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No pain, no gain: embodied masculinities and lifestyle sport in Japan^{*}

Abstract: In postmodern society, the field of consumption has replaced the world of production as the main arena in which dominant stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are communicated and reinforced. Previous research findings suggest that deference to male authority, homosociality, hierarchical junior–senior relationships, conformity and control, and the appreciation of pain and violence are characteristic elements which exaggerate masculine traits and devalue feminine ones in sports in Japan. My own experiences with rock climbers in Western Japan questions the conventional wisdom of the preponderance of such “masculinity rites” – which overwhelmingly have been observed in highly formalized, competitive, and organized settings. Confronting traditional, mainstream sports with less explored subcultural modes of alternative sport involvement, such as surfing, skateboarding, or climbing, this article explores to what degree hegemonic masculinity has also shaped ideas and ideals of maleness within lifestyle sport and whether these subcultural spaces actually offer the opportunity for the experience of alternative modes of masculinity.

Keywords: lifestyle sport, gender perception, masculinity, embodied identity

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^{*} The author wants to thank the editors and reviewers for their critical inputs that helped straighten the discussion. I also want to thank the Japan Foundation for financial support for this study.

痛み無くして得るものなし：日本における男らしさの体現とライフスタイル・スポーツ

ウォルフラム・マンツェンライター

ポストモダン社会では、生産の世界よりも、消費の世界が男らしさと女らしさに関する一般的なステレオタイプを表現し補強する主要舞台となった。日本におけるスポーツと男性性の関係を調べる先行研究が示唆するように、男性権威、ホモソシアリティ、先輩・後輩の上下関係、調和と支配、そして痛みや暴力に対する肯定的態度などの典型的な要素が男性的な特質を誇張すると共に、女性的な特質を低評価する。著者が西日本でロッククライマーの団体との付き合いで得た経験は、一般通念である上記の特質を疑問視するものである。先行研究で「男らしさの儀式」が観察されたのは、非常に形式化された、競技的に組織されたメインストリーム・スポーツの場面であるが、サーフィング、スケイトボーディングやロッククライミングなどのサブカルチャー・スポーツにおいては、必ずしも通用しない。本稿は、従来のスポーツにおける覇権的男らしさがどの程度までライフスタイル・スポーツにも浸透して男らしさの概念や理想を形成するか、却ってこのサブカルチャー・スポーツが男らしさの異なる可能性を開くか検証する。

1 Introduction: mainstream sport, hegemonic masculinity, and Japan

In post-Fordist society, the field of consumption has replaced the world of production as the main site in which dominant stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are communicated and reinforced. The representation of the body in leisure, fashion, popular culture, and other fields of consumption is of particular importance for the symbolic ordering of gender relations in societies where physical strength has become largely irrelevant to the labor market, the production system at large, and the maintenance of public and private security. Within this shift, and throughout the twentieth century, the world of modern sport remained a lasting stronghold giving shelter to a gendered hierarchy which was originally based on popular folk models of physical and psychological differences between the sexes. Biological scientism and the gendered division of life and labor in modernity, in particular the spatial and functional segregation of gender roles, provided the ideological nutrient for the exclusively male appropriation during those formative years.

Feminist interventions against a gender-indifferent historiography of sport (e.g., Hargreaves 1994; Markula 2005; UN-DAW 2008) have disclosed how sport emerged during the modernization process as a social institution, shaped by and for men into a predominantly male domain in which boys learned to become men (Messner 1990). Notwithstanding the massive foray women have made into this “most masculine institution” (Wörsching 2007: 203), the popular perception of sport continues to be tainted by a taken-for-granted belief that male athletes are superior to female athletes. This is because consumer industries and the sport media complex collaborate with each other and established sport organizations in the fabrication of a master script that transfers commonly shared ideas about gender differences into the world of sport and from the world of sport back into broader cultural discourses and wider spheres of consumption.

A substantial body of research has identified the key features working toward the celebration of male superiority and the marginalization of women in sport (e.g., Messner and Sabo 1990; Hargreaves 1994; Whannel 2002; Aitchison 2006). Sport and hegemonic notions of masculinity resonate best in fields where a long history and rich tradition have preserved the celebration of masculine qualities. The perseverance of male domination is outstanding in sports that esteem mental and physical attributes which are closely associated with traditional notions of manliness, such as strength, leadership skills, fighting spirit, will power, and aggressiveness. The predominance of men in sport is also supported by the male appropriation of power and control in organizations and institutions governing sport – hardly ever are female managers and office holders in charge of running or regulating the affairs of male athletes, whereas more often than not male bureaucrats and administrators are in the position of coaching or controlling female sport involvement. Furthermore, the media do not only give preferential attention to men’s sport, but also tend to present women’s sport in a different style that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Thus as recently as 2008 a special report by the United Nation’s Division for the Advancement of Women stated that “the positive outcomes of sport for gender equality and women’s empowerment are constrained by gender-based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity, fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women’s physical abilities and social roles” (UN-DAW 2008: 3).

