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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Embodied philanthropy and Sir Captain Tom Moore's "Walk for the NHS"

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## Abstract

Recent decades have witnessed growing popularity in embodied philanthropy, where participants undertake various types of publicly displayed bodily labour in support of their respective causes. The fundraising potential of such efforts reached extraordinary heights during Sir Captain Thomas Moore's "Walk for the National Health Service," wherein the 99-year-old World War II veteran walked laps of his garden to raise funds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within less than a month "Captain Tom" raised over £30 million, the highest amount ever by an individual charity walker. To better understand the social and cultural drivers behind Moore's incredible popularity this article applies Julie Robert's theoretical framework of embodied philanthropy, exploring the multivalent semiotic potential that Moore radiated through his age, disability, military adornments, Yorkshire grit, and unfailingly positive, aphoristic style of speaking. During a time of global crisis, this distinct array of bodily affordances enabled Captain Tom to simultaneously serve as an honest broker, teacher, exemplar, rallying figure, and ultimately martyr. Such practices of sacrificial citizenship, however, raise troubling questions, particularly in relation to expectations that fellow citizens should likewise stoically uphold civic-minded resilience during times of crisis. Furthermore, while the potential benefits can prove extraordinarily impactful, organizations should exercise care in too readily attaching themselves to particular causes, lest they become complicit in contentious agendas or even inadvertently mislead donors.

## KEYWORDS

citizenship, COVID-19, crowdfunding, embodied philanthropy, fundraising, martyrdom

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a 99-year-old World War II (WWII) veteran in Northern England walked laps of his garden to raise funds for the National Health Service (NHS). The campaign raised well in excess of £30 million, receiving donations from 1.5 million individuals across 163 countries. Captain Sir Thomas

Moore's "Walk for NHS" was the most funds ever raised by an individual in a charity walk, transforming him into a global icon. "Captain Tom"—as he affectionately became known—pledged to walk, with the assistance of his walking frame, one hundred lengths of his garden. In part, Moore's motivation was to thank the NHS workers who had recently helped him recover from a serious fall, along with previously caring for his ailing wife. Moore walked 10 lengths each day, at 25 m

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per length, aiming to complete the task before his 100th birthday. After finishing the challenge with 2 weeks to spare Moore continued walking. Funds raised were donated to the NHS Charities, a collective of around 250 organizations that operate in support of the NHS. The campaign was hosted on JustGiving—a crowdfunding platform oriented to social and charitable causes—under the title “Tom’s 100th Birthday Walk for the NHS.” Among many other honours, Moore’s efforts culminated in a knighthood, awarded just four months after his campaign began. In early 2021, Moore died after being hospitalized with pneumonia and then contracting COVID-19. Praised for his heroic and sacrificial citizenship in rallying the nation during a time of crisis, Moore’s nationally televised funeral featured a military guard of honour and a WWII-themed flypast.<sup>1</sup>

How can we understand the emergence of Captain Tom as a philanthropic phenomenon? What were its social and cultural drivers? How and why did Moore become an international hero? What did his acts symbolize and what drove his incredible popularity and the success of his philanthropic efforts? This article addresses these questions by drawing upon Julie Robert’s (2018) theoretical framework of “embodied philanthropy.” The article argues that Captain Tom Moore possessed a set of bodily displayed symbolic markers that imbued his efforts with an almost universal appeal. Moore’s age, disability, military adornments, everyman Yorkshire-ness, and his unfailingly positive, aphoristic style of speaking presented a range of “tools” that enabled him to be “staged, handled, performed” (Mol, 2002, pp. 40–41) in multiple appealing ways. This multiplicity, suggests Robert (2018) p. 4, is “a central premise of embodied philanthropy,” for it “explains how the body can be or serve as many things at once to both participants and campaign creators.” By applying Robert’s framework of embodied philanthropy, this article systematically unpacks how Moore’s distinct bodily affordances enabled him to simultaneously serve as an honest broker, teacher, exemplar, rallying figure, and ultimately martyr. The article concludes by noting some of the risks that third sector organizations may face in leaning too heavily on novel exemplars of embodied philanthropy.

## 2 | EMBODIED PHILANTHROPY AND THE SIGNIFYING POWER OF THE WILLING BODY

In recent decades, a growing social phenomenon has emerged around “embodied philanthropy,” with participants called upon “to pledge their bodies to raise funds for and awareness of a variety of causes” (Robert, 2018, p. 1). From charity fun runs, Dry July sobriety challenges, to the viral spectacle of the Ice Bucket challenge, the body in both its potentials and privations has become central to acts of charitable giving. Bunds (2018) p. 53, for example, notes the complex relationship between physically active participation in charity events and the philanthropic “hook” used to engage supporters, observing they are often “mutually reinforcing.” Embodied philanthropy, then, often relies on using the body to viscerally signal to others the willing labour of the philanthropist, including their willingness to suffer in proving both their duty to others and their own “will to health” (Higgs et al., 2009; see also Olivola & Shafir, 2013). Embodied philanthropy

has thus become a highly visible means of modeling “good citizenship,” particularly in practicing both care of the self and civic-minded entrepreneurialism (Palmer & Dwyer, 2020). An emerging ideal of embodied citizenship, therefore, is not just that we should cultivate personal resilience, but do so in service of others, demonstrating through our physical feats what a wholly self-governing citizen can achieve. Robert (2018), p. 2 observes that much scholarship on embodied philanthropy has typically adopted “a critical stance concerning who is targeted by these campaigns, who is excluded and for what reasons.” King (2012) and Sulik (2011), for example, have drawn attention to the cultural politics surrounding mass participation-based philanthropic movements, noting that their “upbeat message of empowerment, in tune with contemporary liberal, individualist self-empowerment zeitgeist” often obscures or even exacerbates underlying structural inequalities (King, 2012, p. 3).

