10 Enduring disability, ableism, and whiteness

Three readings of inspirational endurance athletes in Canada

Danielle Peers

Canada is not a country famous for celebrating endurance athletes. Yet, an endurance runner from the early 1980s named Terry Fox was voted Canada's greatest hero in 1999 and the second greatest Canadian of all time in 2004 (Terry Fox Foundation [TFF], 2014a). Fox was awarded these and many other honors despite never having won a marathon or competed in the Olympics. Rather, he was a man with an amputation who tried to run across Canada to fundraise for cancer research.

Fox is one of three heroized Canadian endurance athletes experiencing disability[1] who embarked on highly publicized fundraising marathons in the 1980s. Collectively, they won Canadian Newsmaker of the Year (2014) five out of seven years: Terry Fox (1980, 1981), Steve Fonyo (1985), and Rick Hansen (1986, 1987). Canada's infatuation with these three endurance athletes[2] did not end in the 1980s. Fox and Hansen, in particular, continue to hold privileged places in the Canadian national imaginary. In this chapter, I first introduce these three athletes by reading how mainstream national media, as well as each of the three athletes' websites and biographies, portray each athlete and his social effect. In the second section, I read these popular representations, collectively, through the supercrip critique: a pre-existing theoretical framework developed by disability and sport studies scholars (e.g., Berger, 2008; Clare, 2009; Hardin & Hardin, 2004) for understanding the characteristics and effects of inspirational disability representations. In the third section, I offer a more contextualized and historicized reading of each of these figures and their effects: a reading I developed as part of my genealogical doctoral project.

Inspirationally enduring disability

In this section I introduce Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen to demonstrate the reoccurring claim that these athletes have inspired Canadians with and without disabilities to overcome barriers in pursuit of their dreams.

Terry Fox. In 1980, a young recent amputee and cancer survivor, Terry Fox, began his Marathon of Hope: an 8,860 km (5,505 mile) fundraising run across Canada from the Atlantic Ocean in Newfoundland to the Pacific Ocean in British Columbia. In so doing, Fox became a nation-wide celebrity and an inspirational

hero to thousands of Canadians. According to his biographer, Scrivener (2014b), Fox was inspirational because "he showed there were no limits to what an amputee could do. He changed people's attitudes towards the disabled, and he showed that while cancer had claimed his leg, his spirit was unbreakable" (para. 4). Fox came to symbolize the strength of the Canadian spirit and the ability of ordinary Canadians to accomplish great things (Coupland, 2005; Scrivener, 2000). Less than two thirds of the way across Canada, Fox was air-lifted back to his British Columbia home due to cancer's return. Fox died of cancer less than a year later.

Fox's memory lives on through an annual fundraising marathon and through his numerous awards. Fox was twice named Canadian newsmaker of the year and once Canadian athlete of the year. He was the youngest person to be named as a Companion to the Order of Canada—Canada's highest honour (TFF, 2014a). Fox has become a quintessential Canadian icon, appearing on Canadian money, stamps, and passports. He has had countless schools, roads, and awards named after him, as well as a coast guard ship and a mountain. To date, over $650 million has been raised for Cancer research in Fox's name (TFF, 2014a).

Steve Fonyo. In the spring of 1984, an 18-year-old British Columbian amputee and cancer survivor, Steve Fonyo, began his cross-Canadian cancer fundraising run: The Journey of Lives. Fonyo set out "to do what Terry Fox had been unable to do … to run from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a battle against weather, an unforgiving landscape and a physical handicap" (Adams, 2010). Fonyo completed the journey in 14 months, raising $14 million.

Fonyo spent most of his run in Fox's shadow, often perceived as a brash and uppity copycat (Chivers, 2009; Saddy, 2013). As Fonyo surpassed where Fox had left off, and in particular as he successfully navigated the massive Rocky Mountains, he started to be treated as an inspirational hero in his own right: a tenacious overcomer of physical and geographical obstacles. Of the moment when Fonyo completed his Journey, Canadian news anchor Mansbridge proclaimed:

> it was a moment of magic, and a moment you will see spread across the newspapers of this land tomorrow morning, and it will be a moment of history in Canadian books for years and years to come.
>
> (in Adams, 2010)

Indeed, Fonyo was immediately met with significant national press and numerous awards and accolades. He replaced Fox as the youngest person to be named to the Order of Canada, and a Vancouver beach was renamed in his honor. Fonyo, unlike Fox, however, would not be destined for the history books. He was almost entirely discredited and forgotten within a decade of his run (Chivers, 2009; Saddy, 2013). As headlines of Fonyo's inspirational feats were replaced with those of drug use, violence, and imprisonment, he was transformed from a symbol of inspiration to one of desperation.

