



LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY

---

Citation:

Light, R (2008) Learning masculinities in a Japanese high school rugby club. *Sport, Education and Society*, 13 (2). pp. 163-180. ISSN 1357-3322 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320801957079>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/922/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

---

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on [openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

# *Learning masculinities in a Japanese high school rugby club*

Richard Light

*University of Sydney, Australia*

This paper draws on research conducted on a Tokyo high school rugby club to explore diversity in the masculinities formed through membership in the club. Based upon the premise that particular forms of masculinity are expressed and learnt through ways of playing (game style) and the attendant regimes of training, it identifies variation on a hegemonic, culture-specific form of masculinity operating in Japanese high school rugby. By focusing on one particular high school rugby club it identifies differences at the institutional level of the school. Further tightening its analytic focus it explores individual variations in the masculinities developed by boys in the school's top team. In doing so this paper highlights the ways in which diversity in the masculinities constructed through contact sports can be obfuscated by a reductionist view of there being only one, universal hegemonic patterns of masculinity.

**Keywords:** *Masculinities; School rugby; Japan; Culture; Situated learning; Practice theory.*

## **Introduction**

Research and writing on the social construction of masculinities over the past few decades has highlighted the ways in which gender is not genetically determined but is 'learnt' through the individual's engagement in society. This learning of gender is different to common sense perceptions of learning as a rational, intellectual, process. It is, instead, a long term, whole body social process operating at a non-conscious level that is implicit and difficult to identify or measure. As Bourdieu (1990) suggests, by bypassing the scrutiny of the conscious mind such embodied learning is also powerful and durable. If recent interest in learning theory in the sport and physical education pedagogy field is extended to research on sport and the construction of masculinities it provides a valuable means of understanding the role that sport in schools plays in the development of young men's gendered identity.

Contemporary thinking about learning in the education field over the past two decades suggests that it is a far more comprehensive process than the mere acquisition of pre-existing knowledge limited to the rational processing of information. It recognizes the complexity of learning as a life long process tied into day to day living. It also highlights the pivotal role of experience, emotion, the body, and its sensations in the formation of identity. These are important considerations in analyses of boys' experiences of sport that differentiate it (and physical education) from most of the academic curriculum. When the concept of learning is broadened to move beyond the confines of the classroom, the physical education gymnasium or field to include the learning of class, culture and gender, sport emerges as an important social practice through which a range of important

yet often implicit learning takes place. As Connell and others note (for example see Connell, 1995; Jefferson, 2002; Tomsen & Donaldson, 2003), there is not one form of masculinity but rather multiple masculinities that are culture and class specific. Even within patterns of masculinity that are dominant enough to assume hegemonic status there are variations, contradictions and varying degrees of compliance and resistance (for example see, Connell, 1995). Studies on the social construction of gender over the past two decades highlight the need to account for the dynamic inter-relationships between culture, class and gender. They also emphasize the importance of embodiment and social and cultural context at both a macro and micro levels.

Within a theoretical framework provided by the practice theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) complemented by that of Bourdieu this paper draws on research conducted on a Tokyo high school rugby club to explore diversity in the masculinities formed within a hegemonic form operating in and through Japanese high school rugby. Based upon the premise that particular forms of masculinity are expressed and reproduced through ways of playing (game style) and the attendant regimes of training, it identifies variation on a hegemonic, culture-specific form of masculinity in a Japanese high school rugby club. At the institutional level of the school in the study it identifies differences club due to the influence of class. By further tightening its focus it then explores individual variations in the masculinities developed by boys in the 'regulars' (the A team or 1<sup>st</sup> XV). In teasing out the complexity of the ways in which masculinities in the rugby club are constructed this paper highlights how the diversity of masculinities constructed through contact sports can be obfuscated by a reductionist view of there being only one, universal hegemonic masculinity.

### **Situated learning.**

Over the past decade Lave and Wenger's (1991) concepts of situated learning and communities of practice have been used in the sport and physical education field. This has been particularly noticeable in writing on Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) and similar student-centred, inquiry-based approaches to teaching and coaching team games (see for example, Kirk & Macdonald, 1998; Kirk & MacPhail, 2002; Griffin, Brooker & Patton, 2005). It has also been applied to empirical research on learning and identity formation in and through sport (Light 2006). As Lave and Wenger suggest, it offers a means of understanding 'how we really learn' through participation in social practice. Although often referred to as 'situated learning theory' Lave and Wenger do not actually offer a theory per se but, instead, a set of important analytic concepts for understanding how learning occurs. Their concepts of communities of practice, situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation provide ways of understanding how learning, in the broadest sense, takes place on a day-to-day basis. Reflecting a rejection of objectivist views of knowledge they see what is learnt as being inseparable from the learner and a way of being in the social world rather than just knowing about it. That is to say, that authentic and meaningful learning is a product of participation in social practice. The concept of situated learning implies comprehensive understandings involving the whole person and the world within which he/she lives to challenge reductionist views of learning as an exclusively in-the-head process of cognition. It suggests that agent, activity

and the world are mutually constituting. This view is also evident in the conceptual tools of Bourdieu (1984) and the ways in which the habitus, the embodied life history of the individual, and the cultural field within which he/she acts are mutually constituted through the mediation of practice.