While the dichotomy of male/female provides a salient feature of the prioritization of bodies marked as male, it obscures the relational nature between masculinity and femininity as well as within each other. The fact that bodies occupy different social positions within a multilayered matrix of domination including class, race, and age, underscores that images of gendered identities

are actually experienced in various ways and modes, including hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalized forms (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Previous research suggests that homosociality, homophobia, hierarchical relationships of dominance and subordination, internalized norms of conformity and peer control, and the spiritual or ethical appreciation of violence and pain are characteristic elements that exaggerate traits coded as masculine and thereby devalue aspects of femininity.

Since sport is a very complex institution, each single sport combines a distinctive variety of cultural discourses to create its own set of masculinities. But in any sport most men – as well as most women – must cope with the experience of inferiority and subordination due to failure and defeat, as the inherent reward structure of sport and the intertwined cultural discourses of male solidarity and competitiveness are at the root of a paradoxical logic that leaves many (losers) behind while pleasing only one or a few (winners). As in society at large, hegemonic sporting masculinity can be enacted only by a minority, which makes it all the more desirable to anyone else. Paying tribute to this commonly accepted and probably most systematically constructed and promoted way of being a man (Connell 1987: 85), hegemonic masculinity forces any male athlete in sport to position himself in relation to it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 833).

Academic literature on sport in non-Western societies suggests that, regional variation notwithstanding, modern sport has always been a man's world ever since it became a globally acknowledged system of signifiers and signifying practices. Precisely for that reason, sport has lent itself to the global representation of hegemonic masculinity, allowing men's dominance over women to continue worldwide (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 833). Japan is no exception to the rule. Social scientific research on the gendered nature of sport in Japan provides ample evidence that in this country, too, the construction of sport as a male institution has been shaped basically by the same institutions and ideologies that structure national sport systems anywhere: cultural patriarchy (Edwards 2007; Manzenreiter 2008), consumer capitalism (Spielvogel 2003; Manzenreiter 2004a, 2004b), the educational system (Itō 2001; Sekiguchi 2001; Itani 2003; Light 2003; Manzenreiter 2007a), and the media (Hirakawa 2002; Iida 2002, 2003). Ever since modern sport found its institutional homeland within Japan's educational system, the male body has been appropriated as the expressive medium of maleness. Particularly at the new public institutions of higher education (*kyūsei kōtō gakkō*), the future male elite saw themselves raised in the spirit of "muscular spiritualism" (Kiku 1984: 10). This Japanese variant of Anglo-Saxon "muscular Christianity" was equally tainted by Neo-Confucianist elements, Western pedagogy, and cardinal virtues inbred within

the male-only world of the elite boarding schools (*zenryōsei*). Graduates from such high schools and universities did not only spread the knowledge and practice of sport throughout the country, they also acquired the social positions allowing them to dominate the cultural discourses which framed the popular perception of manliness and the values of sport. As a consequence of this trajectory, hegemonic sporting masculinity in a Japanese context closely resonates with a popular reading of the male image of the pre-modern warrior class. Its core elements include honor, courage, stoicism, coolness (in the sense of showing no emotional reactions, either in the face of danger or in the moment of victory), perseverance, and loyalty to one's social organization (Nakamura 1981, 1995; Uesugi 1982; Sanbonmatsu 1994).

In this article, I focus on the very practical aspects of the production and reproduction of masculinity ideology in Japanese sport. I do so by taking a subcultural perspective that takes into special account the everyday experience of participants. I will explore traces of some of the core "masculinity rites," which so far have been usually observed within highly formalized, competitive, and organized settings, such as martial arts *dōjō* (Chapman 2004), boxing gyms (Ikemoto 2006), and extracurricular *bukatsu* sport clubs at schools and universities (Cave 2004; Dalla Chiesa 2002; Light 2000a, 2000b; McDonald and Hallinan 2005; Vincenti 1997) in less researched, alternative modes of sport involvement such as surfing (Mizuno 2002), skateboarding (Tanaka 2003), or climbing (Manzenreiter 2007b). In fact, as Itō (2001: 133) and others outlined, the very conception of sport as fashioned by the framework of Olympic sport relies on features preferring the male body, such as speed, strength, and aggression, which were designed with only male participation in mind. Contemporary lifestyle sports, by contrast, are less about winning and more about cooperation. They are characterized by a demand for physical qualities that are rather gender-neutral, inviting more diversity and individuality, as they offer participants more freedom in finding self-esteem and accomplishment at their own level of competence and comfort without bearing the pressure of competitive team sports. In addition, core participants center their identity and lifestyle on this activity. They tend to regard themselves as unconventional, adventurous, and explorative in the creation of new spaces and values, inviting researchers to rewrite the scripts for male and female physicality (Wheaton 2004: 16).