Rick Hansen. From 1985 to 1987, another British Columbian man—Rick Hansen—wheeled 40,000 km (24,855 mile) across 34 countries in his Man in

Motion Tour ("Rick Hansen," 2014). His purpose was to raise funds for curing spinal cord injury, to change attitudes about disability, and to inspire people to believe that "if you dare to dream, anything is possible" (Rick Hansen Foundation [RHF], 2009a, para. 1). Unlike Fox or Fonyo, Hansen was already a world-class athlete prior to embarking on his tour, having won six Paralympic medals in wheelchair racing, and 19 international marathons ("Rick Hansen," 2014). Hansen was also a personal friend and wheelchair basketball teammate of Terry Fox, and often mentioned Fox as the inspiration for his tour (Scrivener, 2000).

Although not as widely or intensely celebrated as Fox, Hansen has remained in the spotlight as an inspirational Canadian. Hansen was named a Companion to the Order of Canada, was twice named Canadian Newsmaker of the Year, and has several roads and schools named in his honor. Unlike either Fox or Fonyo, Hansen's spinal cord fundraising continues to this day in his role as a leader of the RHF. More recently, Hansen was one of the final five inspirational torch-bearers for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics opening ceremonies. Shortly thereafter, he embarked on a fundraising and media tour (this time flying, not wheeling) to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his Man in Motion Tour. During the tour, Hansen awarded medals to local "difference makers" across Canada: people who were inspired to do as Hansen had, to "turn tragedy into triumph," and who "courageously followed their dreams, and inspired others to bring positive change to the world" (RHF, 2014a "stories of inspiration," para. 1).

Enduring ableism through inspirational disability

The above-described inspirational representations of Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen can be read as part of the pervasive supercrip story: a hyperbolic mainstream media representation of hyper-able disability that scholars have argued has negative impacts on disability communities and social movements (Clare, 2009; Hardin & Hardin, 2004). Below, I highlight three interrelated critiques of supercrip stories and apply this critical framework to analyze the representational strategies used around Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen.

Undervaluing accomplishments

Several scholars have argued that supercrip stories undervalue the accomplishments of the people they celebrate by focusing on disability than their achievements (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Silva & Howe, 2012). For example, disability sport stories are frequently placed in the "human interest" newspaper sections, rather than in the sports section (Berger, 2008; Tynedal & Wolbring, 2012). The media campaigns of disability sports organizations also tend to devalue the achievements of disabled athletes (Silva & Howe, 2012). The official 1996 Paralympic motto, for example, was: "the Olympics is where heroes are made. The Paralympics is where heroes come" (Steadward & Peterson, 1997, p. 8). Read

through the supercrip critique, this connotes that some Olympians are heroic because of their extraordinary athletic accomplishments, but all Paralympians are heroic simply for enduring disability and participating (Peers, 2009; Silva & Howe, 2012).

News stories of Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen also centered on how each acquired, endured, and overcame their disabilities, not their athletic feats. Fox, for example, ran nearly a marathon a day for 143 consecutive days, yet the vast majority of his media coverage appeared in the "Family" section of the Toronto Star (Scrivener, 2000). Fox himself was vocal about how his athletic accomplishments were consistently undervalued by the media, most notably when reporters refused to recognize his non-traditional running gait:

> It's not a walk-hop, it's not a trot, it's running, or as close as I can get to running, and it's harder than doing it on two legs. It makes me mad when people call this a walk. If I was walking it wouldn't be anything.
>
> (in TFF, 2014b, para. 4)

Although Fox understood the athletic feat of endurance running as pivotal to the meaning of his Marathon of Hope, reporters found the run-walk distinction as irrelevant to the real story of how Fox endured and overcame both illness and disability.

Fonyo ran over 7,900 km in 14 months yet the vast majority of the coverage either focused on his disability, or (unfavorably) compared him to Fox (Chivers, 2009). It was not until he managed to cross the massive Rocky Mountains that his athletic accomplishments—to some degree—were acknowledged (Saddy, 2013). Furthermore, although Fonyo ran far further than Fox through far more difficult terrain, he was far less celebrated. Fox overshadowed Fonyo, I argue, not because of his greater athletic performance, but because of his performance of gracious and tenacious disability overcoming.