The work of both Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bourdieu focuses on practice to emphasize both the transformative nature of action and the importance of action over conscious thought. The concept of situated learning sees learning as an aspect of social practice that involves deep and significant change in the whole person as he/she becomes “a certain type of person” (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 52) through the individual’s relation to particular socio-cultural communities. While the learning of masculinities through engagement in practice may not necessarily be specific to particular communities the notion of situated learning provides a valuable means of understanding how learning masculinity involves a comprehensive, whole person-in-the-world process of learning that is socially and culturally situated. Here, Bourdieu’s concept of cultural field offers a more useful means of identifying the larger socio-cultural contexts within which masculinities are formed and embodied.

### **Practice, context and embodiment**

The focus of Bourdieu’s work on practice and context complements Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of situated learning. Bourdieu emphasizes the centrality of the body and its experiences for the embodiment of culture and class and is one of the few mainstream sociologists to recognize the significance of sport in social processes. According to Bourdieu (1984, 1977), class and culture are reproduced through processes of engagement in social and cultural life within particular cultural contexts, or *cultural fields*. Bourdieu conceives of practice as mediating between the individual’s *habitus* and the *cultural field* within he/she engages in social action. Habitus refers to the embodiment of the individual’s history of engagement in social and cultural practice and has been widely used in studies of embodiment and emphasises the range of non-conscious learning that occurs through participation in practice in particular cultural fields. Habitus does not determine social action but it does structure it. Bourdieu’s emphasis on practice is useful in identifying how experiences of day-to-day social and cultural life operate to shape our social action and identity. Learning is deeply situated in particular cultural and social contexts and, as Lave & Wenger (1991) suggest, it is inseparable from the formation of identity. Extending the concept of learning to include the learning of gender highlights how the immediate socio-cultural environment and the embodied experiences of the individual within these particular contexts profoundly shape the development of gendered identities. Although Bourdieu has paid some attention to gender (1990 [pages 66-79], 2001) it has not formed a significant aspect of his work. However, his conceptual tools have been applied to gender analyses (Laberge, 1995; McNay, 1999; Skelton, 2000) and analyses of sport and the embodiment of masculinity in Western settings (Brown, 2005; Light & Kirk, 2000) and non-Western settings (Light, 1999a, 2000b).

## **Research method**

This paper draws on research that I conducted in Japan in 1998 to provide an example of the diversity of masculinities developed through participation in heavy contact sport and the culturally and socially situated nature of this learning. Within the context of the interplay between culture, class and individual experience, it focuses on training and game play to highlight variations at cultural, institutional and individual levels. It draws on a four-month ethnographic study of a high school rugby club in a Tokyo high school during which I followed the club's 'regulars' (The A team or 1<sup>st</sup> XV) through the Tokyo regional competition and the national secondary schools All Japan championships. Although the research was conducted almost a decade ago this does not detract from the diversity and complexity it exposes to offer an example of the internal dynamics of hegemonic masculinities with their varying degrees of compliance and resistance and variations in individual constructions of masculinity within them.

### *The site and the participants*

The research was conducted at an academically elite high school in Tokyo referred to in this paper under the pseudonym of the Tokyo High School (THS). The stronger high school rugby teams in Japan tend to be academically lower level schools drawing on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The demands of the Japanese education system, are such that it is extremely difficult to aim at a high academic achievement and play sport at a competitive level. This is exacerbated by the typically demanding daily training regimes that major school sport such as rugby involve (see for example, Light, 1999a). THS was unusual in that it was within the top five percent of schools base upon the number of graduates who were accepted into the most elite universities yet had won several All Japan high school rugby championships.

The study focused on eight key informants including seven players in the 'regulars' and the coach. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of the participants. The players consisted of three forwards and four backs.

### *The Researcher*

I lived in Japan for a period of six years from 1990 to 1996. During this time I coached rugby at elite varsity level in the Kansai A League (West Japan) for three years and, as a teacher in an academically elite high school in Osaka, coached the school rugby team for three years. I returned in 1998 to conduct the research referred to in this paper and have returned on a regular basis since then for both personal and professional reasons. I speak Japanese and am familiar with Japanese high school rugby.