As to ethnographic accounts from secondary sources, my analysis draws on fieldwork notes from participant observation of two groups of free-climbers from Western Japan I was associated with in the mid-1990s. These case studies have been previously addressed in a conference paper to explore the connections between free-climbing and androgyny (see Manzenreiter 2011). Here, however, I want to contrast the aforementioned relations between gender identities

and mainstream sport with the assumptions about subcultural lifestyle sport. I want to explore to what degree hegemonic sporting masculinity is shaping ideas of maleness within countercultural sport worlds and whether these subcultures actually have the potential to rearrange the borderlines between the sexes. The article continues with a short history of free-climbing in Japan, followed by my observations on mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, body talks, power relationships, the significance of mastering pain and fear, and a concluding investigation of shifting masculinities in relation to social change and life course issues.

2 Free-climbing in Japan

Free-climbing is a distinctive sport centering on a particular variant of mountain climbing. Originally denounced by the conservative camp of mountain climbers as decadent, free-climbers restrict their ambitions to master the technical challenges of climbing routes of limited height just by relying on their own strength. In contrast to artificial aid climbing, equipment is restricted to protect oneself against the consequences of a fall; upward progress is achieved by making use of hands, feet, and other parts of the body only. As a distinctive subculture, free-climbing emerged as a response to the unease among climbers over the technological repression of nature and its hazards by the excessive use of artificial climbing aids in the 1960s. The increasing emphasis on ascending ever more difficult routes initiated a sportification process that reduced the inherent elements of jeopardy and risk taking. First, the traditional placement of protection while leading was replaced with fixed protection. This allowed climbers to concentrate on the move instead of wasting scarce energy and strength on placing bolts or nuts. In a second step, the manufacturing of handholds, artificial walls, and entire indoor climbing halls enabled climbers to forge their physical and technical abilities all year.

Free-climbing became popular in Japan in the 1990s, at a time when the sport gained popularity in many industrialized countries. The Japanese topography is abundant with mountains, crags, and cliffs. But the rock is often of minor quality, brittle, or covered with moss. Indoor climbing gyms provided not only a solution to this problem. They also moved the mountains closer to the city, which highly reduced access time for Japan's urban population. When the Osaka City Rock opened in 1989, it was the first indoor training facility of its kind in Japan. Similar commercial climbing gyms followed suit, first in other metropolitan areas and then throughout the country. Presently more than 200

private climbing facilities are in operation nationwide. Some of the newer gyms are colossal, even by Japanese standards, at three stories high and with hundreds of climbing routes. The biggest of them offer space to more than hundred climbers simultaneously at various bouldering areas and diversified walls sporting inclined faces, chimneys, noses, and roofs. Most of Japan's climbing gyms are open to the general public. They usually run some kind of membership system, providing their members with lofty discounts and prime access to the facilities.

Pinnacles Gym, one of my regular training hang-outs named after its two huge climbing towers, welcomed me with a membership form by which I waived any right for compensation claims in the case of an injury during the usage of the facility. In exchange for a small registration fee I was handed out a green membership card that authorized me to make full usage of the climbing area, including the 40-foot outdoor pinnacles and the locker rooms (though not the fitness and power training equipment, which was the main income source for the fitness club). As a limited member, I was granted access to the climbing area at any time during the opening hours for an entrance fee half that of one-time visitors. Many climbers are satisfied with the opportunities they find at places like Pinnacles Gym with its long climbing routes and dense bouldering area. While for some it is only a kind of substitute for the real thing, most users would perceive the gym as a perfect supplement to natural rock, allowing them to concentrate their training on particular problems (*kadai, puroburemu*), memorizing technical moves (*mūbu, kotsu*), and working on particular body parts.

The gym offers training opportunities for all kind of climbers. High altitude mountaineers and alpine climbers mingle with cracksmen, amateur boulderers, and competitive sport climbers. Competitions are regularly held under the auspices of the Japan Free Climbing Association (JFA) and traditional alpine federations. The Japan Mountaineering Association (JMA) and its regional branches are officially in charge of hosting national and international tournaments. It is a nationwide organization affiliated with the semi-public Japan Amateur Sports Association (JASA) as well as with the International Federation of Sports Climbing, a recent offspring from the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA). The JFA, which was established in 1989, numbered about 1,100 individual and institutional members twenty years later, though it is estimated that some tens of thousands are involved in free-climbing regularly and over a prolonged period of time.

Going to the gym or the rocks is but the core activity for members of the climbing subculture to express their way of life. As the colorful advertisements for climbing gear, clothes, travel equipment, and other paraphernalia on the

pages of special interest magazines such as *Rock and Snow* show, there is a huge universe of commodities waiting to be explored and consumed. Consumption here is not merely the act of buying new protection gear or climbing shoes but a concatenation of communication processes ranging from data gathering and decision making to usage, adaptation, and disposal of outdated gear. The JFA publishes a membership magazine that features mainly articles on climbing spots in Japan, domestic competitions, and outstanding athletes. The JFA heralds its *Free Fan* as “Japan’s best Free Climbing Magazine” (*Free Fan* cover no. 56), which is probably true, being as it is the only special interest magazine with such a close focus on the market. Catering to the needs of Japan’s ambitious climber scene, Japan’s leading outdoor publishing house Yama to Keikoku Sha re-launched its temporarily suspended magazine *Iwa to Yuki* in 1997 under the corresponding English title *Rock and Snow*. Covering all variants of avant-garde rock and ice climbing, this stylish quarterly magazine reports on the national and international climbing scene, offers training tips, travel plans, information on new gear, clothes, and publications. Because of its high-quality standards, it is considered to be the most important information source for the Japanese climbing scene. In recent years, the Internet has established itself as a prominent resource both for communicative and representational purposes.