These critiques inform wider discussions about changing forms of philanthropy amid global austerity, shrinking welfare states, greater pressures for corporations to display “caring capitalism,” and increased burdens upon civil society to alleviate growing inequalities (Barman, 2017; Rogers, 2015). In particular, the new emphasis on the body and physical virtuosity has been critiqued as a uniquely neoliberal form of charitable giving, linking pedagogies of self-empowerment and personal responsibility to wider ideals of civic engagement (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2017). For example, Nettleton and Hardey (2006) observe that charities are becoming increasingly reliant upon “active citizens” willing to share their experiences of resolve against illness, or their embodied drive to perform extraordinary physical feats in support of others (with the ideal “charitable body” being a person who can do both). Charities can thus lean on mass participation sport events, for example, to evoke ideals of the generous citizen who—if lacking in economic capital—can instead use their body in demonstrations of spirited voluntarism (Hookway, 2019; Nettleton & Hardey, 2006). Altogether, these expectations drive distinct normative ideals of the “good,” “moral,” and “responsible” subject, who imagines themselves solving collective problems through willed bodily labours, affecting advocacy, and virtuous health choices.

While these critiques are important, there remains a tendency to overlook the significance of the body and to instead analyze it only in reference to “related agendas oriented around martyrdom, empathy, and health promotion” (Robert, 2018, p. 3). However, a greater emphasis on the body usefully connects with wider sociological and feminist accounts, which recognize the importance of embodiment and emotions to everyday practices of ethics and autonomy (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2018; Hookway, 2019). Moreover, the varying display, visibility, and valorization of different bodies have clear practical and ethical implications for fundraising and other forms of advocacy. Robert’s (2018) theorizing of “embodied philanthropy” is thus useful for linking these discussions about bodies and their moralities to substantive practices of philanthropic fundraising. Robert (2018, p. 1), provides a conceptual framework that shows how “the affordances and versatility of the body make it both easy to give from a participant’s perspective and multiply useful for organizers.” Specifically, Robert (2018, p. 1), suggests that

“... the body's multivalent semiotic potential allows it to be, when philanthropically tasked, (i) *an income generator*, (ii) *billboard*, (iii) *martyred example*, (iv) *producer of emotion*, (v) *pedagogical space*, (vi) *exemplar of good health*, and (vii) *style project*, and to cohere these functions despite potential tensions.” (italics and numbers added)

The following sections applies Robert's theoretical framework of embodied philanthropy to Captain Tom's “Walk for the NHS,” demonstrating how each of the seven bodily capacities outlined above were starkly evident in his campaign, rendering Moore highly effective as a rallying advocate that appealed to many during a time of extraordinary crisis.

### 3 | BODY AS INCOME GENERATOR

We commonly associate the body's range of physical capacities with its income generating potential. However, observes Robert (2018), in embodied philanthropy it is often the constraints, sufferings, and self-inflicted stresses on those bodily capacities that best signify worthiness (and thus fundraising potential). Indeed, in contrast to the fit and able body commonly featured in “fitness philanthropy” causes (Palmer & Dwyer, 2020), it was instead Moore's 99-year-old frail (but willing) body that was extraordinarily productive. Much embodied philanthropy reflects this *corporeal fungibility*, where previously economically “unproductive” bodies can be made marketable through their sacrificial labours. This became acutely evident in the valorization of Moore—who was ostensibly no longer economically productive—but whose embodied labours in support of others rendered him *civically* productive. Moore's voluntary self-sacrificial labour placed an ethical injunction on those bearing witness, implicitly challenging them to acknowledge his efforts (with the most tangible and readily accessible means of doing this simply being a donation to his JustGiving campaign).

Prior to his campaign, Moore had suffered a severe fall and was recovering at home in Bedfordshire. To aid his rehabilitation Moore began walking laps of his garden, prompting some teasing encouragement from his family, who pledged they would give him £1 for every lap he walked. However, thought Moore:

“... as I kept walking, step after step, I began to think about what they'd said. What if I did raise a bit of money and gave it to the nurses and other healthcare workers who'd looked after us over the years? Even £100 would be a nice gesture. And how much might I raise if I could manage enough laps before my 100th birthday to help them combat COVID-19?” (Moore & Holden, 2020, p. 3)

Moore's daughter, Hannah Ingram-Moore, subsequently put together a press release, and her public relations expertise proved

crucial in managing the campaign. Upon the campaign's launch on April 6, 2020, the initial fundraising goal of £1000 was met within four days. Extraordinary exponential growth meant that by the time the campaign closed, only 26 days after it began, £32.79 million had been donated (rising to almost £39 million when “Gift Aid” tax rebates are included). Beyond this, further funds were raised via a cover of “You'll Never Walk Alone” by Michael Ball (featuring a spoken word interlude by Moore), along with several books by Captain Tom, including his autobiography *Tomorrow Will Be a Good Day*.

Moore's campaign began two weeks into the first lockdown, when the death toll already exceeded 5,000 persons in the United Kingdom alone, and would increase to 28,533 by the end of the month (Public Health England, 2021). By April 20, 2020—only halfway through Moore's campaign—at least 100 UK-based health workers had died from the virus (Marsh, 2020). Severe lockdown measures also quickly resulted in sharp spikes in anxiety and depression (Mohdin, 2020), while growing panic over the UK's preparedness had left the country's mood in an almost unimaginably parlous state (Calvert & Arbuthnott, 2021). This, perhaps more than anything else, may explain why Moore offered such a compelling beacon of hope, for the image of “Captain Tom” embodied a restoration of old ideals that had seen the nation through earlier times of hardship, offering simple and actionable lessons in caring for both oneself and others.

