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(Dis)empowering Paralympic histories: Absent athletes and disabling discourses

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Through sport, its ideals and activities, the IPC seeks the continuous global promotion of the values of the Paralympic Movement, with a vision of inspiration and empowerment. (International Paralympic Committee 2003, 4)

...every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history. (Foucault 2003, 360)

Introduction

In a brochure published in 2003, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) set out their current mission, vision and values. The purpose of the Paralympic Movement, it states, is not to promote sport, but rather to use sport for “the continuous global promotion of the values of the Paralympic Movement” (IPC 2003, 4). The promotion of Paralympic values at a global level, has been operationalized through increased marketing efforts, greater media exposure, more formalized ties with the Olympics, and an institutional focus on expansion, “especially in developing countries” (IPC 2003, 4, see also Bailey 2008; Howe 2008). Given the deliberate propagation, popularization and globalization of the Paralympic Movement, it is crucial to critically

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analyze the discourses and discursive effects that Paralympism promotes, produces and reproduces.

In this paper, I analyze contemporary discourses about the Paralympic Movement with a focus on how they narrate the past. What kinds of stories must one tell about the past in order to make 21st century Paralympism, and its claims of “empowerment and inspiration” (IPC 2003, 4), make sense? By analyzing discourses that are necessary for the production of the Paralympic Movement, I am also analyzing the discourses that must be reproduced by the Movement in order for it to reproduce itself.

For the sake of scope, I limit this analysis to discourses that appear within the only two book-length histories of the Paralympic Movement yet published: Steadward and Peterson’s (1997) *Paralympics: Where heroes come*, and Bailey’s (2008) *Athlete first: A history of the Paralympic Movement*. Although I focus on these two texts, I begin with a short personal narrative about my own ambivalent experiences as a Paralympian and poster-child. I start here in order to situate myself as the analyst, as well as a producer and a product of Paralympic discourses. In so doing, I hope to emphasize the necessary, mutually dependent elements of Paralympic discourses, which include: progressive, empowering and benevolent able-bodied experts; heroic, empowered, and grateful Paralympians; and tragic, passive and anonymous disabled.¹

¹ I use the term *disabled* with two very clear intentions. First, contrary to the intent of person-first language, what I am describing is a subjectivity that revolves around disability and not around personhood. Secondly, I wish to signal the active construction of disability, showing that subjects are being *disabled* by the discourses of the Paralympic Movement. I also use various other terms for disability throughout this paper. These include terminology used by recently quoted sources, as well as the more theoretically interpretable term, *person experiencing disability*. In my lack of consistency, as in my use of this last term, I intend to highlight the contextual, constructed, disparate and fluctuating conglomeration of bodily and social interactions that gets classified as disability.

Pedestals and pitfalls: A Paralympian's narrative

I read the newspaper articles and press releases that others have written about me. I read my own grant applications, speeches and business cards. I read myself defined, in each of these, by one word: not cripp, queer, athlete, activist, student, woman or lesbian, but Paralympian. I read my life story transformed into that of *The Paralympian*. I see my origins declared, not at the moment of my birth, but at some tragic moment of my physical disablement. I read my new coherent life narrative: my salvation from the depths of disability by the progressive, benevolent empowerment of sport. My destiny reads as a coming of age. I am the heroic Paralympian: pedestal, medal and all.

I realize the ways that this pedestalled narrative has paid off for me: the grants, the speaking gigs, the looks of awe, and the postponement of pity. I read deeper, and I realize its costs. I see how it renders me anonymous just as it renders me famous. I feel how it renders me passive, so that it can empower me (Linton 1998; Nelson 1994; Titchkosky 2007). I realize how the pedestal turns the social inequality of disability into something to overcome, rather than something to challenge and change (Hardin and Hardin 2003; Schell and Rodriguez 2001; Shapiro 1994). I realize how the heroic Paralympian relies on discourses of the pitiful cripple who can't overcome, and the burdensome gimp won't (Clare 2001; Hardin and Hardin 2004; Linton 2006). I realize how these discourses serve to set us apart, whether up on the pedestal or down in the gutter: they enable others not to look us in the eye, they induce us not to look into each other's, and they encourage us not to look inside of ourselves.