3 Inclusion/exclusion: getting access to a man’s world

At Pinnacles Gym, members and customers varied considerably in sex and age. Since there was a constant coming and going, it was impossible to keep record of all visitors at one time, let alone throughout the year. My guess is that the number of regular subscribers to the club membership was possibly not higher than 200, while only on very rare occasions were there more than forty climbers in the gym at the same time. The more avid members were in the age group of 20 to 30, followed by adults in their forties and fifties. I spotted hardly any teenagers and no old-age climbers at Pinnacles Gym. Men outnumbered women in general. On regular weekdays, female climbers were fairly underrepresented, and on no occasion did I notice that less than seven out of ten climbers were male. On Sundays the ratio of female climbers tended to increase, as the number of couples accompanied by children was conspicuously high then. At Yamanaka High, where some of my climbing mates had rented the gymnasium including its movable climbing wall for two weekly training sessions of three hours each, there were just two females among the loose network of 12 or 13

members. Being in their late twenties and early thirties, they were quite younger than the male club members, who were between 34 and 45.

The apparent marginalization of women may partially be caused by the lasting legacy of the masculine world of mountaineering from which free-climbing originated. Mountain climbing in general is perceived of as a potentially dangerous and even life-threatening activity due to the hazards of its physical environment. In the Japanese context, nature was not seen as a hostile opponent to be conquered but rather as a disinterested setting aggravating the conditions under which the climbers struggle with their own shortcomings. This was seen as a fighter's world and women were naturally excluded from participation well into the 1970s – notwithstanding the highly mediatized ascents of female mountaineers in the Himalayas. Particularly alpine rock-climbing clubs that saw themselves on the front line of the development of their sport, and those who wanted to be like the frontrunners, strictly limited their recruiting to male candidates when advertising in the Japanese mountaineering press. But change became apparent when the sportification process largely diminished the risks of natural hazards and human error. As the risk of death or serious injury is fairly limited in contemporary urban free-climbing, climbing as a lifestyle sport seems less suitable to please archaic hypermasculine fantasies.

The overrepresentation of men in climbing is somehow at odds with the fact that the central requirements of the sport do not necessarily disadvantage women. Whereas the male physique is preferably equipped for excelling in most team and many contact sports, women are equally qualified to cope with the difficulties of free-climbing. Shira, a 40-year-old bachelor and artisan with a long climbing history and probably the most talented climber at Yamanaka High, noticed that only at first sight does muscular strength appear to be crucial, while a good sense of balance is much more of importance – which may make climbing rather suited for women. Many of the qualities that characterize a strong climber are not necessarily in favor of the male physique in particular, such as flexibility, balance, stamina, rhythm, a favorable strengthweight ratio, and a high degree of body control. Physical strength is of course helpful and needed, but it is far from sufficient. Kita, a 24-year-old graduate student whom I occasionally met at Pinnacles Gym, regularly observed at the climbing gym where he was part-time working as an instructor that the male bias toward physical strength can even be obstructive.

It may be instructive to look at the particular conditions that regulate entrance to the free-climbing scene. As a commercial club, Pinnacles Gym is open to anyone willing to join and able to pay. Since climbing is actually a cooperative activity relying on mutual trust and teamwork of the rope party, customers usually came in groups or pairs, though staff at Pinnacles Gym was

always ready to belay any solitary customer. During my first visits to the gym, I often used this service, until I had the confidence to ask people for a helping hand and ultimately established my own network of climbers. Suki, the young female club attendant who showed me around at the gym, confirmed that there was nothing unusual about the apparent absence of larger groups of female climbers, because it lacked the fashion appeal of more popular activities the club had to offer, such as aerobics or jazz dance. What is bringing women into the climbing gym and keeps them coming is often a relationship with a climbing husband or boyfriend. Starting a serious relationship with a partner who is not part of the scene often causes women to drop out, as Mizuno (2002: 52) also observed among surfers. Even though the market mechanism at the gym smooths access to the world, there must be other, more powerful obstacles keeping women away.

The customer–provider relations allow people to come and go as they please, but I could be pretty sure of meeting certain people at certain times. On my regular Tuesday night I often joined a group of students who I had met during the first month of my membership. Ken (22), Taka (22), and Hiro (20) had a climbing record of two to four years during which they had reached quite an advanced level. A major cause making them start climbing was the depiction of the sport in the mass media, but also a diffuse desire for excitement, and friends from inside the climbing scene. The importance of male–male relationships is pronounced in the case of voluntary associations like the Yamanaka High Club. In contrast to the market-mediated membership system at the gym, access to the club relied solely on personal contacts and individual gate-keepers. I was invited to join the group by Fuji, who recognized me as a neighbor living in the same ward. A 42-year-old married telecommunications engineer with two children, Fuji happened to be the strongest climber of the group, who spent more time and energy in the sport than anyone else in the group. Like Tarō (43, public employee) and Mori (40, shop owner), he developed his interest in climbing during his years at university, of which he spent a great deal in ice cliffs, big walls, and the mountains.