Furthermore, the “Walk with Tom” campaign required no direct solicitation of donors, thus sidestepping common dilemmas around emotional manipulation in fundraising (Dean & Wood, 2017). In recent years the UK's extremely competitive third sector has been subjected to widespread suspicion, impatience, and antagonism toward both its organizational leaders—accused of mismanaging funds and neglecting their core mandates (Carrigan, 2021)—and against “chuggers” or other soliciting agents, commonly perceived as employing underhanded or pressuring tactics (Dean & Wood, 2017; MacQuillin, 2016). However, in the “Walk with Tom” campaign, the *ask* was only conveyed implicitly, due to the immense popularity of the widely-shared cause and Moore's willingness to establish a reciprocal relationship with the world (e.g., by patiently consenting to countless interviews, estimated by Hannah Ingram-Moore to number around 700 in just six months). Therefore, drawing on Breeze and Jollymore's (2017) suggestion that we go beyond the binary of simply being *asked* or *not asked*, we can instead observe that Moore ideally embodied the figure of the “honest broker,” one who did not actively solicit others, but upon whom trust could be placed. Moore's status as an “honest broker” was further reinforced through glowing public endorsements offered by the UK Government, the Royal Family, and the British Armed Forces, among other established institutions.

### 4 | BODY AS BILLBOARD

This express desire among established interests to align themselves with Captain Tom is unsurprising, for his visage and comportment became potent signifiers upon which many could attach their own notions of solidarity and citizenship. Typically, embodied philanthropy

leans heavily on this “showiness of the body for philanthropic ends” (Robert, 2018, p. 4). In the case of Moore, the now iconic image of Captain Tom is of “the stooped but dapper veteran,” wearing a blue blazer, adorned with military service medals, a regimental tie, and leaning on his walking frame (AFP, 2021). As an unassuming but nonetheless striking billboard of hope during dark times, this stoic display proved immensely effective. Yet, in considering the “theatricality of humanitarianism” and “dependence on spectacle” (Chouliaraki, 2012, p. 2), it is worth acknowledging that—beyond his sartorial style, the walk itself, and participating in interviews—Moore did not actively contribute to the campaign's spectacle-making. Rather, it was others who did so, with each public display—for example, awards, television specials, guards of honour, celebrity visits, and so forth—further affirming Moore's worthiness and elevating the cause.

In turn, Moore constantly redirected any adulation he received back toward wartime ideals of patriotic duty, which was then duly reciprocated by the manner in which he was feted. For example, on his 100th birthday Moore was honoured with flypasts by the Royal Air Force and British Army. In further binding together wartime camaraderie with the pandemic, Moore and Holden (2020), p. 358) observed that these aircraft “symbolized so much about the resilience of this country.” Moore's constantly deferential and dutiful responses to these spectacles thus positioned him as a uniquely deserving subject. Amid an otherwise overwhelming crisis, such “spectacularization thus offers an aura of wholeness against the perturbations and inconsistencies of social life ... reconcil(ing) opposites in overwhelming, immersive images of human heroism” (Lim & Moufahim, 2015). In other words, Moore became a rallying focal point during a time of overwhelming dread, through whom belief in the redemptive power of simply giving one's best and upholding personal duty to others could be sustained.

In this way, Moore's efforts avoided the alienating effects of the soft activism commonly practiced by celebrity athletes, who often possess unattainable bodies and unfathomable fame (Palmer, 2019). Such leisurely activism of the cultural elite stands in stark contrast with the broken-down body of Moore, who—while freely confessing his ardent love for the Queen—frankly admitted he could not kneel down for her at his investiture (Penna, 2020). Thus, in contrast with the oft-patronizing benevolence of celebrity philanthropists who struggle to convincingly align themselves with catastrophes wholly alien to their own experiences, Moore could more easily embody a governing ideal of “philanthromentality” wherein simple but exemplary acts of virtue provide instructive guidance to citizens (Nickel, 2012). Thus, while pop icon Madonna was mocked for describing the pandemic as “the great equalizer” as she lowered herself into a rose petal-filled bathtub, and celebrities likewise derided for singing a cover of “Imagine” from their luxury abodes, and billionaire David Geffen condemned for urging everyone to “stay safe” while sheltering on his 454-foot megayacht in the Grenadines, Captain Tom instead embodied simple pragmatic ideals that could be meaningfully emulated by others.

It was this very combination of humility and duty that rendered Captain Tom uniquely marketable during times of widespread despair.

Moore's accessibility invited a form of public participation by proxy, where onlookers could witness a narrative of the hero overcoming “physical hardship” to achieve “ultimate victory” (Lim & Moufahim, 2015, p. 538). Simplifying matters during a time of mass uncertainty, a figure who had lived through comparable crises calmly advised that modest acts of solidarity should see us through. While Moore's obvious identification with the military, his affections for the Queen, and his admiration for Prime Minister Boris Johnson could have rendered him a polarizing figure, his geniality and seeming apoliticism entailed that “Walk with Tom” could sidestep any uneasy contradictions that undermine many celebrity-driven fundraising efforts. Instead, what was valorised was the extent to which Moore's everyday, ordinary qualities were directed to extraordinary ends.

Witnessing Captain Tom in action—walking laps of his garden, patiently answering questions, receiving noteworthy visitors—also underscores the “entertainmentality” of embodied philanthropy, wherein supporters enthusiastically engage in order to heighten feelings of togetherness (Nickel, 2012, p. 169, citing Luke, 2002). To summarize, Moore radiated symbolic imagery that fostered an almost nostalgic solidarity during its greatest post-war crisis. This, in turn, attracted the endorsement of esteemed figures and institutions, further cementing his rallying power. Moreover, not only did Captain Tom speak in humble but rousing aphorisms, but he had also experienced comparable hardship with those for whom he advocated, and for whom he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

## 5 | BODY AS MARTYRED EXAMPLE

Robert (2018), p. 4 observes that campaigns based on martyrdom “seek to capitalize on the (perceived) difficulty of the form of embodied participation.” While Moore's walks were not the “extreme journeys of physical suffering” that some philanthropists undertake (Lim & Moufahim, 2015, p. 525), it was nonetheless a symbolically powerful act that could be held aloft as an instructive example for others. When asked if he ever got tired during his walking, Moore replied “Absolutely, but you don't give up. I come from Yorkshire. We don't give up” (Kellaway, 2020). Similarly, in ways reminiscent of the “hiking suffragettes”—who downplayed their suffering in comparison to the everyday injustices inflicted on fellow women (Schultz, 2010, p. 1144)—Moore and Holden (2020) deflected any praise he received toward the “real heroes” working in the NHS, who he noted were voluntarily “entering the lion's den” each day (p. 338). Such statements further demonstrate “the ways in which physical expressions might draw attention to multiple socio-political causes of the day” (Schultz, 2010, p. 1144).