Hansen wheeled 50 to 70 km per day over a two-year stretch, with very few rest days (Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, 2015): an athletic feat that is rarely mentioned in media accounts of the Man in Motion Tour (e.g., CBC, 1985a, 1985b). Most accounts do not mention Hansen's many Paralympic medals and international marathon wins to contextualize his incredible feats of endurance. More commonly, the opening couple of sentences reveal that "Rick Hansen was crippled in a car accident when he was 15, crippled but not defeated" (CBC, 1985b). From the perspective of the supercrip critique, I conclude that stories of enduring disability trump stories of the athletic accomplishments of these endurance athletes.

Raising expectations

The inspirational stories that often highlight achievements of exceptionally talented, trained, and physically able athletes have been critiqued for creating unrealistic expectations for all people experiencing disability (Longmore, 2003;

Withers, 2012). As Darcy (2003) argued, "the elite athlete's attitude that if you want to do it you can, no matter what," might work for some athletes, "but for the majority of people with disabilities this is not their lived experience" (p. 747). Some people face far greater physical, social, political, and financial barriers than others, some of which are either not surmountable, or surmountable only at great personal cost. Supercrip images, Longmore (2003) asserted, can be used as "a weapon to blame handicapped people who have not proved their worth by cheerfully 'overcoming' " (p. 130).

Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen each contributed to the imperative of disability overcoming by parroting the very inspirational discourses used to describe them. Fox, for example, repeatedly declared: "I'm not special … I just wish people would realize that anything's possible if you try" (TFF, 2014b, para. 1). Hansen similarly used his pedestal to argue that "just because you've had a spinal cord injury or other disability, doesn't mean you can't be successful in business, or family life … so long as you have the heart and desires" (Hansen in CBC, 1985b). Journalists and fundraisers ran these quotes ad nauseum, and often extrapolated to point toward those who did not simply overcome. As Scrivener (2000) declared: "[Fox] didn't blame anyone … he didn't expect special privileges," including increased accessibility or disability income (p. 35). Further, "he showed that you can live with cancer, you can be productive. Part of his legacy was to show you don't go to your room and hide" (p. 255). Thus, just as disability scholars have suggested, inspirational celebrations are never far removed from judgment aimed at those who do not, or cannot, simply overcome barriers in order to achieve such success.

Although Fonyo also parroted inspirational overcoming narratives during his run, he later came to represent the other side of the inspiration/underachiever divide. As his legal troubles emerged, Fonyo was widely scorned in the media for not overcoming these obstacles. The diatribes against Fonyo often used his own inspirational language including claims that he could "overcome" his addictions and make something of his life if he would only set his mind to it ("Honoring their legacy," 2011). Thus, through both their celebratory and scornful discourses, the mainstream media reproduced the imperative of disability overcoming.

Medicalizing and depoliticizing disability

The third critique is that supercrip stories represent disability as a tragic medical problem in individual bodies, as opposed to a social-structural problem of systemic oppression and marginalization (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Withers, 2012). Clare (2009) argued, "supercrip stories never focus on the conditions that make it so difficult … I don't mean medical conditions, I mean material, social, legal conditions.… The dominant story about disability should be ableism, not the inspirational supercrip crap" (p. 2). The critics argue that stories of individual overcoming veil the socio-political structures that actively marginalize and exclude those with non-normative embodiments. This veiling perpetuates ableist

structures and attitudes, undermines disability activist claims, and perpetuates life-effacing violences, poverty, and isolation faced by people experiencing disability (Clare, 2009; Longmore, 2003).

The medicalization of Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen is apparent in the focus on their impairments, but also in each athlete's focus on curing disability and illness. Such a focus reproduces the seemingly benevolent (yet eugenic) imperative to eradicate disability from society (Clare, 2009; Withers, 2012). It also constructs the medical-industrial complex as a savior rather than one of the greatest causes of direct and indirect violence for disabled people (e.g., institutionalization, experimentation, sterilization) (Withers, 2012). Further, these athletes' discourses of medical salvation are rarely tempered with discussions of more social strategies for increasing the life chances of those experiencing disability.

One exception to the above is that Hansen, Fox, and Fonyo have discussed the social impact of negative attitudes towards disability. One of Hansen's explicit marathon goals, for example, was "to raise awareness of the potential of people with disabilities" (RHF, 2009a). Undoubtedly, attitudes that equate disability with total inability contribute to isolation and marginalization. However, the sole focus on individual attitudes tends to efface the social structures that reproduce inequality and ableist attitudes (Withers, 2012). Further, raising awareness through overcoming near-impossible obstacles arguably puts the onus back onto individuals to overcome unfair social barriers instead of challenging governments to rectify barriers. Finally, the use of activist language by these athletes undermines politicized struggles to effect more radical, systemic change (CBC, 1987; Spade, 2011). The most glaring example of this is RHF's (2014b) call to action: "more needs to happen so that one day we can achieve a fully inclusive world where the wheelchair is obsolete." This implies that all disabled people will somehow be fully included in society through medically and eugenically wiping out all spinal cord injury.