Yama, aged 45 years, married with two children and working as a sales person at a local book shop, started climbing when he followed the invitation of the local branch of the Japan Workers Alpine Federation (JWAF) to a climbing day at the local rocks in the late 1980s and immediately fell in love with the sport (*hamatta*). Tarō, the only other member next to Fuji and Shira who had been with the group for the entire five years of its existence, was a board member of the JWAF and one of the belay persons at that open day. He invited Yama to get in touch with the people who later founded the Yamanaka High club. Tarō also channeled some more recruits from the JAWF into the club, like

Yūji, a 35-year-old junior high school teacher. Other members were similarly introduced by colleagues, neighbors, or business affiliates (the company Matsuo was working for was the main supplier of Mori's shop) who happened to be a member of the club themselves, or an acquaintance of one. Among the two women in the group, Miho, a 31-year-old office worker at a local newspaper publisher, joined the group three years earlier with her husband Yūji. Both of them were also members of the JWAF. As Yūji was often too busy to attend the Thursday night training sessions, she persuaded her friend Takako (30, sales assistant) to accompany her. Takako was not as enthusiastic in climbing as her friend and popped in only once in a while.

The same pattern of networks channeling male members into male groups has been observed for other subcultures. Studying a group of regulars at the surf shop where she was working, Mizuno (2002: 45) noted how word-of-mouth recommendation and advertising (*kuchikomi*) facilitated the translation of male-dominated relations from the public into the male-dominated surfer scene. The skateboarding scene that was observed by Tanaka (2003: 54–56) similarly was born and reproduced through *kuchikomi* and personal relations. These are some very basic barriers preventing many women from getting access to a man's world.

4 Body talks in a homosocial world

In the groups that I observed, women were not totally excluded. Rather, they were granted a kind of transitory membership status. According to the literature on sport and masculinity, such a peripheral position is caused by an implicit desire of the core members to stay among themselves. The performance of manhood in front of men reconstructs the homosocially defined environment, in turn providing men with ritualized markers to express their identity and status. Such “markers of manhood” usually include occupational achievement, wealth, power and status, physical prowess, and sexual achievement (Kimmel 1994: 128–129). Women are tantamount to confirm status and identity of the male members, as long as they conform to the expectations. Surf magazines like *Beach Combing* occasionally feature “flirt sections” that describe spots where chances are best for “chatting up chicks” (*nanpa*), how to address the girls, and where to find commercial sex services in case the strategies did not work out. Beach jamborees or parties (*konpa*) are elementary for the surfers' lifestyle, and they offer plenty of opportunities for the men to demonstrate their masculine qualities, both as womanizers and as heavy drinkers. Mizuno (2002: 48)

also found that married men are usually excluded from the beach parties, though she indicates that the strict rules of married life tend to be bent and twisted when the surfers go rambling abroad.

Because most of the climbers at Yamanaka High were married, sexual achievements played no significant role for the expressive demonstration of masculine identity. Talks in the locker room or during the rather rare drinking sessions tended to deal with the awkwardness of professional life – most of them were employed in a typical middle class profession and, with the exception of Matsu (34, career track sales manager, not married), none exhibited any particular career aspirations – or bemoaned the demands of family life (*katei s̄abisu*). Among the young men at Pinnacles Gym, girls and conversations about girls played a slightly more significant role in men's conversations, though at the climbing gym they usually accommodated their comments to the surroundings. This kind of self-constraint did not prevent them from peeping through the windows into the Tuesday night aerobics course or pointing out women they found particularly attractive.

Yet in both settings other forms of masculinity rites were employed to symbolically express consent with one or more of the core elements of what it means to be man: gender difference, male solidarity, heterosexuality, and dominance. Alcoholic beverages were not allowed in the gym, though most climbers brought their beer cans along to the rocks. Due to the suburban location of Yamanaka High, everybody either came by car or motorbike and usually the group dispersed as soon as the training was over. Yet occasionally a group of three to four agreed to go for a drink on the way home. Heavy drinking only occurred at prescheduled parties when the group met at a downtown *izakaya* to celebrate a birthday or at the regular year-end parties. Pouring the glasses for the men was quite natural for Miho and Takako, though this routine was performed by anyone who was interested in having his own glass refilled. Tidying up the gymnasium after the training session was another routine that tended to reinforce gender-specific role patterns. Even though this task was always collectively managed, Miho or Takako usually were the first to start moving the pads back to the storage rooms and the last to lose their hold of the broom. Sometimes some of the advanced climbers, deeply immersed in an argument about the way of solving a climbing problem, missed out on the sweeping session, whereas the women, if they were around, never failed to fulfill their share of the work.