### *Data Generation and Analysis*

Data were generated through extended, conversational interviews and observational notes focused on eight key informants that included the head coach. The original analysis was conducted using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) involving an

ongoing process of generating data and then comparing and contrasting it to identify emergent themes and develop substantive theories that were then tested through further data generation. In the latter stages of the research developing theory was linked to more formal theory.

### **Rugby and schooling in Japan**

At the time of the study rugby was the number-two team sport in Japan after baseball and was a major sport in junior high schools, senior high schools and universities. It has since lost a little in popularity due to the rise of football (soccer) since the introduction of the J. League in 1992 (see, Light & Yasaki, 2002). Rugby was first introduced at one of Japan's most prestigious private universities, Keio, by an English teacher in 1899 and spread throughout the school system during the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Up until the Pacific War it was only played within schools and universities (other than in the military services) but was taken up by companies in the post war period. The spread of sport into schools over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was driven by a belief in its effectiveness as a vehicle for the reproduction of a particular form of culture and the fostering of particular social and moral values in a rapidly changing society with a need for social cohesion (Light, 2000a; Passin, 1980; Roden, 1980). As a relatively conservative sport the practice, organization and meaning of rugby has been shaped by cultural assumptions of it as a form of social, moral and cultural education.

Playing sport at the highest levels in schools has traditionally been seen in Japan to require the same single-minded commitment demanded for success in the education system (Light, 1999a; Moeran, 1986). The demands of the Japanese examination system known as 'examination hell' (*jiken jigoku*) and of the training regimes that typify the higher levels of competitive school sport such as rugby are usually mutually exclusive. In modern Japan the samurai ideal of balance expressed in *bun bu ryodou* (study and martial training; both ways) is beyond the grasp of most Japanese boys. The boys in this study, however, were required to maintain a high 'GPA' (*seiseki*) at an academically elite level school while playing high school rugby at the highest level in Japan. The boys at THS all aspired to playing rugby in a good company team but, at the same time, wanted the security provided by qualifying for employment by entering a well regarded university through an entrance exam rather than through rugby.

The demands of both the education system and the school/university sport system are underpinned by the cultural imperative of *seishin* (Moeran, 1986; Rohlen, 1986; Passin, 1980; Light, 2000a). Although it is not always articulated, the cultural concept of *seishin* operates at an unquestioned, common sense level to structure much of Japanese behaviour and exert a strong influence on the practice and meaning of sport in Japanese schools. It has no equivalent in English and refers generally to a holistic conception of human existence that conceives of a human force or 'spirit' that is neither mind nor body. It rejects dualistic divisions of mind and body and of the separation of the individual from society. It can be trained and developed through particular practices that stress tolerance and endurance and a degree of suffering that involve the need to overcome the weakness of the mind and the body as described by anthropologist Thomas Rohlen (1986) in the

training of new recruits in a Japanese bank. Although there are distinctions made between body and mind in day-to-day language, and between achievement in the intellectual demands of the education system and physical achievement in sport, both practices are assumed to develop and express *seishin ryokou* (*seishin* strength). Owing to the appropriation of the concept by militarists leading up to the Pacific War (Passin, 1980) some Japanese are disinclined to identify it as a cultural imperative but, as cultural anthropologists suggest, it operates at an implicit, embodied level to form a powerful influence on Japanese behaviour (see for example, Moeran, 1986; Rohlen, 1986). Although boys who gain entry into prestigious universities through the examination system gain access to better employment and social resources than those who get into the same universities through sport, the qualities seen to be developed through the rigors of a sport such as rugby often suggest to prospective employers that the graduate is likely to have the qualities needed to be of value to the company.

The highest level of rugby is played in the corporate leagues where it was, until recently, functionally professional but labelled as amateur. As is the case with many other sports, good rugby players can get into prestigious companies that field teams in the better leagues. However, their position in the company is not assured once they retire from playing with prospects for post-playing careers generally being poor. Much like the sport system in the USA, rugby players can only access company rugby (the equivalent of professional sport in the USA) by playing for and graduating from a good university. Good players, therefore, use their *physical capital* to move from junior high school to a strong senior high school and into a prestigious university with a strong rugby team, following a pathway into the company leagues. Over the past decade corporate rugby has undergone significant changes including the acceptance of professionalism, a rise in imported rugby players and coaches and changes in training and game style (Hirai, 2005). School rugby, however, has been more insulated from these developments but numbers have dropped so much in some areas that it has forced the introduction of ten-a-side rugby.

