

This multi-component output consists of one collaboratively devised theatre piece, which I led as director, writer, historian, and performer; two scholarly peer-reviewed articles; and two public engagement web articles. The different methodologies (practice research, history, reflective and autoethnographic writing) locate the origins of the Anglo-American physical fitness movement in the physical culture shows and performances of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vaudeville theatres and Music Halls, in order to argue for a different relationship between the muscular male body and orthodox masculinity.

*Dynamic Tensions* is motivated by urgent questions about men, masculinities, and fitness and health in the present day: 1. how do men negotiate their relationship to the ideal of the strong, athletic, and muscular male body? 2. how can fitness be seen as an expressive practice? and 3. how do men use fitness as a way of relating to self and others? It considers these questions in the historical archive and uses performance practice as a method to propose that the muscular, athletic male body ideal is a cultural script produced through embodied acts of everyday performance. Considering these acts as performance reveals the “dynamic tensions” (borrowing the term from Charles Atlas’s mail-order programme of muscle-building) between the institutions, industries, and social structures of physical fitness and the participant’s individual bodily experience. The research began in 2014 and was supported by an AHRC Leadership Fellows grant from 2016–18. It has been shared through performance practice, workshops, post-show discussions, publications, and performance documentation.

The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show

Broderick Chow



Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–F. Items marked with an \* are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A\* Full video documentation of *The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show* 
- B Short video documentation of workshop and rehearsal process of *The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show* 
- C\* Journal article: Chow, Broderick D.V. 2015. 'A Professional Body: Remembering, repeating and working out masculinities in fin-de-siècle physical culture', *Performance Research*, 20(5): 30–41
- D\* Journal article: Chow, Broderick D.V. 2019. 'Sculpting Masculinities in 19th- and 20th-Century Physical Culture: The Practiced Life of Stanley Rothwell', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 63(2): 34–56
- E\* Article: Chow, Broderick D.V. 2017. 'The unlikely origins of fitness culture could give us a different view on what it is to be a man', *The Conversation*, 1 December 2017
- F\* Journal article: Chow, Broderick D.V. 2019. 'The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show', *Contemporary Theatre Review: Interventions*, 2019

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

Broderick Chow

THE DYNAMIC TENSIONS  
PHYSICAL CULTURE SHOW

A Counter-Genealogy of Built Masculinities

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London

THE DYNAMIC TENSIONS PHYSICAL  
CULTURE SHOW: A Counter-Genealogy  
of Built Masculinities

Broderick Chow

ORCID ID 0000-0003-2301-6032

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The Royal Central School of Speech  
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Broderick D.V. Chow is Reader in Theatre,  
Performance and Sport at The Royal  
Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London. His research  
examines the intersections of theatre,  
performance, sport, physical culture,  
and the historical construction of  
masculinity. He is co-editor with Eero  
Laine and Claire Warden of *Performance  
and Professional Wrestling* (Routledge,  
2016) and is co-editing a new collection  
with Laine entitled *Sports Plays*. His  
forthcoming book *Dynamic Tensions*  
explores the origins of men's fitness  
practices in the popular theatre in the  
UK and US. Broderick is a competitive  
Olympic weightlifter and qualified coach.

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*Director/Writer/Performer:*  
Broderick Chow

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Michael Pearman

*Musical Director and Piano:*  
Sally Goodworth

*Technical Manager:* Jelmer Tuinstra

*Technical Assistant:* Jamie Russell-Curtis

*Technical Manager (KCL):* James Hare

*KCL AHRI Producers:* Laura Douglas,  
Vicky Bowman, Madeleine Ryan

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*Videographer:* Alexandros Papathanasiou