As alluded to earlier, Moore (with Holden, 2020, p. 3) also regularly drew equivalencies between military service and the health vocations, framing the latter as “our brave army of frontline carers to whom I owed so much.” In turn, Moore underplayed his own military service, recalling “the brave young British and Allied pilots, many of them only in their twenties and with a life expectancy of something like three weeks,” while mocking himself for his assigned role guarding “what I only recently discovered was a decoy airfield designed to

confuse the German pilots” (p. 98). Nonetheless, Moore firmly emphasized his patriotic resolve, declaring that “I wasn’t afraid of fighting for freedom and democracy ... The Germans started it and I felt it was my duty to defend our country” (p. 82). It was this martyr-like sense of patriotic duty, observed Moore, that motivated his walk to protect the NHS, with his death ultimately caused by the very scourge he was fighting against.

Such patriotic resolve was emphasized upon news of Captain Tom’s death, declaring him “the hero who fought fascists and viruses” and solemnly noting that “to have lost this fine man to the very disease he was working so hard to eradicate is an irony so painful it defies description” (Obordo, 2021). Politicians duly echoed these laments, evoking ideals of the “imagined community” of nationhood (Anderson, 2006) while carefully avoiding the uncomfortable circumstances of Moore’s death. Boris Johnson’s tribute summarizes how Moore was framed as the ideal rallying figure for times of crisis:

“Captain Sir Tom Moore was a hero in the truest sense of the word. In the dark days of the Second World War, he fought for freedom, and in the face of this country’s deepest post-war crisis he united us all. He cheered us all up, and he embodied the triumph of the human spirit... He became not just a national inspiration but a beacon of hope for the world.” (The Telegraph, 2021)

Opposition Leader Keir Starmer likewise suggested that “He, perhaps more than anyone, embodied the spirit of Britain and will be sadly missed.” The Archbishop of Canterbury declared Moore was “an example to us all. Where he walked a nation followed” (ITV, 2021). Ruth May, England’s chief nursing officer, claimed Moore’s most important contribution was “helping my fellow nurses, doctors and all those in the NHS responding to coronavirus ... he brought the country together and gave us all a boost when we most needed it” (ITV, 2021). For others the comfort was especially poignant, with one well-wisher stating that Moore “got me through divorce, lockdown, and despair. He reminded me of my dear departed dad and I am sad to see him go” (Obordo, 2021). Such sentiments resonated across tens of thousands of comments posted on Moore’s JustGiving campaign website and an online book of condolences, further cementing his martyr-like status and rituals of “heroization” during times of crisis (McCormick, 2020; Morgan, 2020).

## 6 | BODY AS INSTIGATOR OF EMOTION

Moore was instrumental in the creation of “intimate publics” (Berlant, 2008), fostering hope that seemingly insurmountable calamities could be resolved through a stiff upper lip and “musn’t grumble” grit (see Kellaway, 2020). As Lauren Berlant (2008, p. viii) suggests, intimate publics constitute “a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general ... it is a place of recognition and reflection.” In the intimate publics fostered by Moore, those often

isolated, excluded, and at risk of becoming even more marginalized during lockdowns (e.g., older and disabled persons) saw themselves reflected in him. Inspired by Moore’s efforts, they too became instructive figures on how to sustain shared meaning during times of loss, fear, and uncertainty. These intimate publics were further nurtured by the media attention dedicated to Moore, which established an ongoing reciprocity between Moore and the public. At a time marked by drastic losses of autonomy, the ease of donating—and thus accessing the warm glow of aiding a worthy cause (Andreoni, 1990; Dean, 2020)—became a uniting salve among the 1.5 million donors to Moore’s campaign, who could then watch his narrative unfold each day (one JustGiving donor, for example, noted that they “have loved watching such a lovely man on BBC breakfast each morning”). Not only that, but supporters could also elevate the cause—thereby affirming their own good citizenship—through their endorsements across social media.

Such endorsements were commonly tinged with heartfelt emotion, pride, a sense of reciprocal duty, and declarations that Moore was a moral exemplar for others to follow. For example, one JustGiving donor stated “Thank you Tom, for reminding us all who we can be!” while another wrote “I can only hope that our children follow in your footsteps!” Many donors also tied their admiration of Moore to expressions of national pride, declaring: “You make us proud to be British”; “Tom you have single handedly demonstrated that which makes Great Britain so Great”; “Well done Tom, you are a credit to all that’s British.” Other donors bound together this patriotic pride with Moore’s fellow “heroes” in the NHS: “Captain Tom represents everything great about Britain, just like the NHS”; “Thank you so much to our NHS superheroes and thank you to the amazing Captain Tom!”; “75 years ago Captain Tom and his generation won a war and then developed the NHS to save us”; “Thank you Tom for making us realize how blessed we are as a nation to have such a wonderful NHS.” Others, meanwhile, pointed to Moore’s unflinching optimism, expressing gratitude “for making something so good out of a bad situation with your truly inspirational can-do attitude!” As the pandemic worsened, it was this resolutely positive disposition that was highlighted as a model to emulate during times of immense collective suffering.