Having a muscular and trimmed body is a basic signifier of masculinity in any achievement sport. Yet there were significant differences in the presentation of bodies at both places. Among the elder climbers at Yamanaka High, hardly anyone's physical appearance resembled the standard model of hege-

monic masculinity, with the notable exception of Matsu, who had been on the rugby team of his university. But his position at the sales department of a major household appliance maker kept him under constant demand, and therefore he lacked the time to attend the meetings regularly and had recently started to gain unfavorable weight. Tarō had the fleshy appearance of an overweight white-collar employee who ate too much and did not exercise enough; as for Matsu, he performed rather poorly in climbing. Yama had probably the same body weight as Tarō but due to his enormous size and shoulder frame, he was better proportioned and, not least because of his dedicated training, much more proficient in climbing. Fuji, by contrast, even for Japanese standards was rather short and slim, but nonetheless very sharp in shape and extraordinarily strong at the wall. Shira, thin and of average size, excelled in flexibility and balance, but did not bother as much about climbing or training as the former two. Despite his apparent disinterest in honing his climbing skills, he was competing on a fairly equal level with Fuji. The body and its performance, and occasionally also its appearance, were a regular topic of conversation before and after climbing. Climbers complained about excessive weight or injuries that were hampering them, or they mildly criticized each other for “stupid” and “wrong,” ineffective moves.

In contrast to the casual clothing style at Yamanaka High, where flabby T-shirts and shorts or, in winter, jumpers and track pants prevailed, the climbers at Pinnacles Gym throughout the year sported revealing tank tops and tight-fitting pants from brands popular with the climbing scene. Often their shirts and trousers sported tribal designs, images or phrases referring to climbing, or simple but suggestive logos of companies specializing in climbing gear. Body consciousness was not only expressed by the stylish appearance but also by conspicuous demonstrations of their bodies, their strength and functionality. Occasionally the climbers demonstrated their impressive power to each other and the involuntary audience by one-handed pull-ups or by speeding up inclining routes without using their feet, just by moving hand over hand from one big hold to another. Showing off more of the body was not desired, since management at the gym explicitly proscribed climbing with a naked upper part of the body. Body talk among the younger climbers did not just touch upon the climb-specific functionality of body parts but also its shape, development, and appeal.

5 Status and hierarchy

Both groups would consider themselves as egalitarian, informal, and easy-going. And in fact the climbing experience was embedded in a very friendly, open-minded, and warm-hearted atmosphere of mutual trust, support, and sympathy. However, there were status differences between the climbers, and they were aware of them. Status differentiation in this subculture is first of all built on climbing ability, followed by length of membership in the group, and to a lesser degree experience and overall knowledge related to climbing. Whereas Mizuno (2002: 45) observed that surfing skills, length of membership, and age were the variables defining the hierarchical relationships within the surfing subculture, age did not play a discernible role. Gender was not a category of importance for status differentiation: both of the women at Yamanaka High were climbing at a lower level than all other members, while the student group at Pinnacles Gym was male-only. With the exception of climbing ability, the remaining aspects seemed to correlate to a certain degree: Fuji was the most powerful climber, as well as one of the oldest group members with quite a long history of climbing experience. He belonged to the founding generation of the group and was tacitly accepted as their leader, largely because he managed the rental contract with the owner of the gymnasium and collected the monthly fees from the group. Tarō, by contrast, belonged to the same age group and the founding generation. But as a climber, he was certainly inferior to most others, and his overall experiences as a free-climber were not very rich, notwithstanding his affiliation with the JWAF. Yama joined the group slightly later but had a more prominent position since he was markedly better in climbing. He was also acknowledged for his distinctive experiences, including overseas travelling to famous climbing spots such as Arco in Northern Italy, Krabi in Southern Thailand, and Yosemite National Park and Joshua Tree in California.

Status differences impacted on the order of succession at the wall and the choice of the belayer, among others. The climbing wall at Yamanaka High offered space for up to four parties at a time, but the less skilled climbers usually kept back until the expert climbers had finished their first round, unless they were directly invited to go ahead. Climbers of the same level teamed up automatically, since belaying often was a reciprocal service. When it became necessary to ask someone else to hold the rope, except for members of the top group, who did not mind to ask anyone, the climbers tended to first turn to someone further down in the hierarchy or someone of a similar level. If Miho and Takako were around, they would usually build a rope team.

When addressing each other, the climbers usually used nicknames, though not everyone seemed to have one; the women, for example, were addressed by

their first name and the belittling suffix *-chan*. Status markers like the honorific *-san* (as in Shira-san) or the *masu*-form of verbs were used by the women and some of the younger and peripheral male members when talking to Shira or Fuji of the core group. People of the same age group usually used the plain style among each other. Fuji, Yama, and Shira talked in plain colloquial style in nearly all instances, both to each other and to the rest of the group. When I was first introduced to the group, they would use a more honorific style, most likely on account of my outsider status as a foreign researcher affiliated with a very prestigious university rather than my young age or my climbing skills. Polite language was used by everyone when a climber was about to start a route, like *onegai shimasu* ('I beg for your help') or *hajimemasu* ('Starting!') to indicate that from this moment onwards, the primary responsibility for the climber's physical soundness was entrusted to the belayer holding the rope. The formula reversing the status level belongs to a ritual device that frames the climbing activity itself and is in marked contrast to the colloquial phrasing of the preceding invitation. The closing of the ritual frame was usually announced by a ritual phrase like *otsukare sama deshita* or *arigatō gozaimashita*, by which the climber expressed his or her gratitude to the belayer, though at this time the more advanced climbers tended to fall back on using plain or neutral forms (*gokurō san*).

