans was inferior to the actual machinic interactions she would like. Her sentiment echoes that of many of the research participants. Even the male participant who stated that he would prefer role play presented a caveat with that preference.

I am inclined to say it [role play] would be preferred, because naturally I would like to have an actual relationship with a woman where I would be comfortable enough to engage in this kind of play and she would be willing to participate and we could both have fun. Yet there is part of me that would always be a little embarrassed at my desire, and fearful that her interest would wane and that she would always be hoping that it was just a phase I would ultimately shake off in favor of more conventional bedroom behavior. (Steven)

Steven would prefer robot play with a human partner but doesn't think a human partner would be willing to indulge those fantasies for long. As a result, and for fear of stigmatization, he doesn't tell anyone about his desires for technosexual roleplay. He rarely enters into relationships, and never mentioned his robot play desires to his last partner. Silence and fear of other people's reactions to technosexual desires has a considerable impact on the life choices, particularly the relationship choices of those interested in entering intimate assemblages with machinic bodies – or even interested in fantasy scenarios with other humans pretending to be machinic bodies. Fears of stigmatization and feelings of isolation that often accompany technosexual desires are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

VI. 21st CENTURY DIGITAL BOYS

This chapter presents the findings and discussion around discourse within and outside the technosexualities community, stigmatization surrounding technosexualities, and the effects (and affects) of stigmatization concerns in the lives of community members. The chapter begins by addressing the question of who creates and dominates the discourses at online technosexualities spaces, particularly Fembot Central (the center of anglophone technosexualities in cyberspace.) I examine the discourses within and without the group, and if anyone is silenced in group discourses. Hypothesis 2 is then evaluated. I continue by discussing group members' fears of stigmatization and how gender affects stigmatization. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at discourses around women, feminine bodies, and feminized technology at the Fembot Central site and how they compare to discourses around men and male bodies, and how technosexual desires fit into the larger picture of Western cultural discourse around technology in general, and gender and technology in particular.

This chapter seeks to answer the following question:

Q2. What are the parameters of discourse around technosexual desires and practices within the group itself? What about from outside the group?

- Who creates these discourses? Who has a voice in it and who is silenced?
- How do discourses of stigmatization intersect with technosexual desires and practices?
- How does this group fit in to the larger picture of human interactions with technology, especially in the U.S.?

- Are discourses around women and feminized technologies different from discourses of male bodies and masculinized or non-gendered technologies?
- Is there gender-based stigmatization within the group? Is stigmatization from outside the group gender-based? Since fear of stigmatization is expressed on the forum pages, what kinds of stigmatization is this group afraid of and why? How does this impact their face-to-face relationships? Are their lifestyle and/or health ramifications of potential stigmatization in this context?

Digital Discourse

The majority of registered group members at Fembot Central identify as male (in their profile information at the site.) As the site itself is named “Fembot Central”, and it features predominantly female-form humanoid machinic bodies in its featured artwork, the site appears geared toward heterosexual males with technosexual interests. This does not deter female group members from becoming registered users at the site however, nor does it deter them from taking part in group conversations at the site, but it does create an interesting gender dynamic at Fembot Central.

Although female research participants were not directly asked about gender dynamics in discourse at the site, several volunteered such information during their online interviews. One female participant, (Paige) mentioned that Fembot Central is “small and heavily male populated. It seems to be a common theme to use bots for sexual purposes” Another participant wrote,

I think the issue in the community for me is that it is very male dominated or feels like it. Trying to find things that are attractive to a lesbian is a near impossibility as most of the stories and images were made by men for a male audience. This makes it especially hard for folks like me who want to try and escape that. I wanna see two women for once and not just a woman in [the] control of a dude.”
(Suzanne)

(I added “[the]” to the above quote from Suzanne, to clarify the apparent intention behind the statement. I conducted this interview via email and did not realize until much later that the written statement appeared to indicate that the art on Fembot Central and its associated site, FembotWiki featured women controlling male bodies. This is not the case. The majority of the art on these sites feature either men controlling female-form machinic bodies, or, for visual art, a lot of female-form machinic bodies from media, or artistic photographic manipulations of women’s bodies to make those bodies appear machinic. In the latter instances, the female bodies are often shown without any male bodies present. When Suzanne’s other statements were consulted, and the statement read aloud, it became clear that she was indicating that she was not interested in seeing a woman in the control of a male. She was instead interested in media that showcased female machinic bodies in intimate assemblages together, without male bodies. I did not feel the need to contact her for further clarification, since, based on her other statements, this was clearly a typing omission.)

Between some female research participants' feelings that Fembot Central is a male-dominated, and potentially exclusionary space, and Farah's previously mentioned comments about "built" technosexualities dominating over other types at the site (see Chapter V) it is evident that many community members believe there's a clear majority group controlling content and discourse at Fembot Central.

Figure 7: Screen Image, Fembot Central topic page "Gender and Technosexuality"



In Figure 7, one administrator at the site commented on the fact that Fembot Central is a male-dominated space, "From observing the community as a lurker for about 5 years and then a member for about 13 now, I can say it's overwhelmingly guys." (Robotman 2016, Administrator.) Another administrator at the site, Kishin, followed up by writing about technosexualities in general,

I don't think men enjoy it more. Certainly I have seen plenty of women who were introduced to the idea and seemed open minded or even enthusiastic about the

idea. But, for whatever reason, men seem to be the most vocal about the idea. And as most women don't actively seek pornographic materials, it seems to be men who find and post more often than women.

I know I'm being a bit generalist in these ideas, but the trend does seem to start with men, and women embrace it when they discover it.

Unfortunately the fetish isn't mainstream yet and many of the people who frequent the site are lurkers. Its hard to tell someone in reality, "I think you're so beautiful. But when I look at you, I imagine the circuitry and wiring behind your faceplate." Likewise most women don't approach men and say, "I want to be your obedient fembot." It would sure make things easier if both sexes could do it without fear of ridicule or shame.

My (so far entirely positive) experiences presenting my technosexualities research to students and on panels suggests that Kishin is likely correct in thinking that more women might find intimate assemblages with machinic bodies interesting, or even desirable, if they were exposed to the idea. On the site of Fembot Central however (and other small technosexualities sub-sites in cyberspace I have explored such as “subReddits” on Reddit) males do appear to be the majority of group members and users at these sites, and as a result, the majority voices. Additionally, from both the interview demographics and everything I have been able to discern from discourse at Fembot

Central, the majority of community members also identify as "white." (see "Participant Demographics" in Chapter III for details; additionally, on Fembot Central itself, I have only seen one group member specifically refer to himself as a "technosexual of color" while many of them have identified themselves as "white.")

The second hypothesis for this dissertation was as follows:

H2: White, heterosexual male “voices” are dominant at Fembot Central, with these “voices” as the primary creators of discourse around bodies and sexuality.

H2 cannot be rejected based upon the apparent demographics of community members and discourse at the Fembot Central site.

In looking at the interview data and from "speaking" with community members at Fembot Central, it appears that the average technosexual in the anglophone world is male, late-thirties, heterosexual (or “heteroflexible” online) and white (non-Hispanic/Anglo.) Very often this “average” individual in the community has either a job in technology or is involved in technological pursuits as a significant avocation. However, unlike the stereotypes put forth by sensationalizing media accounts, and by de Fren in her work, the “average” technosexual is not socially deficient and lonely; in fact, many of these men are, or have been in, long-term relationships, including marriages, with women in the physical world. The primary reason that such men seemed to be so involved at Fembot Central despite being in committed, physical world relationships was that their technosexual interests were not fulfilled by their physical world significant others. There were a variety of reasons for this. To begin, many of them had a sexual

and/or romantic interest in machinic bodies, and their flesh-and-blood significant others simply were not machinic. Although machinic entities were not their only sexual or romantic interest, a flesh-and-blood significant other did not address these desires. Second, although many of them would have been fulfilled (or reasonably fulfilled) by sexual roleplay with a flesh-and-blood significant other (with the sexual partner pretending to be a machinic body), many expressed either fear or simply a lack of desire to share their technosexual fantasies with their physical world partners.

The only “lonely” person that I met during this research (who told me he felt isolated by more than his technosexual interests,) seemed more socially constrained by circumstances than any social or psychological pathology. He was a widower, raising a young child, and working at home as a technology call center worker to facilitate the life of a single father. His physical world life revolved around the home and around child care. Fembot Central offered a much-needed social outlet and community for him. Nonetheless, he took whatever opportunities he could to socialize in the physical world, and was currently contemplating how to approach a new acquaintance to ask her out on a date.

Is Anyone Silenced?

The argument could of course be made that any time you have majority groups and minority groups in any interaction, you have unequal control of group discourse and the silencing (or at least muffling) of minority voices. And of course, when you have the blanket reproduction of larger social roles in any medium or space (virtual or otherwise) you generally find heterosexual white men controlling that medium or space to some

extent. Fembot Central is no different, and majority control of discourse *does* occur at the site. In the nearly seven years that I have been a member of this online group however, I have rarely seen attempts to silence minority voices. Although white, heterosexual males dominate the discourse at the site – by sheer numbers, if nothing else - anyone can create a new “topic” of discussion or voice their opinion in response to other member’s posts.

According to one administrator at the site, “Fembot Central does not have any features installed that allow users to block or mute each other. We feel that our community is far too small for such features to be constructive, and that their use would only be divisive and inhibit discussion.” (Fembot Central Administrator, Private Correspondence.) Ostensibly, all group members have an equal voice in the community, regardless of gender, race, machinic attributes, or other bodily aspects, either in the physical world, or as represented by their avatars. They also cannot have that voice silenced, or silence each other, via tools inherent to the site. The same could be said of many spaces where public conversations take place in the physical world, but, as in the physical world, a virtual public forum can still be a space in which unofficial and subtle silencing is regularly practiced.

As in any community, arguments and even informal attempts to silence dissenting voices spring up in the forum pages. I experienced and was a part of several such informal silencings during both exploratory research and the research for this dissertation. In 2016, I joined the “Gender and Technosexuality” topic discussion, started by then-group-member “JessicaDupre” a male group member (male-identifying in the physical world) who had created an alternate “female” account to create discussions on gender, and who later broke with the group (see later in this chapter for more on this member.)

The topic page was about how technosexualities are expressed by gender, specifically that more males appear to be interested in machinic bodies than females (my terminology here, not that of other group members.) The topic page however ended up erupting into an argument over feminism.

Community member “tdlsn” wrote, “Hyper politicization of sex roles,gender feminists and good ol' you're some kinda wierdo/looser for wishing to make it with a robot plain and simple. [sic]” This was in response to Kishin’s comments on the topic (see Figure 7, this chapter.) This comment from tdlsn was followed up with,

Let's all fondly remember that era gone by, before hyper politicization of sex roles, when no one would think you were a weirdo loser for wanting to make it with a robot.... Wait, WHAT ?! What alternative universe did you fall out of? Robot sex has never been acceptable among the masses.

This mixed-up talk of "Hyper politicization of sex roles" slanders mainstream feminism and decades of progress empowering human beings.

The least qualified people to understand sociology are the least capable of appreciating how very unqualified they are to have any opinions on the subject.

(Dale Coba 2016, “Gender and Technosexuality” topic page.)

Dale Coba and tdlsn continued to exchange some (rather barbed) words, when community member 33cl33 expressed dissatisfaction with this line of discussion. “Could we not do the gamergate/mra -v- feminism thing for the thousandth time? If these kinds of threads bother you so much, tdlsn, maybe just duck out of them. I don't like

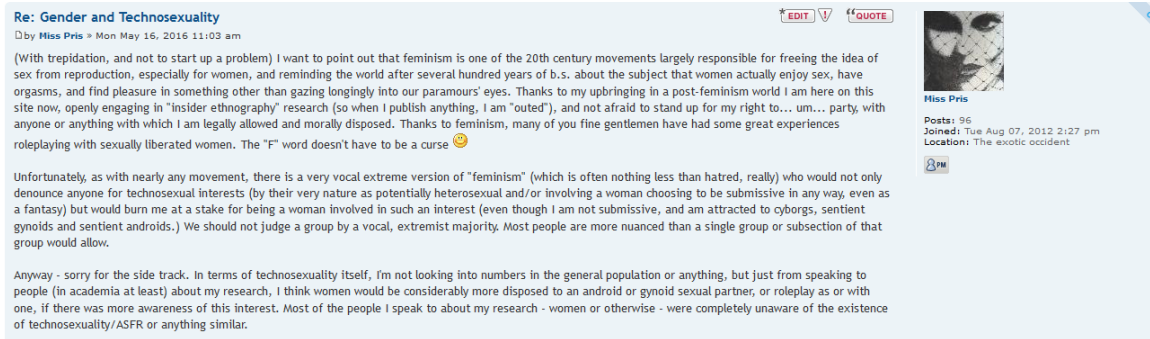
transformation stories, so I don't pop in to bitch about them.” (33cl33, 2016.) Group member tdlsn then objected to the suggestion that he was” bitching” (perhaps a charged word for someone who expressed such dislike for feminism?) at which point one of the administrators, Robotman, wrote “I'd just like to remind everyone - especially dale coba and tdlsn - to keep this discussion civil and on topic. Tangential discussions can be started in Off Topic and insults can be hurled via private message.” (“Off Topic” is hyperlinked in the original.)

The exchange described here illustrates both the embodied nature of assemblages and interactions in cyberspace, and how group members in online interactions enter into affective assemblages. Each of the members involved in the conversation bring opinions and emotions formed by years of living in their physical world bodies into the online interaction. These group members experienced affects and emotions in the course of the conversation that seeped into their thoughts and then into their statements.

As I am a part of the Fembot Central assemblage, I had both an affective and emotional reaction to tdlsn’s comments about feminism. There are times when, upon hearing or reading something that (I, seconds later register as something that) upsets me, I feel a sensation of... something like heat, move up my spine and into the base of my skull - heat, just on the surface of my skin. I am affected by certain rhetoric, and in turn affect others in my assemblages with my responses.

I also wanted to defuse the situation a bit – also an affective, and then cognitive response to the mounting tension in this discussion. My response is found in Figure 8.

Figure 8: My response to “tdlsn” on the “Gender and Technosexuality” topic



The discussion continued from there, moving back into pro- and anti-feminism polarities.

Just look, for example, at how much money the (United States) federal government earmarks for women's health, shelters, etc. **WOMEN ONLY**, mind you. Now take a look and find out if there's any money earmarked whatsoever for men. Wait, I can save you the trouble - there isn't. \$0 budgeted for men, multiple millions for women. Hell, men don't have the right to bodily autonomy (female circumcision = illegal, male circumcision = legal; the draft is currently male-only and I **DON'T GET LEGAL RIGHTS UNLESS I SIGN UP...**), sexual freedom and the right to say no (men **cannot be raped** under the US legal system's definitions except by another man), or even the right of fatherhood (men don't have to be notified if a child is theirs, and are legally required to care for a child who is **not** theirs if a woman takes them to court for child support).

All of that is the direct result of feminist campaigning. That's not all of it, mind you, but those are just some of the glaring obviously unequal results of feminism. Leaving alone shared parenting, the education gap, the massive welfare gap in favor of women, and the legal system's undue weight on sentencing men more

harshly than women - as well as the assumption that men are guilty where women are not (predominant aggressor policies come to mind).

...How aren't feminists in power, again? (Lithorien 2016, “Gender and Technosexuality topic pages, Fembot Central, bold text in original.)

As the emotionally charged discussion went on, one member suggested that the topic be locked or moved elsewhere on Fembot Central. This could be read as an attempt to silence other members (most of whom male) by appealing to an authority at the site – in this case, an administrator. This is not to imply that an attempt to silence group members considered to be disturbing or derailing a conversation is not a normative response; such mechanisms of social sanction, such as appealing to rules and authority figures to tame the unruly, is a commonly used tactic that can be observed in our everyday conversations and group dynamics (and provides an additional example as to why my first hypothesis, H1 – discussed in the previous chapter – should be rejected; social sanction and repercussions, as per a community, are far more prevalent at the site than I thought!) In this case however, the attempt was unsuccessful.

I've seen nothing in this thread that warrants locking it. I will say that some participants are getting close to making personal attacks on other members, so I'd like to warn them to keep things civil. If you feel the need to attack the person making the argument, you've already lost. (Robotman, Administrator 2016, “Gender and Technosexuality” topic page, Fembot Central.)

This was the second time that this administrator felt the need to tell the group members at this topic page to remain “civil” - except this time, his wording changed from “remind” to “warn”, suggesting that there could be formal sanctions if discussants were unable to discuss the topics without the affective and emotional responses of their bodies leaking through their fingertips and into their typed responses.

What the administrator did here can also be seen as an attempt at silencing community members at the site. The role of the administrator affords additional powers at the Fembot Central site than a regular “user” has, such as the ability to lock a topic or ban a member. This administrator is using the possibility of formal sanctions from an authority at the site to silence affective and emotional responses, and insist that discussants adhere to a logical, unemotional, and cerebral tone (read masculine in North American and many other anglophone cultures.) He is attempting to shut down the emotional and pre-cognitive responses of the assemblage.

Even now as I write these findings, I am capitulating with the masculinist objectivity that my education attempted to bore into me. I am fond of these community members that I am now citing as having used various tactics to silence other members and steer, even dominate, discourse at the site. I enter into a kind of intimate assemblage at Fembot Central with these same people, as community member, and am torn now by affective and emotional responses of caring and an intellectual attachment to objectivity and rigor. I like these people, but the format of the dissertation demands that I examine their actions as potential attempts to control discourse at the site, and that I do so with an unfeeling lens. It is an uncomfortable bodily position, having different parts of my

nervous system seemingly at odds. Of course, such conflict is found in every assemblage, and whenever assemblages (such as people) enter into other assemblages (such as public discourse.)

The example that I have given here is far from the only community argument that can be found at Fembot Central. Such quarrels, with various types of silencing attempts, happen often in discussions at the site. Another one that occurred during exploratory research (so I won't detail it, as it was in 2012, before the research for this dissertation, but it is still a part of the public forum and remains accessible) involved myself (a new member) and another user arguing over feminisms. Feminism comes up often at the site, as some members see feminism as a movement which would try to wield political influence and public opinion to outlaw technosexualities; admittedly, some radical feminists in cyberspace have suggested as much be done. Radical feminism is however, only one type of feminism. Several of the members supported my arguments in which I countered a particularly anti-feminist community member. Most of the group members supporting me were male.

Were they coming to my rescue – helping a damsel avatar in distress? If so, this could be read as a form of gendered silencing in its own right. Defending a woman who is in process of defending herself could be seen as taking away her agency, asserting the (cyber)space as a male domain where only men may be involved with discourse, or “mansplaining” a woman's own defense for her in argument. It did not *feel* like male encroachment into my sense of agency or silencing in any way, however. It felt like I had support from the people at the site – my fellow group members – who, just happened to

be male. Again, for the sake of this dissertation, I must question their motives, but it may have been that these community members were just attempting to support a new member, or that they just simply agreed with me, and felt the other discussant was wrong.

(Emotionally speaking, I favor the latter possibility.)

It is important to note that the above-mentioned (possible) motives for supporting a female discussant are no different from those that may be present in public conversation and shared spaces in the physical world. Fembot Central appears no different from physical world, anglophone, public spaces that I have experienced in terms of support, silencing, or (gendered) power dynamics in discourse. In fact, in showing support of my argument, and reinforcing my continuing press of my own argument, we were all effectively silencing the dissenting group member who was arguing against feminism!

Unofficial silencing and social sanctioning happen at Fembot Central, as in any community, in cyberspace or otherwise. Official silencing at Fembot Central functions differently from most physical world spaces, however. Official silencing by administrators at the site can lead to being permanently banned from Fembot Central (by name, and internet protocol address as well no doubt, as otherwise a banned group member could simply get a new username.) This is the harshest punishment that authorities at the site can offer and comes after multiple warnings (unlike in physical world spaces where there are intermediate steps between warnings and complete banishment, such as community service or incarceration.) The infractions that can lead to banishment from the community by the authorities are usually clearly stated however, so these potential infractions function like rules - or even "laws" for the community

One rule that's not quite as clear as the others is, "Fembot Central exists for discussing and celebrating female robots. Any posts or other content on these message boards that involves racism will be removed... Anyone who posts racist content in any way here will be warned and possibly banned." (Announcements, "Racism will not be tolerated" 2013.) This "law" (my term, not theirs) is particularly interesting, as it is unclear who decides if a post is racist - the administrators/authorities, or the members of the community. Either way, this "law" could end up functioning as a silencing mechanism for anyone with dissenting ideas from the rest of the community, or of the administrators (even if the community's or administrators' ideas of racism are very different from that of the rest of Western, anglophone mainstream cultures.) The mention here is not to indicate that this is occurring at the site presently, simply to point out that this community "law" *could* be used as a silencing mechanism, as threat of banishment in any community, even a cybercommunity can provoke fear and self-policing.