## 7 | BODY AS EXEMPLAR OF GOOD HEALTH

Many forms of embodied philanthropy are dedicated not only toward fundraising purposes, or to entice further participants through the promise of fun and pleasure, but also to convey public health messaging that aligns with the cause. Mass participation sporting events, for example, are often a crucial fundraising occasion that also delivers wider public health benefits (Filo et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2010). In the UK context, the COVID-19 pandemic presented grave public health concerns related not only to the virus itself, but to the evident strain on mental health that would eventuate following extended lockdowns, job losses, financial precarity, home-schooling, caring

obligations, and so forth. (Daly et al., 2020). It was perhaps extraordinarily fortunate for the UK Government, therefore, to be presented with a rallying figure who simultaneously: raised funds to support the NHS; reiterated the “stay home” message; demonstrated how wellbeing could be maintained under such circumstances; and raised collective spirits through his unflinching optimism. Moore, who grew up with a father who was profoundly deaf, and later married two women who both suffered with severe mental ill-health, was a firm advocate for people with disabilities throughout his life. Thus, while an unflappable stoic of the “stiff upper lip” variety, Moore was certainly not unsympathetic to the plight of others, but rather urged that “We’ve got to look after one another, from the beginning to the end” (quoted in MacKenzie, 2020).

Moore’s motivation for fundraising therefore consisted of several pillars, among which were: to prove that the rehabilitative care invested in him by the NHS was being returned through his dedicated efforts; a form of advocacy against ableism and ageism; and as an act of gratitude for the NHS workers who cared for both himself and his wife Pamela in her final years living with Parkinson’s disease. Moore (with Holden, 2020) regularly declared his pride in “the marvelous NHS” and that he was “eternally grateful” for the care given to Pamela. Such publicly proclaimed sentiments proved immensely valuable for governing authorities during a time where the public was being urged to “Stay at Home—Save Lives—Protect the NHS.” Moore’s vein of optimistic stoicism served to reframe an otherwise overwhelming catastrophe into something manageable through small but decisive actions:

“The secret to tackling any challenge is to treat it just like my walk. Start off with the first step, which might be a bit hard, but then take another one and another until you think, well, I can do more now, and that’s how you keep going. Never give up. Try to build resilience through optimism. It is all in the mind. If you decide that you’re going to have a terrible time and you’re not going to get through something, then that’s what will probably happen. We all go through bad patches, but we do get through them. I couldn’t have got through my life if I didn’t think things would get better, and they did.” (Moore & Holden, 2020)

Such stoicism was also evident later in life, for after being admitted to hospital following a fall Moore imposed a “Do Not Resuscitate” order upon himself, recalling:

“My philosophy is and always has been that one day my time will come—we all know that it is going to happen. Some people can’t bear the thought of death, but I draw strength from it. It is the certainty of death that makes me so convinced that tomorrow will be a good day. Enjoy what you have today and don’t be miserable about it.” (Moore & Holden, 2020)

In witnessing this model of active citizenship, some media outlets praised Moore’s “weaponized optimism” (Sky News, 2021). This apparent “weapon” refers to an unflinching positivity and refusal to bemoan one’s circumstances, a type of resolve purportedly characteristic of early to mid-20th century Britain, seeing them through their most trying times. Embodied philanthropy is likewise a potent vehicle through which fundraisers can signify their resolute positivity in the face of hardship.

At the same time, however—and in considering Moore’s advocacy for older and disabled persons—it is noteworthy that the adjacent appeals of both pleasure and self-improvement commonly offered through embodied philanthropy events (e.g., fun runs and other athletic challenges) can help to reach “a younger demographic not traditionally motivated by appeals to altruism” (Robert, 2013, p. 261). However, one potential downside is that this strategy can lean heavily on stoking individualistic, self-regarding motivations, which may undermine cultivating long-term, ongoing commitments to causes. For example, many forms of embodied philanthropy are “typically coded as making participants more physically, sexually, and socially desirable” and so can inadvertently “further a mentality that philanthropy is foremost about personal gain” (Robert, 2013, p. 261). Therefore, one consistent dilemma is that:

“... these campaigns present themselves as highly individualized undertakings in which the fashioning of the participant’s identity as a fun, attractive, successful, hyper-masculine/feminine, style-conscious individual is in productive tension with the meaning-making centered on altruism that comes from philanthropic activities.” (Robert, 2013, p. 262)

Such concerns are echoed in research that questions whether charitable campaigns too often conspicuously spotlight the virtue of donors and volunteers while constructing recipients as passive, vulnerable, and even moral failures (Parsell & Clarke, 2020; Parsell & Watts, 2017).

In addition, bodily and aesthetic driven campaigns can prove exclusionary to those who cannot participate, or would be discomforted in doing so (Jacobson, 2010). This, of course, does not mean that such innovations should be abandoned or even maligned, for it would be naïve to assume that charitable endeavor is solely undertaken for purely altruistic reasons (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009). Indeed, under neoliberal imperatives of self-care, the pursuit of health-minded self-enhancement is a powerful driver of participation in embodied philanthropy (Palmer & Dwyer, 2020). Equally powerful are contemporary aspirations for “fun morality” (Wolfenstein, 1951) and “virtuous play” (Wade, 2018), wherein the pursuit of pleasure need not prove a selfish personal indulgence, but indeed the very means by which we rally around a worthy cause. With regard to embodied philanthropy events, such logics are evident in the many pleas to participants to share their pleasures in taking part across their social networks, as evident displays of enjoyment and enthusiasm can prove crucial in enrolling others into the cause. Still, despite these

strategic efforts to pragmatically accommodate the “mixed motives” of participation (Robert, 2018, p. 3), concerns around exclusion and subjugation remain, and hence it is worth considering how the Moore campaign fostered more inclusive forms of embodied philanthropy—particularly for older and disabled persons—in ways that proved instructive beyond the ostensible initial motivation for the campaign.

## 8 | BODY AS PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

Critical perspectives have long acknowledged that the bodies of disabled and marginalized charity recipients have “been used to elicit an affective and largely guilt inspired financial response” (Robert, 2018, p. 5). As Paul Longmore (2016) observed, such depictions might be the *only* encounter donors have with people living with disabilities, and the prevailing frames of pity can too easily slide into stereotypes, stigma, and patronizing support. However, some forms of embodied philanthropy offer the potential to overcome this subjugating sympathy and serve wider advocacy and reparative purposes. Instead of being paraded as helpless and passive subjects, people with disabilities may voluntarily perform bodily feats in support of others, thus demonstrating both their dedication to the cause and the (oft-underestimated) capacities they possess. Such persons thus assert themselves as “individuals with the right to participate in interdependent exchanges, where they are reliant on others and others are reliant upon them” (Parsell & Clarke, 2020, p. 14). These displays of strength and resolve can also generate “kinesesthetic empathy” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012) among those who bear witness, and with it an ethical obligation to reciprocate in kind.