### **Game style and regimes of training in Japanese school rugby**

There is an identifiable hegemonic form of masculinity operating through the practices and discourse of Japanese high school rugby (see for example, Light, 1999b, 2000b, 2003). It manifests itself in both the ways in which games are played (game style) and the training approaches taken to play this style of game. This is not to suggest that all schools in Japan play precisely the same style of rugby, as there is a wide range of different styles that particular schools are known for playing. These are, however, more variations within a reasonably universal approach adopted across Japan as the historical product of over a century of rugby in Japan shaped by political, social and cultural forces (Light, 2000a). This approach is made identifiable when compared to the approaches of high school rugby in settings that are culturally distinct from Japan (see for example, Light, 2000b). During the massive social changes associated with the Meiji Revolution (1868-1912) the collective nature of team games and their potential for fostering cultural values of group consciousness (*dantai ishiki*) appealed to Meiji educators (Roden, 1980). Within a group-

oriented cultural and social setting such as Japan there is a far stronger emphasis on the collective over the individual (Light, 2000b).

Social life in Japan is organized on the basis of small groups with strong interdependence between group members, competitiveness with other groups and a sense of intra-group surveillance (Nakane, 1970; Sugimoto, 1997). Members of a small social group such as a school rugby club share responsibility for decision-making and performance with individual sensitivity toward the expectations of the group discouraging action that departs from the plans and decisions arrived at on a collective basis. In high school and university rugby the coach holds a position of authority and respect but the majority of decision-making about training and game plans is the responsibility of the senior players. In the case of (senior) high school rugby clubs it is the third year students who provide the most leadership. Coaches and other adults such as old boys (*OBs*) tend to focus their talk more on social and moral issues, attitude and 'spirit' (Light, 1999a). The training 'menu' is typically decided by agreement between the coach and the senior players who usually make up most of the 'regulars'. This was the case at THS where the coach acted more as a facilitator than someone calling all the shots, being explicitly in charge and purposefully directing training and game strategy.

Reluctance of the players to break from strategy and tactics determined by the group contributes to the ways in which game style in Japanese high schools, rugby tends to be predictable. It also tends to be fast-paced aimed at testing the stamina, tenacity and resolve of the opposition team. As Greenwood (1986) suggests, rugby games in Japan often appear as a 'war of attrition' in which the fitter, tougher and more courageous win. This approach is underpinned by cultural assumptions about the physical and mental qualities needed to win such games being manifestations of *seishin* power even though it is often not articulated as such. This approach holds significant cultural meaning reflecting a belief in the propensity of sport such as rugby to develop admired values of dominant culture which is not dissimilar to assumptions about rugby's capacity to develop certain types of men in the schools of the ruling classes in Australia (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowset, 1982; Light & Kirk, 2000) and elsewhere. Displays of such moral fortitude and internal, collective strength convey important cultural meaning in Japan and contribute toward the reproduction of what could be described in Gramsci's (1971) terms as cultural hegemony.

### **Class and the practice of rugby at THS**

Owing to the demands of the education system membership in the more competitive rugby playing schools the vast majority of the competitive high school rugby teams are located in lower academic level schools. Fushimi Kogyo Koko (Fushimi Industrial High School) represents a classic example of this. Fushimi Kogyo Koko is a government school serving a low socio-cultural regional area with low academic achievement levels and formal educational outcomes. During the study I was able to interview the school's head rugby, Mr Hamaguchi, coach and he explained to me how success in rugby had turned the school around from a school with enormous student behaviour problems to a



school with pride and hope. From his appointment at the school as teacher Mr Hamaguchi identified the opportunities for the school to be ‘saved’ by rugby. He gradually developed a very strong rugby team that brought pride to the school and greatly enhanced employment opportunities for graduates of the rugby club. After Fushimi Kogyo won an All Japan High School Rugby championship a television station aired a popular drama based on the success story of the school and its rugby team for eight years. Mr. Hamaguchi told me that his boys were not particularly intelligent but were immensely tough, fit, committed and devoted to the team and the school. He said there was no secret to their success other than hard training every day of their life at school adding that the harder it was the more they liked it.

There was a stark contrast between THS and Fushimi Kogyo. THS is an academically elite private school that is also strong at a number of sports but particularly strong in rugby. The boys in the rugby club came from financially comfortable families and had to maintain high minimum grades (*seiseki*) to stay in the club. Unlike other rugby playing schools there was no entry other than by academic examination results. Although over 90% of Japanese see themselves as middle class research suggests that there is no systematic deviance in patterns of socio-economic inequality in Japan from those in other advanced capitalist societies (Sugimoto, 1997). Class had a significant impact upon the practice of rugby at THS. While the game style adopted by the team and its approaches to training bore similarity to most other strong rugby schools it varied significantly in ways that can be accounted for by the influence of class. This was apparent, not only at an embodied level and expressed in ways of playing and training, but was also clearly articulated. Sitting on a train with the squad on their way to a game at the national championships at the famous Hanozono stadium the former coach, Mr. Yamashita, made this difference very clear to me:

(THS) is absolutely different to schools like *Fushimi Kogyo*. Their boys only have rugby and their approach is all about *seishin* power, guts (*konjo*) rugby and hard training. Our boys are different. They have to study very hard as well and they have good *seiseki* (GPS). They are intelligent boys and that’s why they play differently. They are always thinking about the game and not relying solely on guts (*konjo*).