Actual banishments are few and far between however. Administrators usually exercise their authority over discourse in three ways. As one of the administrators explained it to me,

the only actions the admins here [names omitted] take are 1) locking threads, 2) moving threads to a quarantine section when underage content is involved (effectively deleting them before they are permanently deleted), and 3) replacing the text of posts which contain links to underage material. #3 is the only time this is done, and usually the thread gets locked after the user gets issued a warning. You can read our No Underage Fembots policy here [hyperlink to rule in the original.] (Administrator, Private Message)

Any posts that appear to violate the rules of the site are removed, and the user who posted the content is warned not to repeat the infraction. Repeated infractions - as in most communities, online or otherwise –result in, as mentioned, eventual expulsion. Although the main concern of administrators at Fembot Central is to root out potentially underage content (protecting the site both legally and in terms of reputation, and protecting people under 18 years of age) there *are* some other actions that can lead to expulsion from this community.

When the official and permanent “silencing” of a group member *does* happen – i.e. being banned from site participation by an official administrator – there is a clear, well-supported, and often public reason for such “silencing” given. An administrator at the site mentioned that since Fembot Central's inception, only nine people (totaling eleven accounts) had been banned from Fembot Central (Administrator, Fembot Central.) Over the course of Fembot Central’s existence, there have been 2,113 registered group members (as of this writing, most of whom are not currently active community members, some of whom were simply short term “lurkers,” curious about technosexuality and its proponents but not engaged in discussion at the site, or becoming a member of the community.) As online forum sites go, nine group members banned in seventeen years is quite low – less than half of one percent of users. This low percentage may have to do with the general clarity of the rules at the site (the above-mentioned rule on racism being the exception) and the consistent actions of site administrators.

One of the most noteworthy instances of a community member being banned from Fembot Central involves the 2016 expulsion of “JessicaDupre” a “sockpuppet” account (alternate registration) of “Adama2014” a well-known group member.

JessicaDupre was a seemingly female member of Fembot Central who had gone to another online group called "Something Awful" and been accused of "trolling" at the site (writing purposefully inflammatory comments with the intent of causing a reaction on the discussion boards.) Those comments were apparently regarding gender equality, feminism, and "her" treatment at the Something Awful site. As a result of the accusation of "her" trolling Something Awful, and the fact that the administrators of Fembot Central had linked the JessicaDupre identity via IP address (internet protocol address, a unique designation for device and location) to Adama2014, the user was banned from Fembot Central for violating the rules of the site.

Figure 9: Fembot Central Administrator's Announcement Regarding Banned Group Member

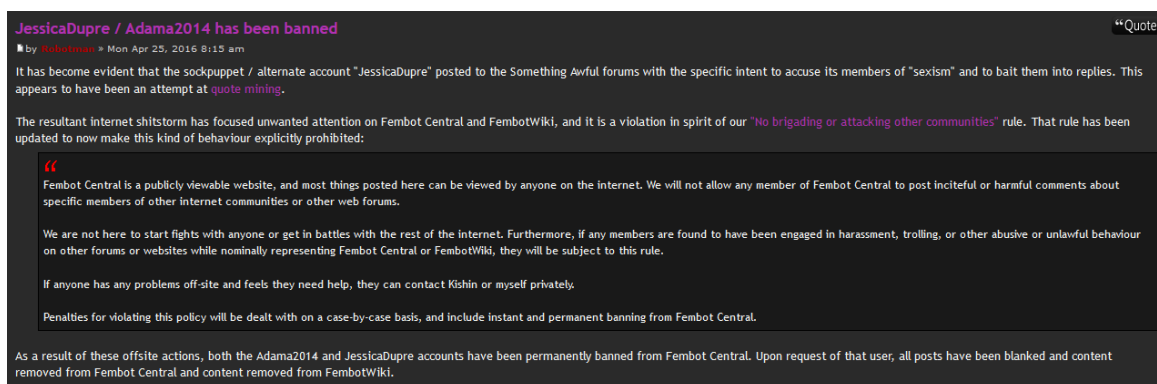


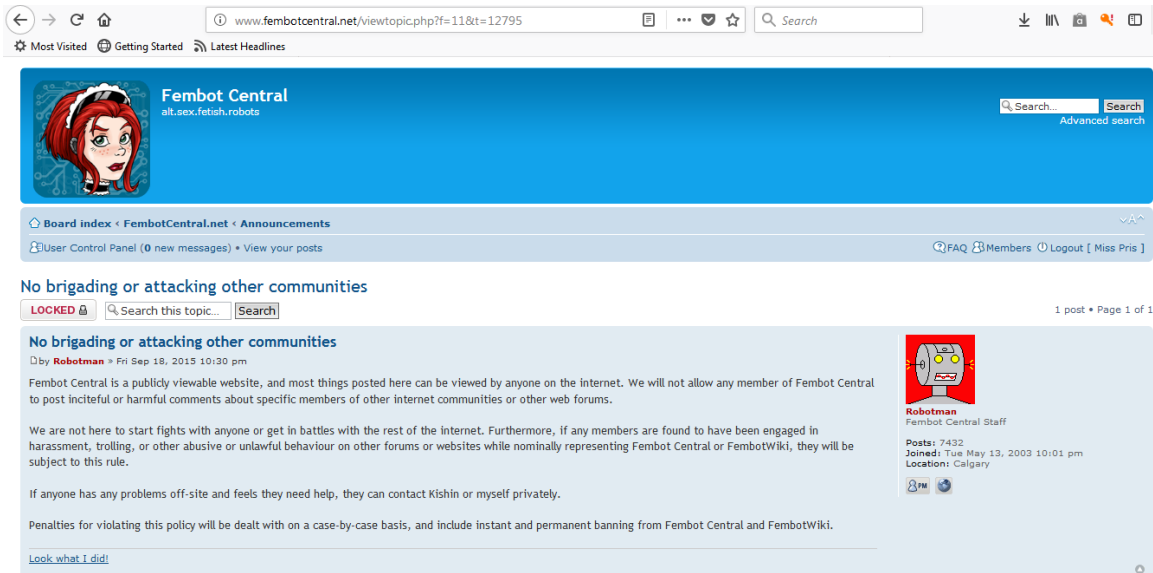
Figure 9 is a Fembot Central administrator's explanation of the banning of JessicaDupre/Adama2014 for her/his actions on the "Something Awful" web forum, and a further explanation of the update to the rule "No brigading or attacking other communities". (The Black and Purple color scheme indicates that I was not logged in as "Miss Pris" when I retrieved this image.)

There were many responses to this post from community members at Fembot Central. The following are some of the replies that best exhibit overall community sentiment on discovering JessicaDupre/Adama2014's activities outside of Fembot Central:

Seriously (¬_¬) Don't people have better things to do than to annoy people on the internet? And then to get **us** involved in that shit? If there is one thing i can't stand it's a tumblr feminist/trolls that is trying to fuck everyone over and give propper [sic] feminism a bad name (Community Member, N6688.)

Adama2014's behaviour offsite as JessicaDupre was dishonest and abusive by its very nature and against the spirit and intent of our "No brigading or attacking other communities" [hyperlink in original] rule. To put it into an analogy - don't go kicking a hornet's nest while holding our banner. There is evidence of what occurred online, and it's possible to get an idea of what happened. (I will not be posting or linking to any of those images or discussions here. They can be easily found using Google.) Adama/Jessica went to Something Awful specifically to provoke negative reactions. Adama/Jessica had a screencapping tool at the ready to record any such reactions so "she" could paint that community as sexist. Also, this separation from the community is mutual. I had already made up my mind to ban both accounts when I received private messages from both accounts this morning asking me to delete them and all of their posts and content from this website and FembotWiki (Fembot Central Administrator.)

Figure 10: Screenshot, Rule Regarding Activities on Other Websites



(The blue and white color scheme indicates that this screenshot was taken while I was “logged in” to the Fembot Central site as “Miss Pris.” It’s a personal preference, as registered users may choose among a variety of set themes, including the black with white text color scheme, which is the default look of the site. The black, purple, white text color scheme is the one that the unregistered user and member of the general public sees when viewing the Fembot Central forum pages. All content is otherwise the same when looking at the public pages, whether registered user or unregistered user at the site.)

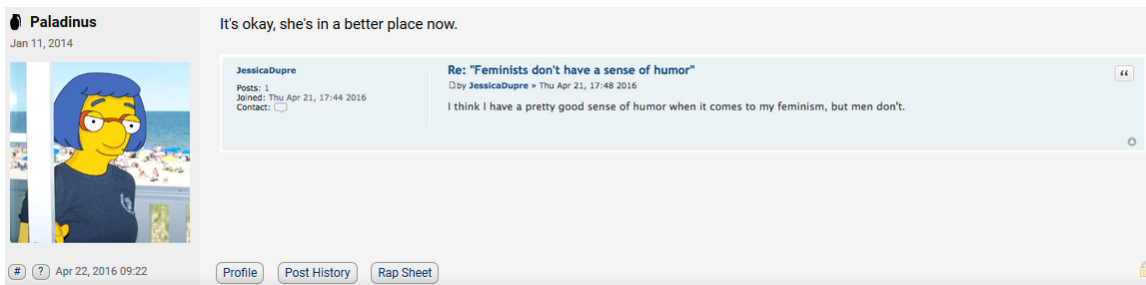
Some of the text shown above in Figure 10 reads,

Fembot Central is a publicly viewable website, and most things posted here can be viewed by anyone on the internet. We will not allow any member of Fembot Central to post inciteful or harmful comments about specific members of other internet communities or other web forums [...] We are not here to start fights with

anyone or get in battles with the rest of the internet. Furthermore, if any members are found to have been engaged in harassment, trolling, or other abusive or unlawful behaviour on other forums or websites while nominally representing Fembot Central or FembotWiki, they will be subject to this rule (Announcements, "No brigading or attacking other communities" 2015.)

JessicaDupre/Adama2014 had gone to the "Something Awful" web forums (<https://forums.somethingawful.com/>) and identified "herself" as a technosexual, apparently referenced and posted links to "her" blog (with technosexualities content), and then had documented any responses that could be perceived as sexist. There's some suggestion from posts at Something Awful that "Jessica" also posted content that was intentionally provocative to elicit sexist responses (it's difficult to tell, since much of the incident has been erased from the internet, presumably by Jessica/Adama judging from that person's request that other posts be deleted; "Jessica" deleted "her" blog as well, around the same time that s/he requested that the administrator erase the Fembot Central posts. Some of the forum members at Something Awful did save portions of the Jessica Dupre blog however, and have posted them at the site.) Jessica/Adama's actions – motivated by what seems to have been an attempt to create interest in a self-published book, with links to the blog and Amazon.com site selling the book – drew negative attention to Fembot Central and violated the rules of the technosexualities site.

Figure 11: Screenshot from Fembot Central, as Posted by User at Something Awful Forum



[Retrieved from "Something Awful" thread "CONGRATULATIONS YOU SEXIST MISOGYNIST PIGS" starting at <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3773186&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>]

In Figure 11, above, the user, "Paladinus" at Something Awful has reposted a comment made by JessicaDupre that was very clearly taken from Fembot Central (the visuals betray the origin - the color scheme, the font, the way the date is displayed - I recognized the origin of the post immediately.) As I have previously mentioned, Fembot Central is the (anglophone) hub of technosexualities in cyberspace. It does not take someone long to find the site if looking for technosexualities on the internet, and this is apparently what Paladinus did when "JessicaDupre" came to the Something Awful forums discussing "her" technosexuality. "Jessica" had put a spotlight on Fembot Central, displaying the community to an online site known for the scathing humor and vitriol of its users. And she did so by irritating and "trolling" those users. Fembot Central Administrators were not pleased with her actions.

That incident did lead directly to the creation of this rule [hyperlink in the original to a new rule in which alternate accounts would be identified as such] and to an amendment of this rule [hyperlink in the original to a rule against "trolling" at other sites.] The gist of it is: don't go poking a troll's nest while waving our banner, or we will kick you out. (Administrator, Fembot Central.)

Figure 12: "Sockpuppets and alternate accounts" Rule from Fembot Central

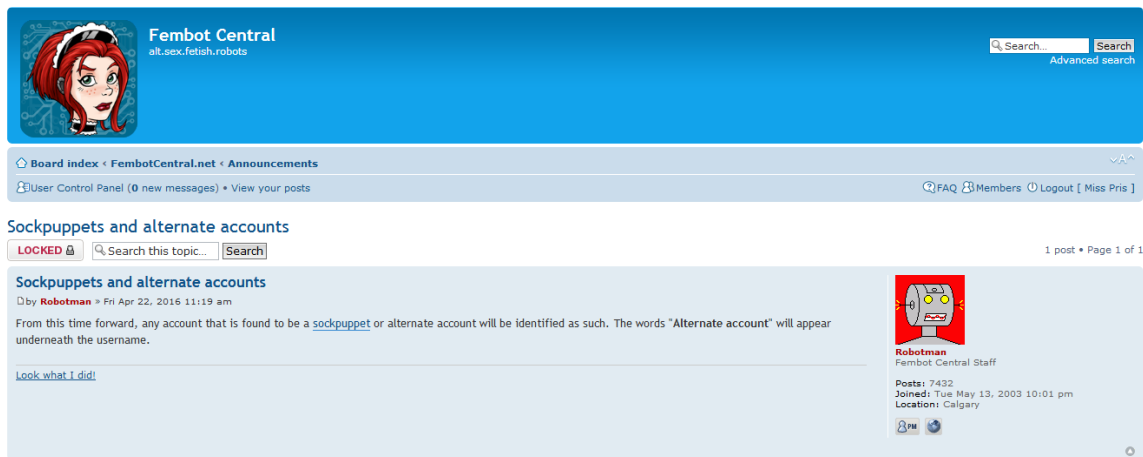
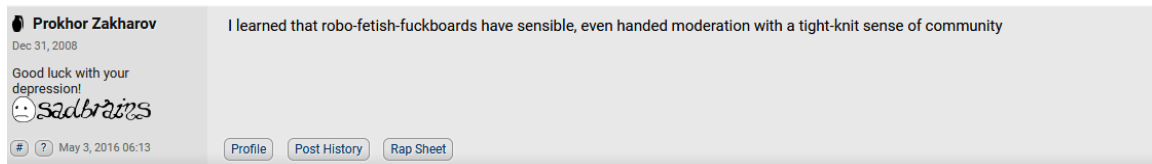


Figure 12 shows the new rule that was created as a result of JessicaDupre's actions at Something Awful. The rule states, “From this time forward, any account that is found to be a sockpuppet or alternate account will be identified as such. The words "**Alternate account**" will appear underneath the username.”

The Fembot Central administrator that I spoke to about the incident informed me that he had traced Jessica/Adama’s internet protocol (IP) address and discovered that the IP address was associated with a person who turned out to be someone he suspects is a

male in the physical world. Essentially, in addition to causing potential harm to the technosexualities site by calling attention to potentially unfriendly eyes, "Jessica" was using "her" associations with the community to profit by selling "her" self-published book.

Figure 13: "Something Awful" member commenting on Fembot Central



[Retrieved from "Something Awful" thread "CONGRATULATIONS YOU SEXIST MISOGYNIST PIGS" starting at <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3773186&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>]

In the end, the incident appears to have resolved peacefully enough for the Fembot Central community. The group members of the Something Awful forum, despite their reputation for being vitriolic, reacted with humor to the incident, and some even expressed admiration for the way the incident was handled at the Fembot Central site. Figure 13 shows one such example. User "Prokhor Zakharov" wrote, "I learned that robo-fetish-fuckboards have sensible, even handed moderation with a tight-knit sense of community." In this instance at least, the Fembot Central community, and technosexual practices in general, left the encounter (reasonably) unscathed. Many community members did not believe that they would be so lucky in other circumstances.

Stigmatization and Fear

Outside of the online community at Fembot Central research participants rarely discuss technosexuality, and are even less likely to “come out” to friends and intimate partners as technosexual. The primary reason for these decisions is the fear of stigmatization.

There is a huge stigma that I see now from several different groups. First, you've got your sexual purists that see it as somehow deviant, much like homosexuality was viewed 50 years ago. Then you've got folks that think it is pathetic in the vein of "oh he's such a loser that he can only fuck a robot." [sic] However I feel the most potentially damaging group, and the one I most fear, are those that feel ASFR is an anti-woman, nearly rape play fetish. IE "They really want to go around raping women and want them to be mindless bimbos." Someone with that attitude and knowledge of who's doing what online can end careers, destroy families, and otherwise cause all kinds of chaos. (Sam)

One female research participant expressed particular fear for her professional life if her desires for machinic bodies were made public. “I am sometimes afraid, because of rather unstable economic situation it's hard to find a descent job those days and losing one because of my kinks is very possible.” (Nora) another participant wrote,

what i've seen there is little doubt of that [stigmatization]. People in general don't like “weird stuff”, there's a lot of flack being shot at the LGBT community from people that don't like sex when there is no chance of procreation or stuff like that, the technosexuality might get saved only on the premise that's so weird and

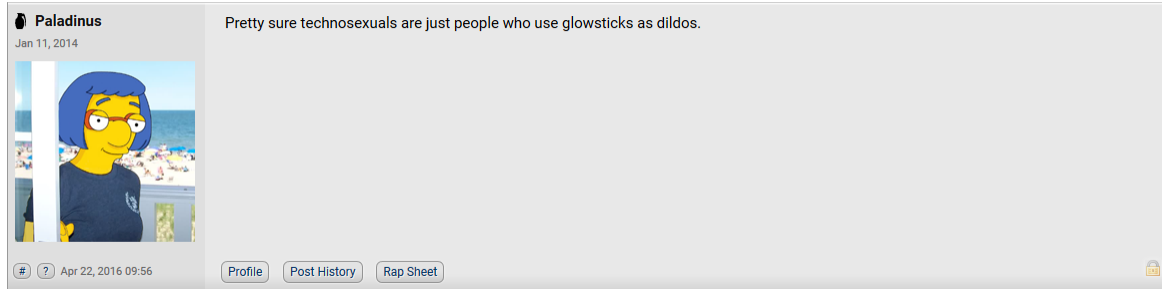
possibly expensive that people would not consider it even possible. [...] I don't feel stigmatized because I don't express my views on the subject. As for fear i've minimized this window at least 7 times while writing these answers when people came here for business or other stuff. So... yeah. I would definitely not like people to know about it unless they are so intimate that they don't care.[...]

Thankfully i'm a white male. That offsets so much of the flack I would receive that I can't even compare it. However I would still not like it. [sic] (Trevor)

Another research participant did not think technosexuals were severely stigmatized (to the point of persecution) by those outside technosexualities communities. He explained,

We are not persecuted. We are dismissed and ridiculed, but that is the natural response when people are unfamiliar with and nervous about fetish sexualities in general. I think that since Furrries [anthropomorphic animal fetish] became [sic] more widely known of, they have partially displaced the robot fetishists as a punchline punching bag. Maybe twice in 10 years, Fembot Central had a problem with outsiders coming in to mock us. The administrators have discouraged the kind of outreach which I would have tried, promoting our images and other creative works in a wider sphere. This has helped prevent any further such intrusions. (Glen)

Figure 14: Post from “Something Awful” Web Forum



[Retrieved from "Something Awful" thread "CONGRATULATIONS YOU SEXIST MISOGYNIST PIGS" starting at <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3773186&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>]

Figure 14 shows a screen image from the “Something Awful” forum pages – an example of the type of ridicule that technosexualities face outside the online community. Not every community member at Fembot Central was concerned about ridicule or potential stigmatization, however.

Every time I've told a friend about my fetish, they've responded positively. I have seen other members report that it hasn't gone so well for them though, and I'll let them tell those stories themselves if they're willing. I will say that those are firmly in the minority. We seem to be able to keep decent friends for the most part. As for the lampooning, I honestly couldn't care less what some assclowns on the internet think about me and what I get off too. When I get concerned is when people want to change laws and bring about censorship because they don't like what they see. It used to be that we had to keep our eyes on radical elements of the religious right for these kinds of authoritarian shenanigans, but lately

authoritarianism is gaining popularity with elements on the extreme left too. I find it's the authoritarians - those who want to restrict the hard-won rights of others - who are the first to throw out baseless accusations like "pedophile" or "rapist" when their narrow views are challenged. (Robotman, Administrator 2016, "Gender and Technosexuality" topic page on Fembot Central.)

On that same topic page, another community member wrote,

The only times I've talked about / disclosed it, two different ladies in real life, it was met with not only curiosity, but enthusiastic participation.

I think the lampooning comes from the same place all other troll-like behavior comes from. From thinking this is something only strangers you never meet engage in. If most people had half a clue what their closest friends and loved ones were into, kink-wise, I think we'd see a lot less sex-shaming in the world. (33c133, Community Member 2016, "Gender and Technosexuality" topic page on Fembot Central.)