There was another ritualistic reversal of the social order that usually happened during the ascent: when a climber encountered difficulties in moving ahead, either because of lack of stamina or technical knowledge on how to let loose without falling out of the route, the belayer or someone else watching from below would usually start shouting encouragement, such as *ganbare!* ('Hang on to it!'), *faito!* ('Fight!'), or *akirameru na!* ('Don't give up!'), followed by similar or identical cheering from more members until the entire group had joined the cheering choir. Since the pain, the labor, and the struggle the climber went through in this particular moment were deeply engraved into the memory of any climber's body, they were all allowed to reverse the communication codes in order to express their sympathy, notwithstanding the differences in climbing skills between the climber and the cheering crowd. This demonstration of collective suffering, caring, and group solidarity is surprisingly effective. No matter how much the muscles of the forearm are trembling, the legs shaking, or the finger joints hurting, you can't simply let off when your comrades at the foot of the wall are doing their best to motivate you to stick to it just a little longer, to go for one more move, to give it one more try. Mizuno (2002: 52–53) observed a similar pattern of mutual surveillance and supportiveness, based on shared experiences, disciplining the surfers' behavior when they felt

shivering with cold or struggling with the waves on their way out to the line-up.

6 No pain, no gain: body and mind control

Long, exhausting, and tiring training routines are a central element of traditional approaches in sport education in general and in the martial arts in particular. The endless repetition of exercises helps the athletes to internalize movements of the body until these techniques can be performed automatically and without conscious effort. At the same time, by going through the arduous repetitions they acquire certain dispositions that are highly esteemed by Japanese society in general. *Seishinryoku* ('will power') is the underlying capacity which enables the athletes to endure (*gaman*) hardship (*kurō*) and to overcome psychological strain. With regard to school and university rugby in Japan, Light (2000b: 99) concluded that the ability to endure discomfort, frustration, pain, and labor is an indication of "a particular form of masculinity shaped by *seishin* and the associated cultural concept of *gaman*." Chapman (2004: 329) described how a Japanese karate athlete positively reframed the severe beating he obtained from his master over 30 minutes as a valuable lesson in hardship, which is "the tool by which a craft apprentice is fashioned into a skilled practitioner and, in a wider Japanese social context, how the youth is seen to mature into a man of-the-world." In the context of university rowing, McDonald and Hallinan (2005: 194) even argued that what the practice of rowing at university level is about is actually accumulating *seishin* capital, or a body–mind disposition revolving around hierarchical relationships (*jōge kankei*), self-sacrifice and learning through hardship (*kurō*), the concepts of harmony and cooperation, and the qualities of patience, endurance, perseverance, and discipline.

Climbing resonates with these archetypical features of the dominant sport ideology in various regards. A climber needs a lot of practice and repetitious exercise to acquire a kind of somatic intelligence, consisting of a stock repertoire of basic moves, grip techniques, and body postures that can be applied efficiently, fast, and therefore naturally in accordance with the demands of the line. What is more, the accumulated experience of successful climbs translates into the manly qualities of courage and endurance. The stockpiled differences in climbing skills become evident when the climbers are in action. While all members acknowledged individual effort and progress, the rank order was ultimately based on the question *Who is able to lead the most difficult route?* While all climbing scales are to some degree lacking in preciseness and objectivity,

the immediate comparability of climbing one and the same route in front of the group answers all open questions. On-sight ascents (i.e., without any prior information about the route) are generally higher valued than red point ascents (leading the entire route without a fall or rest from bottom to top). Climbs at the upper limit of a climber's ability usually need more than one continuous push to be finished and more than one attempt, until a red point ascent follows last. Top-rope climbs, which are less difficult since the assurance from a rope fixed from above reduces the fear of a fall, were clearly frowned upon, particularly among the advanced free-climbers. Despite this widely shared negative image among sport climbers, everyone except for the top climbers at Yamanaka High occasionally or even frequently enjoyed the comfortable safety of this belaying style. Top rope was commonly perceived of as an acceptable style for women, but not for men, or at least not for the "hard guys" faction (*kōha*) of climbing, even though they naturally would resort to it when following as the second climber in multi-pitch climbing. Constant training is needed to build up the required physical strength, stamina, techniques, and knowledge required in order to lead in climbing. Experience is further needed to cope mentally with the inherent risk of falling and the lurking fear of pain. Rephrasing the famous quote of US football coaching legend Vince Lombardi "Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing," Fuji explained that "in climbing, mental power is not everything, it is the only thing."