Through his labours, Moore thus inspired many not simply to donate, but to practice their own forms of embodied philanthropy. Crucially, however, Robert (2018) p. 5, observes that “appeals to martyrdom and sacrifice” in embodied philanthropy “must walk a fine line” that “keeps barriers to participation low.” The relative accessibility of Moore’s efforts (i.e., walking to the limit of one’s ability) thus enabled others typically excluded from such endeavors to emulate him and voluntarily “suffer like they do for charitable causes” (Lim & Moufahim, 2015, p. 541). In this manner, some of those inspired by Moore undertook comparable campaigns, many of whom were either very old or very young fundraisers.

Many of those who sought to emulate Moore found inspiration in that he was not only rehabilitating his body, but also challenging ageist and disablist assumptions. For example, 103-year-old Tom Jones also walked laps of his garden (O’Reilly, 2021), as did fellow centurion Dabirul Choudhury, for which he was awarded an Order of the British Empire. Even more impressively, Choudhury did this while fasting during Ramadan (Young, 2020). Margaret Payne, at the age of 90, fundraised by climbing the height of Scotland’s Mount Suilven on her staircase, for which she later received a British Empire Medal. Joan Willet, 104 years-old, walked 17 miles for the British Heart Foundation. Willet was also able to meet Moore, noting that it was “because of his efforts that I started on my walk” (Hickey-Mason, 2020). Similarly inspired was 98-year-old RAF veteran George Sutherland, who undertook a two-mile walk on VE Day in aid of a

soldiers’ club in Belgium at risk of shutting down for the first time since German occupation (Boffey, 2020).

Meanwhile, many of the children similarly inspired by Moore had mobility impairments, drawing encouragement from his use of a walking frame. Among them was 11-year-old double leg amputee Maisie Catt, who walked 26 miles in her garden over 10 days in 2020, and then again in 2021 (Cleary, 2021). Frank Mills, a 6-year-old with spina bifida, walked 10-meter lengths to raise over £300,000 (after beginning with a target of £99, in honour of Moore’s age) (Jones, 2020). Also inspired after seeing Moore on television, 5-year-old double-leg-amputee Tony Hudgell walked 10 kilometers, raising well over £1 M (Speare-Cole, 2020). Another was Lewis Whele, a 5-year-old with cerebral palsy, who also walked laps of his garden and later met Moore in person (BBC, 2020). Whele’s mother remarked that “[Moore] just gets everybody thinking, you know, if Captain Tom can do it, why can’t I?” Many more examples could be highlighted, all invoking similar sentiments of both inspiration and obligation in following Moore’s lead. Still, a troubling undercurrent remains here, for what lessons about good health and good citizenship should we draw in witnessing older and disabled persons undertaking physical feats to raise funds for the NHS?

In the eyes of many observers, Moore exemplified the idea of fundraisers as “moral trainers,” figures of proactive virtue who inspire others to comparable practices of citizenship (O’Neill, 1994, p. 4). Furthermore, Moore’s campaign—along with many others he inspired—were characterized by a firm rejection of displaying “the ease of hard work” that is sometimes evident in embodied philanthropy (Luna, 2019, p. 253). This conspicuous ease is most evident among athletic subjects who exude high-embodied cultural capital, as their both “earned” and “naturally” fit bodies complete extraordinary tasks with seemingly effortless grace. In contrast, those who were directly inspired by Moore exhibited clear strain in willing their often unruly, weary, and pained bodies to achieve their fundraising goals. Also, like Moore, many were from working-class backgrounds, engaging in sincere but knowingly absurdist challenges (e.g., pogo-jumping the height of Mount Everest, or rowing a homemade “Tintanic” along the Chichester Canal). This, again, stands in stark contrast with more elite forms of embodied philanthropy (e.g., marathon running, cycling events) where conspicuous displays of athletic achievement can create exclusionary boundaries (Luna, 2019). Instead, there is perhaps hope that Moore’s campaign may undo some classist and ableist tendencies that have become entrenched in volunteering (Dean, 2016). Given miserable public sentiments during the pandemic, perhaps something simultaneously light-hearted but nonetheless galvanizing was most needed, instructing onlookers as to what exemplary “good health” might look like in trying times.

Moore’s humble act of walking laps of his garden thus reframed the sensitive political complexities of COVID-19 into something that seemingly required only the good faith efforts of willing citizens to overcome. Moore’s elevation as an exemplary citizen implicitly conveyed an instructive challenge to others to publicly affirm his worthiness. Intended or not, such pedagogies have consequences. In the contemporary “somatic society”—where “major political and personal



problems are both problematized in the body and expressed through it” (Turner, 1996, p. 1)—the extensive promotion of a 99-year-old rehabilitating war veteran as a model to emulate implies that *no one* can easily exclude themselves from expectations of embodied philanthropy (or comparable labours). Such moral instruction was duly reflected in tributes to Moore:

“Thank you from us, a family, with young ones, grandchildren, who need a hero like you, Sir Tom, and for we “older ones” who also need to know that age is no barrier to doing what we set out to do. Thank you, too, for giving me courage and greater vision beyond myself. There is such strength in the ordinary extraordinary.” (Obordo, 2021)

Others similarly noted that Moore's example could help undo persistent ageism (Ramadan, 2021). Likewise, the idea that Moore could prove an educational example for children was apparent not only among young persons completing their own feats of embodied philanthropy, but also in the publication of an illustrated children's book, *One Hundred Steps*, and the posthumously published *Captain Tom's Life Lessons*. In retelling aspects of Moore's life, each book encourages pursuing small, positive actions for the benefit of others, “Because one step has the power to inspire one hundred more!” Popular media quickly latched onto those duly inspired by Moore, who “dusted off their own walking frames and took to the streets to prove they could play their own part in the drive to raise funds” (Burchell, 2021). For many, Moore's appeal was “in making us feel, no matter how tottery, that there is a first step we might all take toward a brighter horizon” (Kellaway, 2020). Such rhetoric evokes notions of “romantic democracy” and “heroic citizenship,” wherein voluntary labours contribute to more fulsome embraces of civic duty, but do not threaten established powers (Murphy, 2003). It is therefore little wonder that those in high positions sought to align themselves with Moore's stature, and it is toward these claims upon Moore's legacy that we will now turn.