*Post-Show Response and Discussion*

*Chair:* Kéline Gotman

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I

## Overview

*Dynamic Tensions* is an ongoing research project that aims to transform understandings of the relationship between physical fitness and masculine gender construction by investigating fitness and sport as performance, using an original interdisciplinary methodology combining historiography, ethnographic fieldwork, and artistic practice research. The research began in 2014 with archival and historiographical work concerned with tracing the origins of men's fitness in the theatre and performance practices of the late-nineteenth century. The first output of this period of research was a journal article, reconsidering the fitness manuals of Edwardian wrestler, strongman, and performer George Hackenschmidt and published in 2015. In 2016, the research was awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellows grant of £159,045. During the two-year fellowship, concentrated archival research took place at the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin, with ethnographic field visits made to gyms in London, Glasgow, and Austin. The embodied approach to historiography modelled during this time resulted in a following journal article, published in *TDR: The Drama Review* in 2019. Concurrently, in 2017, I engaged in a process of practice research/arts-based research (ABR) with a group of performers with a background in both performance (theatre, live art, and vaudeville) and sport/fitness: Philip Bedwell, Daniel Crute, Jonathan Hinton, and Peter Moore. Seen through the lens of ABR (broadly speaking, a methodology in qualitative social sciences research that seeks to elicit data on lived experience through participation in creative activity, and where the creative activity is not an end in itself), the performers can be seen as interlocutors or research participants. However, following a practice research methodology, Bedwell, Crute, Hinton, and Moore might better be framed as artistic collaborators, whose interests and expertise drove the nature of the creative process. Through a series of workshops, the group explored historical documents (reviews, drawings, photos) of early "physical culture" performances in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century theatre, drawn from my archival research. Rather than re-enact these performances, the documents acted as catalysts for performative "self-reflection" through which

the men performed their life histories through words and embodied gesture. The resulting performance (*The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show*, hereafter *DTPCS*) was designed as an unrepeatably one-off, as the final "act" was a live weightlifting demonstration replicating the Music Hall and vaudeville attempts to break a record. It was performed at the Anatomy Museum, King's College London (KCL), as part of KCL's Arts and Humanities Festival, on 13 October 2017. It was recorded and produced as a film with accompanying documentary of rehearsal processes. The documentation of the film was disseminated at a panel on ABR methodologies at the Qualitative Research for Sport and Exercise conference 2018 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Two public engagement articles were published in *The Conversation* and *Contemporary Theatre Review Interventions*. These articles disseminate the documentation of the performance and reflect on the process of making and performing the show, in addition to elaborating the key findings of the research.

## II Questions, aims and objectives

Sport history and masculinity studies has long considered physical culture and fitness a disciplinary technology that produced a normative masculine subject aligned to industrial capitalism, militarization, patriarchal reproduction, and nationalism (elaborated in two public engagement articles, see also Andreasson and Johansson 2014). But few sport historians have considered the origins of physical culture in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vaudeville theatres and Music Halls. Nor has theatre and performance studies fully explored the rich history of the "physical culture show" in the nineteenth century. As an interdisciplinary project working across theatre, performance, and sport, *Dynamic Tensions* suggests that theatre and performance can produce new insights about the relation of masculinity to the practice of physical culture and fitness.

As I elaborate below (see III. Context), examinations of masculinity in the present moment have drawn attention to the way toxic behaviour is symbolized and performed by the ideal of the muscular, athletic male body. A performance-focused inquiry would seek to draw out the multivalent meanings of the built male body. Thus, the following research questions were explored:

## I Overview

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FIG 1 Pre-show photograph during audience entrance, from *The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show*, performed at the Anatomy Museum, King's College London, 13 October 2017



FIG 2 Chapter 1: *A Challenger!* performed by Daniel Crute from the video documentation

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*How do men negotiate their relationship to the ideal of the strong, athletic, and muscular male body?*

*How can fitness be seen as an expressive practice?*

*How do men use fitness as a way of relating to self and others?*

These questions guided a series of research objectives resulting in the outputs listed in the documentation:

- ⦿ to document and analyze the historical relationship between physical culture, theatre/performance, and the construction of masculinity through archival research and writing;
- ⦿ to describe the embodied practice of physical culture and fitness through autoethnographic research and writing;
- ⦿ to create performance work in collaboration with the expertise of fitness and physical culture practitioners.