The practices of rugby in the form of game style and methods of training at THS were significantly different to that of most other strong rugby schools in Japan that I had been exposed to over six years of coaching and that which I had observed while following THS through its season. They were also different to the practice of rugby by the other schools at the national high school rugby championships. While THS game style displayed some of the characteristics of most other schools such as highly patterned plays, unvaried high pace of play and heavy front on contact it varied in ways that supported Mr. Yamashita’s claim that the team played ‘thinking rugby’. THS players valued being able to stay calm and think about what they were doing instead of adopting the almost manic commitment and sustained intensity of other teams. The captain, Kou, explained this to me as it became apparent that the THS were likely to play Fushimi Kogyo in the final at the rugby championships:

(Fushimi Kogyo) play old style *konjo* (guts) rugby. We play thinking rugby. We stay calm even under pressure in big games and think about what we are doing. We play hard rugby but it's not just guts and you will see two different ways of playing if we meet them in the final.

There was similarity between practice at THS and the dominant approach of most strong rugby schools with a tendency to rely on patterns of play and a stress on the development of physical and emotional endurance (Light, 1999a) but the players and the coach saw their approach as being more tactically oriented with a more intellectual approach than most of their opponents. Initially they were quick to devalue the importance of *seishin* in their approach due to their view of it as an old fashioned idea and their desire to distance themselves from the traditional *seishin teki* (style) approach. However, as the study and the season progressed several of the players admitted that it was, in fact, important as the winger, Suzuki, suggests:

*Seishin* is not the most important thing in rugby but I think it does matter and I think the other players do too. In a lot of the game where it's very aggressive and violent you need *seishin*.

Although players and staff at THS sought to distance their approach from what they saw as outdated approaches that emphasise *seishin* it had a significant influence on practice. It also had an influence on the boy's views of the masculine values and characteristics that the THS players admired as the captain Kou outlines:

I admire a man who sticks to what he is doing and keeps at it no matter how hard it gets. Getting up every day to do your best and overcoming hardship is what makes a man and not just chasing what ever looks cool or fashionable at the time.

School teams in Australia and other Western settings invariably claim that their students learn teamwork by playing rugby (for example see, Light & Kirk, 2000). It also forms a prominent feature of both discourse and practice in Japanese school rugby (Light 1999a, 1999b; 2000, 2003). The emphasis on teamwork in Japanese school rugby dovetails with a cultural emphasis on group consciousness and a focus on the group over the individual (for example see, Moeran, 1986; Nakane, 1970; Sugimoto, 1997). The young men at THS consistently emphasized the enjoyment of working as a team and the importance of teamwork as is evident in this quote from the winger, Ono:

It's great being part of a successful movement in a game. If I pass the ball and someone scores then I took part in scoring, just like the guy who passed the ball to me. If I score I get to cap off the efforts of the whole team.

Teamwork and the elevation of the group over the individual figured strongly in the THS rugby club with several players suggesting that rugby provided a vehicle for the development of this important social and cultural value as the prop, Fujiwara explains when asked what aspects of rugby he enjoyed the most:

(What I enjoy most is) When our line is threatened but we all combine and nobody lets them through. If we let them over the line we fail as a team and if we fail as a team then

we fail as individuals... This the real meaning of rugby. This is what you learn from rugby.

Practice at THS was underpinned by a dominant; culture-specific set of assumptions but was overlaid by class specific *doxa* (values, beliefs and discourse) producing a particular socio-cultural context and a particular pattern of masculinity. Training at THS was demanding but less emotionally and physically intense than 'traditional' approaches with regular breaks for the seniors to discuss different technical and tactical aspects of the session. There was also none of the cruel treatment and humiliation of junior players that I had seen in some university and school rugby. It was common for many school rugby clubs to reinforce the *joge kankei* (vertical social relationships) of the group by giving juniors menial tasks such as pumping up balls before training and deflating them after training every day (Light, 1999a). In some school and university rugby clubs there is also hazing of juniors that includes explicit physical abuse. While there was certainly a social hierarchy at the club it was free of unfair treatment and humiliation of juniors.

