

# ***Culture at Play: A Comparative Study of Masculinity and Game Style in Japanese and Australian School Rugby***

**Richard Light**  
**University of Melbourne**  
**Melbourne, Australia**

## **Abstract**

Work on the social construction of gender over the past few decades has identified how masculinities assume multiple class and culture specific forms. This suggests that studies on the role that sport plays in the construction of masculinity cross diverse cultural settings offer an ideal means of highlighting the central role that culture plays in the construction of masculinity. Despite this there remains a dearth of studies on the construction of masculinity through sport in Asian cultures. In setting out to redress this gap in the literature this paper draws on a comparative study of rugby in an Australian and a Japanese high school to examine the ways in which culture specific forms of masculinity are embodied through school rugby. Employing the analytic tools of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu it focuses on rugby game style as the unit of analysis.

## **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, school-based sport and physical education have emerged as important sites for the construction of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Light, 1995; 2000c; Tinning, 1998; Walker 1988; Wright, 1998). School sport, and team sports in particular, form bodily practices through which dominant versions of masculinity and femininity are reproduced (Wright, 1998). Boys' experiences of school sport make a highly significant contribution to the formation of their masculine identity and the form that this might assume is shaped by the corporeal nature of their experiences (Connell, 1983; 1995). Bob Connell's work highlights how the multiple forms that these masculinities assume are class and culture specific. Indeed Mike Messner and Don Sabo (1990) argue that meaningful gender analyses need to account for the inter-relationships between gender, class and culture. This recognition of the complex processes through which gender is socially constructed around engagement in sport suggests that comparative studies might offer an ideal means of highlighting the culturally specific and distinct forms that masculinities assume in different cultural settings. There is, however, a paucity of comparative studies on the construction of masculinity through sport or physical education in schools in different cultural settings. In setting out to re-dress this gap in the literature this paper draws on data from a comparative study of rugby as practised in a Japanese and an Australian high school. It examines the interaction between culture and the development of masculine identity through the analysis of game style and tactics.

### **Social Analyses of Game Style and Tactics**

Connell (1998) suggests that, despite the significant advances made in research on gender over the past two decades, we still know little about the development of masculinity. He calls on researchers to adopt innovative approaches that can contribute to the expansion of our understanding of masculinity and gender relations. Richard Giulianotti (1999) argues that, despite a lack of research in this area, social analyses of game style, tactics and aesthetics offer a valuable means of exploring the social and cultural meanings of sport. Going further than Giulianotti (1999), I suggest that the analysis of game style and tactics in sport also offers a means through which we might further our understanding of how particular forms of masculinity are produced and reproduced through young men's engagement in sport. With the exception of Richard Majors' (1990) study of black basketball players' 'cool' game style as an expression of culture-specific masculinity, tactics, game style and aesthetics of play are yet to be empirically examined as sites for the expression and production of masculinity.

### **Embodied Masculinity**

The notion of embodied learning is central to the analysis of how ways of playing high school rugby act to produce and reproduce culture specific forms of masculinity. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) sees the body as the point at which culture and social structure are manifested and produced. He recognises sport as a significant area in which culture and social relations are produced and reproduced. When learning to play sports the individual's performance initially involves conscious effort but as the sports player develops into an expert performer her/his responses and actions become automatic and bypass conscious thought to become what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as second nature. In embodying the game, Bourdieu (1990) contends that the player also embodies the 'larger social game'. The significance of such corporeal activity for the embodiment of gender is made clear by feminist work such as that of Iris Young (1990).

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus is central to the notion of embodied learning. The habitus can be seen as the individual's embodied social history that is constructed through day to day engagement in social life. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions, inclinations and tastes that are developed through taking part in social practice within particular social and cultural contexts. Everybody's experiences are different but those who move through similar social and cultural contexts tend to develop a similar habitus. This is not to say that the habitus determines how people will act and behave but that it *structures* their social action. In attempting to circumvent the Cartesian dualism of mind and body Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus offers the flexibility needed to deal with the 'fuzzy' nature of social life (Wacquant, 1992). Through the individual's engagement in sport within particular social and cultural contexts the social world within which he or she labours is embedded in the body (Wacquant, 1995). Although Bourdieu (1990; 1998) does discuss gender in some of his work, it is certainly underdeveloped,

However, his concept of habitus offers an ideal means through which to understand how the practices of everyday life operate to construct gender (Light & Kirk, 2000). The concept of embodiment is extended here to include the ways in which particular forms of hegemonic masculinity are embedded in the body through young men's engagement in high school rugby. Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony is used in this paper as it is applied by Connell (1995) to analyses of gender relations. The term hegemonic masculinity helps explain how one form of masculinity becomes so completely dominant that it is unquestioned and accepted as common sense.