These group members appear to be the exception. Most of the research participants that I interviewed (seventeen out of the twenty) expressed at least some fear of stigmatization, or even discrimination, if their physical world communities and/or intimates discovered their desires for machinic bodies. As a result, many of them felt anxiety and isolation. Nora stated, "Considering my job [teacher] any chance of it being exposed would simply ruing my life [sic][...] I am sometimes afraid."

Another participant, Aidan, described his feelings about his early interest in machinic bodies,

I definitely felt guilt about being interested in something that I thought my friends and classmates would absolutely not share. I felt loneliness in that I couldn't share it with anyone. Unfortunately, the community didn't really help in this regard because many of the experiences were "I told my wife, and she (left me/tolerates it)

Discourse on the Fembot Central site itself also tends towards secrecy and anxiety that technosexual interests could be discovered. Even for those group members willing to share their technosexual desires within relationships that have no technosexual component (with "non-technosexuals", to force the designation), there is concern as to how technosexual desires will be understood and received by friends and other physical world intimates.

Unfortunately, the effects of stigmatization are far more severe than just affective discomforts (not to trivialize such; discomfort of various kinds – bodily, cultural, socio-corporal, as per Ahmed 2004 - can become unbearable when chronic.) Stigmatization, and the potential isolation that can come from the fear of it, can lead to physiological stress responses and long-term anxiety that have substantial repercussions on health. The vast majority of work on stigma and its negative, chronic effects on the body focus on stigmatization that comes from mental illness or HIV diagnoses, but they provide findings on a suite of negative effects that can result from stigmatization in general and how people respond to it. Some of these effects include problems with self-control,

depression stemming from self-imposed isolation (especially for fears surrounding sexual-based stigma), general psychological distress, difficulties in social interaction, self-esteem problems, and a lower quality of life (Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema and Dovidio 2009, Inzlicht, McKay and Aronson 2006, Link et al. 1997.) Stigmatization, and the fears of it, cause real, bodily pain.

Stigmatization and Gender

Research participants had some differing opinions on whether or not there was a gender component to stigmatization either inside or outside the community. In her interview, Hailey discussed gender-based stigmatization,

For men, if they are interested in fembots, they would be stigmatized [outside the group] as never-had-a-girlfriend losers or women-molesting crackpots. For women into it it's even worse, being stigmatized as giving a willing target for such "objectifying" fantasies. And I think it would even affect women like myself who would never subdue to others, being stigmatized as man-hating terminatrices. All of it happened on Fembot Central a couple of times.

Hailey apparently had negative experiences with one or more group members at the site. Although I couldn't find any public discussions on Fembot Central in which she had a verbal altercation with another community member, she has said things on the site that show her to be a proponent of strong, autonomous female machinic bodies with

agency; her posts could have caused her to receive negative feedback in private correspondence (I did not press the matter, as most of the participants were very concerned with privacy.)

Fears of stigmatization from outside the group were discussed during the online interviews. Participants were asked about sex and gender specifically and how that tied into stigma. They were divided however, on which gender faces more potential stigmatization.

Me: Do you feel that your sex or gender plays a role in whether you would be stigmatized for your technosexual interests? Why or why not?

Sabrina: Yes. In many ways having a fetish for robots and wanting to be one falls into an "objectification" category. Being female I would hate for others to think of me as an object.

Another participant, Mackenzie, responded,

Yes, just like in modern society its ok for a woman to own a dildo or vibrator and we are encouraged to be empowered in taking our sexuality into our own hands while men are criticized if they own a fleshlight [masturbatory tool] or even for masterbating [sic], I feel like as a woman if I were to own either a male or female robot for sexual pleasure that I would not be looked down upon where as a male would be seen as some kind of pervert.

Danielle, a female participant, also felt that males were more likely to be stigmatized for technosexual interests. "I feel that a stereotype has come about where the technofetishist

is seen as a typical "basement dweller" with no interest or skill in real relationships, or is an extreme chauvanist [sic] and/or control freak." Steven, a male participant wrote,

The general power imbalance between men and women is already such a troubling situation that to own up to even the smallest interest in what is often mistakenly perceived as a desire for the aspects of women without any of the freewill or agency would lead people to make generalizations about my attitudes on women that would be untrue and hurtful.[...] We are in the midst of a violent last gasp of patriarchal attitudes about women, and too often technosexuality is used as a description for what the patriarchy wants to impose upon them rather than what I fantasize about.

Not every female participant was sure that there was gender-based stigmatization outside of the group. Skylar felt that technosexualities themselves were a potentially stigmatized set of practices, but she also wrote, "I don't think it [gender] does [matter], but if it does, being a woman might be an advantage on this issue, since men are stigmatized for paraphilia more."

There were two male research participants and one female participant who felt that sex or gender would not have an impact on the stigmatization that they might face from outside technosexualities groups. They cited the main source of stigmatization to be non-heteronormative, non-reproductive sexual interests, such as technosexualities. Aidan wrote, "I don't think it [gender] would [affect stigmatization] because I feel like non-typical sexual interests are stigmatized no matter the gender. They just tend to fall into different tropes with the different genders."

Gender, Technology... and Gendered Technology

Discourses around women, and feminized technologies, are different from discourses around male bodies, or non-feminized technologies at Fembot Central. To begin, male bodies and non-feminized technologies do not come up in discussion nearly so much as feminized technologies, specifically “fembots” and the media in which they can currently be found.

Figure 15: Hierarchy Chart of Coding from Randomly Sampled Discussion Topics

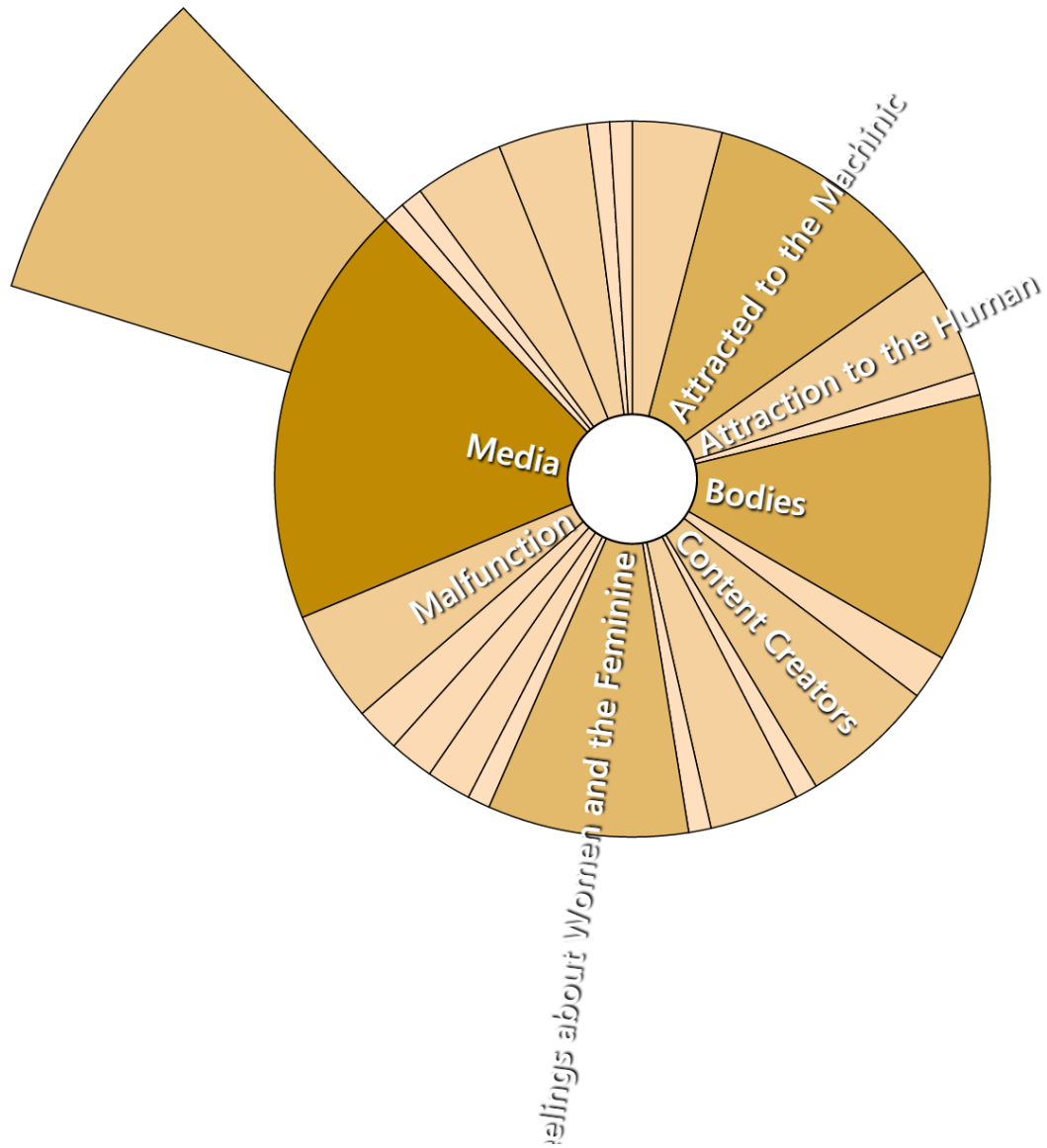


Figure 15 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo, illustrating the coding for randomly-sampled "Discussion" topics at Fembot Central. Although the program does not label the

"child node" coming out of the "parent node" named "Media" above, the area extending from media is the researcher-created code (called a "node" in NVivo) "Science Fiction Media in Childhood." The program also allowed the title of one of the nodes to be truncated. That node is entitled "Feelings about Women and the Feminine."

In the above figure, the various strata in the circle indicate researcher-created codes (again, called "nodes" in NVivo) with the size of each "pie slice" stratum determined by how often a node was coded for by the researcher; each selection of a line of text as being associated with a particular node is a deliberate, researcher-determined choice. The more frequently the subject or idea came up in the randomly selected "Discussion" topics (and was then coded with a particular node by the researcher), the larger the "pie slice" the subject or idea received in the above hierarchy chart. The NVivo program only assigned a name, in the graphic, to the largest "pie slice" strata, representing the most frequently-discussed subjects or ideas in the "Discussion" selections - allowing the viewer to see what the most frequent subjects or ideas under discussion in the randomly selected samples were. The variations in color are present to differentiate one stratum from the next, and have no significance beyond that.

Figure 15 shows that Media in general, and science fiction media in childhood were the nodes most coded for in Discussion topics that were sampled. "Bodies" was the second most coded for node, with "Attracted to the Machinic" and "Feelings about Women and the Feminine" as the next most coded for nodes. The sample appears highly representative of the Discussion pages at the site. Media, specifically science fiction media, attraction to female-form machinic bodies ("fembots" and "gynoids") and attributes of women's bodies (both machinic and human) are major topics of conversation

at Fembot Central. This is all fairly unsurprising given that Fembot Central is a site specifically designed to discuss female-form machinic bodies and the media in which group members can find such machinic bodies. The randomly sampled Discussion topics are representative of discourse at the site, and that discourse focused on female-form machinic bodies and their sexualization.

Complex technologies themselves are often feminized – cars, ships, and other machines. It's not a coincidence that technology objects are feminized in masculinist, mainstream Western cultures, just as women are the objects of the male gaze and the objects of desire in standard, male-centered heteronormativity (Sedgwick 1985.) The nonhuman, such as nature and various objects of technology tend to be equated with women and the feminine, while those who wield technological power and make technological interventions (often upon nature "her"self) are read as male, with technology being the domain of men (Bray 2007, Massey 1995; see Chapter II in this dissertation.) For males in the group, technosexualities may be something of an extension of "man's" relationship with technology, as dominator of (a feminized) natural world, and (symbolically, and for some, literally) men therefore feeling they're entitled to women's and female or feminized bodies to various extents. But, this is theoretical speculation upon the place of technosexualities in the larger Western cultural schema. I would far rather examine technosexual desires for machinic bodies through the words of the community members themselves - which is what I do in the two chapters that follow.

Discourse surrounding human female bodies at Fembot Central echoes the larger cultural and social understandings of gender, women, and female bodies found throughout majority-culture “Western” anglophone spaces in the physical world (see Chapter II, “Ideal (Female) Bodies”.) Public spaces are still male-dominated in the physical world, with women generally adapting their behavior to fit into male spaces (wearing business suits, hiding menstruation, suppressing emotional responses, attempting to be “assertive” despite being trained by culture to demure and be submissive.) Fembot Central, an assemblage of physical world bodies sharing ideas in cyberspace, unsurprisingly reinscribes the same cultural and social assumptions of gender and the same gender(ed) expectations for human behavior that we can observe daily in our physical world spaces and places.

“The default instinct for women is to be animal-like, to be desired by a male animal's gaze.” (Dale Coba, “This fetish origins...” Discussion, addressing why he thinks many women don’t have a drive to be machinic bodies.) I have not found this community member to be knowingly sexist in either our online interactions or his other interactions at the site. He appears to simply subscribe to a specific mid-20th century narrative of masculinist science on the differences between men and women. This likely has something to do with the era in which this community member received his schooling, as he’s a bit older than the average male user of the site. This view of women and their desires has been thoroughly critiqued in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st by scholarship in everything from gender studies to science and technology studies (Harding 1986, Jackson 2007, Jordanova 2000, Lorber 1994, Wajcman 1991.) This idea that women are tied to an animal nature or are somehow “closer” to nature and

the nonhuman natural world than men are, or that they are “natural” and “bodily” (often read as emotional) while men are “cultural” and more intellectual and logical (read as not captives of their emotions, as women are seen to be) is a major cultural and social narrative in the West. Although this quote by Dale Coba is one of the few times I have seen this expressed outright and explicitly at the Fembot Central site, the thread of this nature/culture-woman/man-emotion/logic-body/brain gender dichotomy is pulled through much of the discourse at the site.

As a final note on the gendering of technologies and gendered bodies at the site, what was perhaps more surprising to me than the way in which group members discussed female bodies and feminized technologies was the way that male bodies (and masculinized technologies) were discussed. Hyperlinks and member posts that include masculinized technologies, actors pretending to be such technologies (actors playing androids), or male bodies (particularly nude male bodies) are usually prefaced with a “Warning” in the title of the topic page or post. Examples include “Warning Male bots” and “She-male Warning” (to indicate that a transgender body is visible in the media.) While it may be fair to let community members know that there are male or transgender bodies in a particular piece of media, as Fembot Central members are predominantly heterosexual males (with some members who identify as heterosexual still seeking out male and transgender bodies, as well), the use of the term “Warning” is very telling.

Male heterosexuality and heteronormativity is a fragile thing in many Western cultures, to the point where male homosociality has “traditionally” (meaning early through late modernity, late 18th-early 21st centuries) been *dependent* upon the assumption of heterosexuality (Sedgwick 1985) Successful performances of masculinity

also tend to depend upon the presumption of heterosexuality – indeed the *compulsion* to heterosexuality (Connell 1995.) As a result, most men are both heavily policed and heavily police *themselves* toward heteronormative expressions of sexuality, even when those expressions of sexuality are non-normative (and non-reproductive) themselves. Continuing body (and thought) disciplines of sexual orientation and gender performance are as likely to create affective responses, such as pre-cognitive feelings of revulsion for the stimulus we are disciplining ourselves, or being disciplined, away from as they are to become the enticing, proverbial “forbidden fruit.” For males in Western cultures however, in the U.S. in particular, the desire to not desire what is non-heteronormative can be intense – the result of the way boys and young men are so strictly policed by society and culture (Pascoe 2007, Sedgwick 1985, Guttman 1997.)

Male and transgender bodies in erotic material (especially as marketed to men) represent a threat to heteronormativity and masculinity itself. Such materials need a “Warning” tag. Some men have disciplined themselves into an affective response of bodily revulsion or discomfort to male or transgender bodies, thus, such materials may be unsuitable for self-pleasure – ostensibly, the reason for a warning. Other men may have a similar affective response as above, but revulsion may become cognitive and reflective, turned inward as they realize that they are not so repulsed by a male or transgender body as their society and culture have told them they should be. The fear that sexuality and sexual orientation may be fluid means that men must be warned that a threat to their sexual identity is imminent or present. The use of the term “Warning” makes it clear that a threat exists.

This doesn't mean that all of the men at Fembot Central are threatened by the fluid nature of sexuality or bodies. Two of the ten male interviewees were very forthcoming about being interested in transgender or male machinic bodies as sexual "objects", even though they considered themselves heterosexual. In fact, they found their interest in male or transgender machinic bodies unproblematic. There's even a topic page at Fembot Central in which discourse around male-form machinic bodies is encouraged, and some member-created media (stories, primarily) in which male or transgender machinic bodies are featured.

According to my analysis, no one on the site is particularly ridiculed for sexual interests that involve masculinized technologies or male or transgender bodies, nor are they policed in other ways to conform to heteronormative expectations. Community members recognize that non-normative sexual identities are their "norm" (although I would argue that most of Fembot Central members don't really have non-normative sexual interests despite their "non-normative" sexual identities, at least that I have seen, with the desire for machinic bodies becoming more normalized with time; see Chapter VIII and IX.) The discourse around masculinized technologies and male bodies (at least in the sense of sexualities) is partially restricted to designated sections and media, while discourse around female bodies and feminized technologies is prolific and detailed. In the next chapter, I discuss the details of community members' specific desires for female-form machinic bodies – what types of bodies are desired, and what types of desires technosexuals have for - and in - their intimate assemblages.

VI. KICKSTART MY HARD DRIVE

Chapter VI begins with a discussion of the types of desires for machinic bodies and intimate interactions that research participants and community members at the Fembot Central site expressed to me in interviews, or at the forum itself. The chapter continues by exploring what kinds of machinic bodies research participants wanted intimate interactions with, or wanted to be themselves. Finally, Hypotheses 3a and 3b (H3a and H3b) are evaluated.

The research question addressed in this chapter is as follows:

Q3. What are the interactions present between technosexuals and the technologies they sexualize?

- What kinds of behaviors are currently present and what kinds of behaviors are technosexuals looking to engage in with sexual partners?
- Do most technosexuals desire intimate interactions with humanoid robots behaving like humans or humans behaving like humanoid robots (and if so, what types of humans in terms of sex, gender, race, etc.)?
- What kind of technologically modified bodies (if any) do these individuals want? What technologies? What modifications? Who wants to be a “robot” (as in the original meaning – from the Czech - of “slave,” passive, controlled) and why? Who wants to be modified technologically to augment power and control (perhaps even to control others?) Is there a gendered association with these desires?

- Do some technosexuals want cybernetic human partners? Do they want cybernetic human bodies of their own in which to engage sexually? Do they want bioengineered cyborg bodies or partners?

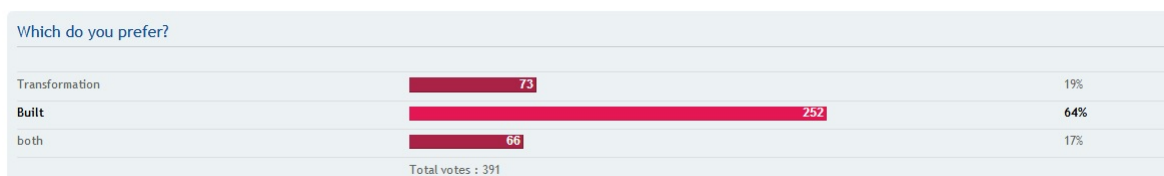
Machinic Desires

“Built” vs. “Transformed” interests are arguably the first major variations on technosexualities encountered by a perspective group member at the Fembot Central site. “Built” is a designation meant to indicate that a machinic body is created from raw materials and/or disconnected (and generally unconscious) parts. This designation can be somewhat imprecise however, as many people consider a cyborg, modified from a once-“all natural” body, to be “built” (as in, we are building a cyborg from “scratch,” out of a human body and mechanical augmentations to that body.) “Transformation” however indicates that an already extant body (generally a living, conscious, human body) is *changed* to make it machinic. Some people consider a cyborg to be a transformed body. Equally, a disembodied artificial intelligence might have a machinic body built for it, or might be seen as being *transformed* into a robot when it had once been a computer system. Fembot Central asks for registrants to choose a designation for one’s technosexuality, and even has polls centering on built vs. transformation preferences, but neither the strict definitions of the terms nor the philosophy behind each individual answer is discussed during registration (and perhaps rightly so, as having to launch into an in-depth philosophy on consciousness, intelligence, artificiality and what constitutes a transformation may be a bit much to ask someone during the initial registration process to an internet forum.)

As the terms “built” and “transformation” may have different meanings for different members of the research site, looking at aggregate responses only provides a limited glimpse into technosexual desires. However, these designations provide a good, general starting point to see the interactions and desires present in technosexualities, both online and in the physical world.

Figure 16, below, is a screen image retrieved from Fembot Central (public access data, not gathered by the researcher; retrieved June 22, 2019.) The poll was created by an administrator at the Fembot Central site, and I have been updating it regularly here while writing this dissertation to ensure that I present the latest possible version of it to date. Except for the actual numbers presented in the poll (new users vote every day, and this poll has been up at the site for years,) the general percentages have not changed markedly over the years that I have been watching this poll. “Built” technosexualities have overwhelming always been the majority vote since I began exploratory participant observation in 2012.