## 9 | BODY AS STYLE PROJECT

Many of those permitted by his family to make an in-person pilgrimage to visit Moore during his campaign were celebrities that personified a broadly agreeable form of patriotism (e.g., sporting figures). Such visits and bestowal of honours contributed to the stylizing and commodification of Moore as a national icon. Images like the one below perhaps best reflect this patriotic aesthetic, with Moore placed front and centre of the English Football Association's Lionhearts squad, alongside several fellow embodied philanthropists. (Figure 1)

GQ—a men's culture, fashion, and style magazine—likewise awarded Moore as their 2020 “Inspiration of the Year.” Moore became British GQ's oldest ever cover star at 100, pictured wearing a tuxedo, draped in the Union Jack, and with his service medals affixed.



**FIGURE 1** Screenshot of the England FA's “Lionhearts” squad (Football Association, 2021)

Given such potent symbolism, it merits considering Moore's cultural legacy following his death.

In a pointed tribute Sir Nicholas Soames (2021), former Conservative MP and grandson of Sir Winston Churchill, argued that Moore was “epitomized by an unquenchable spirit, a deep sense of duty, selflessness, and courage in the face of great adversity; all the things that in the eyes of some, are outdated today.” Yet, continued Soames, “almost uniquely, Sir Tom inspired Britons of every stripe, Left and Right, young and old, people of all social classes.” Soames therefore proposed:

“In recent years the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square [located in Westminster, central London] has featured a number of fashionable or politically correct art works ... How much better it would be if the magnificent and nationally unifying figure of Sir Tom was on view instead.”

Such a suggestion that Moore should become a presumably permanent fixture on the Fourth Plinth has significant implications. Though once intended to display a statue of William IV, for over 150 years it has been debated as to who (or what) might be deemed worthy to occupy the plinth. For the last two decades it has hosted a series of commissioned works, which arguably better reflect the diversity of modern Britain. This was especially apparent during Antony Gormley's *One & Other* performance, in which 2400 members of the public—selected to represent a broad cross-section of British society—were able to occupy the plinth for an hour each, to use in whatever way they liked. Installing Moore's likeness would arguably prove the absolute antithesis of this inclusive democratization of public space, and speaks to a deeper conservatism evident in promoting Captain Tom as a model of exemplary citizenship.

In any case, it is unlikely that a statue of Moore will be installed on the plinth, though not because the Fourth Plinth will remain a changing installation that reflects a changing Britain. Rather, it is likely being reserved for the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. The legacy of Moore will nonetheless persist and he is “without doubt, set to be woven into the tapestry of the UK's national mythology”

(Ramadan, 2021). For some time, Moore will remain a sacred figure; praised, fetishized, and commodified by many.

## 10 | DISCUSSION—RISKS IN EMBRACING EMBODIED PHILANTHROPY

A veritable mini-industry has now been built around Captain Tom, with a minor cultural struggle emerging around what ideological worldviews he best embodied. While Moore's campaign was able to avoid the “cheesy paternalism” (Dean, 2020) of telethon-like spectacles, it would be naïve to deny that Moore was commodified and used for political leverage in elevating models of virtuous citizenship for others to follow, and with it potentially burdensome expectations of bootstrap endeavor. Inspiring though they may be during times of crisis, such models of citizenship should not be exploited as a means of distracting from state failures, or further shifting responsibility for the provision of essential services from the state to civil society. How such forms of “heroic citizenship” (Murphy, 2003) sometimes evident in embodied philanthropy may smooth over or disguise such failings—particularly by invoking ideals of patriotic pride and duty—merits further research.

Moreover, and of more pragmatic urgency for practitioners, contestations over the legacy of Moore reveal the reputational risks that organizations should consider when leaning heavily on forms of embodied philanthropy. Such considerations are particularly important when fundraising campaigns are oriented around persons not normally associated with athletic endeavor, and where their self-sacrificial efforts are given in support of services that should arguably be provisioned by the state. Given the extraordinary resolve of many persons undertaking arduous forms of embodied philanthropy, those who may profit from associating themselves with such labours can be subject to intense criticism (even when providing key support). For example, JustGiving—the crowdfunding platform that hosted Moore's campaign—was widely pilloried following claims the company would receive around £2 million in revenue through donation fees. Though these claims were proven false, ongoing criticisms drew upon Moore's own rhetorical style of comparing the pandemic with the war effort (including likening health workers with soldiers on the frontline). Such equivalencies were invoked in accusations that JustGiving's rent-seeking was undermining the nation itself during a time of crisis. Tabloids claimed that JustGiving had “creamed off £385,000” from Moore's campaign, which could have instead been “enough to pay 17 nurses” (Dathan, 2020). The implication was that a disembodied, faceless, for-profit platform was depriving us of the actual bodies most needed in these times. Such dilemmas reflect ongoing tensions within cause-based crowdfunding, where companies can derive extraordinary revenues from those who publicly display their suffering in competitive markets of moral worthiness (Berliner & Kenworthy, 2017). Amid ever-worsening inequality, continuing austerity, and increasing reliance on civil society interventions, there have emerged conflicting expectations and anxieties around what purpose for-profit crowdfunding platforms should serve. Meanwhile, at the time of writing the Captain Tom

Foundation itself is now being investigated for potential improprieties. While not grievous missteps, some decision-making within the Foundation was perhaps naïve and reflective of a lack of experience in third sector management (Hargrave, 2022).