### **The Study and the Site**

Data were generated through observation, semi-structured interviews and analysis of game videos during ethnographic field trips to both sites. At the Japanese site interviews were conducted in Japanese without the services of an interpreter and analysis drew on the authors experience as a rugby coach from 1990 to 1996. The schools are referred to under the pseudonyms of the Brisbane independent School (BIS) and Tokyo High School (THS). They are both academically elite, independent schools in which sport forms a valued part of the curriculum. They both have a history of success in rugby, and it formed a central concern in the lives of the boys playing in each school's top team. Both schools had very good academic reputations and drew students from the wealthier sections of society.

The analysis of game style and tactics focuses on games played by BIS during the 1997 Brisbane Greater Public Schools (GPS) rugby season and on THS's participation in the 1997 Japanese National High School Rugby Championships held annually at Hanazono in East Osaka. The paper examines the ways in which social dynamics operating at both sites influenced styles of play and how this was linked to the construction of a culture-specific masculinity. It then identifies some key differences in play that can be connected to culturally distinct features of the masculinity practised at the two sites.

### **The Symbolic Value of Rugby as Educational Practice**

Sport has a long history as a form of social education in both Australia and Japan. In Australia it has formed a central element in the education of 'ruling class' boys in the schools of the social elite. In post-World War Two Australia the practice of school sport spread from the schools of the social elite to government schools, a process David Kirk (1998) refers to as 'massification'. Despite this, rugby union continues to function in the elite independent schools as a 'practice of distinction' (Light & Kirk, 2001). Bob Connell, Dean Ashenden, Sandra Kessler and Gary Dowsett (1982) argue that such schools operate as 'masculinizing institutions' charged with making particular types of men from the sons of the privileged and that rugby forms the prime mechanism through which this is achieved.

Although equally valued as a vehicle for social education, sport in Japan serves quite a different function" During the remarkably rapid modernisation of

Japan in the late nineteenth century leading educators recognised the value of team sport and the games ideology for the newly formed system of mass schooling. Since then sport has primarily functioned in schools and universities as a means of disseminating and maintaining homogenous culture (Light, 2000a; Roden, 1980). Although many academically elite schools field rugby teams, the stronger schools are invariably low academic level institutions of the lower socio-economic levels of society, though THS is a notable exception. Academically, it ranks in the top five per cent of schools in Japan, yet values, and promotes, its sporting success. With several national championships to its credit, rugby is its most successful sport.

At both sites rugby operated as a measure of the schools' worth in the social education of their students. Academic achievement was prized most in both schools but the symbolic meaning attached to rugby meant that success in that area contributed significantly to the schools' status in competitive education markets. This placed considerable pressure on both the 1<sup>st</sup> XV at TBS and the 'regulars' at THS to win games. The symbolic cultural capital attached to winning was a significant factor in shaping style of play and tactics at both schools. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of capital is far broader than that of Marx. Basically, capital can be seen as something that is owned, such as real estate, a car or money in the bank that can be exchanged for other forms of capital. However, it exists in a variety of forms that are less explicit. Bourdieu (1990) conceives of capital as existing in economic, social and cultural forms. Social capital refers to the value of social connections and networks and cultural capital refers to things of cultural value such as paintings, university degrees or even manners and deportment. A person's social position is largely determined by how much capital she or he possesses. The practice of rugby at both schools was underpinned by broadly accepted assumptions of the social and cultural learning that is transmitted through playing rugby. Success in rugby games, thus tended to confirm the school's worth as an institution that inculcates culturally admired qualities in the sons of its clients. Victory on the rugby field symbolised the school's cultural worth.