Figure 16: Informal Fembot Central Poll on Preferred Type of Technosexuality



In this Fembot Central user poll the majority of respondents voted “Built” as their technosexual interest, with 64% of votes going to that category. 36% of voters professed an interest in “Transformation” (either by voting for transformation or voting “both” built

and transformation as their technosexual interests.) As of the date of this screen image, 387 group members at Fembot Central (including myself) have voted in this poll.

In addition to “Built” and “Transformation” being problematic terms, as they can vary from group member to group member, the poll in Figure 16 is just an informal attempt to gather information; it is unclear how many of the participants in that informal poll were the “ghosts” of Fembot Central past - long unused avatars and group members who have just wandered away from the site. It is also unclear how many of these votes came from curious “lurkers” who were not members of the actual Fembot Central community at all, merely guests passing through. Although it is nice to see the general preferences of users as they reported them, the poll is presented at the site as an informal glimpse, and is not an attempt to provide definitive information on group members. In fact, one administrator told me directly that the administration does not keep or use any sort of formal statistics on group members; given many group members’ fears of discovery and stigmatization, the community appears well-served by the administration’s decision not to formally track Fembot Central members.

To delve more in depth on the interactions and desires of technosexuals, interview data and discourse from Fembot Central is presented below, in group members’ own words. Essentially, technosexual interactions and desires are quite varied. Some technosexuals want humanoid robots behaving robotically, some want robots or other machinic bodies behaving like humans – “sleepers” – who are revealed or reveal themselves to be machines. Some group members want humans behaving like robots or other machinic bodies, in a form of roleplay (see Chapter V for more detail.) Some group members want to be machinic bodies of various types and for very different reasons.

Technosexual desires, and the reasons behind them, appear to be deeply personal, and can even vary day to day for the same person.

Me: What types of machinic bodies do you prefer?

Danielle: I have a wide variety of interests from all metal feminine robots to synthetic skin-covered androids that are completely indistinguishable from humans. I tend not to like cyborgs or anything that incorporates “wetware” though.

Me: What is it about machinic bodies that interests or attracts you?

Danielle: I think I have a general attraction to the artificial, I believe. I find the fusion of feminine (or masculine) form with artificial aspects (wires, circuitry, metal parts, etc.) to be extremely arousing.

When asked the same questions, another female research participant – this one, interested in roleplaying technosexual themes with a human partner – responded,

Vivienne: [I]t actually varies a lot based on my mood. Most commonly those that look fully human, if exceptionally attractive, a perfect ideal of beauty. The 'sleeper' archetype, one where the mechanical nature is hidden, totally or nearly so. Sometimes I prefer more obviously mechanical, sometimes more the cybernetic look, a mix of organic material and technological parts. It's really more about them being a machine, or part thereof, than the specific type. Sorta like choosing a different flavour of ice-cream. It also depends on what the person I'm talking to or engaging in activities [technosexual roleplay] with likes, I can be fairly accommodating.

Mackenzie, another female participant wrote,

I prefer a robot that looks human, with a few subtle give-away's.[sic] Things like seams where individually manufactured parts might join together, panel openings, and barcodes. I think I like them because it solidifies that it is a machine I am looking at or reading about instead of a human who is just pretending. This is why I don't like "sleeper" stories, since the robot is made to look as realistic as possible to the point of even thinking it is a human. I like my humans to be human and my machines to be machines. (Mackenzie)

The majority of the male research participants were interested in having intimate interactions of various types with machinic bodies similar to what Mackenzie had described - human-looking but one with panels, seams, or some other indicator that the machinic being was not human. The male participants did not have Mackenzie's dislike of media in which "sleeper" robots and machinic bodies revealed to be nonhuman, however.

Paige, a female research participant, wrote that she wished to be, "Basically a programmable extension of my owner's desires and needs. Human like skin, integrated high tech tools within me to help me better complete tasks and orders." She however made it clear that she only wished to be a controlled machinic body in fantasy and role play with a human partner. Two of the female research participants expressed this fantasy-only caveat in their machinic desires. The other eight female participants expressed an interest in being a physical world machinic or augmented body. Of these, five wanted to be "sexually passive" while three mentioned that they wanted to be

“Independent” and “Strong.” One female participant expressed the desire to be “sexually passive”, but also “independent.”

Some of the research participants were very specific and detailed in describing what types of machinic bodies they desired; the passage that follows is indicative of the amount of thought that many group members apply to their intimate interests and fantasies:

I prefer android women that are almost perfectly human-like, with some minor but noticeable exceptions.[...] They have soft plastic skin, hair, and fingernails. They wear clothing and makeup, but they don't look quite right. After a few moments of observation, it would be easy to spot them as machines and not people.

Their movement would be slightly stiff and mechanical, and their skin would appear a little glossy, and have a faint scent of plastic to it. Their movements would also be accompanied by faint mechanical whirring sounds and occasional computerized beeps. Talking to these women would reveal instantly that they were computers, because they would be programmed to react in the most inhumanly logical and analytical way imaginable. They would have no simulated personality, nor any simulated emotions. They would operate like any computer today operates: it does only what it is instructed to do. These android women would have no will of their own, and would not be programmed to make decisions either. They would tell you this if you asked them to.

Underneath the imperfectly simulated human exterior would be an easily accessible electromechanical inner structure, with a metal frame, wiring, circuit

boards, and other complex computer components. The androids would have access panels built into various parts of their skin so that these inner workings could be exposed, and the most important of these to me is the removable facemask.[...] It is also important because our faces portray to the world who we are, and visually speaking, they are our identity. When an android woman can reach up and take off the plastic mask that is her face, it reveals that she is only a replica of a person, and not the same as you or I. She has no identity, no self, no soul. (Todd)

Not every research participant was quite so detailed as Todd, but it's clear from both the responses and the Topic boards at the site (which feature descriptions of plethora of types of machinic bodies in detail) that Fembot Central members are very specific and self-reflective where it concerns their desires for machinic bodies. They need no "experts" to understand their own desires for various types of "bodies and pleasures" (Foucault 1978.)

Interesting Connections

In addition to asking research participants to discuss their desires for machinic bodies, I coded their interview responses, and used exploratory data analysis methods in NVivo, looking for connections between various concepts, desires, and interests that participants talked about in their interviews. In this section, I present and discuss some of the more interesting research findings involving participant desires for machinic bodies.

Figure 17: NVivo analysis comparing interviews coded for “Cares about machinic entity” and “Wants to control female form machine” nodes

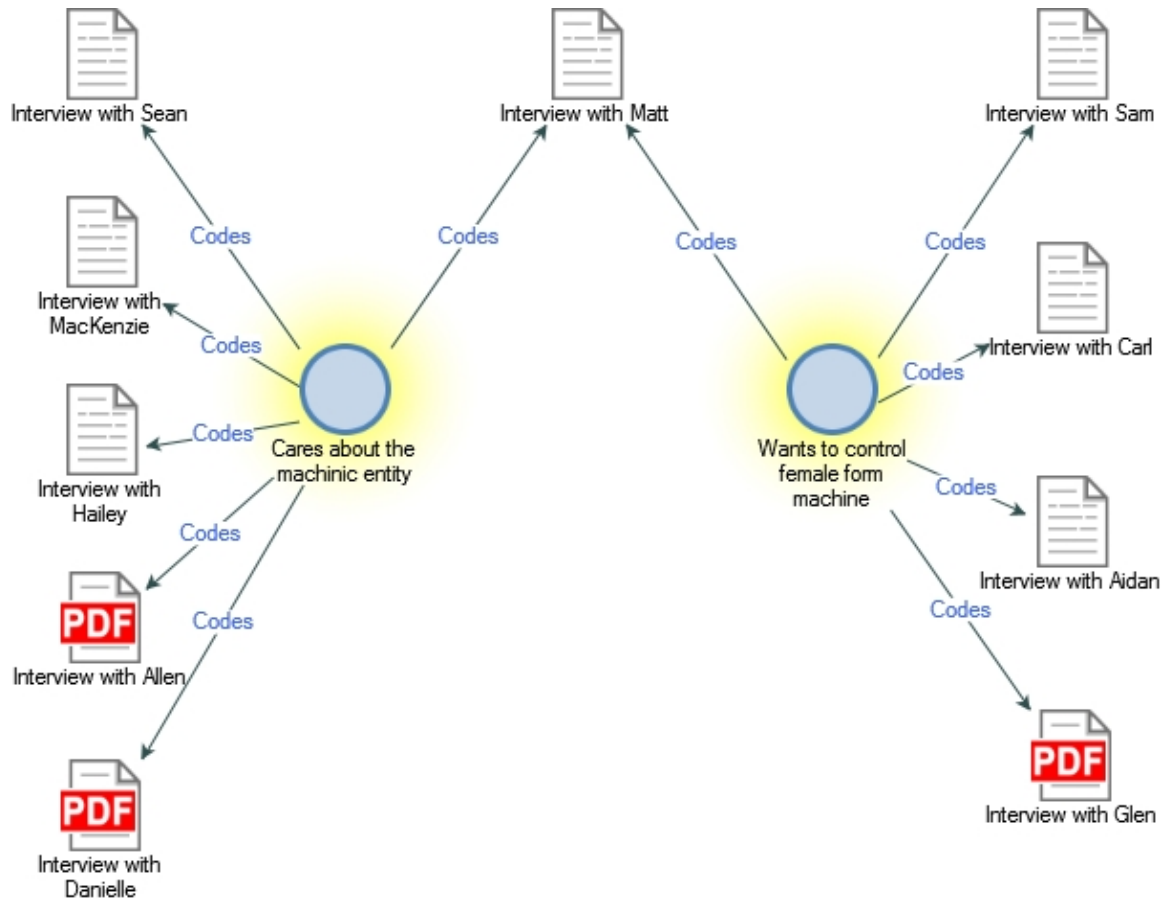


Figure 17 compares interviews with responses coded with the node “Cares about machinic entity”, which was used to code any responses that indicated that the participant expressed care, concern, or emotional attachment to the well-being of a machinic body, with responses coded with the node “Wants to control female form machine”, which indicated a participant’s desire to have some form of bodily control over a female form machinic body. These two nodes were chosen for comparison based on my initial analysis of participant observation and interview data. I noticed a pattern emerging in the

data in which Fembot Central members who expressed concern for the agency, autonomy, and/or well-being of machinic bodies (beyond their physical maintenance) did not desire to control a female-form machinic body. I compared these two nodes to see if more evidence could be found.

There was almost no overlap between these two codes. Six of the twenty research participants, three each male and female, expressed care or concern for machinic bodies. Five research participants expressed a desire to have bodily control over a female form machine, and these were all male participants. Only one of these male participants indicated that he wanted to both control a female form machinic body (for him, he indicated a desire to change a machinic partner's personality at will) and in some way cares about the well-being of that machinic body. This participant, "Matt", mentioned that he was interested in intimate interactions with a machinic body who was "completely programmable, would likely play with different "personality" types" but he also stated that he was excited at the thought of being in a romantic relationship with a true artificial intelligence in the future. Matt wrote,

[...] I imagine something more of an equal. Sexually charged, but not too passive or aggressive. Probably just a bit on the passive side, demure, calm. Appearing loving / compassionate. I'm interested in the potentials of artificial intelligence, but I think there will be a useful place for a completely programmed machine as well.

Matt's preferences are echoed in nearly any discussion on the possibilities of artificial intelligence at the Fembot Central site. Although an equal and reciprocated relationship with an artificial intelligence is not a possibility at this time, many technosexuals would be very open to a romantic and/or multi-faceted intimate relationship with a machinic being.

Figure 18 : NVivo analysis comparing interviews coded for “Wants to control female form machine” and “Malfunction” nodes

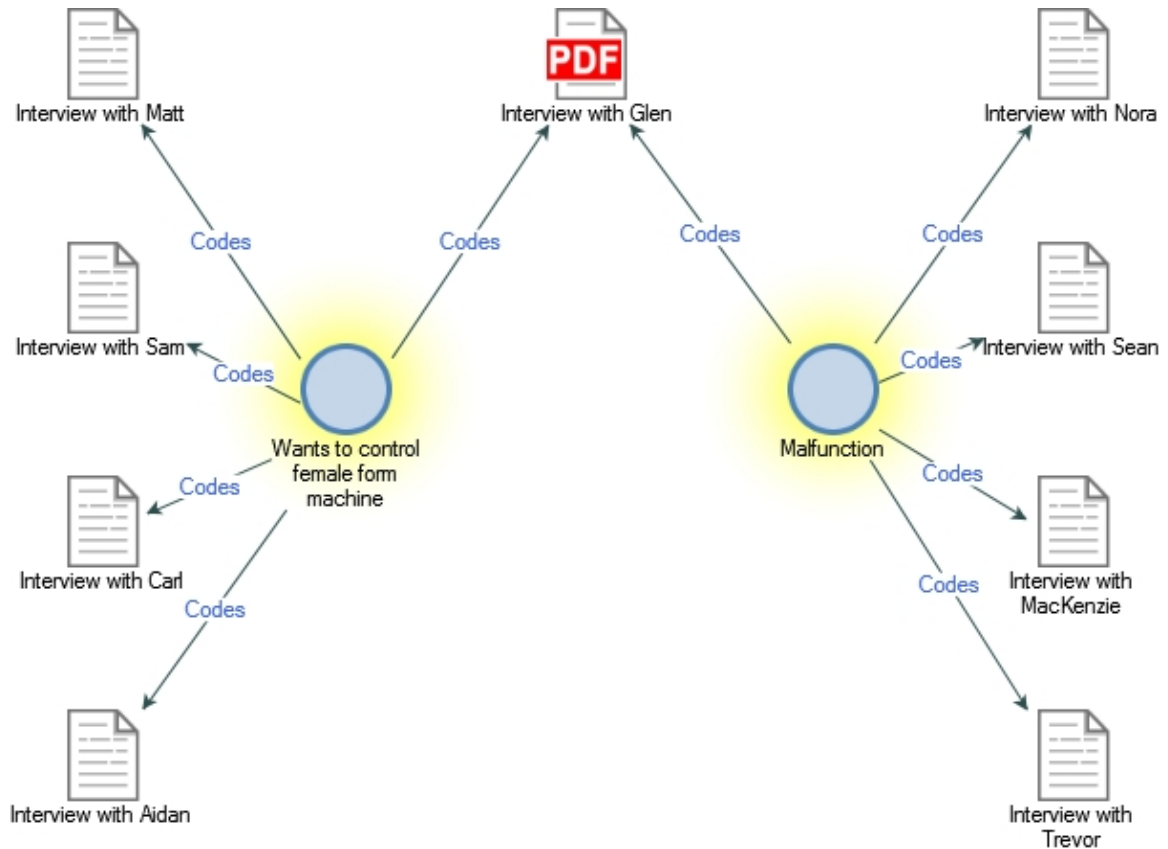


Figure 18 compares interviews with responses coded with the node “Wants to control female form machine”, which indicated a participant’s desire to have some form of bodily control over a female form machinic body with the node “Malfunction” which indicated that the participant desired to see or experience a malfunction of a machinic body to which they felt intimate attraction. Five participants, three male and two females, cited malfunction as a particular technosexual interest they had, while five participants,

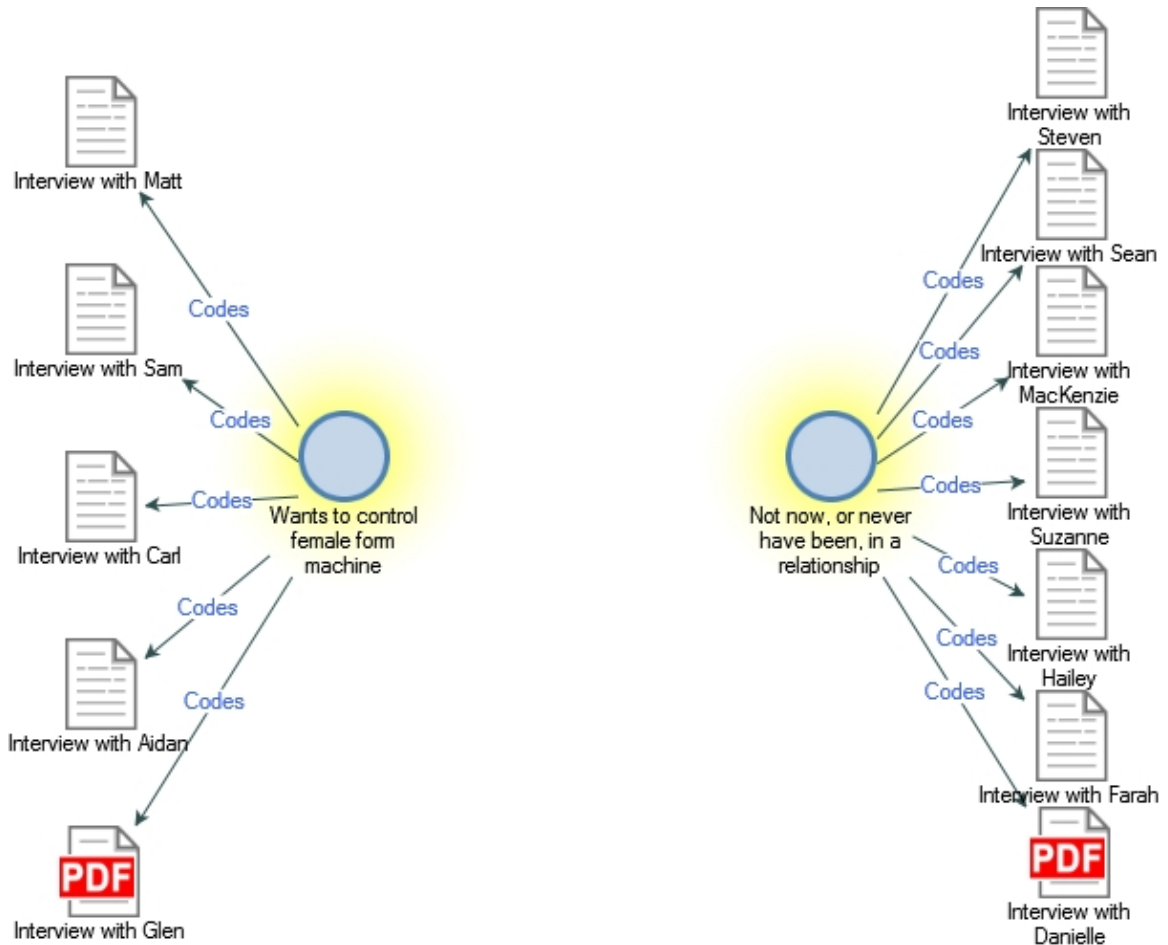
all male, wanted to control a female form machinic body. As in Figure 17, there was almost no overlap between these nodes, with only one male participant expressing both a desire to control a female form machinic body and experience malfunction of that body.

Contrary to prior academic treatments of technosexualities, which highlight malfunction and the revelation of the machinic as primary in technosexual desires (such as de Fren 2009), I found that – at least among my interviewees – malfunction did not appear to be much of an integral component in their desires for machinic bodies.

Revelation was considerably more popular with participants (it came up more than twice as much in the interviews than malfunction did, when participants were discussing their specific desires), but most of the participants also mentioned that their primary preferences for machinic bodies were for those who looked human but had something obvious that marked them as nonhuman, without the requirement of a malfunction or revelation. This order of preference for human-looking but obviously machinic bodies as primary, followed by bodies that are revealed to be machinic (through the opening of a panel for example), followed by bodies that are found to be machinic through malfunction appears to match up fairly well with the general discourse at Fembot Central. The primary “complaint” about the idea of malfunction that comes up again and again at discourse at the site revolves around the idea of paying for an expensive machinic partner of some kind and then having to deal with malfunctions; malfunction seems to be preferred in stories and roleplay, and not for a future, physical world machinic partner or machinic body augmentation.

That there was almost no overlap between participants who desired malfunctioning machinic bodies and those who wanted to control a female form machinic body may be a simple order/chaos divide; those participants who want to control a machinic being want just that – control – while those who were interested in malfunction may be looking for the unexpected, surprising, and challenging in their intimate interactions. It is interesting to note (though not clear evidence of a correlation of course) that all of the participants who wanted to control a (machinic) intimate partner were at that time in a relationship with a human woman, while there was no overlap between that category and participants who had never been in a relationship with a woman before (see Figure 19.)

Figure 19: Desires Control over a Female-Form Machinic Compared with Not in a Romantic and/or Sexual Relationship



It is also important to note here that none of the participants expressed a desire to control a male-form machinic body or a non-gendered machinic body. One reason for this may be that the community site is “Fembot Central” and does revolve around desire for female-form machinics primarily, with heterosexual and bisexual males and homosexual or bisexual females as the main members of this group. “Mandroid Central,” an online site that focused on the desire for male-form machinic bodies, the companion site to Fembot Central, did once exist, but it lasted only from June of 2011 until sometime in

2012, well before this research began. It is worth noting that this site appears to have closed down from a lack of interest.

