Various sociocultural changes have influenced the emergence of non-hegemonic, oppositional masculinities in Japan. Herbivore masculinity exemplifies a non-hegemonic masculinity that has emerged in the wake of a shifting social landscape and thus departs from salaryman hegemonic masculinity. This paper provides an overview and critical investigation of the gender practices constituting herbivore masculinity. Results of the analysis indicate that many gender practices that constitute herbivore masculinity appear to resist salaryman hegemonic masculinity and in the process legitimate an equal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, herbivore masculinity is simultaneously underpinned by gender practices which rather than depart from, reify the hegemonic status quo. An implication of this investigation is that non-hegemonic masculinities are not necessarily more democratic than their hegemonic counterparts.

*Keywords*: herbivore masculinity, Japan, professional housewife femininity, salaryman masculinity

Similar to other socio-cultural contexts, non-hegemonic masculinities have recently emerged in Japan challenging and interrogating cornerstone elements of hegemonic masculinity. Sôshokukei danshi (“herbivore men”), or more accurately herbivore masculinities, represent an oppositional form of Japanese masculinity. Maki Fukasawa coined “herbivore” in reference to slim heterosexual men who are professionally unambitious, consumerists, and passive or uninterested in heterosexual romantic relationships (Chen, 2012; Fukasawa, 2009; Morioka, 2009; Ushikubo, 2008). “Sex” translates as “relationship in flesh” in Japanese; “herbivore” connotes an apparent disinterest in sexual intimacy. Notably, herbivores contest many of the time-honored practices associated with hegemonic masculinity such as excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption, chronic workaholism, emotional illiteracy, and the subordination of women.

The present article critically examines the gender “practices” (Martin, 2003, 2006) that constitute herbivore masculinity, especially considering the extent to which
they contribute to gender equity. Analysis indicates that while previously hegemonic archetypes are in a state of upheaval and reconfiguration, the emergence of alternative masculinities is not necessarily an indicator that gender relations are becoming more egalitarian in Japan. Rather, situated within Japan’s shifting social geography, herbivore masculinities mark a context where long-cherished and hegemonic masculine gender practices are currently unavailable. In response to this sociocultural vista, herbivore masculinity entails a pastiche of alternative gender practices that might but do not per se equalize the relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity.

**DATA AND METHOD**

This research note consists of a content analysis (Berg, 1998) of emergent secondary literature on herbivores (Chen, 2012; Fukasawa, 2009; Morioka, 2009; Ushikubo, 2008). Excluding Chen’s, these studies fail to conduct critical analysis or empirical research of herbivore masculinity. Instead, these sources provide exclusively popular, non-scholarly portrayals of an emergent phenomenon. Chen critically engages with the same secondary sources as this article, however he neglects to conduct primary empirical research. Building on and extending Chen’s research, I critically analyzed this research in order to identify the recurrent social practices that arguably amount to herbivore masculinity. The article problematizes “herbivore” as an overarching category that encompasses men who engage in an array of divergent gender practices.

Validity issues arise from basing this article on a small sample of secondary sources. The secondary sources here examined failed to specify their sampling procedures, so the representativeness of their samples remains unclear. Notwithstanding, we can view the studies analyzed as part of an extended popular discourse circumscribing herbivore masculinity as a distinct entity. The significance of popular discourses surrounding herbivores is that previously hegemonic forms of masculinity are being challenged and potentially undermined by non-hegemonic forms. This paper, then, offers an initial investigation of herbivore masculinity which further empirical research may extend.

I first discuss the pre-1990 rubrics of salaryman hegemonic masculinity and housewife emphasized femininity. Certain gender practices support the ascendancy of salaryman hegemonic masculinity and subordination of housewife emphasized femininity. While salariedmen exercise social power and have access to material wealth, various costs are incurred from practicing this form of masculinity. A prolonged period of economic stagnation has significantly impacted salaryman masculinity and housewife femininity. Next, the article shifts focus to discuss potential factors leading to the emergence of practices constituting herbivore masculinity. Across domains of wage labor, body grooming, interpersonal relationships, and sexuality, herbivore gender emerges as an oppositional form of masculinity. The article then addresses problematic aspects of depictions of herbivore masculinity. The final section of the article maintains that while herbivore masculinity appears to subvert many elements of salaryman hegemonic masculinity, herbivore masculinity fails to significantly undermine the superior status of masculinity over femininity, thus failing to dismantle heteropatriarchal gender relations.
Empirical research has demonstrated that the figures of corporate salaryman and fulltime housewife serve as archetypes of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in post-World War II Japan (Dasgupta, 2009, 2012; Hidaka, 2010; Roberson, 2003; Taga, ed., 2011; Tokuhiro, 2010). Originally formulated by R.W. Connell and later expanded by James Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity covers “that form of masculinity in a particular social setting that structures and legitimates gender relations hierarchically between men and women, masculinity and femininity” (Messerschmidt, 2011, p. 206). Hegemonic masculinities incur intelligibility through their relationship with subaltern masculinities and “emphasized” femininity, that is, “a form of femininity that is practiced in a complimentary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity” (p. 206).