As important as winning was, it was equally important at both sites to win in a manner that confirmed the value of rugby as a medium for the development of preferred social behaviour and valued cultural traits. The boys at THS had to win every game in the 1997 national championships at Hanazono. It was important that they won in a way that displayed culturally valued qualities of unequivocal commitment, courage, physical power and endurance as a manifestation of inner strength. These characteristics are celebrated as markers of a 'Japanese spirit', that are celebrated as indicators of culturally valued male qualities in sports such as rugby (Light, 1999a) and baseball (Moeran, 1986). They also had to display respect for the rules and ethos of the game, subordination of the self to the team and to win through effort, not trickery or marginal play. There was no masculine status attached to 'bending the rules' or winning through 'tricky' plays. There was also no masculine status to be earned through fighting or illegal play.

Staff and players at THS felt that their approach to play was different from the majority of other high schools. As the former coach of the team said to me on the way to a game:

Our boys are different. They don't just play rugby, they have to study very hard as well and they have good GPAs (*seiseki*). They are clever boys and that's why they play differently. They are always thinking about the game and not just relying on guts (*konjo*) (THS Former coach, interview, January 1998).

Although the style of play adopted at THS was different from that of most other schools it still displayed a stress on winning through superior force and endurance that typically characterises high school rugby in Japan (Light, 2000b). This included heavy, front on contact and an unvaried, high pace of offensive play sustained throughout the game. The players and staff saw their play as being distinguished from most other teams at the championships by an emphasis on 'thinking rugby' and staying calm on the field and, it was, indeed, different from the other teams at Hanazono. However, when compared to the way games are generally played in Australian school rugby, it tended to be predictable and highly patterned. In this way it followed a dominant approach to play identified by Jim Greenwood (1986) and Richard Light (2000b). It displayed a similar stress on winning through physical superiority to confirm the value of rugby as a vehicle for the promotion of a culturally valued hegemonic masculinity.

As important as victory was at BIS, the team needed to win in a way that confirmed a class-specific form of masculinity. Rugby games needed to reflect and confirm a particular form of hegemonic masculinity associated with the 'stock broking' classes. There is great symbolic meaning attached to membership in the 1<sup>st</sup> XV of schools such as BIS. It is underpinned by assumptions of social learning and of a masculinity valued in the world of work into which most boys will enter. It implies that rugby develops young men who are ruthlessly competitive and yet are team players who respect order and authority. BIS players had to strive to win yet play fair and exhibit a class specific ideal of disinterest that Bourdieu (1978) contends is a marker of the dominant classes. This was clearly evident in the traditional rituals that surrounded the playing of games in the Brisbane GPS competition such as the post game function. The stress on winning discouraged creative variety and the opportunity to exhibit 'flair' or individual creativity. Play was thus conservative, highly structured and focused on establishing physical and psychological superiority. The captain described it as:

It's really pretty boring rugby, hit it up a few times and then kick for field position and contest the lineout. The ball never really goes wide, and we just work on not turning it over or making mistakes. All the teams play a pretty similar way, nobody's really game to try anything different (BIS Captain, interview, July 1997).

It was a style of play that the players found restrictive yet were willing to accept for the sake of the status to be gained from membership in a successful 1<sup>st</sup> XV.

### **Traditional Game Style and Masculinity**

The extent to which expectations of victory shaped the way games were played at BIS was outlined by the coach at the end of the 1997 season:

You might start a season and say we're going to play good open, enjoyable rugby but there's that pressure there and you see a weakness and you worry about it and play where your strengths are. I think the kids coming through playing thirteens, fourteens, fifteens are playing the same traditional game. . . . I mean you're out there to win and it's a very structured, traditional type of game (BIS Coach, interview, August 1997).

The captain described the traditional style of play at BIS as conservative, heavy and boring. He labelled it 'no mistakes rugby'. It was highly structured. In the early part of the season at BIS the players seemed happy to comply with the restrictive and highly structured approach to play aimed at limiting mistakes and overcoming the opposition with superior power. Training for such an approach involved repetitive drills aimed at increasing the body's efficiency as a weapon (Messner, 1990) and at creating what Michel Foucault (1977) refers to as productive and docile bodies. By this Foucault (1977) does not mean bodies that are passive but bodies that are trained to conform. Such regimes of training developed bodies that were powerful, forceful and efficient yet would conform to authority. This game style relied on not making mistakes and on winning through producing superior force and endurance. It was also based on intimidating the opposition through highly aggressive and uncompromising play. There was a hegemonic masculinity expressed in a traditional way of playing that was constantly reproduced through practice and discourse at BIS. It is described here by one of the players:

When I was in year eight (first year of secondary schooling in Queensland after seven years at primary school) the first were awesome and everybody respected them. . . . In those days teams were afraid to play us because our forwards were so powerful and scary. Players would always get hurt playing us. They'd come out bleeding and injured from every ruck (BIS player, interview, July 1997).