Figure 20 : NVivo analysis comparing interviews coded for “Wants to control female form machine” and “Reveal of the Machinic” nodes

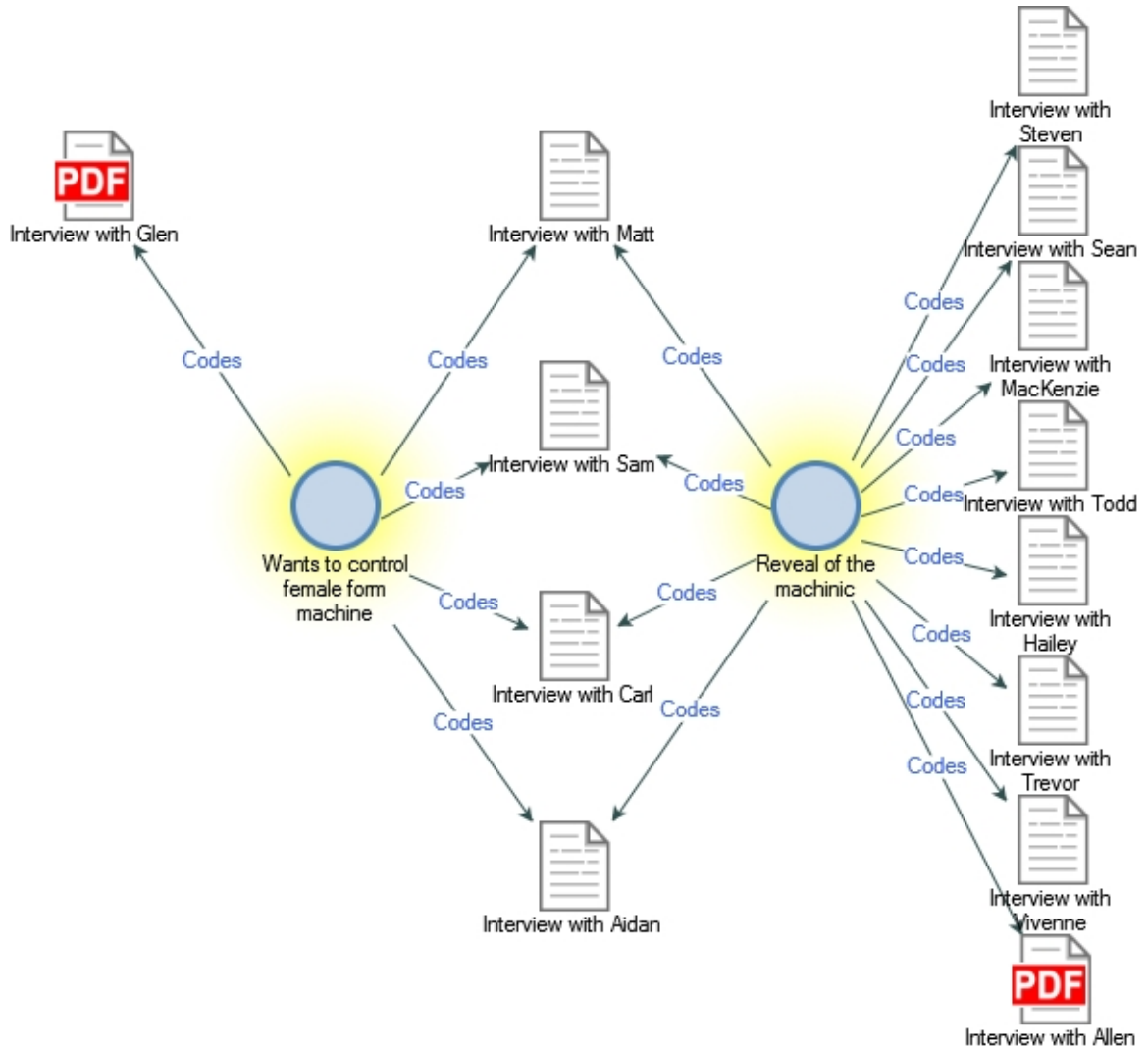


Figure 20 compares interviews with responses coded with the node “Wants to control female form machine” which indicated a participant’s desire to have some form of bodily control over a female form machinic body with the node “Reveal of the Machinic” which indicated that the research participant desired to see a human-appearing and/or “sleeper” machinic body revealed as machinic at some point during the intimate encounter (and/or fantasy.)

Nearly every male participant who wanted to control a female form machinic body wanted to see that body *revealed* as a machinic rather than appear machinic from the beginning of the intimate encounter, fantasy, or media piece. The reveal of a machinic body as machinic rather than human was more popular among research participants than controlling a female form machinic body was, with twelve out of twenty participants desiring such a reveal in an intimate experience of some type. Again, revelation of the machinic was considerably more popular than malfunction, as well.

Figure 21: Desires Control over a Female-Form Machinic Compared with Desires Machinic Being with Sentience or Free Will

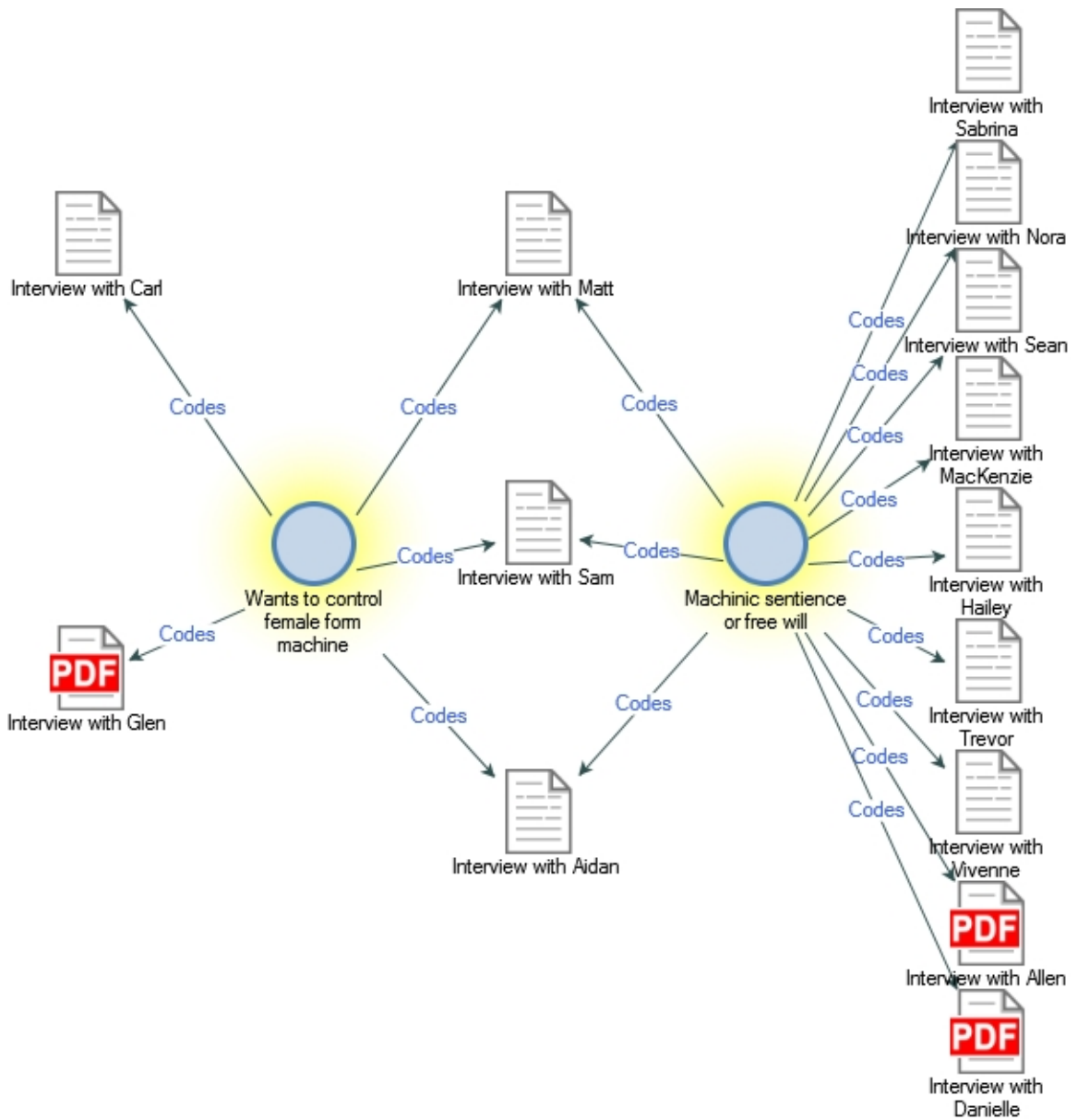


Figure 21 presents the NVivo analysis comparing the expressed desires of research participants who wanted to control a female form machinic body or being and those who wanted an intimate involvement of some type with a machinic body or wanted to be a machinic body themselves. Nine of the twenty research participants expressed some form of interest in, or a desire for a machinic partner with, sentience or free will (coded as “Machinic Sentience or Free Will”.) The majority of these were female participants who expressed a desire to be a machinic body. It’s unsurprising that participants who themselves wanted to be machinic bodies wanted such bodies to have sentience and/or free will – even those participants who stated that they wanted to be, or enjoyed being, sexually submissive. There is a considerable difference between choosing to be submissive in an intimate situation and lacking sentience. Of the males who wanted machinic sentience, one of them had interest in being a machinic body, as well.

Only five of the participants – 25% - were coded as “Wants to Control Female Form Machine” indicating that they expressed a desire for control of a machinic partner’s body, behavior, and/or thought. Of these participants, three also discussed machinic sentience and free will in their interviews. Matt’s interest in programming a non-sentient machinic being has been previously discussed; Sam and Aidan each had their own unique reasons for this seeming contradiction, as well.

Depending on my mood, my ideal partner can shift but in general my perfect gynoid would be quite intelligent, of course attractive, playful, and entirely dedicated to providing service. She would have no problem doing exactly as I command but still would have the capacity to make decisions on her own and

show initiative. She'd have friends, desires, interests maybe even a job, but in the end her purpose would be to serve my needs. (wow this sounds really horrible when I actually write it down [...]) (Sam)

Sam went on to mention that he had engaged in roleplay scenarios with many people who “find this quite appealing”. He did not specify if those people had been women, but judging from posts from female members of Fembot Central, and the fact that half of my female research participants expressed some variation on the desire to be a controlled and/or a sexually passive machinic body, I would not be surprised if they were women (“real” women, rather than a man “pretending” to be a woman in an online scenario to create an image of an idealized, submissive woman in the fantasy/roleplaying space; as I have mentioned in previous chapters however, such a critique of who we “really” are outside of cyberspace is a bit disingenuous given the embodied and affective nature of that space. You must extend yourself - even if a normally unexpressed part of yourself - from physical world space into cyberspace to interact there. The identities we choose to express in cyberspace are just as “real” as our physical world performances of self.)

Sam also mentioned that he did not start out desiring sexual interactions with a fully controllable machinic body.

The attraction might have started out as something romantic at one point, but now it is something completely sexual. Robots and cyborgs are more machine to me than a person so they just provide a method of easy, guilt free, sexual pleasure.

(Sam)

The evolution of his technosexual desires over time, and the fact that he appears to actually want only the semblance of sentience, are likely the reasons for the apparent contradiction in how his responses were coded (not that there aren't people who wish to control a sentient being, but judging from the rest of Sam's responses, this does not seem to be the case here.)

Aidan had some similar feelings about non-emotive, non-sentient machinic beings, writing,

A romantic relationship would involve emotions like love and such, and those sorts of emotions I currently find impossible to convey to an object. However, [...] if a machinic partner were to exist that would emulate and stimulate those emotions, I don't see why I wouldn't "fall in love" with that partner.

The current state of artificial intelligence in 2019, and the present incarnation of machinic sexual partners available (for example, "Roxxy" by the company TrueCompanion – overwhelmingly viewed as unrealistic and undesirable by Fembot Central members – and "Harmony" the sex doll with accompanying AI software from the sex doll company Real Doll, largely judged as unimpressive by some early adopters of the software application in the Fembot Central group) keeps many technosexuals from having any interest in a romantic, or some other reciprocal intimate relationship with a machinic body. As the technology for more advanced machinic beings, with their own form of emotions for example, is yet over the technological horizon, these types of seeming contradictions – evolving and/or concurrent desires to control a machinic body and to value the sentience of a machinic being without wishing to control them – will

likely remain present in many incarnations of technosexualities. And, of course, there will always be people who wish to have complete control over any intimate partner, machinic or otherwise; we need not develop sentient machinic beings to see humans manifesting controlling behaviors in their intimate relationships.

I, Robot

Nine female research participants and two male participants expressed the desire to be a machinic body.

Table 12: Research Participant Interest in Being a Machinic Body, by Gender

Are you interested in being a machinic body?	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>
Yes	9	2
No	0	7
Other	1	1

Table 12 describes research participant responses to being asked directly if they were interested in being a machinic body of some kind. Nine out of the ten female participants responded that they wanted to be machinic bodies, with the remaining one female participant, Paige, explaining that she only wanted to play a machinic body in intimate roleplaying and fantasy with another human. Only two of the ten male participants expressed any desire to actually be a machinic body. Most of the males (seven of them) had no interest in being machinic, only in having intimate encounters of

various kinds with such bodies. One male participant was classified as "Other", writing, that he would only be interested in role play as a machinic body, but did not have such interests otherwise.

Participants described a wide range of attributes when asked about the type of machinic body they wanted to be.

I would love the Maria (Metropolis) look [all metal, silver, feminine body], as a preference to the more human one that most at FC [Fembot Central] seem to like. Hey, if I'm going to be a robot, I really want to be a robot, not a faux human. Having said that, if someone offered me a very dramatic cyborg upgrade (more practical at present, I suspect), I would happily take up their offer. Why, I'm sick of all this emotional stuff that has messed up my life, so being without it, would be wonderful. (Farah)

Another research participant, Nora, voiced a similar aesthetic preference to Farah's, writing,

Pure mechanical bodies are ones that I like most, steel/plastic in design, hairless, even faceless. Soryama works are good example here. They are perfectly shaped, clean, no one has to waste long hours each days on keeping them in good shape like in case of organic bodies.

Nora and Farah's desires for a metallic machinic body are atypical however, judging from both the responses of interviewees and the discourse at the Fembot Central site surrounding desired body types (both for group members who want to be machinic bodies, and those who want intimate interactions with such bodies.) Mackenzie's response, "I would still like to have human like skin and appearances" echoes most community member's preferences to be, or to have intimate interactions with, a machinic body that appears human - but human with a difference. Mackenzie went on to write,

I prefer a robot that looks human, with a few subtle give-away's [sic.] Things like seams where individually manufactured parts might join together, panel openings, and barcodes.[...] I like my humans to be human and my machines to be machines.

Another female participant, Skylar, stated that she was less concerned with the type of materials of her ideal machinic body, and more interested in the prospect of augmentation itself. Skylar wants a machinic body that is

Changeable, Independent, Strong, Metal, Plastic, [or] Organic, but above all: Human enhanced by inorganic technologies [...] I like imagining myself becoming more than what I am now, and [the] process of being radically changed into something superior also feels interesting. Interventions to my body for such changes cause arousing intimate feelings for me.

I found this framing of the machinic body as superior or closer to "perfection" repeated, time and again, in the interviews. When asked why they wanted to be machinic

bodies for example, female participants were split on what they saw as personality-based reasons behind their desires - with about half of them citing a desire to be submissive - but nearly all of the female participants expressed some form of the idea of a machinic body as superior over the human body.

The idea of being one [a machinic body]- of being 'better'. Of not being subject to all the issues and problems of an organic body (I have several health issues I would love to do without). Of being attractive, perfect, unaging. Of all the possibilities that such a body would offer - enhanced and extra capabilities, extensive customisation and alteration. (Vivienne)

Me: Are you interested in being a robotic, cyborg, or other machinic body?

Sabrina: Yes. I think this is partially due the possibility that a machine can in effect, live forever [... I want to be a] Robot made of off-the-shelf parts. I would want to be controllable and programmable, yet still independent. Human-like on the outside, but mechanical inside

Me: Why does this interest you?

Sabrina: Answer: Possibly a bit of my submissive side coming out... another possibility is that machines can be fixed and upgraded indefinitely, so it's kind of an immortality.

Mackenzie answered the question of whether she wanted to be a machinic body enthusiastically, writing,

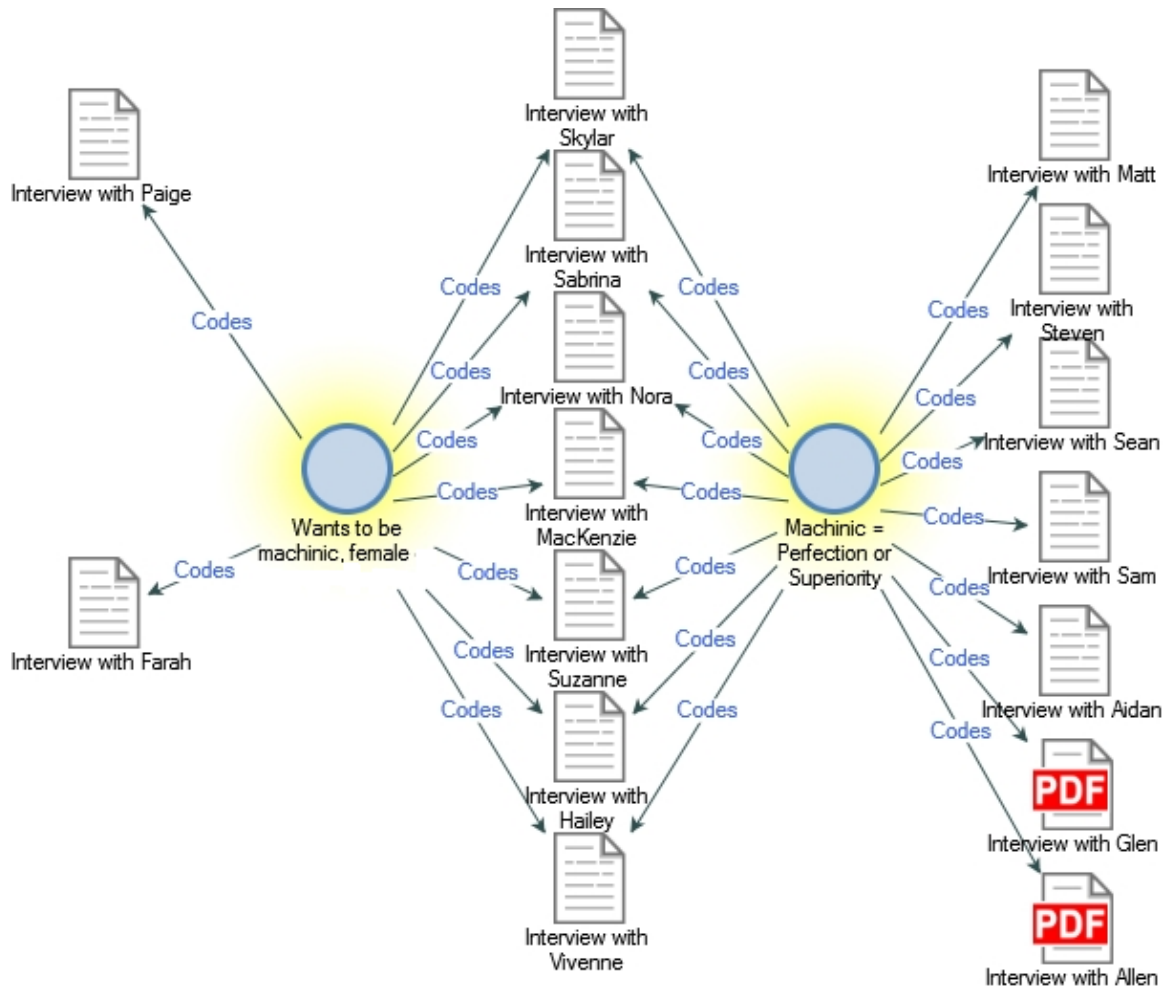
Yes! It's appealing to me, not only for the chance at eternal youth, but also to be in complete control of not only how I think and feel, but also with how I look.

The ability to change my appearance or even try out a whole new body for a while is very appealing.

For Nora, wanting to be a machinic body was about

Their difference. The way they are so perfect on form, but fragile at the same time [...] Mechanical bodies have all the options of organic ones, and they add so many new ones that exploring them all would take many many years. That's why I see them so interesting.