Like JustGiving, Virgin Money Giving (VGM)—which ceased operations in late-2021—was also a target for criticism due to the administrative fees imposed on donations to NHS-related causes (Bucks & Dennys, 2020). As part of Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group, VGM arguably invited such condemnation, in part, due to Branson's request for a £500 million loan from the UK Government to support Virgin Atlantic through Covid-19, despite not paying any personal income tax himself in Britain for 14 years. Nonetheless, one year on from Moore's campaign, and in honour of what would have been his 101st birthday, VGM invoked Moore's example by encouraging fundraisers to take up the “Captain Tom 100” challenge by doing 100 physical acts of their choosing. Perhaps the brief lesson here is that if philanthropically minded companies wish to associate themselves with particular causes—especially those related to embodied philanthropy or similar forms of self-sacrificial labour—they must exhibit comparable ethical regard with the advocates they aspire to align themselves with. Otherwise, such entities may be accused of opportunistic grifting and cynical brand enhancement, elevating the labouring body only to profit from it.

In gesturing toward further research, there are also wider concerns to consider around potential unintended consequences of hugely popular charitable campaigns led by lay persons using crowdfunding platforms. Such disintermediation of traditional charitable practices can prove immensely successful, as uniquely deserving, widely appealing, and morally exemplary everyday citizens can be used as rallying focal points to motivate contributions to worthy causes. Furthermore, the typically user-friendly affordances of crowdfunding platforms are highly effective in quickly converting *interest* into *action* (i.e., donations and sharing). However, this relative ease of access and engagement for both fundraisers and donors often results in distortions whereby a very small proportion of campaigns—which typically align with already dominant cultural ideals—achieve popular prominence and receive enormous sums, while the remaining vast majority are left to languish (despite their comparable need). Moreover, in some instances, donors may be unaware of where precisely their donations will be directed, or how the use of these funds may be restricted. Indeed, this was a point of contention during Moore's campaign, as the donations were specifically collected for the *NHS Charities*. Such funds could therefore not be directed toward essential “core” services of the NHS, due to provisions intended to ensure that essential NHS functions always remain a state responsibility (rather than potentially becoming dependent on charity and philanthropy). Though a sound protective measure, this arguably resulted in perverse constraints, for while the NHS found itself “desperately short” of personal protective equipment (PPE) during a crucial time, “under charity law, money raised for the NHS can't be spent on PPE” (Ainsworth, 2020). A comparable example emerged during the 2019–20 “Black Summer” Australian bushfires, when comedian Celeste Barber crowdfunded \$AUD51 million for the New South Wales Rural

Fire Service. Unfortunately, both Barber and many enthusiastic donors were under the impression that received donations could also be distributed to organizations like the Red Cross and animal welfare groups assisting with the bushfire recovery. However, this was not permitted under the conditions of the NSW RFS Trust, resulting in tensions among the parties involved (McKinnell, 2020). Similar forms of good faith miscommunication and unmet donor intentions also occurred in response to the Black Lives Matter movement (Albrecht, 2020). Such instances of large-scale fundraising where the disbursement of funds may not be what was intended by donors warrant further study, particularly given the reputational risks for charitable organizations and potential to disincentivize contributions from increasingly wary donors.

Finally, one key limitation of this study is due to the sheer anomalous quality of the case study in question. The “Walk for the NHS” was a truly exceptional event during unprecedented times, marking the most funds ever raised by an individual through a charity walk. Julie Robert's (2018) original framework applied the seven dimensions of embodied philanthropy to a variety of micro-case studies. In contrast, there are likely very few occasions where all seven dimensions could be applied to a single case study. Of course, this is precisely what makes Moore's campaign interesting and noteworthy, but practitioners should be exceedingly careful if attempting to pursue and implement multiple dimensions within their own embodied philanthropy events. It is difficult, for example, to call upon participants to undertake martyr-like sacrifices while also promising fun and inclusivity to a wide variety of participants. Better instead to focus on just one or two key rationales that align closely with the ideals of the organization and resonate with the intended participants. However, in those rare instances where all seven dimensions can be plausibly implemented, there is a strong possibility that such forms of embodied philanthropy may prove immensely successful.

## 11 | CONCLUSION

Embodied philanthropy is still a relatively recent phenomenon, but amid the “demotic turn” of ordinary people generating extraordinary media spectacles (Turner, 2010), examples like Captain Tom demonstrate the potential of bodies that can radiate widely recognizable semiotic markers. Moore's multiple ontologies as: war veteran, senior citizen, widow, disabled person, rugged Yorkshireman, and charity walker enabled him to simultaneously serve as an honest broker, teacher, exemplar, and ultimately martyr. However, as embodied philanthropy gradually steers away from the once exclusionary, elitist, ableist practices of primarily elevating athletic and aesthetically pleasing bodies, care must be taken to ensure that this veneer of greater inclusion is not used to perpetuate burdensome expectations around who should be willing to undertake such duties of sacrificial citizenship. Moreover, organizations who wish to associate themselves with embodied philanthropy should be careful in avoiding perceptions they are unduly profiting from such sacrificial labours. Further research in this area could fruitfully explore these tensions between inclusion,

autonomy, potential exploitation, donor intention, and brand reputation that emerge when using the capacious affordances of the body to garner support for various causes. Embodied philanthropy offers immense creative possibilities for both effective fundraising and inclusive representation, but care must be taken to avoid becoming complicit with long-term harms in perpetuating onerous expectations of good citizenship.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> While formalities indicate that we should refer to Moore as ‘Sir Tom’ or ‘Sir Captain Tom Moore’ throughout this paper, we are concerned this may read as stylistically odd. Therefore, with utmost respect, we hope the primary use of ‘Moore’ or ‘Captain Tom’ will prove acceptable to readers.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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