This individual Paralympian's story is neither benign nor isolated from larger narratives of Paralympic history. In many ways, it is inseparable from the two published

Paralympic histories that I am about to critique. I am implicated in Paralympic histories at the same time as I am an implication of them. These histories construct me as the tragic-gimp-turned-heroic-Paralympian, and this identity serves, in turn, to reproduce these stories about Paralympism. In analyzing these histories, I seek to challenge my own unified identity, I seek to trouble my own disabling stories, and I seek a more intimate relationship to resistance.

Covers and titles: A surface analysis of two Paralympic histories

On the surface, there are a number of differences between Steadward and Peterson's (1997) *Paralympics: Where heroes come (Paralympics)* and Bailey's (2008) *Athlete first: A history of the Paralympic Movement (Athlete first)*. Most notably, *Athlete first* has the distinct feel of an academic textbook, while *Paralympics* seems more like a book one would store on one's coffee table. While the former has only sixteen black and white photographs to break up the small print, the latter is filled with hundreds of glossy, full-color photographs and larger font. Additionally, *Paralympics* offers complex and detailed accounts of the Movement's conflicts, power struggles, and domineering personalities, while *Athlete first* offers a more simplified, linear, and accessible narrative. Another key difference is that Paralympic history is the subject of all 280 pages of *Athlete first*, while only 154 of *Paralympics*' 260 pages deals with Paralympic history. As such, I limit my analysis to the first 154 pages of *Paralympics*, but analyze all of *Athlete first*. The last significant difference that I address is that of author credibility, an issue addressed in the "forward" sections of both books. Dr. Robert Steadward, the primary author of *Paralympics*, is constructed as having insider's credibility, both as an academic in the field of Adapted Physical Activity and as the founding president of the

International Paralympic Committee (Steadward and Peterson 1997, 9). In contrast, Dr. Steve Bailey, author of *Athlete first*, is constructed as credible due to his outsider's objectivity and his professional expertise as a sports historian.

Although clearly different in their intended audiences, range of content and authorial perspectives, *Paralympics* and *Athlete first* share remarkably similar discourses and discursive effects. These discursive similarities are present in many aspects of the books, but perhaps none so symbolic as their front covers. Both front covers feature remarkably similar photographs of Paralympians in action: both feature a skier, a goalball player, and a track athlete, while *Athlete first* includes an equestrian and two soccer players, and *Paralympics* includes a diver. Above these photographs, the titles proclaim either the athletes' heroism, in the case of *Paralympics: Where heroes come*, or their centrality, in the case of *Athlete first: A history of the Paralympic Movement*. Although these titles and photographs explicitly represent Paralympians as active, empowered and central to the Paralympic Movement, they also serve, more implicitly, to construct Paralympians as passive, disabled, and marginal.

One example of how Paralympians are implicitly constructed is that eight out of the nine photographs that adorn these two front covers feature clearly discernable markers of disability. Whether through the marked absence of limbs, or the marked presence of a wheelchair, sit-ski, or blindfold, the reader is able to quickly identify the disabling difference of every athlete except for, perhaps, the soccer players. As DePauw (1997) argues in her analysis of visual representations of athletes with disabilities, the "visibility of disability" acts as a kind of caveat, lowering expectations of the athlete's abilities and re-centering their disability-based (as opposed to athlete-based) identities

(424). The hyper-visibility of disability allows the athletes to be read within the context of common stereotypes about the inability and passivity of disabled bodies. These covers also play to disabling stereotypes by rendering the athletes in the photographs anonymous; nowhere in either book are photographed athletes named or otherwise acknowledged. Although the covers are plastered with photographs of Paralympians, individual Paralympians, and their accomplishments, are completely absent.