Figure 22: “Wants to be machinic, female” compared with “Machinic = Perfection or Superiority” Nodes



As seen in Figure 22, a very slight majority of female research participants (five) stated that their desire to be a machinic body was in some way tied in with what they saw as a submissive sexual nature or preferred sexual role. Four of the female research participants stated that their machinic desires were actually extensions of their desire to be in a dominant sexual, or even general social role.

I like to emphasize I've been dragged into this fetish by the idea I, and women in general, would benefit from overcoming the physical limitations of the female body in a way I've been accepted as equally potent and competent as a man in a number of fields previously reserved to men. Most prominently, being a fighting heroine in a dangerous environment. That was way before I had a sexual interest in it. This idea is massively underrated at Fembot Central but is present in various popular media, mostly anime and manga. [...] The moment I connected my own sexuality with it it became a secret haven, a place where I could live out my mostly intellectual competences without being belittled, with my sexual response being both the trigger for good feelings and the power running through my imagined supernatural body. So both my interest in being a robot woman and my sexuality are mostly a tool to me to feel good. (Hailey)

Female research participants' explanations about why they wanted to be machinic bodies, coupled with male participants' descriptions of the various types of intimate interactions they desired with machinic bodies, led to my evaluation of the following hypotheses:

H3a: The majority of male-identifying technosexuals are interested in primarily sexual relationships with machinic bodies rather than romantic or other kinds of intimate relationships

H3b: The majority of female-identifying technosexuals are interested in being machinic bodies and having sexual relationships *as* machinic bodies.

Of the twenty research participants, only four respondents expressed a strictly sexual and/or physical interest in the machinic (either a sexual and/or physical relationship with or as a machinic humanoid.) Three of these respondents identified as male, and one as female. That only three male research participants expressed only sexual and no other intimate desires for machinic bodies. This is far less than I expected. Based on exploratory participant observation at Fembot Central, I had expected that far more of the male research participants would have primarily sexual desires for machinic bodies; the actual desires of male research participants were far more nuanced however.

H3a is therefore rejected while H3b is *not* rejected. Although their reasons for wanting to be machinic bodies are varied, with some female research participants expressing a desire to be controlled and others expressing a desire for independence and control of their own bodies – and nearly all female participants expressing a desire to change and augment their bodies - female participants overwhelmingly wanted to be machinic bodies more than they desired intimate interactions with other machinic bodies. Female participants would rather enter into intimate assemblages *as* machinic bodies than with them. The only exception to this were Paige who only desired to roleplay as a machinic body; a male participant, Steven, also expressed an exclusive desire for roleplay. For these participants, machinic bodies are simply sexual and/or intimate fantasies to “play” with a human partner.

The Desire to Be Machinic

Why would a woman want to be a machinic body?

The history of Western cultures involves something of an obsession with women's bodies, with a new, modern "roll out" of this obsession in the form of hypermedicalization around sexuality and women's bodies beginning in the 19th century (Foucault 1978, Seidler 2004.) The increased focus on women's bodies in modernity, defining them as non-normative (compared with the male or man's body), uncontrolled, leaky, messy, and in all ways troublesome (see Chapter II for more detail) creates the discursive female and woman's body as a problem that needs solving – often by technologies devised to hide menstruation, constrain the female or woman's body (in uncomfortable undergarments that constrict free movement, Burns-Ardolino 2003) or ensure that bodily "leakages" such as lactation won't contaminate public spaces (nursing pads, breast pumps - and the technology of social policing, found in the recent trend for nursing mothers asked to leave public areas by officials despite the legality of public breastfeeding.) The female or woman's body has also been framed consistently in discourse in the West as weak, passive, and yielding as well, and so we seek to tame unruly female bodies in various ways. Females are generally taught, through enculturation and agents of socialization, that "lady-like" behavior (quiet, demure, submissive) is socially desirable, and indeed, expected.

With the West's cultural and social histories of policing and micro-managing woman's bodies into passivity, it came as no surprise to me that so many of the female-identifying research participants wanted to change their bodies into a more "perfect" form and then surrender to a masculine controller. The desire to change to conform to social and cultural expectations of a woman need not be seen as weak-willed or entirely passive however. This is a valid and productive strategy in a society or culture in which men

have dominance, and a strategy that women have been using for millennia to gain power and exercise their agency. The only problem with this strategy is that it leaves patriarchal structures in place – never troubling or challenging them. While there's agency in wanting to be programmed - the women who want this particularly ask to be programmed – this desire conforms to normative Western cultural and social scripts. There's also freedom in not being responsible for your own actions, but again, this idea of freedom perpetuates the discursive construction of female and women's bodies as infantile, passive, and yielding; this discursive construction does not reflect the lived bodily experiences of most women (at least not entirely.) Real human bodies are more complicated than their discursive framings.

Only about half of the female research participants expressed the desire to be controlled as a machinic body, however. Four of the female participants desired independence and/or dominance over other (often male or masculinized) bodies, and felt that a machinic body could be the path to such independence or dominance. As with those participants who desired a passive role in intimate interactions as a machinic body, the potential found in being a machinic body was expressed in terms of machinic superiority or perfection. While the desire for independence from the masculine, or even dominance in various forms, could be seen as a reworking or “flipping” of the normative cultural scripts of Western patriarchies, the assumption that technological augmentation or transformation would be required to turn a female or woman's body into a dominant, or strong body sees its origins firmly in the normative discursive framing of the female or woman's body as weak and passive.

Most male-identifying participants however, stated that they had *no* interest in being a machinic body. This was because they felt no need to change their bodies and/or because they felt comfortable with and as their bodies. This is unsurprising, as there may be less pressure on men and males to conform to a particular body type, or even to conform entirely with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, when there are valid, alternate pathways to performing masculinity and being a “man” in modern, Western cultures – to identify with the mind and with intellectual pursuits, such as science and technology, for example (see Chapter II for further detail on masculinities.) The male or man’s body is also already discursively constructed as strong, dominant, active, and normative in Western cultures, so there is little need to “perfect” that which is already the model form for the human being.

Two male research participants *did* state that they had an interest in being machinic bodies, however, and there are several males who would like to be machinic bodies on the Fembot Central site (although they appear to be very much in the minority with this desire.) When I asked one of the male participants, Aidan, if he was interested in being a robotic, cyborg, or other machinic body, he replied the following:

Yes, I am very much interested in becoming machinic, however, it would have to be much further developed before I would consider it. For example, the current cybernetics experimenters who have implanted electronics under their skin doesn’t hold any interest to me. I find it fascinating from an engineering and

biology perspective, but I find no drive to do that myself. However, once technology gets to the stage of being able to replace whole limbs with something superior to the human limb, and as reliable, then the serious talk of “Will I do it or not?” will come up.

I asked Aidan what type of machinic body he was interested in being (or having an intimate relationship with) and he continued,

It would primarily be a servant type robot, that basically tends the house or is left at home only turned on when being used. As to if that would be me or if that's what I would want in a partner, that depends on my mood, but roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time, I want that in a partner. I would want them controllable, programmable, and changeable. They would be something I could work on, upgrade, accessorize, repair, etc. As to sexual aggression or passiveness, that would be something that could be adjusted and controllable/programmable. They would be made of metal and/or plastic, but definitely not organic. I would prefer humanoid, but the idea of being able to change them or myself into a non-humanoid chassis also intrigues me. As to why this interests me, I would say the idea of having effectively unlimited access to sexual activity which would also be effectively unlimited in it's variety is the main appeal [sic]. Another way to put it would that I could have sex whenever I want, with whatever or whomever I want, and that sort of freedom is desirable.

Aidan's responses are given here because they highlight both the variation in the types of technosexual desires (even for one interviewee) and how such desires change with mood and the needs of the moment. Although female participants overwhelmingly wanted to be machinic bodies, their specific interests and the types of machinic bodies they wanted to be varied. Male participants, and community members at the research site, also express a great deal of variation in the types of machinic bodies they desire, what types of desires and their reasons for such desires. In the next chapter, I turn to possible origins for some of these varying technosexual interests and desires.

VIII. SHE BLINDED ME WITH SCIENCE FICTION

This chapter begins with the final research question (Q4) and its associated hypothesis. It goes on to describe and discuss research participants' early encounters with machinic bodies, and their earliest technosexual interests. Hypothesis 4 (H4) is then evaluated.

Q4. What were the initial experiences and media exposures that research participants had with machinic bodies? When did they first begin to feel desire for such bodies, and what did they desire of those bodies?

To answer this question, research participants were asked to describe their earliest memories of machinic bodies and their earliest technosexual experiences.

Early Encounters with Machinic Bodies

All twenty research participants were asked the following question in the structured, online interviews: "Can you remember the first time you saw a movie or image - or experienced any other form of media - with a robot, cyborg, or other machinic body? What was the movie, image, or other form of media? How did you feel about it?"

The average age of reporting participants' first experiences with machinic bodies in media was 7.5 years old. The age range for their initial encounters with ideas of and images of machinic bodies was between 5 and 13 years old, with one participant simply responding that she was a "teenager" at the time. This data about participants' age at earliest remembered encounters with machinic bodies was entirely volunteered, in that

the interview question did not ask them for a specific age at first encounters or media experiences. As so many of the participants wanted to report their ages, I decided to include it here. Of the six male participants who volunteered a specific age at first encounter with machinic bodies, the average age was 7 years old. The number of female research participants who reported a specific age was far fewer than the males, with only two providing a number. The average age for those female participants was 10.75 years old.

That female research participants did not report, or often said they could not remember, the exact age at which they first encountered machinic bodies does not indicate that their first encounters were any less memorable to them than male participants. In fact, female participants discussed their first media encounters with machinic bodies in great detail.

It was an episode of the new Twilight Zone [The Outer Limits] called Valerie 23. In the opening scene a researcher is introduced to a woman who looks human, but is in a white jumpsuit and leaves the room so that the researcher can talk to his manager. His manager then takes him into the next room where we see the woman from before but her hair has been removed and the back of her head has been opened and another researcher has some kind of long tool slid into the back of her head. All the while the woman, who we now know is [sic, is] a robot, carries on a casual conversation with the first man.

When I saw this, I immediately had some kind of stirring of emotion, I wanted to be that woman and I wanted to be able to be opened up and worked on. I was

fascinated by the idea of being able to not only continue to function like a human, but at the same time be absolutely artificial. [...]

Later on in the same episode of *Outer Limits* the researcher (who is now living with the robot from earlier) has implied sex with the robot. She leads him into a bedroom of some kind, takes off her night gown and announces to him that she is “fully functional.” In that moment I knew they were going to have sex. I was about 12 or 13 when I saw this, and I was a little disappointed that there wasn’t more shown in the episode but craving seeing what it would look like to have sex with a robot (from the robots perspective in my case, since I was more interested in being the robot than having a robot) (Mackenzie)

The above-mentioned episode, “Valerie 23”, of the science fiction television show *The Outer Limits* (1995), was cited by three of the participants (two male and one female) - and with one additional male mention of “*Outer Limits*” robots in general, but not “Valerie 23 specifically - as being both among their earliest exposures to machinic bodies and something of a moment of awakening into technosexualities (whether they were consciously aware of it at the time, or not.) These participants cited the robot’s artificiality as being particularly compelling, with two of them commenting on the moment in the episode when the robot is sitting in a chair, with a panel on her head open (being repaired while still speaking.)

Aidan mentioned “I saw this [Valerie 23] when it aired back in the 90s, and the image of the gynoid in the chair with her head open, but still talking is very vivid in my memories. It was a definite sexual attraction at the time.” Being able to engage in

conversation while being surgically modified is something that we in Western culture (via the biomedical model) would likely view as something more-than-human (despite that there are many surgical interventions that can be carried out without completely anesthetizing the patient, including some forms of brain surgery.) The ability of the machinic to do what is perceived as nonhuman, particularly the more-than-human, came up again and again in my interviews with the research participants, and can be found as an ongoing point of discussion in various Fembot Central topic pages (including “Discussion” and “Character Play.” Many of the female research participants specifically cited machinic abilities and augmentations – to be superior to, or more-than-human – as part of the reason they wanted to be machinic themselves.

Some of the other media that were particularly mentioned by participants as influential early or earliest media encounters include “Day of the Robot” (an episode of the science fiction television show *The Six Million Dollar Man*), the original 1987 science fiction film *Robocop*, the *Star Wars* franchise for male participants, and for female participants, the 1987 science fiction film *Cherry 2000*, episodes of the SF television show *Star Trek*, and the 1995 anime (Japanese animated) film *Ghost in the Shell*.

Ghost in the Shell was cited by several female research participants as having been a very important influence for them in shaping their understandings (and ultimately desires for) machinic bodies. One participant stated, “I’d have to say that the strongest influence was *Ghost in the Shell*. I remember finding Motoko attractive both for her strong-willed nature and her artificiality.” (Danielle)

Figure 23: Matoko Kusanagi, Machinic Being, Ghost in the Shell, 1995
(Source: <https://pop-verse.com/2015/01/28/casting-kusanagi-live-action-adaptation-of-ghost-in-the-shell/>)



Motoko Kusanagi (seen here in Figure 23), the main character of the "Ghost in the Shell" is a machinic body. She is a robot body with some sort of artificial intelligence (although dialogue in the film suggests that Kusanagi may have been human once.) Her

body is, as mentioned above, “artificial”, but more than that, it is powerful. The character is presented as physically strong, dexterous, extremely capable in martial arts, resistant to damage, and easily repaired when damaged in combat. She is also, as mentioned by Danielle “strong willed”, but also intelligent, tactical, and a leader. She is highly sexualized in the images in the film too - from the opening scenes in which her naked body is constructed (see Figure 24) to scenes in which she wears a skin-tight stealth/camouflage suit (essentially rendering her invisible to attackers, but also making her appear nude.)

Figure 24: Matoko Kusanagi, from creation scene, Ghost in the Shell, 1995.

(Retrieved from:

<http://www.midnightanimation.com/gallery/ghost/gallerykusanagithemakinggs034.htm>)



Ghost in the Shell begins with a scene in which the main character, the machinic being, Motoko Kusanagi is being created. The audience literally sees Kusanagi's body being constructed from the inside out. Throughout the film, the viewer sees Kusanagi's machinic body subjected to various injuries (which reveal her machinic body as machinic once again) as well as seeing Kusanagi display her machinic superiority over the flesh and blood bodies (and unintelligent machinic beings of combat) that she fights. There is good reason why Motoko Kusanagi (seen in Figure 25 revealing the machinic nature of her body in the poster art for the film) has become a symbol of machinic perfection and potentiality - and a possible gateway into technosexualities for young females.

Figure 25: Image emphasizing Kusanagi's machinic aspects, from Ghost and the Shell Cover Art (Retrieved from: <httpsthevaultpublication.com20150120a-philosophical-analysis-of-ghost-in-the-shell-1995>)



Ghost in the Shell was also often mentioned alongside other Science Fiction media as being formative in machinic desires for female research participants.

Favourites? Ghost in the Shell and the Shadowrun RPG [role-playing game]. I was 10 or 11 the first time I saw that movie, and my first experience with Shadowrun was playing the RPG with friends in highschool. I thought cyborgs were cool and exciting, and I really wanted to be one. (Vivienne; “Shadowrun” is a science fiction media franchise which includes print books, online media content, and video games.)

Female research participants cited similar strong and strong-willed machinic bodies as Kusanagi as being essential to their developing desires to be machinic bodies. The female, humanoid Cylons in the 2004 science fiction television show Battlestar Galactica, and the 1976 show The Bionic Woman, were all mentioned by research participants (females, but also some males) as being formative to their early technosexual desires.

Figure 26: Comparison of Nodes “Attracted to the Machinic” and “Science Fiction Media in Childhood”

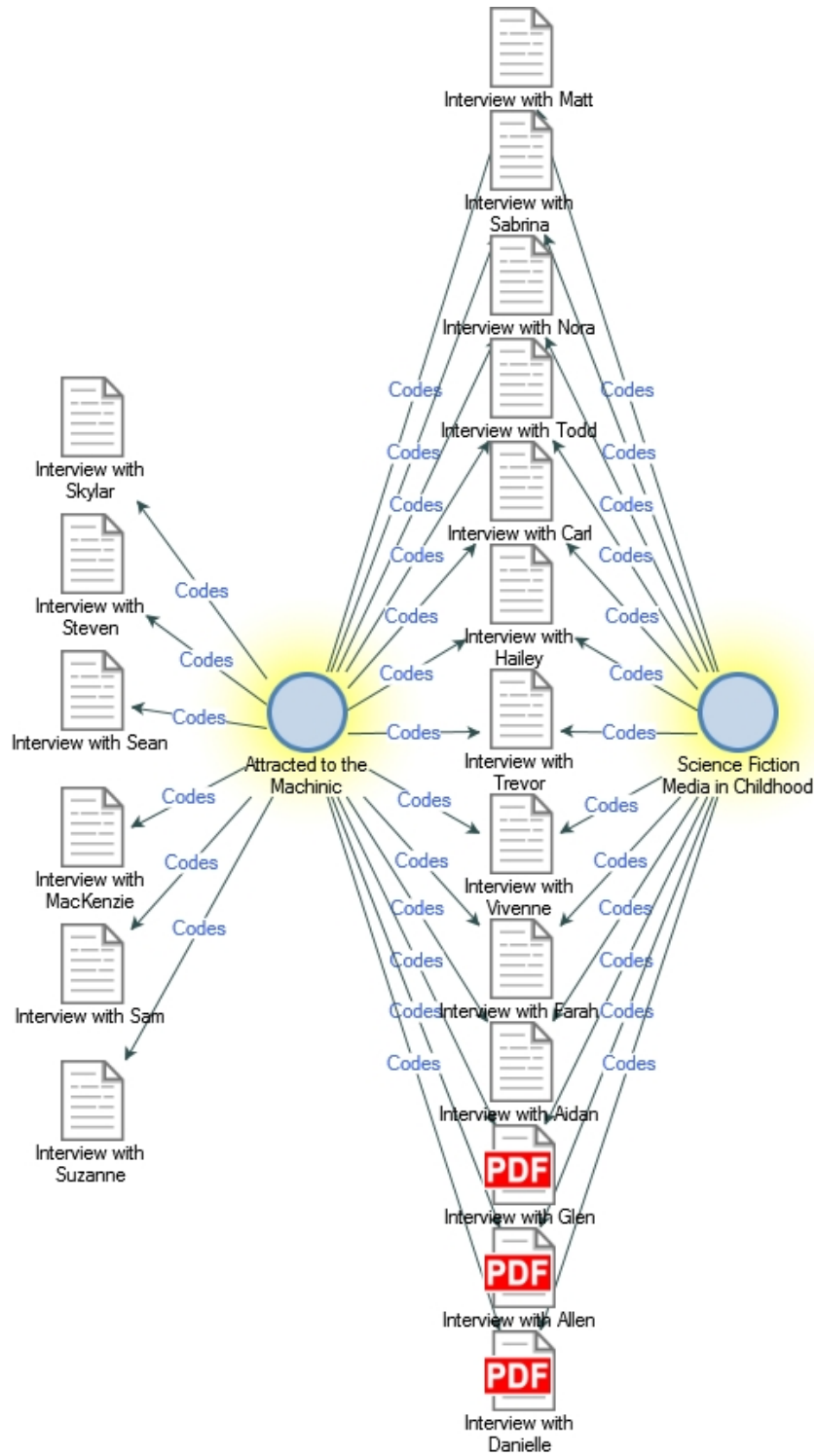


Figure 26 illustrates the connection between Science Fiction (and other SF) media in childhood and the development of an attraction to machinic bodies later in life. The majority of research participants who directly expressed a desire for machinic bodies, thirteen out of nineteen, stated that they had experiences with SF media at a young age (the twentieth research participant was not coded for “Attracted to the Machinic” because she’s only interested in fantasy “robot play” with another human.) A relationship *does* appear to be present, especially when discourse at Fembot Central is considered.

Kishin, an administrator at Fembot Central, stated, “Being exposed to sci-fi elements (IE: robots, fembots) is definitely what triggered it for me.” (Kishin 2016, “This fetish origins...” Discussion, Fembot Central.) This sentiment corresponds to statements made by many community members at the site, with one member, Korby mentioning that “the openable panels on the old Bionic Woman action figure/doll loom large in the earliest stirrings of my technosexuality...” (Korby, “Bionic Woman Season 4 comic” in Media, Reports, Fembot Central.) As research participants appeared to have a high level of self-reflection and understanding of their own drives and aims in their intimate desires, particularly their technosexualities (as seen in Figure 27), it’s highly likely that other members of the Fembot Central community have engaged in similar self-reflections (looking at the discourse at the site supports this idea.)