In sum, the supercrip critique is useful for analyzing Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen's media representations because it unpacks how seemingly positive inspiration stories can negatively impact the life chances and social movements of people experiencing disability.

Enduring white supremacy, nationalism, and eugenics

In this final section, I offer a more historically contextualized, genealogical reading of Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen. This reading goes beyond the somewhat one-size-fits-all and disability-focused supercrip perspective that, while offering a social critique, tends to present a universalized interpretation of the negative impacts of contemporary inspirational stories. Through my genealogical analysis, I will demonstrate how the inspirational treatment of Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen was tied to Canadian histories of white settler colonialism, nationalism, eugenics, and neoliberalism. As a consequence of this, I argue, the celebration of these figures tends to perpetuate significant economic and political inequality for disabled, racialized, and colonized Canadians.

Genealogy was developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1980) as a deeply archival method of critique that "allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (p. 83). It provides much more complex retellings of the different power relations, discourses (e.g., different knowledge used to define race or Canadian nationalism), and subjectivities than do traditional, linear histories. In my genealogical doctoral dissertation, I studied over 200 archival documents (including Canadian Acts of Parliament, transcripts of political debates, academic journals, and newspapers), along with over 75 secondary historical sources, in order to trace the emergence of inspirational and physically fit disability from Canadian Confederation (1867) to contemporary times. The arguments I make herein draw from the penultimate chapter of my dissertation.

I begin my discussion below by demonstrating that the 1980s phenomenon of heroizing three fundraising disabled endurance athletes did not emerge out of nowhere. There are specific historical conditions—including discourses and power relations—that had to be in place to make this phenomenon possible and intelligible to Canadians, and that are, in turn, reproduced through the emergence of inspirational disability. The first of these conditions is the emergence and celebration of physically fit disability in Canada.

Physically fit disability and eugenics

Sport and physical exercise for people experiencing disability in Canada emerged during World War I (McKenzie, 1918; Wall, 2003). Such programs and practices were explicitly developed as techniques for rehabilitating injured soldiers, as well as for assisting in the state-supported project of eugenics. Eugenics is the nineteenth and twentieth century project of trying to improve the racial quality of future populations (McLaren, 1986). It was practiced through (often publically funded) programs for supporting the life and reproductive opportunities of certain "desirables" while curtailing the life and reproductive chances of "non-desirables" (McWhorter, 2009). The most famous examples of eugenic programs are forced sterilization laws in North America and the Holocaust in Germany.

The guiding logic behind eugenic programs was biological racism (Foucault, 1997; McWhorter, 2009). By the turn of the twentieth century the notion that there were separate "races" or species of humanity was replaced by an understanding that there was only one human race with some members thereof having evolved faster than others. The most developmentally advanced humans were understood to be able-bodied upper class Western Europeans with white skin. The increased supremacy of white people and the faster evolution of the human race, it was believed, would result from Europeans passing on their superior developmental traits through sexual reproduction. People with darker skin were conceptualized as less evolved (and thus more animalistic) and were thought to pass on their evolutionary "primitiveness" to their offspring. Similarly, those born with pale skin but understood to have congenital or

development disabilities were conceptualized as racial throwbacks threatening to degenerate white populations back to earlier (and lesser) forms of human existence. Their sexual reproduction thus threatened both human evolution and the supremacy of "whites." Eugenics, at its heart, was about protecting and supporting white supremacy, and to do so, social programs had to target and curtail the sexual reproduction of "racial throwbacks," both those with darker skin and congenital disabilities.

Schools played a pivotal role in helping to identify, target, and sexually segregate those deemed degenerate (McLaren, 1986). Early Canadian public schools were explicitly designed and celebrated as "a place of observation, a kind of 'Sorting House'" for Canada's youth (MacMurchy, 1907, p. 7). Due to the capacity of surveillance, and the gathering of youth with peers of similar developmental age, it enabled the quick recognition and removal of the "feeble-minded" and other racialized and disabled "degenerates" who seemed to develop less quickly than their peers. Once identified, these "degenerates" were sent to lifelong sex-segregated institutions where their reproduction could be stopped.