Given this marginalization of athletes, it is hard to miss the (presumably unintended) irony of the title *Athlete first*. However, the discursive importance of the title *Paralympics: Where heroes come*, may be less obvious. As explained in Steadward and Peterson's (1997) preface, this title was inspired by an advertising slogan for the 1996 Paralympics: "the Olympics is where heroes are made. The Paralympics is where heroes come" (8). The first sentence of this slogan articulates the active process through which specific athletic achievements during Olympic competition earn certain able-bodied Olympians their heroic status. The second sentence contrasts this active and specific heroism against the passive, generalized heroism bestowed upon all Paralympians, regardless of their accomplishments or actions. This contrast downplays Paralympians, in comparison to Olympians, in the following terms: their athleticism; the relevance of their achievements and identities; and the importance of their training, strategizing, organizing, innovation and resistance. According to this quote, Paralympians need only appear disabled and appear at the event in order to be considered heroic. Thus, both the titles and cover photographs of both books construct the Paralympian as passive and disabled, as well as marginal to Paralympic history.

Constructing origins: Tragedy and paternity

The relationship between the explicit discourses of Paralympic empowerment, and their implicit disabling effects, is also evident in the origin narratives of both texts. Both *Paralympics* and *Athlete first* claim that the Paralympic Movement began in 1944 when Dr. Ludwig Guttmann began working with paralyzed war veterans at Stoke Mandeville, England. Steadward and Peterson go so far as to hail him as “the father of the Paralympic Movement,” (Steadward and Peterson 1997, 21). Both books construct Guttmann as primarily responsible for igniting hope, through sport, in a population that they represent as unequivocally tragic, hopeless, passive, and as good as dead. This population is signified, in *Paralympics*, through the description of Guttmann’s alleged inspiration: a big, strong (anonymous) soldier with a spinal cord injury, who was put at the end of the ward to die (21). In *Athlete first*, this population is first introduced in the second chapter, entitled, “An Air of Hopelessness,” which begins with quote in which Guttmann describes paraplegia as, “one of the most devastating calamities in human life” (Guttmann qtd. in Bailey 2008, 13). In order, presumably, to attribute these tragic origins to the wide range of current Paralympians, Bailey (2008) confidently, and without citation, claims that: “this description can equally be applied to many other debilitating causes that so radically affect the mobility and functioning of individuals in society” (Bailey 2008, 13). In this way, Bailey constructs all forms of disability as unequivocally tragic problems rooted in bodies of individuals.

Both books further marginalize those with disabilities by focusing on Guttmann’s 1944 sport programs as the origin of Paralympism. This move downplays the importance of competitive sports that were being organized by members of Deaf communities by

1888, that were practiced in schools for the blind by 1909, and that were invented by inmates of Stoke Mandeville before Guttmann even began his sporting programs there (DePauw 2005; Goodman 1986; Howe 2008; Legg et al. 2004). Although both histories briefly mention some of these events, they do not treat them as significant enough to challenge the Guttmann's paternal role or to call into question the passivity of athletes within the Movement.

Furthermore, constructing Guttmann as Father of the Paralympic Movement conceals significant social shifts that contributed to the construction of disability as sites of both tragedy and potential athletic rehabilitation. These developments include: post-war urbanization and industrialization; increased state control over the health and productivity of populations; the construction and popularization of statistical (ab)normality; and the institutionalization of medicine's power over defining, treating, discovering and controlling disabilities (Davis 2006; Foucault 2003; Linton 2006; Tremain 2005). These developments are the contexts within which we must read how the Paralympics, and its origin narratives, became both possible and intelligible.

Guttmann is not only the paternal figure of these Paralympic origin narratives, but he is also their primary source of information. Both histories rely almost exclusively on the words of Guttmann, as sometimes paraphrased by his biographers or friends, to characterize the lives of all those experiencing disability in the first half of the twentieth century. It is assumed that, because Guttmann is both able-bodied, and a doctor, he has no personal stake in how those with disabilities are represented. However, if the pre-Paralympic disabled were not represented as wholly tragic, they would not seem in need of rescuing, and by extension, Guttmann and his movement could not claim to be wholly

responsible for their empowerment and salvation. It is only by acknowledging what is at stake in discourses of tragic origins, or through providing alternate sources about them, that we can challenge the tragedy embedded in Guttman's descriptions of those who: "dragged out their lives as useless and hopeless cripples [*sic*], unemployable and unwanted... with no incentive or encouragement to return to a useful life" (Guttman qtd. in Bailey 2008, 14). Unfortunately, the authors of both texts fail to acknowledge which egos, institutions, and worldviews this prioritization of sources, and its resulting construction of tragedy, might serve, and to whom it potentially does a grave disservice. They fail to consider how pre-Paralympic 'cripples' actively interpreted and differentially navigated their own lives. Did they all really live without hope? Did they feel like useless and unwanted burdens on their loved ones? By contrast, did many find joy, hope and use in their lives as lovers, parents, friends, thinkers, teachers, artists, organizers, and perhaps even revolutionaries?