Figure 27: Indications of Self-Reflection on Technosexual Desires

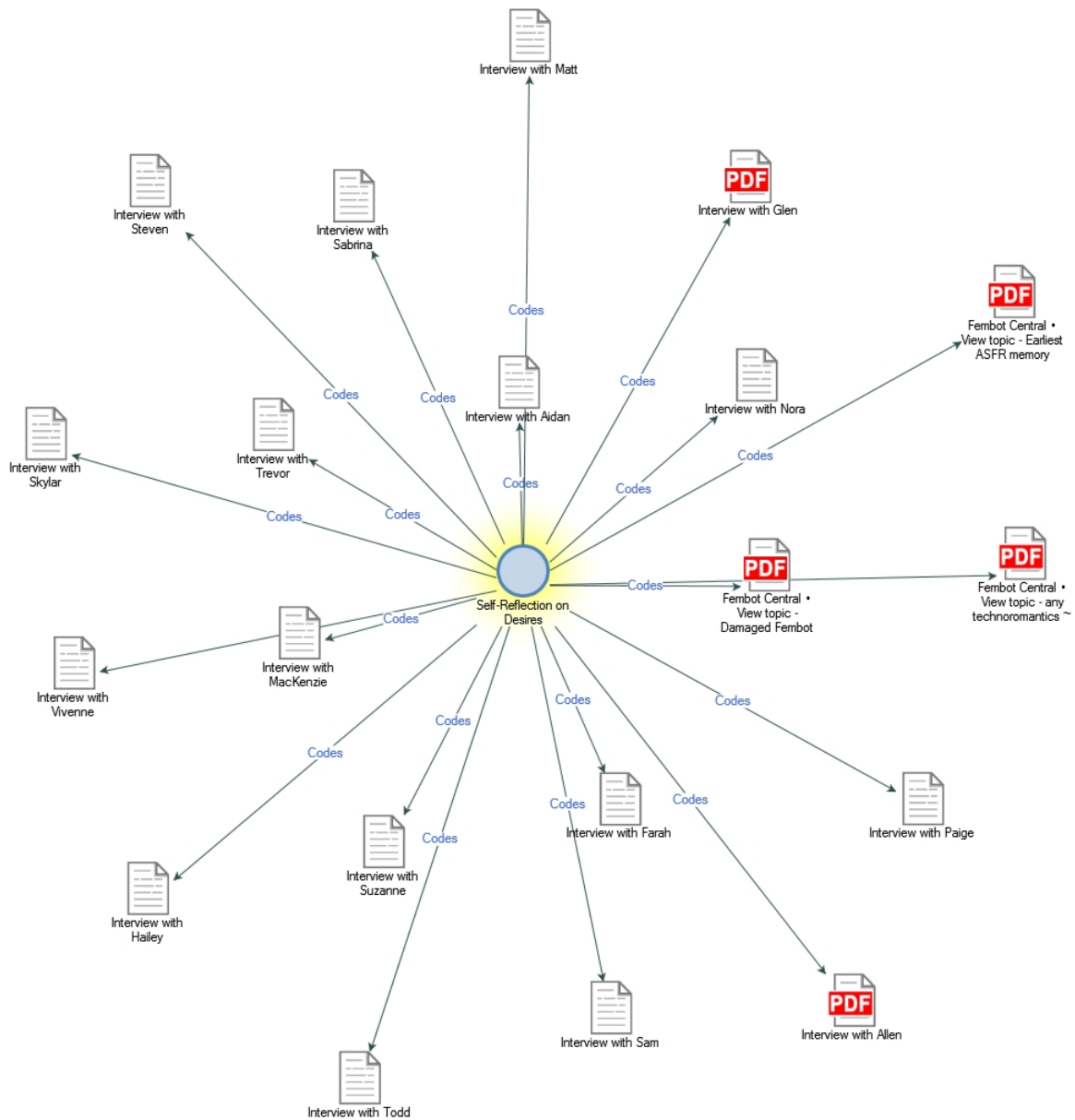


Figure 27 is an "Explore Diagram" in NVivo, showing the number of interviews and randomly sampled topic pages in which research participants or Fembot Central group members expressly reflected on their machinic desires. 15 of the 20 interviewees had

their discussions coded at the node "Self-Reflection on Desires", as did 5 of the topic pages that were chosen at random for coding. Group members at Fembot Central are highly self-reflective when it comes to their own technosexual desires.

Early Technosexual Experiences

For some of the people interviewed, their earliest exposure to machinic bodies came with a sexual awakening. Some of the participants knew from the first that their interest in machinic bodies was sexual. For many others however, the awareness that they desired machinic bodies - whether to have intimate encounters with them or as them - came well after their first exposures to the SF media that portrayed those bodies.

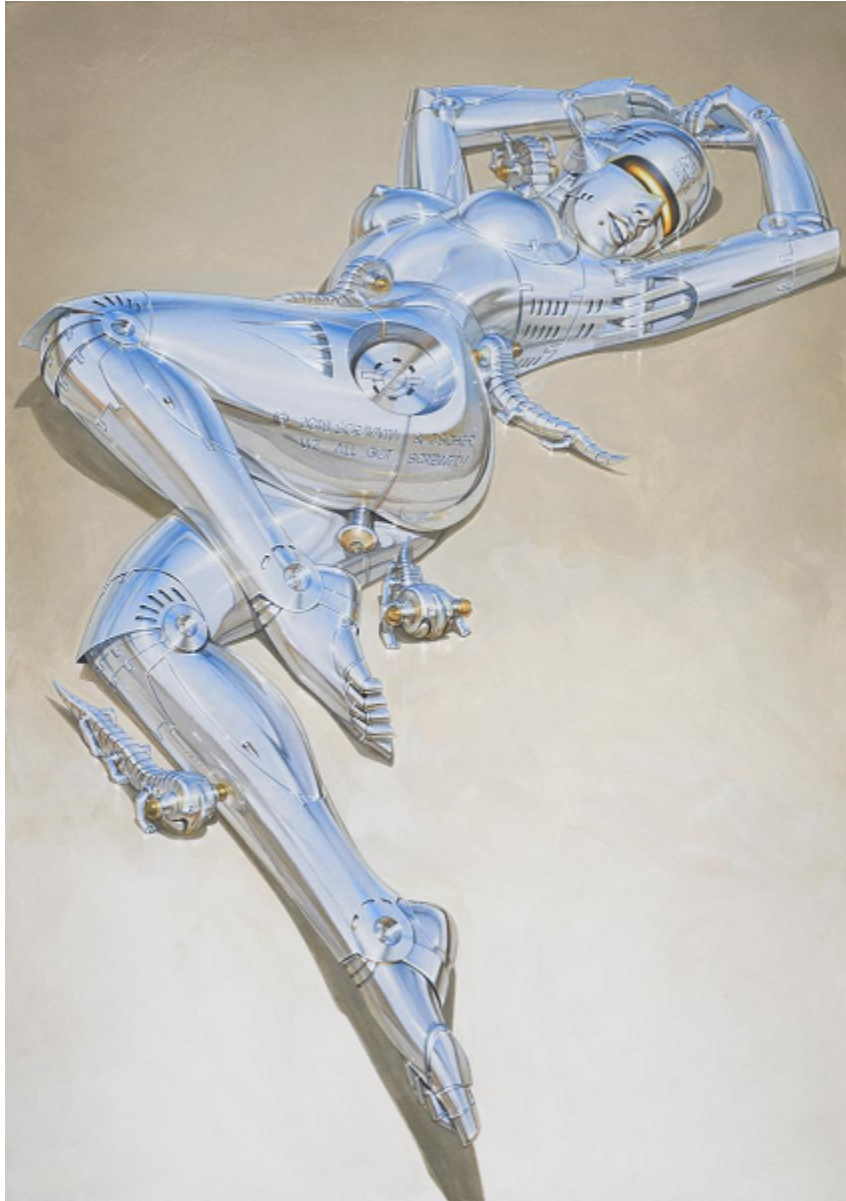
The average age of first technosexual experience or self-aware technosexual sexual interest for reporting male participants was 11.9 years old. The age range for males was between 6 and 20 years of age, although many simply reported that they were in their early or mid teenage years when they realized they had sexual or other intimate interests in machinic bodies. For female research participants, the age range shifts by several years, with females reporting their earliest technosexual awareness between 12 and 27 years old, with an average of 14.5 for those who were able to respond with a specific age.

The majority of male participants (seven out of ten) reported that science fiction media was foundational to their technosexual desires. "I was always interested in robots in general, as a big sci-fi fan. But from that moment on at 12, pretty much any depiction of a woman who turns out to be a very realistic robot is a turn-on." (Matt)

The first exposure that I can remember to any robot media that seemed to have any effect was the 'My Robot Buddy' series of books. I can remember finding one of them in my 3rd grade reader at school and it seemed like some fun sci-fi. The main characters are both male, but there were several female robots that I remember finding quite appealing back then.” (Sam)

At about 18-20 of age. I noticed I liked some kind of photoshopped pictures I found around the internet and sought more of them, ending on the Fembot central forum. The A.S.F.R. was already down by then. May be not completely, as I think I sought it on usenet, but it wasn't carried by any of the usenet servers that I sought. [...] it was specifically sexual. I found a cache of Sorayama's art [see Figure 28] about the female robots in a site and “devoured” them. From then on I sought more. (Trevor)

Figure 28: Artwork by Hajime Sorayama (Retrieved from: <http://www.casestudyo.com/2018/06/hajime-sorayama/>)



Female research participants also cited SF media as being the source of their earliest technosexual experiences that caused affective or emotional reactions that were noticeably sexual or sensual.

Me: When did you first realize that you had an interest – sexual or otherwise – in robots, cyborgs, and/or other machinic bodies? How old were you at the time? What was the context of this realization? How did you feel about this? Was your interest specifically sexual? If not, can you remember the first time you felt definite sexual interest in a robot or cyborg body? When was this? What was the context?

Sabrina: Around 13. Really not sure... probably a combination of the movies and media at the time. I grew up watching scifi shows, and the android characters in books I would read had quite an influence on me. I think one of the early books I read was "Split Infinity" by Piers Anthony which featured naked sexy gynoids!

Hailey, another female participant responded as follows:

Lindsay Wagner in *The Bionic Woman*. I wanted to be like her when I was 14 years old. Strong, helpful, beautiful. When she touched her body due to some rip though the skin of her legs or arm, I touched myself at the same places and imagined I was a machine inside, like her. When she later fought against the fembots, I identified even more with her. Being a machine **and** being human at the same time was necessary to compete with the fembots and to be a heroine defending all what is good. At about the same time I watched the Robocop movie but forgot about it quickly because of all the violence.

My interest wasn't sexual back then. It got sexual when I saw the original *Ghost in the Shell* manga in my local book store. That had to be about 6 years later. I saw a cyborg woman sitting in a service bay with all her machinery exposed, a gun in her hand. And when I opened the book, it was about politics and police work and the strong woman from the front cover as the heroine. Had to buy it, loved to read it. I had my first fantasies being an alluring female Robocop at the time. (Hailey)

Not every female participant could recall specific moments or epiphanies of technosexual realization when they encountered machinic bodies in SF media and felt sexual attraction for the first time, however. For many, there was a gradual movement from an interest in SF media to sexual or romantic fantasies featuring the machinic bodies found in that media.

I don't recall when it became a sexual thing, and I've always really enjoyed sci-fi. I started off reading my grandparent's copies of Asimov, Heinlein, Herbert and Clarke as a child. Somewhere along the way I started fantasising about such things, and it's evolved since, but I can't recall exactly when or how. (Vivienne)

That Vivienne and other research participants started by consuming SF media and in time began to sexualize or have intimate fantasies surrounding machinic bodies is very telling; it suggests that exposure to SF media normalized machinic bodies as viable – and desirable - intimate partners.

The Hypothesis associated with this idea and Q4 in general is as follows:

H4: The vast majority of research participants have grown up with the “deterritorializations and flux of modernity” (Allison 2001) specifically and explicitly expressed in the form of SF media (science fiction, science fantasy, and speculative fiction) which have normalized machinic humanoids and made them – or being them – viable options for bodies, and for sexual and/or romantic partners.

This hypothesis should *not* be rejected. While it cannot be conclusively stated that early exposure to images and stories about machinic humanoids *caused* either normalization of such bodies or a later sexual and/or romantic interest in machinic bodies and entities later in life, there is considerable evidence that a relationship is present. Although I can’t make the claim that the relationship is definitively causal, the influence of science fiction (and SF media in general) on those people who desire intimate interactions with, or as, machinic bodies is clear from their own words and recollections. Growing up in a modernity of flux and new possibilities for bodies – expressed in the technologies and images presented in SF media – appear to have normalized, and made desirable, the new potentialities that machinic bodies bring to intimate desires of various types.

IX. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Seven years of life went into the creation of this dissertation – from exploratory research into the technosexualities group at Fembot Central in 2012 (on which many of the research questions and hypotheses rest), to the beginnings of the official start of this project in 2015, through to the end of data analysis in 2017, and the final round of writing and edits into 2019. It is based on a lifelong fascination with human/nonhuman relationships, including human interactions with technologies such as prosthetics, surgical interventions, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and machinic bodies. Through the structured interviews with research participants in the technosexualities community at the research site of Fembot Central, participant observation and discourse analysis at the research site, and the autoethnography, I have aimed to explore, describe, discuss, and shed some light upon human/nonhuman intimate interactions, specifically human body/assemblage relationships with machinic bodies.

Final conclusions for Q1

Q1. What are the dimensions and characteristics of technosexual desires and practices?

- How clearly can this “group” be defined? Should these individuals be viewed as a group or (cyber) community at all, or as set of practices and discussions in an online environment?
- Are the majority of people engaging in this practice primarily interested in immediate sexual relationships? What about romantic or various types of long-lasting relationships with an artificial partner?

- Is sexual role-play with a human pretending to be a machinic body (“robot-play”) interchangeable with actual sex with a humanoid technology?
- What technologies are sexualized? What technologies are *not* sexualized?
- Which is more important in technosexual practices – the technology aspect or the ascribed gender of the technology?

Technosexuals are a distinct group, with a distinct presence in cyberspace. What’s more, the group at Fembot Central, the hub of anglophone technosexualities in cyberspace, largely considers itself a community. A slight majority of the research participants that I interviewed for this dissertation expressed a desire for both sexual and emotional relationships with machinic bodies, but none of them wanted only romantic or emotional relationships with machinic bodies. This is likely impacted by the present state of both artificial intelligence and the robotic sex partners currently available. While artificial intelligence, “sex robots”, and technological interventions into the human body have become far more developed than their nascent state decades ago, the technologies for creating sentient, artificial partners with machinic bodies or technological interventions into human bodies to create the kind of cyborgs that resemble depictions in science fiction (and other SF) media is still in its infancy. Technosexuals today recognize that it will be some time before they can have the kind of desired intimacies with machinic bodies that humans can currently have with one another.

The hypothesis that accompanied the first research question was as follows:

H1: Group members at the Fembot Central research site do not consider themselves a community.

H1 was rejected, based upon the responses of research participants. Even those participants who did not think that the group members at Fembot Central created a community, nonetheless valued the site for the affective encounters and feelings it fostered – that they (the interviewee) were not alone in their non-normative desires. The most common reasons cited for ambivalence about whether Fembot Central was a community or not was group tendencies towards anonymity due the sexual nature of the forum. Anonymity did not appear to be much of a problem to most research participants however, as those group members who take an active part in the community know each other well by their pseudonyms, converse regularly, and share both original and public media.

Final conclusions for Q2

Q2. What are the parameters of discourse around technosexual desires and practices within the group itself? What about from outside the group?

- Who creates these discourses? Who has a voice in it and who is silenced?
- How do discourses of stigmatization intersect with technosexual desires and practices?
- How does this group fit in to the larger picture of human interactions with technology, especially in the U.S.?

- Are discourses around women and feminized technologies different from discourses of male bodies and masculinized or non-gendered technologies?
- Is there gender-based stigmatization within the group? Is stigmatization from outside the group gender-based? Since fear of stigmatization is expressed on the forum pages, what kinds of stigmatization is this group afraid of and why? How does this impact their face-to-face relationships? Are their lifestyle and/or health ramifications of potential stigmatization in this context?

The majority of registered group members at Fembot Central appear to identify as white, and to identify as male. As the site features predominantly female-form humanoid machinic bodies in its featured media, it appears geared toward heterosexual males with technosexual interests. This does not deter female technosexuals from becoming community members however, nor does it deter them from taking part in group conversations at the site. Many female research participants however did feel that the community and its discourse was dominated by male voices and heterosexual male desires. The discourse analysis that I conducted for this dissertation supports that claim. Thus, Hypothesis 2 (H2) - white, heterosexual male “voices” are dominant at Fembot Central, with these “voices” as the primary creators of discourse around bodies and sexuality - cannot be rejected. The data supports that majority (male) voices drive discourse at the Fembot Central site.

It is interesting to note that what are often referred to as “unmarked bodies” in the literature on embodiment, and in many strands of feminism – white, heterosexual and heteronormative males – who are dominant in the physical world spaces of the public

sphere, have taken these bodies (and the minds shaped by living in those bodies) and have made a new public space in which they dominate the public discourse. And, they have done this because in the physical world, they felt *marked* by their sexuality – by the desires of a body that was marked by those desires. A site explicitly for technosexualities returns those male bodies to their unmarked state – at least while they’re interacting with other technosexuals. (For the two male participants who described themselves as “disabled”, they were likely more familiar with being a “marked” body in public, physical world spaces than other male participants.)

Research participants, male and female alike, unanimously believed that technosexualities were considered non-normative in the cultures in which they lived in the physical world. The Fembot Central community creates a refuge for marked, and *now*-marked, bodies and desires, and a space in which those bodies felt free to express their desires. Physical world spaces and relationships however, remained a source of concern for interviewees.

Although research participants often had differing opinions on how, or even if, gender affected the potential for the stigmatization of technosexualities, most of the research participants did feel as if they would be stigmatized by their larger societies and cultures if their technosexual desires were discovered. Many participants even expressed considerable anxiety that their sexual and other intimate interests in machinic bodies could lead to more than just ridicule; fear was often expressed, in both community discourse and from the interviewees, that if people misinterpret technosexual desires to be misogynistic or about sexually assaulting women, that those people would be moved to “end careers, [and] destroy families” (Sam, interviewee.) Group members at

Fembot Central have examined the recent history of LGBTQ+ communities in Western societies and cultures, and see the potential for an analogy with technosexualities. Sexual desires and activities that are non-reproductive, and are perceived as non-normative, often come with a high price, in terms of social marginalization, economic insecurity, family exclusion, the loss of friends, and even physical violence.

Nearly all of the research participants I interviewed expressed both anxiety and feelings of isolation because of their technosexual interests and desires. Anxiety and isolation, fear of losing relationships and/or livelihood because of characterological stigmatization, and because of larger social and cultural perceptions of non-reproductive sexualities and sexual expressions have been linked with physiological stress responses and long-term anxiety that have substantial repercussions on health. Some of these effects include problems with self-control, depression stemming from self-imposed isolation, general psychological distress, difficulties in social interaction, self-esteem problems, and a lower quality of life (Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema and Dovidio 2009, Inzlicht, McKay and Aronson 2006, Link et al. 1997.) The fear surrounding sexual-based stigmatization is not simply a light concern for those who live with it every day – it can be a serious health problem.

Finally, discourses around women's bodies and around the feminized technologies that Fembot Central members consciously focus on is very different from discourse surrounding men's bodies and masculinized technologies at the site. The discussion of women's bodies and feminized machinic bodies is more frequent, as to be expected from a site in cyberspace whose purpose is to celebrate feminized machinic bodies and the media in which such bodies are found. What's more, such discussions or

links to media in which women or feminized machinic bodies are found are not accompanied by warnings surrounding sexual content; this is not the case for media or discourse around sexualized male bodies and masculinized machinic bodies.

Successful performances of masculinity in Western cultures often depend upon the presumption of heterosexuality – indeed the *compulsion* to heterosexuality (Connell 1995.) As a result, most men are both heavily policed and heavily police *themselves* toward heteronormative expressions of sexuality, even when those expressions of sexuality are non-normative (and non-reproductive) themselves. A “Warning” label on male (or transgender) bodies and masculinized technologies helps in self-policing, and avoids the danger of being exposed to a male/masculinized body (of any kind) while engaged in self-pleasure (defusing both the possibility of ruining an erotic experience for group members who are repulsed by sexualized male bodies, and the danger of finding such a body attractive or pleasurable, even for an instant, when already aroused.) This doesn’t mean that all of the men at Fembot Central are threatened by exposure to such bodies however. Two of the ten male interviewees were very forthcoming about being interested in transgender or male machinic bodies as sexual “objects”, even though they considered themselves heterosexual, and there’s a topic page at Fembot Central in which discourse around male-form machinic bodies is encouraged, as well as some member-created media (stories, primarily) in which male or transgender machinic bodies are featured. Male members who enjoy masculinized technologies or watching male or transgender bodies “robotplay” in media tend not to be ridiculed by the larger Fembot Central community.

As the majority “voices” in the discourse at Fembot Central appear to be white, heterosexual male ones, and given,

H2: White, heterosexual male “voices” are dominant at Fembot Central, with these “voices” as the primary creators of discourse around bodies and sexuality

this hypothesis cannot be rejected. This evaluation is based upon the apparent demographics of community members and the discourse found at the Fembot Central site, as well as comments made by interviewees.