The performance draws on methodologies of arts-based qualitative research (Leavy 2015; Given 2008), in which aesthetic and expressive practice is used to elicit new understandings of participants' (in this case, sport and physical fitness professionals) lived experiences. By re-performing or re-envisioning the practices of the late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century "physical culture show", the performance articulates different understandings of the manly tropes of the strongman, bodybuilder, wrestler, rugby player, and weightlifter. As such, *DTPCS* represents a practice-focused approach to the larger enquiry of *Dynamic Tensions*. The two articles support this enquiry historically and autoethnographically. In the article written for *Performance Research*, I ask how practice and autoethnography (specifically my own practice as a weightlifter) might inform the consideration of historical documents from the physical culture archive; in this case, the training manuals of Edwardian wrestler and strongman George Hackenschmidt. In *The Drama Review* article, I investigate physical culture practice in relation to documented lived experience. This is an extensive biographical study of the little-known Lancastrian bodybuilder, wrestler, boxer, writer, artist's model, and former miner Stanley Rothwell, who left behind several thousand pages of unpublished manuscripts. Noting that Rothwell was an artist model who posed for several well-known public sculptures in London by C. Sargeant Jagger and Josephine de Vasconcellos, I ask how Rothwell's sculpting of the body might have been viewed by Rothwell himself as artistic and expressive practice.

A

A

C,D

C

D

A

## III

## Context

*Dynamic Tensions* represents the first research project to contribute to discussions of masculinity and the built body by triangulating theatre and performance practice, qualitative research of contemporary sport and fitness, and theatre and sport history. As elaborated in the public engagement articles, this research was motivated by urgent and timely examinations of masculinity today, including discussions of gendered violence, institutionalized sexism, homophobia, whiteness, and mental health. While the hegemonic masculine ideal is being rightly critiqued, the image of the conventionally fit, muscular, and athletic male body remains prevalent, from superhero films, advertising, and Instagram and other social networks. “Fitness” itself remains a central part of public health discourse (see Public Health England 2016).

E, F

The interdisciplinary scope and methodology of the project fills a significant gap in the current research on masculinity, sport/exercise, and performance. Questions of the built male body have been extensively explored in historical studies of masculinity (Theweleit 1987; Mosse 1996; Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2010; Tumblety 2012). Such studies have tended to emphasize the muscular or disciplined male body as an expression of grand narratives of modernity, nationalism, fascism, and socialism. In its most damaging form, as Theweleit argues, the muscular and phallic male body has served as a fascist symbol. This association of the built and athletic male body with power, discipline, and patriarchy informs, at times in a problematically general manner, contemporary sociological studies of the gym (Andreasson and Johansson 2014). Sport and athleticism are also central to important concepts in the sociology of masculinity, such as Connell’s “hegemonic masculinity”, which she defines as the form of masculinity that “occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations” (Connell 2005: 76). She argues that “the institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in bodily performances” (Connell 2005: 54). While these historical and sociological studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of the power of representations and performances of the

built male body, there is also a tendency for such readings to draw on what I call, in *The Drama Review* article, the “inscription paradigm”. This paradigm reads built bodies as disciplined and constructed by social and historical forces. *Dynamic Tensions* instead uses performance as a way to bodily agency and possibilities for subversive or counter-hegemonic meanings.