As argued above, the origin narratives within both texts marginalize larger social contexts and those experiencing disabilities, in order to prioritize Guttman's paternity and to (re)produce an unequivocally tragic and disabled pre-Paralympian. As stated in my introduction, however, the purpose of this paper is not to make new truth claims about the past, but rather to analyze how the stories constructed about Paralympic history help make twenty-first century Paralympic discourses and practices make sense. It is important to note, therefore, that this tragic origin discourse does not end where Guttman's Paralympic dream begins. That is, the Paralympic Movement did not remedy the tragedy of disability, but rather, it continually reproduces the figure of the tragic disabled in order to reproduce itself. As Hardin (2004) argues, this discourse is

reproduced in every news story about the heroic Paralympian who overcomes their tragic disabled fate, and in each comparison of this Paralympian to those who have not overcome. This discourse also weaves its way through most celebrations and justifications of disability sport, such as that offered by Steadward and Peterson (1997): “as soon as the community sees the person with a disability participating in sports, that person is looked on as an equal member of society, not as an appendage” (15). Through this statement, the authors seek to justify and reproduce Paralympic institutions with explicit claims of emancipation for athletes with disabilities. In order to make this claim of emancipation, however, the authors must reproduce a not-so-emancipated alternative: the non-sporty, or pre-sporty, tragic disabled ‘appendage’.

The most recent area where discourses of tragic disability have come to be used is in the institutionalized push to expand the Paralympic Movement, “especially in developing countries” (IPC 2003, 4). It is in this growing Paralympic priority that discourses about tragic disability collude with colonialist and racist discourses about the (under)developed and the (un)civilize (Darnell 2007; Landry 1995). For example, Bailey paraphrases one such discussion at the 1994 Paralympic Congress, led by prominent Paralympic organizer Carl Wang. Bailey (2008) writes: “Wang went on to decry the situation in developing countries, where millions of persons with a disability were being denied even the simplest trimmings of a civilized society” (Bailey 2008, 158). This call to action uses tragic origin discourses about those needing sporting salvation to reproduce the colonial benevolence of able-bodied Western experts, and to justify their paternalistic involvement in the ‘betterment’ of other cultures. At the same time, the argument uses colonialist discourses to justify institutional Paralympic expansion, to reproduce tragic

disability, and to efface the economic, social and structural ‘trimmings’ still being ‘denied’ to millions of ‘persons with a disability’ in the so-called developed world.

Progressive empowerment of/over Paralympians

Paralympics and *Athlete first* share a celebratory narrative that begins with the original tragedy of disability and steadily progresses, through institutionalization and expertise, toward ever-increasing levels of athlete empowerment. The great irony of this progressive empowerment discourse is that it serves to disempower athletes in at least five overlapping ways: it reproduces the tragic disabled object; it effaces the actions and stories of athletes; it prioritizes those credited for empowering the athletes; it undermines athlete resistance; and it justifies the increased use of power over and against Paralympians.

I have discussed the first three of these five disempowering elements in other sections of this paper, so I only discuss them briefly here. First, these empowerment discourses require the continuous reproduction of the tragic and passive disabled. Without this needy and powerless disabled population, volunteers and experts would not seem so benevolent, empowerment would not seem so necessary, and the discourse of athletes being passive recipients of empowerment would not seem so rational. Second, these empowerment discourses reproduce the passivity of Paralympians by marginalizing their stories within Paralympic histories. These histories use athlete images, praise their technologies, and add up their records, but omit their names, their stories of innovation, and their stories of excellence. Athletes enjoy a central role within the empowerment discourse, but only as the generalized, anonymous and passive Paralympians for whom,

and to whom, named, able-bodied subjects procure and provide empowerment. This leads us to the third disempowering element of empowering discourses: the predominant focus on the decisions, actions and sacrifices of the volunteers, experts and institutions of empowerment. The focus on these subjects, not unlike the earlier focus on Guttmann's paternity, marginalizes athletes' actions and voices, thereby leaving disabling discourses uncontested.