The traditional way of playing was not only focused on winning without taking risks but also on expressing and confirming a class specific form of masculinity. It also presented an ideal of hegemonic masculinity that the 1997 1<sup>st</sup> XV were often unable to match and this was a source of anguish among many players. A disappointing loss against a team that had 'out-muscled' BIS

followed by playing in a mid-season rugby carnival exposed tension between an ideal of 'traditional' style of game at BIS and the desire of the players to adopt a very different style of play.

### **'Open It Up a Bit': Conflicting Masculinities**

Midway through the season the team played in a week-long rugby carnival during which there was little pressure on the team to win games. It was during the carnival that dissatisfaction with 'no mistakes rugby' emerged in conversation and in practice. The players all indicated a desire to 'open it up a bit'. They wanted to play more intuitively and to interact more in games and training.

After the carnival the team attempted to change their approach and 'open it up' for the last two games. The change was difficult and less successful than they had hoped. This style of play requires intuition, creativity, communication, player autonomy and risk taking. These are qualities that were all at odds with their embodied masculinity and the traditional game style in which they had been schooled. The experiences involved in five years of training for, and playing, 'no mistakes' rugby had embedded a hegemonic form of masculinity in their bodies that made change difficult. They won their first game using a new approach but were soundly defeated in the last game of the year where it was clear that traditional game style could not be so easily challenged and changed.

### **A Cultural Tradition of Game Style at Tokyo High School**

Daily, demanding and repetitious training and patterned, structured game play are common features of rugby as practised in most Japanese schools. There is a culture specific way of playing rugby that characterises most Japanese school rugby. While particular schools display differences in play, there is a dominant approach to play that is reasonably common in most school rugby in Japan. THS's game style conformed to the dominant model of patterned and predictable rugby described by Greenwood (1986). It did, however, vary in some ways from the approaches taken by most other strong rugby schools at the national championships. These differences seemed to be linked to the socio-economic section of society from which the school drew its students. As was the case at BIS, the masculinity evident in their approach to play was a product of both culture and what we might usefully call class.

Victory in Japanese rugby is typically achieved through a 'war of attrition' (Greenwood, 1986), and games are won through superior endurance, will and power. This acts as an implicit indicator of inner strength, is a valued marker of Japanese masculinity. Research on school rugby in Japan (Light, 1999a; 1999b; 1999c) indicates that this approach is widespread and bears much in common with the practice of martial arts. The unvaried nature of training, the perfecting of set forms and patterns of movement through repetition to the point of exhaustion parallel traditional approaches to the practice of martial arts. Training in traditional martial arts is aimed at repetition to the point where responses and movement bypass the

conscious mind to achieve a state of *mushin* (no mind). It is essentially anti-intellectual (Rohlen, 1986) and aimed at reaching a state of spiritual and physical harmony through repetition of physically and mentally testing movement patterns. Daisetzu Suzuki (1959: 74): explains this as, 'When the ultimate perfection is attained, the body and limbs perform by themselves what is assigned to them with no interference from the mind'.

The players at THS felt that their style of play was not in the mould of 'seishin teki' training described above. *Seishin teki* training is the traditional approach to training that is explicitly aimed at developing inner strength and character through long, arduous and testing training routines. All involved with the club felt that their approach to training was not *seishin teki*. They saw their approach as being more tactically oriented and, compared to the stronger, academically low-level schools, it was. When compared to typical Australian approaches, however, training was repetitive and game tactics were predictable. During the national championships the team based much of their attack on kicking the ball high behind the opposition defence and charging through to pressure the receiver. This resulted in several dangerous counter attacks in the final and it was clear that the opposition had devised strategies to counter the high punt. THS, however, persevered with this tactic. While the players could see the limits of traditional training and playing many of them also felt that it built the inner strength that they saw as necessary to win games: 'To do it over and over again you have to have *gaman* (self-control, endurance, tolerance) . . . it's demanding but it builds the *gaman* you need for games' (THS player, interview, 1997).