D

From the perspective of theatre and performance studies, masculinities have been considered in terms of dominant stage representations (Gerstner 2006; Mangan 2002; Savran 1998; Walsh 2010). However, as *Dynamic Tensions* demonstrates, physical culturists created and spread the muscular male ideal via the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre, an area that has remained under-researched by the field. Thus, there is space for the methodologies of theatre and performance studies — in particular the consideration of the body as an agent of expression and transformation — to make an important intervention in the study of men, masculinities, and fitness and exercise. Therefore, *Dynamic Tensions* is a re-reading of histories, archives, and practices that have typically been linked to dominance and power, through the lens of theatre and performance, which shifts our attention to the way in which embodied agents produce, work out, and make sense of their inscription and construction by broader social and historical forces. In addition to mapping out a new approach to physical culture studies via performance, *Dynamic Tensions* speaks back to existing research fields including sport history, nineteenth-century theatre studies, and qualitative research in sport and exercise.

## IV

## Methodology

The practice represents an embodied articulation of *Dynamic Tensions*’s principal aim of producing new understandings of the lived experience of men’s fitness and physical culture practice via the methodology and heuristic of sport/physical culture as performance.

A, B

As elaborated earlier, the methods used in this project may be aligned to both practice research and ABR. *Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show* was created through a period of studio exploration with four individual experts, who, depending on the methodological perspective, might be described as interlocutors, research participants, or artistic collaborators. Each was a physical culture/sport specialist

A, B





← FIG 3 Still from *Chapter 2: The Gym and the Garage*, performed by Peter Moore from the video documentation  
 FIGS 4-5 Stills from rehearsal and devising workshops, from the video documentation of the workshop and rehearsal process, July 2017

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as well as a performer (Philip Bedwell, ex-professional wrestler, personal trainer, and performance artist; Daniel Crute, professional strongman; Jonathan Hinton, rugby player and actor; and Peter Moore, bodybuilder and actor). The studio exploration was broadly divided into the following phases:

- a. One-to-one discussions with participants covering initiation, motivations, and affective responses to their physical culture practices: Some of these conversations were recorded and transcribed, while others took place in more ethnographic settings (for example, conversations during training sessions) and were captured through detailed field notes. I was the fifth participant, with my own autoethnographic reflections on my practice as a weightlifter serving as both data and a guiding principle on the importance of bodily agency in any physical culture practice. These discussions were then analyzed for themes and moments of insight into the participants' embodied construction of self.
- b. "Expert" workshops with participants: Four of the participants (Bedwell, Hinton, Moore, and myself), led workshops for other participants in their respective physical culture practices — bodybuilding posing, rugby scrum training, weightlifting, professional wrestling. These physical explorations were documented in field notes by me and Hinton.
- c. Devising workshops with participants: In these workshops, historical documents, including theatre programmes of physical culture shows, images, magazine articles, and training programmes, all gathered during the project's archival research, provided the stimulus for elicitation of autobiographical and life-history performance texts as well as non-verbal embodied performances. For example, in response to a magazine article detailing the life narrative of an early bodybuilder, Moore created his own "conversion narrative" of initiation into the practice. In another workshop, the training programme and philosophical writings of Edwardian wrestler George Hackenschmidt prompted a simple performative gesture using Bedwell's knowledge of wrestling holds.
- d. Reviewing and editing: The workshops were mostly documented by video. Hinton and I reviewed this footage and worked with the participants to create distinct "acts" of c. 10–15 minutes. B
- e. Framing and composition: The acts were put together in a variety show form that was a "re-performance", but not a re-enactment, of the lecture-demonstration physical culture shows discussed in the articles written for *Performance Research* and *The Drama Review*. C, D  
 Live music and choreography derived from the Edwardian Music Hall was added (performed by pianist Sally Goodworth and singers Adam Johnson, Phoebe Ransome, and Jack Robinson).

- f. Performance: *DTPCS* was performed on 13 October 2017 and documented by filmmaker Alexandros Papathanasiou. It is important to emphasize that the performance was designed as “unrepeatable”, with the final act being my own attempt to break a personal weightlifting record. This final “real” act pushed the theatre show into a liminal space between theatre, live art, and sport, demonstrating both a historical practice (such acts were common finales in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century physical culture shows) and highlighting the intersection of theatrical representation and everyday performance.