Everybody involved with the THS rugby club saw their approach to rugby as being distinctly different to that of most other strong school rugby clubs. This became particularly apparent in the lead up to the final of the All Japan High School Rugby Championships where they played against Fushimi Kogyo, a team that embodied the traditional *seishin teki* approach. Training involved more tactical thinking and less emphasis on physical suffering and the development of inner strength than other teams. The practice of rugby at THS was distinct due to the influence of class. The influence that rugby had on the process of learning to be a particular type of man was shaped by particular, class-specific physical and social practices and discourse.

### **Individual variations within the THS rugby club**

There were distinct differences between the practices of THS and the masculinity expressed and learnt by boys through participating in them, and those of most other strong rugby schools. At a personal, individual level there were also variations in the masculinities developed by boys *within* the THS rugby club that became identifiable over the duration of the study. A close focus analysis made possible by the length of the study and the depth of entry into the team allowed me to identify individual differences articulated during interviews and conversations and in practice at training and in games.

The physical demands of rugby differ according to the players' position and the experiences involved can have an important influence on the types of masculinities players develop. Despite a narrowing of differences since professionalisation in 1995 the physical experiences of the forwards and the backs are quite different and give rise to different cultures within a team. In rugby the forwards have to contest possession in set plays (line outs and scrums) and in contests for possession during play such as rucks (when the ball is on the ground) and mauls (where the ball is in the hand). They are, therefore, typically more involved in aggressive and heavy physical confrontations than the backs. Players in the front row of the scrum (two props and a hooker) are involved in a very aggressive contest as they literally clash head to head as the two scrums engage

and struggle in a very explicit test of collective power. Fujiwara was one of two prop forwards in the team who was a strong and competitive player but, despite the aggression needed for his position, valued fair play and would not transgress the rules in games. He enjoyed the intense contest in the scrum, eye to eye with his opposite number, before slamming into each other driven by the force of seven team-mates. After the final of the national high school rugby championships he recounted to me his satisfaction at seeing the pain and dread in his opponent's eyes in the scrum every time they packed down and how it lifted him for the rest of the game. He did not enjoy causing injury but did enjoy winning the physical contest and dominating the opposition as long as it was within the rules of the game. He would not, however, consider punching or any illegal play. He said that hard competition and fair play was the true meaning of rugby.

The captain, Kou, also played in the forwards at number eight which is a position demanding high levels of fitness, strength and speed. Kou was a little small for the position but was very fit, strong and aggressive on the field. For him rugby was a war and that was how he described games. His commitment, courage and tenacity inspired his team-mates who held him in awe as a leader. At the national championships his leadership was commented on in several newspapers and, despite being unable to play due to a back injury, received much attention from television cameras covering the final of the national championships (Light, 1999b). However, unlike Fujiwara, he was not averse to a little illegal play if he saw it to be necessary. He was also not reluctant to throw punches or step on opponents to intimidate them and establish 'the upper hand' as he explains:

You get heated up in games and I won't start any violence but I will take revenge. If I am in a ruck or maul and the referee can't see, I'll throw a punch. Or sometimes I'll step on someone if I recognize them but only when I am sure the referee won't see it and when it's not near our line but I would never endanger the team by giving away a penalty in our half (of the field).

Honda was vice captain and played at fly half, which is a position requiring skill, anticipation and decision-making. He had a very good relationship with Kou but did not share his penchant for contact play or violence, whether rule legitimated or not. He respected players like Fujiwara and Kou and saw the need to win the forwards' contest and establish physical superiority but did not particularly enjoy contact himself. He enjoyed delivering well timed, accurate passes to his outside players, evading the opposition, executing tactical kicks and the decision-making required by his position. There was, however, not a clear division between the masculinities of backs and forwards. Some forwards were less enthusiastic about deliberate heavy contact and some of the backs valued establishing physical superiority and relished in exercising superior power.

Yamamoto played in the centres (two players in the middle of the back line) that is a position that usually requires strength but also the fine skills of catching and passing and evasive footwork. He was a fast runner with good acceleration and a good (evasive) step yet he deliberately sought direct physical confrontation. This was particularly noticeable during qualifying games in Tokyo where the team

played against comparatively weak opposition. In one game in particular Yamamoto seemed to even change course when running with the ball to smash into a defender. On one occasion he ran over the top of six unfortunate members of the opposition to score a try. After that game I asked him why he didn't use his speed and agility to which he replied:

Rugby is hard contact game and it's important to show the enemy that you are stronger than they are. Maybe I could step around some of them but I want them to know I am stronger. I enjoy contact. I like running fast too but in these games I want to build my power for the championship games.