The discourse surrounding practice at THS expressed a view of faith in spiritual strength as being out dated at odds with what the players saw as their modern approach to play. Yet its powerful influence was evident in the emphasis on strength, endurance and tenacity in games. In the lead up to the final, several players admitted that the concept of spiritual strength (*seishin ryoku*) was important to them:

*seishin* (spiritual strength) is not that important but . . . all fifteen players in the team think that spiritual strength (*seishin*) is very important. Tackling huge guys coming at you, going into violent rucks is scary. I think that if you ask anyone they'll tell you that *seishin* is important (THS Captain, interview, January, 1998).

This culture specific approach to playing rugby tends to marginalise the intellectual dimensions of games and emphasise winning through spiritual superiority. The players and staff at THS felt that their emphasis on staying calm and thinking in games differentiated them from other teams but they also wanted to express their moral worth as a marker of masculinity when the chance arose. During the early stages of the national championships when they were sure of winning they took the opportunity to display their physical superiority and the importance of this is made clear by one of the players: 'When you score tries you have to cross the enemy's line and show your

strength. It shows your dominance so tries have more meaning than goals' (THS player, interview, November 1997).

The importance of winning through scoring tries represents an explicit show of strength and power. Breaking through the 'body barrier' of the opposition is a highly symbolic act that represents one of the game's most powerful demonstrations of physical dominance and superiority. There is similar value attached to scoring tries in Western settings where victories achieved through kicking goals are more than often not viewed as being 'real' victories.

### **The Relationship Between the Individual and the Group**

The most explicit cultural difference between the two sites that was manifested in game style was the different relationship between the individual and the group. At BIS the value of teamwork was constantly articulated by staff and players. Indeed, one of the primary justifications for team sports' inclusion in the curriculum of Australian schools is the claim that its stress on teamwork teaches valuable social lessons. This is particularly so in the elite independent boys schools where it is a valued masculine trait of the ruling classes. Of course the independent girls schools also use sport to imbue particular behaviours and traits but they have traditionally focused less on 'leadership qualities' than the boys schools (Kirk, Nauright, Hanrahan, MacDonald & Jobling, 1996). The boys schools also tend to place more importance on sport. Despite the focus on teamwork at BIS, performance and game analysis typically focused on the individual. During a post game interview with one of the BIS players he said that, although the team had lost, he felt satisfied with his own performance. When I told one of the players at THS this he found it so foreign that it was difficult for him to believe. The different stress on the individual was evident in game style and particularly so when the players felt free to play as they desired. While BIS conformed to a restrictive style they wanted to play more expressive and intuitive rugby that would allow players to play with 'flair' yet the boys at THS valued the collective nature of play over individual considerations.

The masculinity constructed at BIS was a product of the dynamic interaction between class and culture, and, while the emphasis placed on team-work can be seen as a class specific value, this occurs within a culture in which individual achievement is valued and encouraged. The discourse surrounding THS games emphasised the group over the individual. In a group oriented society this is not surprising, Individuals were not singled out for praise or criticism in post-game analysis and all the players identified deeply with the team and the school as is evident in the following quote from one of the players:

There is more satisfaction in all the team being part of the effort to cross the enemy line than just one player kicking a goal. 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 (THS player interview, November, 1997).

At THS, rugby operated to promote a form of masculinity that required subordination of the self to the good of the team. The highly patterned play required group cohesion and promoted group consciousness. It also tended to restrict individual play. If a player were to break from the pattern and fail then he would feel deep responsibility for letting down his team-mates. Even if it were successful such action would be seen as being selfish and not be valued as it might in an Australian team such as the BIS 1<sup>st</sup> XV.

The BIS players did not question the exercise of authority by the coaches. They respected the coach's knowledge, experience and formal position of authority. They studied and played rugby in a hierarchically structured institution where, despite the heavy emphasis on achievement order and obedience were equally valued. The pressure acting on the coaches and players to perform was a significant factor in the maintenance of a traditional approach to play. Any break from 'normal practice' that resulted in a loss would have been open to criticism from the powerful and conservative forces at the school.