Physical education was celebrated as a particularly efficient eugenic sorting mechanism for schools, and thus for society. According to the Nova Scotia Journal of Education (1917), physical education classes were introduced between the wars as "a practical eugenics, which shall assist in the elimination of mental deficiency and preventable physical deformity" (p. 37). McKenzie (1909) argued that physical activity had enormous curative effects on youth with acquired (i.e., not racially degenerate) disabilities. He argued that such curative effects on white disabled boys could help to identify (and thus institutionalize) defectives who were fundamentally (i.e., racially) affected by "mental dullness, backwardness, arrested development or feeble-mindedness" (p. 210) and thus, could not be cured by physical activity. Physical fitness was considered a marker of racial fitness: a way to distinguish white disability from racial degeneracy.

Based on such racial assumptions, sport and exercise programs for (mostly) men with acquired physical disabilities boomed between the World War II and the mid 1970s, including the birth of the Paralympic Movement. Over this same period, institutionalization and forced sterilization of "degenerates" was on the rise, hitting their peaks in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1960s, however, Canada began to rebrand itself not as a superior white nation, but rather as a nation of superior Western tolerance: a compassionate, inclusive, and tolerant welfare state (Thobani, 2007). This led, for example, to the "liberalized," theoretically de-racialized, Immigration Act of 1968. Further, in the era of the United Nations' (1975) declaration of disability rights, forced sterilization was repealed in both Alberta and British Columbia, followed by the closing of many institutions in the 1980s (Jongbloed, 2003). In effect, the explicitly eugenic treatment of those deemed "degenerates" was no longer consistent with Canada's new self-image of compassionate tolerance. In this (barely) post-eugenic context of national tolerance, three Caucasian, physically fit male endurance athletes with minimal, acquired disabilities came to be national heroes and icons.

The fundraising-athon and colonialism

In the 1970s and beyond, benevolence, compassion, and tolerance were celebrated as signs of Canada's Western moral superiority: a trope that replaced explicit claims of white supremacy throughout North America (McWhorter, 2009; Thobani, 2007). As King (2006) argued, philanthropy was another way that Western moral superiority was constructed and reified in this period (King, 2006). Successful national fundraising-athon campaigns, she demonstrated, served to construct the moral value of the marathoner, the benevolence of each donor and, by extension, the moral superiority of the nation. She traced how fundraising-athons were first used by Western countries to raise funds to help impoverished "third world" (often racialized) countries. By the late 1970s, however, fundraising-athons came to be ubiquitously used by private disability charities in the United States, as a way for non-disabled Westerners to benevolently contribute to the dream of a future without disability.

Cross-Canada fundraising-athons, by the 1980s, were a weekly affair (Scrivener, 2000). Because of Canada's size, they offered a hyperbolic, media-worthy, spin on fundraising. They also, I argue, imbued the athlete-fundraiser with a host of exalted characteristics tied to auto-mythologies of Canadian exploration and colonization. Thobani (2007) described such auto-mythologies:

> tales of pristine rivers and virgin mountains … of harsh winters and wild forests … abound in the national imaginary, as do the stories of individual perseverance and triumph over nature. The forces of nature that shape the land are represented as also shaping the national character, cultivating a pioneering spirit and a noble perseverance in these subjects … as [Canadians] celebrated their mythologized relationship to the land, colonial violence was faded into insignificance … the relationship of the settler was constituted as primarily to the land, emptied of Aboriginal life.
>
> (pp. 59–60)

The cross-Canada disabled marathoner, I observe, is often celebrated through such colonial auto-mythologies, in particular for their "noble perseverance" over disability and over the vast and wild Canadian landscape, as well as its harsh climate. Fonyo's marathon, for example, was popularly narrated as "a battle against weather, an unforgiving landscape and a physical handicap" (Adams, 2010). Fox's discursive connection to Canada's natural obstacles was so great that a mountain was named in his honor (TFF, 2014a). Furthermore, Fox was also often constructed in relation to Canada's harsh climate, how: "he ran through ice storms and summer heat, against bitter winds of such velocity he couldn't move," (Scrivener, 2014b). A movie of his accomplishments was named *Into the Wind* (TFF, 2014a). Heroizing Fox and Fonyo through their climate-based perseverance harkens back to a paragraph in Canada's immigration legislation—between 1910 and 1952—which prohibited "immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada" ("Immigration Act," 1910, p. 218). Early biological race theorists posited that the harsh

Northern European climate had accelerated the development of whites in relation to southern, dark skinned others (McWhorter, 2009). I argue that such white supremacist discourses of climate tolerance continue to inform the heroic imagery of contemporary cross-Canada runners like Fox and Fonyo.