Climbing at the edge of one's abilities always includes the risk of a fall. Since protections in free-climbing are set at short distances (on average about every three or four feet), a fall is usually stopped soon, if the belayer reacts appropriately and fast. However, any uncontrolled fall may cause severe pain and injuries, and any advanced climber has his story to tell about skin abrasions, contusions, sprains, or broken bones. For some the fear of falling or getting injured is even reason enough to quit the sport.

Hence it is not the overall climbing capacity but the ability to lead that is most closely associated with sporting masculinity: having the courage (*gattsu*), the mental as well as physical strength to move ahead. The cultural key concept of *seishin* generally operates at the subconscious level, though it occasionally also appeared in conversations with the climbers. Yet in one regard the free-climbers differed markedly from the stoic image of the lonely wolf, the man of the mountains, or *yama otoko*, that dominated sporting masculinity in this field until the 1970s: for them, showing emotions was a natural part of the sport. At Yamanaka High and Pinnacles Gym, one couldn't help but hear how cheerful the atmosphere was. Besides the chatting of the resting climbers and the cheering calls, there was also a constant sound layer of moaning and groaning by

the climbers at the wall, who seemed to use their own voices as a device to amplify their power resources.

7 Conclusion: lifestyle sports and shifting conceptions of masculinity

The discussion of two different free-climbing scenes demonstrates that subcultural sports are tied into the social and psychosomatic construction of masculinity to no lesser degree than mainstream sport. Japan's free-climbing culture of those days has been identified as a homosocial world characterized by mind orientations, bodily representations, and performance patterns, in which stock images of hegemonic sporting masculinity such as dominance, hierarchical relationships, toughness, perseverance, and mental strength were surprisingly abundant. This continuation may have been caused by the history of men's appropriation of climbing as a male activity space, in which homosociality, vertical relationships, scales of sporting power, and the ethical appreciation of pain are to some extent working toward the reproduction of hegemonic sporting masculinity and the borderline between the sexes. However, my data also demonstrate that, as socio-historical constructs, the notions of hegemonic and alternative masculinities are related to a number of factors at the intersection of lifestyle sport and society at large. Sporting prowess in the form of the ability to lead in physically challenging climbs is crucial for peer recognition, but this singular factor is to be weighed in relation to men of different climbing abilities, age, and socioeconomic markers, and in relation to women, too.

Sports such as free-climbing do not just produce hegemonic, subordinated, and compliant styles of masculinity. The variation of attitudes and norms within the Yamanaka High group and between the clubs shows that masculinities are not fixed, essentialized entities but subjected to change and variation both over the life course of the participants and over time in general. For example, for the younger climbers sporting able and powerful bodies, hetero-normativity and hegemonic masculinity were more of importance to express their maleness. By contrast, the older climbers' gender identities were informed by a wider array of socioeconomic resources, such as job achievements, familial roles, or social functions in the community, which become more significant, and pressing, with aging. Differences in gender, age, occupational status, and life course experiences seemed to have a significant impact on the ways members of the climbing subculture related to each other and gave meaning to their individual achievements.

It is important to note that these men's occupational status positions were rather mediocre, and this may have been caused by the high significance they attached to free-climbing. Rather than sacrificing their pleasures to the demand of work life, they abstained from career making in order to focus on what they gained from their affiliation with a social group and a larger subculture, or what they deemed to be a necessity for a satisfying life. The literature on sport and gender identifies such emphasis on the social and emotional amenities supplied by sport participation as a feminine trait. While the accuracy of such a classification may be challenged, the appreciation of relationships surrounding the activity of climbing plus its prioritization over traditional features of hegemonic sporting masculinity suggest a shift in balance between masculine and feminine traits in and through sport participation. This change is congruent with larger social trends in society which have impacted upon the gendered perception of sport and gender relations at large. On the one hand, years of economic crisis have damaged the hegemonic ideal of the male breadwinner, and in the drying-out marriage market of Japanese society, men are more than previously pressured to accommodate to women's expectations. On the other hand, the success of Japanese women in long distance running and the global visibility of women in fields such as football, which were traditionally reserved for men, have equally changed ideas of "emphasized femininity." These are ongoing processes of transformation not immediately related to the subculture of climbing. Since its members are exposed to these forces once they change into social roles outside of climbing, they are contributing to the fluidity and shifting subjectivity of individual men.

Under these circumstances of intersectionality, for some men free-climbing continues to be an arena of hyper-masculinity, while the pool of alternative images of masculinity is growing simultaneously. The climbing subculture hence is not a site for a radically different embodiment of masculinity but rather testifies to the complexity and variability of masculinity conceptions in a particular lifestyle sector and across different life worlds simultaneously inhabited by an individual. With the increasing number of women and girls flocking to climbing gyms after I conducted my fieldwork, the gap between male and female athletes at the top of the sport has been narrowed and the spread of climbing abilities among recreational climbers has been leveled. If these developments ultimately may have enhanced the spectrum of masculinities or rather perpetuated existing notions of gender roles and identities while purporting to change them needs further investigation.

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