All three of these overlapping elements of disempowerment are easily discernable in Steadward and Peterson's (1997) claim that, "the story of the Paralympic Games is the story of volunteers, thousands and thousands of volunteers, who over the years have made tremendous sacrifices to improve the lives of those with disabilities" (8). This quote clearly prioritizes the role of volunteers in the movement, includes Paralympians only as the object of the volunteers' actions, and represents these Paralympians, not as athletes, but as "those with disabilities" who require and inspire "tremendous sacrifices" (Steadward and Peterson 1997, 8). Likewise, in the preface of *Athlete first*, Bailey (2008) claims that the Paralympic Movement was advanced by, "highly dedicated individuals passionately expressing their vision of the future for athletes with a disability" (xvii). Again, the author centralizes the role of those acting for athletes while marginalizing the role of the athletes themselves. Bailey does not explicitly construct the Paralympian to be as passive and tragic as Steadward and Peterson do. However, his marginalization of the athlete's importance in the Movement implicitly reproduces (and relies upon) the discourse of disabled passivity. In both cases, the athlete is central to the explicit discourse of progressive empowerment, but only as the passive object that is acted upon.

The fourth disempowering element of the progressive empowerment discourse is

the undermining, silencing, and downplaying of athlete resistance. This reaction to resistance is not surprising given the marginalization of athletes' stories in general. It is also not surprising given that actual resistance throws discourses of Paralympic passivity and expert benevolence radically into question. This becomes evident when athletes, or others experiencing disabilities, unite and resist within the Paralympic Movement. In these cases, Paralympic histories do not represent those resisting as empowered, knowledgeable, and experienced subjects with legitimate or important critiques. Instead, both *Athlete first* and *Paralympics* represent them as misguided, ignorant dissenters who pose a threat to the Movement and to themselves. This attitude is illustrated by Bailey's (2008) following argument: "the extent of negativity existing within the community of persons with disability was ironic, and also a factor in slowing the initial development of the Paralympic Movement" (12). Bailey construes the disability communities' objections to the Paralympic Movement as ironic because he presumes that athletes were foolishly acting against their own best interest: that they were acting against those more knowledgeable experts who were empowering them, despite themselves. In this way, Bailey dismisses the legitimacy and productivity of athlete resistance by representing it as ironic negativity that is counterproductive to the cause of athlete empowerment.

Similar themes are apparent in Bailey's narrative about the 1992 Korean boccia team. During the medal ceremony, the team members threw their bronze medals to the ground to protest a new "sport-specific rule" (Bailey 2008, 127). Bailey recounts, in detail, the agitated deliberations that purportedly led to the Paralympic executive committee's decision to ban these athletes for their entire lives (as compared to the four year ban issued for a positive steroid test that same week). He then recounts how the ban

was eventually lifted due largely to arguments that it was not “humane” to ban athletes who were so “severely disabled” (Bailey 2008, 127). Bailey’s narrative shows how the Paralympic experts explicitly set out to undermine resistance through extreme sanctions, and then implicitly undermined athlete power through discourses of tragic disability.

What Bailey predictably omits in his detailed, half-page retelling of this story, however, are: the athletes names; details about what it was that they were protesting; their goals for protest; why they had to resort to protest; their reactions to the sanctions; and whether the protest was regarded by the protestors as successful. Bailey undermines the legitimacy of this resistance by omitting the stories of those resisting, and by superseding the story of resistance by the story of expert sanctions.