When I spoke to the coach about Yamamoto he told me that he 'went looking for contact' because of his experiences of rugby as a junior. Yamamoto had been very big for his age and had become accustomed to just running over opposition players to score tries at junior high school. He had learnt to enjoy the sensations involved in very explicit and physical exercise of superior power involved in knocking other boys over or out of the way. His bio-physical attributes had led him into particular experiences from which he had developed an approach to playing where he valued being able to physically dominate opposing players. During games against weaker opposition he consistently sought contact when carrying the ball but in the more important games of the national championships he adjusted his play to look for gaps in the defence and use his pace but the habitus is not so easily changed and there were certainly occasions in the heat of an intense struggle during the final when his embodied masculinity led him into contact when it seemed a better option to evade the opposition or pass.

## **Discussion**

Connell (1983) offers a useful means of analyzing the ways in which different experiences of participation in sport contribute toward the learning or embodiment of particular versions of masculinity operating in and through the sport. She suggests that different forms of masculinity are developed around different combinations of power and skill as core dimensions of most sport. For example, in a game such as badminton, even though it does require power to be successful, skill and tactical knowledge is of primary importance and it is likely to produce experiences that are significantly different to rugby league or sumo where power and force are more important. These are also sports that involve the direct execution of physical power and force onto the bodies of opponents in very personal ways. In heavy body contact sports such as rugby, ice hockey and American football there are also differences in combinations of force/power and skill according to positions and to the tactics and strategies adopted. As is evident in this study socio-cultural contexts shape practices and the learning that emerges from young men's participation in them. This suggests that analysis of the different emphases placed on skill and force offer a useful means of identifying the significance of particular ways of training for their development of masculine identity.

Playing rugby in ways that place more emphasis on skill, communication, anticipation and tactical understanding would thus contribute to the learning of forms of masculinity

that vary from that reproduced through the traditional approach to school rugby in Japan. The interaction and higher order thinking that this stimulates might also be seen as a positive aspect of the learning that occurs through rugby as part of boys' schooling experiences in any setting. The style of play adopted at THS and the accompanying training regimes differ from those typical of other strong rugby schools due to the influence of class. The form of masculinity developed at THS as a collective habitus, therefore, varies from the hegemonic form of school rugby. As the analytic focus is tightened to the level of the individual it reveals further variation at the institutional level of the school. The scope of this paper does not allow an in-depth examination of the reasons for the development of these individual masculinities but the physical experiences of the centre, Yamamoto, suggest that, as Welton (1998) argues, that the bio-physical dimensions of the body can play a part in the learning of gender. His size at a young age that gave him such an advantage in power provided him with experiences that profoundly shaped, not only his style of play, but also the masculinity that he was learning.

This close focus examination of experience and the learning of masculinities suggests that there is a need for sensitivity toward the range of masculinities operating around contact sports and the limitations involved in grossly categorising the masculinities developed through contact sport as wholly hegemonic and therefore wholly bad. As Connell suggests in this issue, there are rightly concerns with the negative influences that elite and highly competitive contact sport can have on young men, with the ways in which contact sport can glorify and encourage violence and the injuries that they inflict upon young men (for example see, Messner & Sabo, 1990; Messner, 1992; Mills, 1997). However, team games in schools such as rugby offer *opportunities* for valuable social learning when appropriate pedagogy is adopted. Certainly sport such as rugby can provide opportunities for learning teamwork, encouraging commitment, striving to achieve collective and individual goals and subjugating individual needs to the needs of the team. They are not automatic outcomes of playing rugby but team games such as rugby offer an ideal medium for their development. Such outcomes are particularly valued in Japan and many of the boys at THS suggested that rugby had played an important part in developing them.

Hegemonic patterns of masculinity such as that operating through the practice of Japanese high school rugby are neither unitary nor fixed. Instead, they are dynamic and open to the external influence of social dynamics and the internal influence of agency. Although the pattern of masculinity operating in Japanese school rugby or at THS was dominant enough to be seen as hegemonic it was internally dynamic with contradictions and variations in compliance. Young men such the ones in this study have complex relations of attachments and rejections of particular masculinities and can actively adopt or distance themselves from them to suit their 'interactional needs' (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). While this might occur at a conscious level it can also occur at a non-conscious level in the practices adopted. At this embodied level the THS boys did not wholly reject the hegemonic masculinity operating through Japanese school rugby but did distance themselves from it to suit their desires and needs at both an individual and collective level. This occurred