The connections between cross-Canada marathoners and European explorers are strengthened by the symbolism of the specific route Fox and Fonyo chose to run. Running eastward from Vancouver to Halifax is the shortest route between the two oceans: it hits all the biggest fundraising cities and places the predominant winds at the runner's back (Scrivener, 2000). Fox and Fonyo, however, both chose a harder, less lucrative, yet more patriotic route. They started in St. John's, Newfoundland—the place where European's first "discovered" North America—then ran westward, like the explorers before them, towards Vancouver, British Columbia.

Notably, Hansen also chose to finish his tour with an east to west cross-Canada journey. More explicitly, Hansen helped Canadians construct themselves as a model of superior Western tolerance, inclusion, and morality as compared to "backward" non-Western societies. In Hansen's words: "every country we travel through just reinforces more that [Canadians] are a very, very fortunate people … I think we should all sit back and be thankful for what we have" (CBC, 1985a). Not surprisingly, China became the ideal "Other" for Canadian comparison. One CBC reporter argued: "in a country where the handicapped are still often left without help … Hansen says he hopes his determination will help the Chinese to change their attitude towards the handicapped" (CBC, 1986a). In this way, Hansen not only assured Canadians of their moral superiority, but also served as a benevolent white savior helping to civilize and enlighten the (racially and morally) less progressive Chinese people.

When read together, I argue that Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen's marathons were each celebrated partially as neo-colonial journeys of noble white perseverance, enlightenment, and supremacy. Each symbolic reconquering reproduces auto-mythologies of noble exploration, and naturalizes white settler claims to the land while effacing a national history (and present) of horrific colonial and eugenic violence.

Terry Fox: ordinary anti-separatist whiteness

Fox did not become a national icon simply because of this colonial imagery and journey. There were other important factors, which took time to fully form. Journalists, politicians, and the public remained largely indifferent to Fox for the first two and a half months of his four and half month run (Scrivener, 2000). Fox was especially ignored as he ran through the highly populated French-speaking province of Quebec. He became increasingly vocal about his disdain and intolerance for their growing separatist movement, their culture, their language, and their ambivalence to him. He wrote: "apparently they can't speak English. Maybe they also don't get cancer" (in Scrivener, 2000, p. 94). As he crossed from Quebec to Ontario, a cancer fundraiser named Vigars capitalized on this disdain,

selling Fox through the "circus-like" atmosphere of the freakshow (p. 93) mixed with the inspirational discourses of ordinary Canadianness and national unity. Although Fox refused to wear any corporate logos, he ran with a map of a unified Canada and a maple leaf on his shirt. In a time of rampant Quebec separatism and anti-Quebec sentiment, this map and maple leaf would have been the most important logos of all.

Fox was used to sell the unified Canadian nation-state more than cancer research. His various tributes and monuments speak to this. Scrivener (2000) wrote that after Fox's death, "his run, like Canada's motto, would be from sea to shining sea" (p. 6): a much more nationalist and unifying tribute than the literal reality that he would run from sea to Thunder Bay, Ontario. Fox's Thunder Bay monument, similarly reads: "Terry Fox inspired an entire generation of Canadians … it was through his strength and commitment that they were united as they had never been united before" (as cited in Chivers, 2009, p. 86). The monument "was designed, joining east with west, proudly displaying all provincial and territorial coats-of-arms" (Scrivener, 2014a). His memorials, Chivers (2009) noted, use Fox's transCanadian run to reaffirm the naturalness of a united nation-state. This despite the fact, she continued, that Fox's failure to pass into Western Canada could have just as well been used to symbolize the many federal failures of the era to fully incorporate and appease both east and west.

Ontario marketers and journalists played up Fox's symbolism of a united Canada, but also increasingly profited by constructing him as an ordinary Canadian with "a handsome face, perfect teeth and curly hair, and … one [amputated] leg" (i.e., middle class, white, non-degenerate, Anglophone, and an Anglo-Saxon national). Although ordinariness may seem like a step backwards for a hero, Thobani (2007) argued "the figure of the national subject is … exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores" (p. 3). Further, the ordinary Canadian has been widely theorized as a discourse that refers to, while invisibilizing, the assumption of whiteness, particularly when the phrase is used to contrast and demean "special interest groups" and their demands for equality and social change (Brodie, 1995). Constructing Fox as an ordinary Canadian, thus, distanced him from degenerate (racialized) disability as well as activist disability-related "special interest" groups. Fox was ordinary, in part, because "he didn't blame anyone … he didn't expect special privileges" (Scrivener, 2000).