The players at THS seemed to enjoy remarkable autonomy and the coach typically removed himself from much of the decision making. Power, however, operates differently in Japan where the exercise of authority is diffuse and often perceived as benevolent (Van Wolferen, 1993). 'Friendly authoritarianism' encourages the individual to internalise a common value system that emphasises order and control. This is developed through the organisation of social life into small groups that feature strong interdependence between group members, intra-group surveillance and intense competition with other groups. Members of collective groups such as a school rugby club share responsibility for decision making and performance and this places restraints on the individual. Credit for achievement is shared but so is failure and this encourages mutual surveillance. The internalisation of control is reinforced by the intimate interdependency within groups and the intense competition between groups identified by Chie Nakane (1970). Deviant behaviour that might threaten the group's success in competition attracts the 'critical gaze' (Foucault, 1977) of the group and of the whole society. This acts as a normalising force that controls behaviour. At THS this acted to prevent departure from a culturally dominant approach to play that stressed achieving victory through collective spiritual strength as displayed through physical superiority.

The masculinity valued and expressed in play at THS displayed an emphasis on spiritual strength as manifested in psychological and physical endurance and collective effort. This is beautifully captured in a player's explanation of what rugby meant to him:

What I enjoy most is when we have a lot of pressure on our defence but we all pull together and defend our line as one. When our line is threatened but we all combine and nobody lets them through. If we let them over the line then we fail as a team and if we fail as a team then we fail as individuals. . . . This is the real meaning of rugby (THS player, interview, December, 1997).

### **Culture and Key Differences in Game Style**

In identifying the cultural dynamics operating at both sites and the way that they shaped game style and tactics this paper highlights the ways in which the construction of gender is deeply tied into social and cultural contexts. There were some marked cultural differences between the style of play adopted by the two schools and in the masculinity that shaped it. On the other hand, there were also some similarities. This tends to support research on rugby and masculinity indicating that, despite its spread across diverse cultures over time, its practice continues to be significantly guided by the original Victorian ideals of 'manliness' (Nauright & Chandler, 1996).

There were some differences between the game style of THS and that of most other Japanese teams and this study suggests that this was linked to differences in social class. THS, however, tended to follow the dominant game style that characterises most Japanese school rugby. It is an approach to play that is driven by a culture-specific and hegemonic form of masculinity. This form of masculinity derives from the culture and practices of the pre Meiji Era (1868-1912) samurai classes. For over 150 years it has been reproduced through the culturally distinct practice of appropriated team sport and the reconstructed forms of martial arts practised since the late eighteenth century (Light, 2000a). One of the distinguishing features of this masculinity is the emphasis placed on inner strength developed through particular bodily practices. As cultural anthropologist Thomas Rohlen (1986) suggests, *seishin* (human spirit) power is seen to be manifested in the ability to endure hardship and to overcome physical and psychological difficulty. Typically skill, creativity and intellectual capacity are not seen as indicators of moral or inner strength. The individual's ability to show tenacity, self control, disregard for personal welfare and physical endurance are seen as indicators of what is valued as uniquely Japanese culture. Rugby provides an ideal vehicle for the cultivation of this hegemonic masculinity tied into ideals of toughness, courage, self-sacrifice and control of the inner self. As Greenwood (1966) notes, the way in which high school rugby games are typically played makes them a war of attrition in which the physically and spiritually strong prevail. Of course Western forms of hegemonic masculinity expressed in rugby games are also tied into ideals of toughness, sacrifice (putting the body on the line) and courage but, at the same time, individual flair, tactical astuteness and 'tricky', creative play are also valued.

Game style at BIS was significantly shaped by class and there was a class specific masculinity embedded in its practice. This was, however, mediated by the influence of culture. In comparison to Japan, Australian

culture values and valorises the individual and this had significant impact on the way that games were played. It also shaped the form of masculinity embedded in the habitus of the young men at BIS. It is perhaps the culturally distinct relationship between the individual and the group that most contributed to differences in game style. The key differences in game style are identified here and connected to cultural differences.

### **1. Game Pace**

The THS games were generally played at a sustained, high pace with a stress on continuity and a quick turnover at any breakdown in play. In between set plays the team strove to maintain rapid and continuous attack at an unvaried pace that requires high levels of endurance and tenacity. This tests the resolve and endurance of the opposition and their ability to keep up and has been identified as a key characteristic of rugby played in Japanese schools and universities (Light, 2000b).

The pace of play at BIS was more varied than at the THS. Despite adopting a structured game style the pace of play at BIS varied according to factors such as field position, relative score-lines and the temporal stage of games. From their own half of the field they kicked for field position and this led to frequent stoppages for line outs to restart play. There were also sequences of high paced play, commonly from within the opposition half, when attacking moves were successful. Although the adoption of open, running rugby led to more continuity of play there was still variety evident in game pace.