Final conclusions for Q3

Q3. What are the interactions present between technosexuals and the technologies they sexualize?

- What kinds of behaviors are currently present and what kinds of behaviors are technosexuals looking to engage in with sexual partners?
- Do most technosexuals desire intimate interactions with humanoid robots behaving like humans or humans behaving like humanoid robots (and if so, what types of humans in terms of sex, gender, race, etc.)?
- What kind of technologically modified bodies (if any) do these individuals want? What technologies? What modifications? Who wants to be a “robot” (as in the original meaning – from the Czech - of “slave,” passive, controlled) and why? Who wants to be modified technologically to augment power and control (perhaps even to control others?) Is there a gendered association with these desires?

- Do some technosexuals want cybernetic human partners? Do they want cybernetic human bodies of their own in which to engage sexually? Do they want bioengineered cyborg bodies or partners?

In terms of the behaviors present in technosexualities, both in cyberspace and in terms of physical world desires, “built” machinic bodies (in which a body is created) are more popular than “transformation” (in which some kind of already extant, living body is turned into a machinic being.) Machinic bodies that appear outwardly human, but which possess some indication that they are not human – such as seams, visible metallic parts, etc. – appear to be preferred by the majority of technosexuals over entirely metal or other types of machinic bodies. Additionally, robot bodies appear to be preferred over cyborg bodies, at least for the majority of people interested in technosexualities. “Majority” does not indicate an overwhelming majority however, and the above description is just a roughly painted picture of the group. Technosexualities are an assemblage of highly varied bodies, practices and desires, that, at the present time, have particular majority group popularities. Such general group preferences change with both time and awakening of new people to technosexual interests and desires.

Female participants preferred to be machinic bodies, and tended toward wanting to be sexually passive in interactions, but were split about whether they wanted to be controlled or independent. When I looked at the discourse however, I noticed that on the Fembot Central site, even discussions or online roleplay in which female group members expressed a desire to be controlled by males involved the apparent exercise of female agency. Female group members told other group members what they wanted, and *told*

them (male group members) to control them. This expression of female agency in submission is similar to the desires and sexual expressions of many “submissives” (or “bottoms”) in bondage and dominance and/or sadomasochism (BDSM “play.”) The phenomenon is called “topping from the bottom” wherein a “submissive” instructs the “dominant” (“top”) in various ways in how to dominate to (thus providing pleasure to) the submissive’s body.

When I examined research participants desires, and the discourse at the Fembot Central site, I found that male community members did not strictly want only sexual interactions with machinic bodies. Although some male community members did want non-sentient female-form machinic bodies for sexual purposes only, others expressed interest in the idea of having a sexual and emotional/romantic relationship with a machinic body who possessed a high level of artificial intelligence, and even artificial emotion. Although computing technologies are a long way from such machinic bodies – with artificial intelligence itself still in its infancy – the desire, and even hope, to have an emotional and intimate connection with a machinic body was expressed by many research participants and other community members. Therefore, hypotheses three a and b (H3a and H3b) are evaluated as follows:

H3a: The majority of male-identifying technosexuals are interested in primarily sexual relationships with machinic bodies rather than romantic or other kinds of intimate relationships

H3b: the majority of female-identifying technosexuals are interested in being machinic bodies and having sexual relationships *as* machinic bodies.

H3a was rejected as male-identifying technosexuals desires for machinic bodies were more varied than the strictly sexual, with many forms of intimacies with machinic bodies desired by those participants. H3b was *not* rejected, however. While female-identifying technosexuals expressed various reasons for wanting to be machinic bodies - with some female research participants expressing a desire to be controlled and others expressing desires to change and augment their bodies - female participants overwhelming wanted to be machinic bodies more than they desired intimate interactions with other machinic bodies. Female participants would rather enter into intimate assemblages as machinic bodies than with them.

Final conclusions for Q4

Q4. What were the initial experiences and media exposures that research participants had with machinic bodies? When did they first begin to feel desire for such bodies, and what did they desire of those bodies?

The average age of first experience with machinic bodies for both male and female participants who remembered and/or reported their ages was very often prior to the average biological ages of sexual maturity. Nonetheless, many research participants felt that their early experiences seeing or reading about machinic bodies in various forms of science fiction media was foundational to later technosexual desires. Many participants could recall both their first exposures to machinic bodies in science fiction media, and their early desires for machinic bodies clearly - and explicitly cited these experiences as the reasons for their desires for machinic bodies. Group members citing early exposures

to science fiction media as formative to technosexuals desires is found in the discourse at the Fembot Central site, as well. As such, Hypothesis 4 (H4) was evaluated as follows:

H4: The vast majority of research participants have grown up with the “deterritorializations and flux of modernity” (Allison 2001) specifically and explicitly expressed in the form of SF media (science fiction, science fantasy, and speculative fiction) which may have normalized machinic humanoids and made them – or being them – viable options for bodies, and for sexual and/or romantic partners.

H4 should not be rejected. While it cannot be conclusively stated that early exposure to images and stories about machinic humanoids caused a later sexual and/or romantic interest in machinic bodies and entities later in life, there is considerable evidence that a relationship is present between SF media exposure featuring machinic bodies and the later desire for machinic bodies. Growing up with SF media showcasing machinic bodies, and having such bodies presented as viable, even attractive, sexual or romantic partners keeps humans from discounting potential relationships of various kinds with machinic nonhumans.

Technosexualities in Brief

Online technosexualities has a clear group with a sense of community in the Fembot Central forum. Most of its members believe Fembot Central is a community, albeit a diverse one in terms of technosexual interests. Where it is not diverse however is in the race and ethnicity of the community members, with the majority of research

participants identifying as white/Caucasian and from North American or North European cultural and ethnic groups.

Discourse at the research site of Fembot central is largely controlled by white, male-identifying heterosexuals, but female identifying and non-heterosexual members are made welcome and regularly participate in community discourse. Nonetheless, physical world male-dominance of public spaces is reinscribed at Fembot Central, much as is found in most locations in cyberspace (as per Sardar 1996 and Kendall 2002.) Additionally, as in male- and white-dominated spaces in the physical world, there are carry-overs and remnants of sexist and imperialistic discourse found in "topic" pages at the site – so Fembot Central is not a libratory space per se, in terms of gender or racial discourse – there is no particular evidence however for any kind of call or group motivation for intentional sexism or prejudice.

Technosexuals (at Fembot Central) do express some concern however about prejudices and stigmatization from outside their community. The fear of stigmatization from their physical world communities, and the potential to lose family, friends, and/or livelihood if their technosexual interests are discovered, keep many community members from expressing this part of their sexuality outside of the anonymous, online space of Fembot Central. Ongoing fears of stigmatization can lead to negative bodily health effects, including depression and self-imposed isolation. The assemblage of the Fembot Central community appears to offer some relief from these health effects.

Community members at Fembot Central are interested in a wide range of technosexualities, with male research participants responding that they were primarily interested in various types of intimate relationships and assemblages with machine bodies

and most female participants expressing a desire to be a machinic body of some type. Many of these female participants expressed a desire to be controlled and/or programmed as a machinic body, citing innate, submissive personality traits as the reason for this desire. None of the female research participants suggested that their personal submissive tendencies nor desire to take a submissive role in sexual interactions had anything to do with their sex or gender, nor did they suggest any kind of naturalized discourse around femininity as being the reason for their individual preferences. Although I occasionally found a reference to those types of naturalized cultural discourses in the Topic pages at Fembot Central, it was in no more a frequency than I observe or experience in the public spaces and discourses of the physical world.

Personally, I also wonder if the desire to be machinic bodies for some of the female participants - to be "worked on" (Mackenzie), passive and controlled isn't a desire to surrender totally to someone that they trust in an intimate situation - to have the kind of intimate connection that can come from total surrender to the will of another - much the way "submissives" often describe their intimate desires in bondage and dominance relationships. This is only personal speculation however, as I have no desire to "put words into the mouths" of my research participants.

Additionally, nearly all of the female participants cited traits such as physical strength, "perfection" and immortality and/or invulnerability as being the reasons behind their desires to be machinic bodies. These participants wanted to "perfect," and to repair or augment their human form, which they found somehow lacking in health, strength and/or appearance. This is unsurprising given that female and women's bodies are heavily subject to hypermedicalization and naturalized discourses surrounding innate

weakness, submissiveness, inferiority and a state of having an uncontained and uncontrolled body without restrictive body disciplines, garments and other paraphernalia (see Chapter II, “Ideal (Female) Bodies”).

The great majority of research participants were also able to cite SF (science fiction/fantasy and/or speculative fiction) as a formative element in their early developing desires for machinic bodies. This association is also discussed by group members at the Fembot Central site, in the Discussion pages. Technosexualities appear to be a normatively-arising set of desires that may extend from the normalization of particular bodies (machinic bodies) in media. Framing technosexualities as arising from some form of psychopathology, or as a result of social inadequacy (as they are often described in academic or popular media depictions of this group) does not match up with the data nor the analysis of this dissertation project.

Limitations

This dissertation is, of course, not the last word in technosexualities. As with any research, there are limitations that need to be addressed. As mentioned in the chapter on Methods, the hypotheses explored herein were created to correspond to each research question so as better to clarify the core ideas that were under investigation. The data obtained are, when quantitative, not from a large enough sample size to warrant being subjected to statistical analyses nor, when qualitative, definitive for such a complex and varied group as are the technosexuals at Fembot Central. Larger sample sizes and more quantitative research would be needed to provide representative statistics or correlation

for this group, with further qualitative work necessary to truly illustrate the size and scope of the community, its experiences, and practices.

As a cis-gendered, white, heterosexual woman, I am also a very particular research instrument, and my interpretation of the data is affected by my identity and bodily experiences. I am a female-identifying woman reporting on a male-dominated research site and male-dominated discourse. I portrayed myself to the Fembot Central community as a female/woman and experienced our assemblage through that body and that online identity. My presentation as female and woman likely affected my interactions with community members at the research site. I was also limited by time, as this dissertation could not carry on forever, and by space, in that cyberspace remains the primary location to encounter technosexualities at this time. (There are physical world fairs and expos in which sex robots such as “Roxxy” by TrueCompanion are featured, but if persons identifying as technosexuals attend these events, they do not necessarily make their identifications or desires known in public, and I know of no physical world technosexuality-specific events at this time.)

Additionally, even though I have a background in anthropology, and in gender studies, including masculinities studies, this does not mean I can truly understand the lived, bodily experiences of the men (or, for that matter, the women) I interviewed or interacted with at the research site. As a white cis-gendered female/woman, I may also be missing or overlooking much about the lived and bodily experiences of non-white technosexuals or transgender technosexuals – a limitation of the research instrument-body that can only be overcome if other research instrument-bodies engage in further

research on technosexualities, especially as such desires and practices (likely) expand and become more “normative” in the coming decades.

Whether due to the necessarily small sample sizes for this dissertation or the current nature of the anglophone technosexualities community at Fembot Central, the lack of adequate representation of people of color in this research also cannot be ignored. Only two out of twenty of my interviewees identified as non-white, and during the course of my participant observation, and I only encountered Fembot Central community members who specifically identified as non-white or "technosexuals of color" on two additional instances. This lack of representation may be the result of individuals choosing not to identify on the site as "technosexuals of color" or may in fact be representative of people of color being a substantially smaller portion of the anglophone technosexualities community. If the latter, the question of "why?" is a potentially productive starting point for ongoing research into technosexualities and its online communities. Are people of color better represented at other, non-anglophone technosexualities communities in cyberspace? Japan, and investigations into a possible Japanese-speaking manifestation of technosexualities online, might be one place to look for more non-white technosexuals.

Fembot Central, and the corresponding Fembotwiki site, also primarily showcase machinic bodies with white/anglo bodies and features in its image galleries. As many of these images are modifications of already extant media images, is this under-representation of machinic beings with features and bodies more akin to people of color a result of the under-representation of people of color in mainstream media? Does the heavily white/anglo look of the machinic bodies at the Fembot Central sites indicate an

internalization of Western - and global - mainstream media emphasis on white standards of beauty? Specific analyses of the images at these sites, who produces them, and how they choose the images they make or modify is necessary moving forward. All in all, further investigation would need to be done into all of these aspects of image and representation at the site (and other such sites in the non-anglophone world) to determine how race, nationality, and ethnicity intersect with people's experiences as technosexuals and with technosexualities as manifested in cyberspace in communities.

Also missing from this dissertation is a discussion of whether technosexualities and a possible technosexual future harm or will harm "woman" (an increasingly fluid category.) I am more than happy to side with many types of feminisms and their proponents that say, yes, technosexual images - many (if not most) of which echo the images of women's bodies as "perfectible" by medical and cosmetic intervention, and echo the images of women's bodies in most "pornography" - provide men with unrealistic expectations of women and their bodies, set women and their bodies up as object for the male gaze, objectify women and position them as interchangeable commodities. This is no different than mainstream media throughout much of western cultures, however. Technosexualities and their adherents are as much a product of their cultures as anything else. Technosexual interests are informed by the media that technosexuals grew up with and the images they've seen all our lives. Technosexual images don't objectify women any more than mainstream media images already do. In fact, some technosexual images include female-form machinic beings in assertive poses and with signs of "traditionally"

masculine power, such as weaponry. An analysis of technosexualities images and a comparison with random mainstream media images could be a productive next step for research on this subject.

More research on this emerging expression of human sexuality – which I (and many in their cyberspace communities) term “technosexualities” – must be done as our exposure to, and desires for, machinic bodies continue and expand with new computing and medical technologies. One of the major components that this dissertation lacks is a study of physical world manifestations of technosexualities. Hopefully, as technosexualities begin to “come out of the closet” of anonymous online spaces – as more human bodies recognize their identity as cyborg, as artificial intelligence improves and machinic companions become more commonplace, and medical interventions into the human body make the (assumed) boundaries between the human and the nonhuman less clear – these practices and desires will be presented more openly in physical world spaces, making research into physical world technosexual practices more tenable.

Contributions and Final Thoughts

This project is meant to contribute to changing academic understandings of bodies, and perceptions of boundaries and practices between the human and the nonhuman. Its purpose is to explore an emerging phenomenon in sexual interactions as well as contribute to anthropological studies on bodily interactions, specifically with technology - to complicate the *perceived* boundaries between bodies and the technologies that are seen to exist outside of these bodies. Understanding the complication and

fluidities of body and technology boundaries is of increasing importance as new technologies become further integrated into contemporary humanity.

The implications for a study of technosexualities extends from an impact upon the regulations and social implementation of biomedical, surgical, pharmacological, and computing technologies to the understanding of a potentially stigmatized population, struggling under the pressure of “passing” under compulsory, reproductive heteronormativity.

Additionally, I hope that my research into technosexualities will help to expand “Western” cultural conceptions of acceptable bodies and acceptable bodily interactions. Barring a thoroughly world-changing event, the future of humankind is with emerging technologies - biotechnologies and machinic bodies - and that future includes machinic sex, love, and other intimate bodily interactions (physical care, companionship, etc.) That future also includes increasingly biotechnological and machinic *people*, as machines enhance, change, and augment what we consider “human.” Our current understandings of closed, bounded bodies that are fully “human” and only interact with or concern themselves with the human is a fallacy even now – indeed, it always has been. The nonhuman has ever been a part of human lives and bodies; we need nonhuman beings to survive.

The future of human beings and human *bodies* will involve even less “human” material than they currently do as the machinic and technological become fully integrated into our social assemblages and selves. The questions and ethical concerns that are dawning now over our technological horizon are immense. These questions include everything from the rights that will be afforded to future human/nonhuman body-

assemblages, to the availability and costs of medical interventions that further merge the technological into the human body for the purposes of extending or enhancing life, all the way to which bodies get to be termed sentient and consenting, or expendable and proprietary. The first step in addressing these emerging concerns is in investigations into new human/nonhuman assemblages, such as technosexualities, and new understandings of human bodily boundaries, affects, and identities – also found with technosexuals who wish to be machinic bodies themselves.

As a species, humans desperately need to recognize their interdependence with the nonhuman. The assemblages we form with nonhuman beings and bodies, from the machinic to the animal to the ecological, are essential to our very existence. Failure to realize how intertwined we are with the nonhuman could well result in the mutual destruction of the human and nonhuman alike. A vital first step in preserving ourselves and the assemblages we enter into with the nonhuman is to recognize their place in our lives, and myriad intimate interactions. Research on technosexualities provides one small inroad into better understanding our relationships with the nonhuman world and its essential place in human lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Interview Questionnaire for Online Interviews

Interview Questions for Research Participants

Demographic Information:

Age:

Sex/Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Nationality:

First/Native Language:

Occupation:

Questions:

1. How do you access technosexualities/technofetish/ASFR websites and content?

home computer and internet connection

work or school computer and internet connection

laptop or tablet at a public site with wifi (such as a cafe)

other public computer and internet connection (such as the public library)

smartphone

other

Why do you access online sites in this way?

2. Do you consider the online technosexualities (/technofetish/ASFR) group a community? Why or why not?

Do the participants and discussions at Fembot Central or other

technosexualities internet sites make you feel like you are a part of a larger community of technosexuals? Why or why not?

Do you feel that forum members at Fembot Central (or any other technosexualities online site) are in the process of building an online community or engage in community- building activities at the site? What are the reasons for you answer?

3. Are you attracted to robots, cyborgs, or other machinic bodies sexually and/or romantically?

What types of machinic bodies do you prefer? Why?

What is it about machinic bodies that interests or attracts you?

Are there any other technologies or entities that you find sexually attractive or arousing?

4. Are you interested in being a robotic, cyborg, or other machinic body? Why or why not?

5. Are you interested in primarily physical, sexual involvement with a machinic or cyborg partner, a romantic/loved-based relationship with a machinic or cyborg partner, both, or neither? Why?

6. Is sexual and/or romantic role-play with a human pretending to be a robot or cyborg interchangeable, preferred, or inferior to actual sexual and/or romantic activities with an actual robot or cyborg body for you? Why?

7. What is more important to you – the gender of the machinic body or its machinic attributes?

Do you consider yourself heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, asexual, demisexual, queer, or other? Please list all that apply.

8. Do you consider yourself technosexual, technofetishist, both, neither, or other?

Do you only communicate this interest or identity online and anonymously or do you express this interest or identity to anyone in the physical world?

To whom do you express this interest and why? OR Why don't you express this interest to those in your physical world life?

How does this interest or identity effect this/those relationship(s)?

9. Do you feel that technosexual interests are/would be subject to stigma outside of technosexual forum groups online?

Do you ever feel stigmatized because of your interest in robot or cyborg bodies? *Yes*

Are you ever afraid that people in the physical world might discover your interest in robots or cyborgs? Why?

Do you feel that your sex or gender plays a role in whether you would be stigmatized for your technosexual interests? Why or why not?

10. Can you remember the first time you saw a movie or image - or experienced any other form of media - with a robot, cyborg, or other machinic body? What was the movie, image, or other form of media? How did you feel about it?

11. When did you first realize that you had an interest – sexual or otherwise – in robots, cyborgs, and/or other machinic bodies? How old were you at the time? What was the context of this realization? How did you feel about this?

Was your interest specifically sexual? If not, can you remember the first time you felt definite sexual interest in a robot or cyborg body? When was this? What was the context?

12. What are your favorite movies, television shows, web series, or other media that feature machinic bodies that interest you, sexually or otherwise? How old were you when

you first experienced them? How did you feel about the machinic bodies in these media when you first encountered them?

13. What type of robot/cyborg sexual partner do you want (to be)? What traits are you looking for in a partner or want to embody yourself?
Sexually passive? Controllable? Programmable? Changeable? "Plug and Play?" Sexually aggressive? Independent? Artificial intelligence? Physically strong? Controlling? Metal? Plastic? Silicate? Human(like) skin? Organic? Bio-engineered human? Human enhanced by inorganic technologies? Humanoid? Non-humanoid? Other?

Why does this interest you?

14. How do you feel about human women? How do you feel about human female bodies? Are you sexually interested in non-machinic human females? Why or why not?

15. Are you currently in a physical-world intimate relationship(s) of any kind? If so, how would you describe that relationship(s)?

Does this relationship(s) have a sexual component? How do you feel about the sexual aspects of your current relationship(s)? Does your intimate partner(s) know about your sexual interest in (being) robotic and/or cyborg/technologically enhanced humans? Do you ever engage in "robot play" (fantasy/role-playing) sexual scenarios with your intimate partner(s)? Why or why not?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add about your interests in machinic and/or technologically modified bodies, technosexualities in general, online technosexualities/technofetish/ASFR groups, your personal experiences with or expectations for machinic bodies - their designs, construction, augmentation, etc. - or any other information you'd like to let the researcher know?

Please include anything that you think might be useful that was not covered in the previous questions.

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