My final example of the undermining of athlete resistance is Steadward and Peterson’s (1997) celebration of how Steadward “narrowly averted” a potential catastrophe during his reign as the President of the International Paralympic Committee (Steadward and Peterson 1997, 86). The event occurred at the end of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, where a large number of athletes were preparing a peaceful protest in regards to their second-class treatment at the games. Steadward (2007) recalls:

the athletes were so angry with regard to the village: the lack of bedding, the dirty accommodations, food lineups or no food ... that they were going to hold a protest at closing ceremonies. This would have been quite a spectacle and public embarrassment for the host committee. I only found out about the protest 20 minutes before I was going down to make a speech at the Closing Ceremonies. I had people go down onto the field and bring back to me the athletes who were leading this protest (86).

Having used his authority to successfully undermine the protest, Steadward further disempowered the athlete-leaders by reminding them of their marginal role within the Movement: “you have provided great entertainment and some great thrills for us; let’s not spoil it and put a black mark against yourselves in these Games” (Steadward and Peterson

1997, 86). In one succinct phrase, Steadward manages to construct these leaders as mere objects of entertainment, while threatening them with the consequences of further resistance. As the historians retelling this story, Steadward and Peterson further undermine the resistance effort by presenting it as an unequivocal victory, wherein the authoritative expert managed to save the Movement from embarrassment, and the misguided athletes from themselves.

These stories demonstrate how resistance is undermined, in Paralympic histories, through omission, and through collusion with discourses of disabled tragedy, Paralympian passivity, expert primacy, and athlete empowerment. These stories also showcase how these very same discourses justify the authoritarian and paternalistic actions of Paralympic experts in undermining athlete resistance. This brings us to the fifth disempowering element of empowerment discourses: its function of justifying the increasingly numerous and invasive technologies of power being exercised over the images, bodies, careers and consciences of Paralympians.

Almost all athletes are subjected to a battery of disciplinary technologies. These include conditional playing time, team selection, training systems of punishment and reward, and disciplinary decisions by both game officials and sport administrators (Markula and Pringle 2006; Shogan 1999). Not only are athletes in disability sport subjected to these disciplinary technologies, they are also often subjected to the following: disability-based labeling; the enforcement of disability-based role expectations; discretionary assigning of necessary and expensive equipment; induced participation in the coach's or administrator's academic research on disability; and, most notably, classification (Howe 2008; Williams 1994).

Classification is one of the earliest and most binding forms of authority to which aspiring Paralympians must submit themselves. Classification is a process whereby experts determine the level of an athlete's (dis)function and thereby assign him/her permanently to an appropriate category of competition, assuming an appropriate category exists (DePauw and Gavron 2005; Nixon 1984). Various (mostly able-bodied) experts create, modify and eliminate these categories based on their ideas about fairness, about what is disabled enough, and about what will improve the efficiency, economic viability or entertainment value of the games (Howe 2008; Howe and Jones 2006; Rayes 2000). These subjective deliberations create objectified categories of disability, and objectify the individuals that they classify as *having* such disabilities. These deliberations may also have other significant consequences to which athletes have no recourse, such as: placing athletes in categories where they are not competitive; deeming an athlete too able to compete; discontinuing an event for an entire classification of athletes because they are not seen as competitive; or submitting athletes to conditions in which they feel that they must under-perform in order to continue competing.²

As athletes move toward more elite levels of participation, one might expect that their increased 'empowerment' would lead to increased autonomy over their bodies and their sports. To the contrary, elite Paralympians are increasingly subjected to surveillance and potential sanctions in order to both maximize their empowerment and to protect them (and other athletes) from the dangerous consequences of this empowerment. A prime

² Many have accused athletes of purposely under-performing in order to be classified into a category that gives them a competitive advantage (or that allows them to compete at all) (Bailey 2008; Steadward and Peterson 1997). They may also under-perform in order to keep races (or games) close. Events won by large margins, especially in competitions involving women and those deemed to have more *severe* disabilities, are considered non-competitive, and by extension, neither elite nor entertaining. Dominating wins, therefore, are often rewarded with the cancellation of the event in question, with little chance of it ever reappearing (Howe 2008; Howe and Jones 2006; Rayes 2000).