This production of Fox's inspirational ordinariness was accomplished through describing, at length, his normal middle-class childhood, his "down-to-earth, solid and dependable" family, and his suburban home with a carved moose on the mantel and velvet pillows under plastic (Scrivener, 2000, p. 14). His biographer introduced Fox in the following manner:

> Terry saw himself as an ordinary person, average in everything but his determination. His tastes were simple. He loved sports, and admired two hockey players in particular.… He was close to his family. He appreciated pretty girls and enjoyed inspirational poetry. He was a loyal friend.

> He worked hard for everything he achieved. He was touched by the spontaneity of small children. He believed in national unity, and was puzzled by the efforts of the province of Quebec to separate from Canada.
>
> (Scrivener, 2000, p. 9)

In the above quote, Fox's ordinariness is produced through his superior white work ethic and loyalty, his caring white family, his love for the great (white) Canadian sport of ice-hockey, his simple middle class-yet-intellectual tastes, his heteronormative desires and cares, and his disdain for Quebec.

Fox's inspirational ordinariness thus imbued him with celebrated national characteristics of whiteness, and—importantly—projected his characteristics and accomplishments onto other Canadian nationals. Ordinary (Anglo)Canadians could strengthen their own identification with these same characteristics. They could further exalt themselves as a caring, compassionate, and tolerant people for the very fact that they were heroizing a disabled person. This heroization of Fox ballooned over the remaining two months of his run, multiplying upon Fox's death in 1981. Canadian flags flew at half-mast when he died. The CTV national news anchor, Lloyd Robertson, reported:

> to me he embodied the best of the Canadian spirit. We are a generous people, fair-minded, not stridently patriotic, but deeply proud of our country. And we're courageous when we have to be—just like him. He was our hero. He was one of us—a true-grit Canadian.
>
> (as cited in Scrivener, 2000, p. 228)

As Robertson articulated so clearly, what Canadians loved and love most about Terry Fox is that he assures ordinary Canadians of their superior white work ethic, generosity, humility, and courage. Further, Fox serves to reproduce discourses about the superior, compassionate, and tolerant Canadian culture, while effacing histories of colonialism and eugenics and undermining movements for structural equality. Perhaps above all, in an era marked by Quebec separatism, and followed by Aboriginal land claims, Fox reaffirms both the supremacy and the legitimacy of the united Anglo-Canadian nation-state.

Steve Fonyo: Fox's shadow

Three years after Fox's death, Fonyo sought to retrace and complete Fox's cross-Canada route from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Despite sharing the same route, similar amputation, and past illness, Fonyo was never embraced with the same patriotism and exaltation as Fox (Chivers, 2009). In a 1985 Maclean's article, for example, Fox is posthumously described as "a gifted athlete, university-educated and articulate man of easy charm" (i.e., an intelligent, physically superior middle class white Canadian), while Fonyo is designated as "a grade ten dropout who has difficulty expressing himself," and a brash, uppity, and uncouth immigrant (Tierney quoted in Chivers, 2009, p. 89). Fonyo, unlike Fox,

could never pass as an ordinary national. He was too under-educated and poor to pass as middle class. His Hungarian immigrant parents were too Eastern European to be considered entirely white or to be imagined as partaking in superior Western morality. In addition, Fonyo's struggles with school and his inarticulate speech colluded with his immigrant status leading numerous journalists to pathologize Fonyo as having inferior intelligence and learning disabilities (i.e., degenerate disability) (Saddy, 2013). He may have been athletic, but he was not entirely intelligible as physically (and racially) fit. Despite rampant racialization and pathologization of Fonyo, by the time he made it through the difficult Rocky Mountains to Vancouver Fonyo was subject to some measure of inspirational overcoming discourses and accolades (Chivers, 2009).

Compared to Fox, however, such accolades are quite minimal. Fonyo has no commemorative statues, coins, or mountains to his name. He is the namesake of only two roads and a beach ("Steve Fonyo," 2014). To my knowledge, he has never been credited with "inspiring an entire generation" or for "uniting a country" (Chivers, 2009, p. 86) despite the fact that Fonyo actually did manage to run "from sea to shining sea" (Scrivener, 2000, p. 6). Rather, he was constructed as an unnatural Canadian, and after his fallout with the law, as unCanadian: an immigrant, an outsider, a wasted life, and a degenerate. Fonyo not only ran in Fox's shadow, he was constructed as the dark, racialized antithesis to Fox's shining white heroism.

Rick Hansen: neoliberal disabled hero

When Rick Hansen wheeled across the world (1985–1987) in his Man in Motion Tour, he was constructed—like Fox—as a white, physically fit Canadian with an acquired disability. His whiteness was constructed largely through silence. Unlike Fonyo, no one wrote about where Hansen's parents were from or how well he had done in school. He seemed to have an ordinary past other than the (constantly narrated) accident that broke his spinal cord. In short, Hansen was too racially fit to be compared to Fonyo.