within the class-influenced form of masculinity operating at the school. At all these levels the young men in this study were not conforming to one universal way of being a man. Instead, they were actively positioning themselves in relation to specific forms of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell suggests elsewhere in this issue, studies on sport and the development of masculinities need to wary of taking a reductionist approach that puts boys in boxes such as a 'hegemonic masculinity box'. Close-focus studies such the one referred to in this paper offer a means of better understanding the complex ways through which young men and boys learn to become particular types of men and the role that school sport plays in this learning of masculinities.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine domination* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press).
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The logic of practice* (Stanford, Stanford University Press)
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press)
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (London, Routledge)
- Brown, D. (2005) An economy of gendered practices? Learning to teach physical education from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's embodied sociology, *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 3-23.
- Connell, R. W. (1983). *Which way is up? Essays on sex, class and culture* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin).
- Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin).
- Connell, R. W., Ashenden, D. J., Kessler, S & Dowsett, G. W. (1982) *Making the difference: Schools, families and social division* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin).
- Connell, R. W. & Messerchmidt J. W. (2005) Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept, *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago, Aldine).
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, (Eds & Trans.) (London, Lawrence & Wishart).
- Greenwood, J. (1986) *Think rugby: A guide to purposeful team play* (London, Block).
- Griffin, L., Brooker, R. & Patton, K. (2005) Working towards legitimacy: Two decades of Teaching Games for Understanding, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 10(3).
- Hirai, H. (2005) Globalising sports culture: Rugby imports from Oceania to Japan, in: S. Alomes (Ed.) *Islands in the stream: Australia and Japan face globalisation* (Melbourne, Maribymong Press), 61-78.
- Jefferson, T. (2002). Subordinating hegemonic masculinity, *Theorizing criminology* 6(1), 63-88.
- Kirk, D. and Macdonald, D. (1998) Situated learning in physical education, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 17, 376-387.
- Kirk, D. & McPhail, A. (2002) Teaching Games for Understanding and situated learning: Rethinking the Bunker-Thorpe model, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 117-192.

- Laberge, S. (1995) Toward an integration of gender into Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 132-146.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Light, R. (1999a) Regimes of training and the construction of masculinity in Japanese university rugby, *International Sports Studies*, 21 (2), 39-54.
- Light, R. (1999b). Learning to be a 'rugger man': High school rugby and media constructions of masculinity in Japan, *Football Studies*, 2 (1), 74-89.
- Light, R. (2000a) A century of Japanese rugby and masculinity: Continuity and change, *Sporting Traditions*, 16(2), 87-104.
- Light, R. (2000b) Culture at play: A comparative study of masculinity and game style in Japanese and Australian rugby, *International Sports Studies*, 22(2), 26-41.
- Light, R. (2003) Sport and the construction of masculinity in the Japanese education system, in: K. Louie & M. Low (Eds) *Asian masculinities: The meaning and practice of manhood in China and Japan* (London, Routledge Curzon), 100-117.
- Light, R. (2006) Situated learning in an Australian surf club, *Sport, Education and Society*, 11(2), 155-172.
- Light, R. and Kirk, D. (2000) High school rugby, the body and the reproduction of Masculinity, *Sport, Education and Society*, 5 (2), 163-176.
- Light, R. & Yasaki, W. (2002) J League soccer and the rekindling of regional identity in Japan, *Sporting Traditions*, 18(2), 31-45.
- McNay, I. (1999). Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16, 95-117.
- Messner, M. (1992) *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity* (Boston, Beacon Press).
- Messner, M. & Sabo, D. (Eds) (1990) *Sport, men and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives* (Champaign: Human Kinetics).
- Moeran, B. (1986) Individual, group and *seishin*: Japan's internal cultural debate, in: T. Lebra & W. Lebra (Eds) *Japanese culture and behavior* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press), 62-79.
- Mills, M. (1997) Football, desire and the social organization of masculinity, *Social Alternatives*, 16(1), 10-13.
- Nakane, C. (1970). *Japanese Society* (Tokyo, Tuttle Press).
- Passin, H. (1980) *Society and education in Japan* (Tokyo, Kodansha).
- Roden, D. (1980) Baseball and the quest for national identity in Meiji Japan, *The American Historical Review*, 85(1), 511-534.
- Rohlen, T. (1986). Spiritual education in a Japanese bank. In T. Lebra & W. Lebra (Eds), *Japanese culture and behavior* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press), 307-338.
- Skelton, C. (2000) 'A passion for football': Dominant masculinities and primary Schooling, *Sport, Education and Society*, 5, 5-18.
- Sugimoto, Y. (1997) *An introduction to Japanese society* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Tomsen, S. & Donaldson, M. (2003) *Male trouble: Looking at Australian masculinities*. (Melbourne, Pluto Press).
- Welton, D. (1998) Introduction: Situating the body. In Don Welton (Ed) *Body and flesh: A philosophic reader* (Oxford & Massachusetts, Blackwell).



---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of rugby's development in Japan see, Light, R. (2000) A century of Japanese rugby and masculinity: Continuity and change, *Sporting Traditions*. 16(2), 87-104.