example of this logic is the 1993 International Paralympic medical sub-committee's argument for increased powers of surveillance and sanctioning. Due to increases in the elitism and commitment of Paralympians, they argued, "most athletes... would jeopardize their present and future health for victory. It is our duty, therefore, to protect them from themselves" (156). Arguments like these have led to the compulsory submission of all aspiring Paralympians to the World Anti-doping Agency's systematized and institutionalized surveillance of their urine, blood and daily whereabouts (Beaver 2001; Black 2001; Bailey 2008; World Anti-Doping Agency 2003). This surveillance occurs both in and out of competition, and concerns not only substances and practices deemed to be performance enhancing, but also "social drugs" (Bailey 2008, 213). In this way, the authority of experts and their technologies of surveillance have moved further and further from the playing field, increasingly invading the bodies, consciences, and daily lives of Paralympians.

Coaches and National Sports Organizations have also increasingly deployed invasive technologies of surveillance on their athletes, such as: detailed training logs; diet and sleep journals; compulsory assessments by team psychologists, doctors, nutritionists and physiotherapists; and compulsory, or strongly coerced, blood and urine tests (Howe 2008; Shogan 1999). National sporting organizations, in Canada at least, secure access to many of these systems of surveillance by making their athletes sign non-negotiated, legally binding athlete agreements (Kidd 1988; Shogan 1999). These agreements also often serve to secure the ownership of athlete images, the control over athlete sponsorship affiliations, and the power to withhold all training, competition and funding opportunities if the athlete attempts to resist any of the above.

Many of the technologies outlined above are not unique to Paralympic sport. Countless sport sociologists, sport historians and athlete activists have documented and theorized both the powers exercised over athletes, and the athletes' struggles to resist those powers (ex. Bridel and Rail 2007; Broad 2001; Cochrane, Hoffman, and Kincaid 1977; Kidd 2005; Shogan 1999; Theberge 1998). The Paralympic Movement, however, is largely sheltered from such critiques, or at the very least, it is sheltered from the public and academic dissemination of such critiques. The reproduction of those with disabilities as unequivocally tragic and passive, and the reproduction of the Movement as unequivocally benevolent and empowering, ensures that these critiques are easily suppressed.

Coming of age: Taking (away) responsibility

Athlete first closes with the following assertion: “the Paralympic Movement has come of age; now a mature adult accepting responsibility for those in need of support and their own empowerment” (Bailey 2008, 263). This claim is not intelligible without discourses of tragic origins and progressive empowerment. Challenging these discourses, as I have done above, unravels the series of assumptions upon which the histories rest. It opens up space from which we can begin to ask the following kinds of questions. What responsibilities has the Paralympic Movement accepted? Who gave the Movement these responsibilities, and from whom were these responsibilities taken? And to whom are we referring when we speak of the Paralympic Movement? If, as my analysis suggests, the Paralympic Movement refers to the Paralympic experts and not to the athletes, then what responsibility do Paralympians have? What must Paralympians do in order to support

and empower the progressive empowerment discourses of the Paralympic Movement? As I suggest above, to make these histories coherent, Paralympians must be seen in photos, but not heard in histories. They must be visibly maimed, but must never be named. They must sit tall on their pedestal and point, passively and anonymously, towards the gutter from which they came.

In saying this, I do not mean to silence athletes even more. I know that many athletes thrive through sport. I know that they build communities and resistances. I know that they actively organize, disorganize, invent and pervert the sports that they play. I know that these athletes have names, and that they have stories that neither originate in disability nor terminate with their sporting careers. I know this because of the stories that athletes tell each other. We tell each other stories that help us remember the historically irrelevant. We tell stories that help us resist the institutionalized silences. We also tell stories, however, that help us raise ourselves above others: stories that reproduce the pedestals from which we speak, and the gutters on which these pedestals are built. Because I have heard these stories, and because I have heard myself telling these stories, I know that resistance must be more than pointing accusing fingers at the institutions, and institutionalized histories, of the Paralympic Movement. I know that the seeds of resistance are also embedded in every story that I tell about myself, and to myself. Resistance means giving up the heroism of the pedestal in order to debunk the myth of the tragic gutter. It means meeting the eyes of those I have put in the gutter, and those who have put me on the pedestal. It means telling different stories: the stories that might not sell, and the stories that will likely be omitted from the history books - until we write our own.

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