The approach of the practice research thus created rich evidence of alternative readings of physical culture in male-identifying bodies in the *present*, proposing a conceptual continuum with the historical arguments of the articles written for *Performance Research* and *The Drama Review*.



A



C, D

v

## Timeline

2014–15	Archival research (British Library’s collections of physical culture magazines and publications). Writing and publication of ‘A Professional Body: Remembering, repeating and working out masculinities in fin-de-siècle physical culture’.	
2016	<i>Dynamic Tensions</i> was awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellows Grant (£159,045).	
2016–17	Archival research (H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin; Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library). Fieldwork in London, Glasgow, and Austin. Initial meetings and workshops held with collaborators/informants.	
2017–18	Writing of ‘Sculpting Masculinities in 19th- and 20th-Century Physical Culture: The Practiced Life of Stanley Rothwell’.	
2017	Summer	Studio exploration with collaborators. Rehearsal process documented by Alexandros Papathanasiou.
	October	Performance of <i>The Dynamic Tensions Physical Culture Show</i> at Anatomy Museum, King’s College London. Post-show discussion conducted with Dr Kéline Gotman.

C

B

D

B

A

FIG 6 Still from *Chapter 3: An Education in Wrestling*, performed by Philip Bedwell (“Lady Killer”) and Broderick Chow from the video documentation

A

FIG 7 Still from *Chapter 4: A Gentleman’s Game*, performed by Jonathan Hinton (standing) and Broderick Chow from the video documentation

A



FIG 8 Still from *Chapter 5: Personal Best*. 80kg snatch, lifted by Broderick Chow from the video documentation

		Documentation of both the performance and rehearsal process produced and edited by Papathanasiou.	A,B
2017 2019	December– January	Reflective, public engagement articles written and published.	E,F
2019–20		Archival work at Stark Center, formulation of future research plans. Publication of <i>The Drama Review</i> article.	D
Future plans		Subsequent archival visits to the H.J. Litcher Stark Center have enabled me to look at two new collections (the Tommy Kono Papers and the Milo Steinborn Collection). One new strand of research is an investigation into the relationship between physical culture and incarceration. Initial research for this project has been shared at an interdisciplinary panel on prison studies at the 2019 American Studies Association Annual Meeting.	

provided the ground to consider how fitness as an everyday lived experience is both performative and theatrical. Guided by my own participation in physical culture, I was able to study physical culture in a way that focuses on the embodied agency of the practitioner, and then to consider such agency in a collaborative way through creative practice with a small group of other practitioners.

The findings are significant for both qualitative sport studies and theatre and performance studies, and initial findings were discussed in presentations at the American Society for Theatre Research conference 2016, the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Meeting 2016, and the Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise conference 2018. These findings were disseminated in varied forms, through a live performance seen by 108 people, performance documentation, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, and public engagement articles. A monograph is currently under advance contract with Northwestern University Press.

## VI Findings

The creative practice and historical research enabled the following key findings: A,B C,D

- The theatrical origins of fitness culture demonstrate that the ideal of the strong, muscular, athletic male is not natural but socially constructed, as are the values we attach to it.
- The cultural script of the muscular male body is produced through embodied labours that can be considered both performative and theatrical.
- The embodied practice of physical culture and fitness can be a way of negotiating the individual's relationships to the institutions, industries, and social structures that surround masculine gender performance. Taking the view of physical culture as expressive performance shows that practices like bodybuilding, wrestling, and weightlifting can be a way of rejecting orthodox masculinity, negotiating the aging body, and exploring one's physical limits and capacities.

These findings could only be arrived at via an interdisciplinary research method that triangulates historical and archival research, autoethnographic fieldwork, and creative practice research. In other words, uncovering the origins of present-day fitness in nineteenth-century theatre practice

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