Hansen also differed from Fox in ways that impacted their political effects. First, Hansen's tour was devoid of national unity discourses. Rather—as discussed above—his travels spoke to the moral superiority of the Canadian nation compared to non-Westerners. The second difference was that Hansen's campaign was much more influenced by the techniques of neoliberalism: some of which Fox fought adamantly against. Spade (2011) argued that neoliberalism is a political, economic, and discursive shift characterized by increasing "privatization, trade liberalization, labor and environmental deregulation, the elimination of health and welfare programs" (pp. 33–34). The generalized effect of neoliberalism, he argued, is "an over-all upward distribution of wealth and drastically decreased life chances for poor people" including a grossly over representative proportion of racialized and disabled people (p. 34).

The most notable example of neoliberalism within Hansen's Man in Motion Tour is his rampant use of corporate sponsorship. This neoliberal tactic of

intensive corporate-charity collaboration was so new in Canada that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) (1986b) spent an entire investigative reporting segment explaining Hansen's use of it. The reporters explained how the symbiotic relationship of charitable sponsorship works. They displayed the names of multinational supporters (McDonalds, Nike, Esso, Ford), whose large logos are plastered across Hansen's clothing, wheelchair, and van in exchange for logistical and personal financial contributions. This use of sponsorship is in sharp contrast to Fox, who was adamantly anti-logo and believed that no one should make money off of cancer (Scrivener, 2000). Hansen, unlike Fox, had no ethical quandary with profiting off of charity. The CBC reporter (1986b) continued: "[Hansen] says the arrangement between him and his corporate sponsors is not only necessary, it's good: for him, for them, and ultimately for disabled people." Such arrangements continue to profit Hansen, who makes upwards of $350,000 per year through the RHF charity, and recently donated his name to his charity for a $1.8 million tax receipt (Baines, 2012). Further, the neoliberal Mulroney Government of the late 1980s used Hansen as a neoliberal poster-child for the Canadian meritocracy to further argue for the public good of privatization. Of note, the Mulroney Government donated $1 million to Hansen in the midst of massive neoliberal austerity cuts to disability supports and services (CBC, 1987).

Enduring inspiration

I began this chapter by introducing three disabled Canadian endurance athletes who are popularly represented as inspirations for all Canadians to overcome life's obstacles. I followed by applying the supercrip critique to these inspirational stories and outlining the disabling effects of such seemingly positive portrayals. Inspiration contributes to the enduring forces of ableism through downplaying accomplishments, creating unrealistic expectations, and depoliticizing disability through medicalization.

The more contextual, genealogical analysis that I developed in the final section offered some insight into why such figures emerged and their different impacts upon a wide range of subjects and social forces—not all of which are obviously related to disability. Based on my reading, Fox, Fonyo, and Hansen, collectively, served to exalt Canadian nationals for their superior perseverance: a mythological white quality that—along with the myth of meritocracy—continues to justify political and economic inequalities, particularly in relation to racialized and pathologized populations (Thobani, 2007). Their heroization also served to exalt Canadians for their superior (white) Western morality, which not only served as a politically correct rearticulation of white supremacy but also enabled Canadians to ignore, and reproduce "the 'actual inequality and exploitation' that disabled people in Canada ordinarily experience" (Chivers, 2006, p. 82). Such spectacles of benevolence and tolerance effaced and/or justified numerous state violences of the 1980s to present, including: immigration laws that refuse entrance to disabled subjects; neo-eugenic practices of incarceration and birth

control that target disabled, poor, racialized, and Aboriginal populations; and, neoliberal austerity cuts that further impoverish, criminalize, institutionalize, and threaten the survival of racialized, pathologized, and colonized people in Canada. The inspirationalization of physically fit, white, disabled male endurance athletes, thus, helped to immunize privileged, white Anglo-Canadians against activist attempts to challenge the enduring violence and uneven distribution of life chances that characterize the "unified" settler colonial nation-state of Canada.

Notes

1 I use the term *experiencing disability* to refer to a range of biological, psychological, social, and political phenomena. I also use the terminology of those I am citing, including the politically correct *persons with disability*, and the explicitly political *disabled person*.

2 The term *running* continues to define marathons and other endurance events that have long been inclusive of athletes who use enabling technologies such as single-leg prostheses (e.g., Fox and Fonyo) and manual wheelchairs (e.g., Hansen). Thus, although all three can be understood as *endurance runners*, I use the less ableist and more inclusive term *endurance athletes*.

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