### **2. Patterns of Play**

The THS players and staff described their style of play as 'thinking rugby' and in comparison to most other strong teams at the championships they did place more emphasis on the cognitive concerns of play. Despite this their play was still comparatively predictable and patterned. It maintained a constant pace and followed similar patterns of play. As Greenwood (1986) argues, this encourages games to be decided by teams' endurance, collective tenacity and physical power. While not necessarily articulated as such, this is typically understood as a marker of both cultural strength and of a culture specific form of masculinity.

The 'traditional' approach to play at BIS was highly structured and coach-centred. It was aimed at systematically advancing into opposition territory before launching attacks. It stressed field position, keeping the ball close to the forwards, crossing 'the advantage line' at each play and not making mistakes. Such corporeal experiences combined with other practices and discourse at the school to construct a class specific form of masculinity characterised by uncompromising competitiveness, courage, respect for authority and a willingness to work in a team. As was the case with THS, game style was predictable but tactics varied a little from game to game over the duration of the season. They varied according to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the opposition. When the pressure to win was lifted at the

carnival the team played a less structured style of play that encouraged more individual decision making, communication and creativity. The form of masculinity embodied over five years at BIS, however, meant that such changes in play were not easily achieved.

### **3. Individual Variation**

THS played a style of game that required strong interdependence, understanding and group unity of purpose. The pace of the game and the reliance on continuous, sustained attack required all players to uphold their individual responsibilities in the team and to know exactly where they should be during play. At the same time, it discouraged individual variation and this contributed to the both predictable nature of their play and the consequent need for 'spiritual' strength.

The normal game style played by BIS was highly structured yet allowed for some individual variation. There were often examples of an individual feeling free to be creative and when successful such creativity and individual play were lauded by the other players and staff. When these breaks from the game plan were unsuccessful the player responsible was often criticised by the coach or other players. Unlike the THS players the boys at BIS were prepared to risk censure for the rewards available for success. The value attached to individual performance in Australian culture was made more evident when the pressure to win was lifted and the team played a very open style of rugby that they saw as allowing the team to use the individual ability of players.

### **Conclusion**

When gender, class and culture are seen as intimately inter-woven social constructs it is clear that analyses of the construction of masculinity through sport must account for the influence of both culture and class. The work of Bourdieu (1984; 1990), Mary Douglas (1982) and Marcell Mauss (1973) suggests that culture is produced through the day to day physical practices that make up social and life. This recognition of the body's role in social processes is also reflected in feminist research that highlights the importance of physical experience in gender formation (cf. Hall, 1996). The regulated management of the body that characterises the practice of sport constitutes a central site for the reproduction of culture, class and gender. This study appropriates Bourdieu's (1990) notion of embodiment to examine how ways of playing rugby act to embody culture specific forms of masculinity. In so doing it contributes to a growing body of literature that identifies the central role that school sport plays in the construction of masculinity. In highlighting the importance of school-based physical activity for the production of gender, class and culture it also encourages recognition of the importance of sport and other physical activity practised within institutions of education. By focusing on game style and tactics as the unit of analysis it also lends support to Giulianotti's (1999) claim that, although this is a neglected area of research, it has much to offer social analyses of sport. This should encourage

further critical examination of the part that game style, tactics and aesthetics plays in the production of gender and the reproduction of gender relations within institutional settings.

Given the widespread acceptance of Connell's (1983; 1995) theory of masculinities adopting multiple, class and culture specific forms, the lack of empirical studies on the relationship between sport, masculinity and culture in non-Western settings is disappointing. It is here that comparative studies of sport's role in the construction of gender have much to offer. As this study illustrates, comparative studies present a means of highlighting the influence of culture on the development of gendered identities. This study of game play in high school rugby at two culturally distinct settings illuminates the complexity of processes through which particular forms of gender are embodied and how sensitive these are to the cultural and social environment in which sport is practised.

Growing interest in the social construction of masculinity within Western settings has drawn attention to the pivotal role that school-based sport and physical education play in the formation of masculine identity. This work now needs to be complemented by studies in more diverse cultural contexts to further our understanding of the ways in which various forms of gender are reproduced through physical activity in schools.

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