This paper adopts a broadly social constructionist view of gender and thus conceptualizes gender as a fluid construct that individuals actively accomplish, craft, do, or practice within specific institutional and interactional contexts (Dasgupta, 2012; Kondo, 1990; Martin, 2003, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Particular institutional and social contexts sponsor gendered practices or gendering practices; that is, specific repertoires of social actions and behaviors that individuals can enact, resist, or even reformulate as they practice gender within social interaction (Martin, 2003, 2006). Practicing gender is the literal event or “the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilizing, maneuvering” of gender within specific interactional contexts (Martin, 2003, p. 354). Although social actors possess agency to construct or practice various forms of masculinity and femininity, individual agency can be curtailed as along lines of class, race, and sexuality. As a result, heterosexuals from privileged race and class positions “practice” more powerful forms of masculinity and femininity than less privileged individuals (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 34). Power is thus inextricably linked to gender as practice, so individuals who are unable to embody situationally appropriate forms of gender are regarded as gender deviant and can face social sanction or denigration (Klein, 2012; Messerschmidt, 2012). Nevertheless, power is never unidirectional and absolute but multidirectional and fluid, so individuals shift between occupying various degrees of powerlessness and powerlessness (Messerschmidt, 2012, Weedon, 1996). Thus, an individual’s position in the hierarchy of masculinities shifts over space and time.

A sarariiman (“salaryman,” salaried employee) is typically a graduate from the ranks of an elite university who is continuously employed by one corporation from university graduation till retirement. Employers expect absolute loyalty, diligence, steadfast dedication, and self-sacrifice from their employees, who are compensated with the coveted three treasures of permanent lifetime employment, seniority-based wages and promotions, and corporate unionism (Dasgupta, 2000, p. 192; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003, p. 9; Sasaki, 2011, p. 163). These treasures are not easily attained and require self-sacrifice, economic capital, eventually an absolute dedication to a corporation. Salaryman masculinity is class specific and thus unavailable to men who occupy lower than middle class positions. Middle-class men and women may access a stable lifestyle by enacting the complementary roles of salaryman hegemonic masculinity and fulltime housewife emphasized femininity.

Marriage and work are cornerstone gender practices constituting salaryman masculinity. Dasgupta (2000, p. 194) maintains that a heterosexual patriarchal family ideology underlies salaryman masculinity. Men are expected to perform the roles of
husband and *daikokubashira* ("family breadwinner"). A salaryman’s wife typically partakes in nonpermanent part-time work. Men are expected to serve as the primary family providers, thus exemplifying the strong connection between masculinity and paid labor. Men are expected to be not only productive in the workforce but also reproductive in the sense of starting and financially supporting a family.

Salarymen are beneficiaries of the *patriarchal dividend* (Connell, 1995, p. 82; 2009, p. 142) and accordingly accrue material wealth, social prestige, and institutional authority. Specifically, corporations reward their employees with benefits that can include health care, a housing subsidiary, a "marriage bonus" for newly married employees, subsequent bonuses for each child, and pension coverage for nonworking women, and for this reason can be viewed as "total providers" (Borovoy, 2005, pp. 81-82; Sasaki, 2011, p. 163). The corporate discourse of total provider expounds the previously discussed heterosexual patriarchal family ideology and heteronormative stipulation that men marry, reproduce, and serve as family breadwinners.

*Sengyô shufu* ("professional/fulltime housewife") emphasized femininity is the relational counterpart to salaryman hegemonic masculinity (Charlebois, forthcoming). Sociocultural norms dictate that women marry by a certain age and devote their full and complete attention to tasks such as managing the household budget, performing housework and childcare, supporting their children’s education, and providing elder care (Kurotani, 2005, p. 127). Given their wives’ domestic support, men are able to prioritize their careers. The classification of a housewife as a profession indicates that domesticity is a fulltime, stay-at-home endeavor (Imamura, 1987, p. 18).

Despite the existence of a sociocultural norm that associates women and femininity with fulltime domesticity, many married women are part-time employees (Nemoto, 2010, pp. 205-206; Tachibanaki, 2010, pp. 227-264; Tokuhiro, 2010, pp. 83-84). For this reason, the term *kengyô shufu* ("working housewife") depicts more accurately than *sengyô shufu* the lived realities of many women. Although many women are employed close to full-time hours, this work is often poorly remunerated unskilled shift work, so they are unable to achieve financial independence. As sociocultural norms position married women as primarily family caregivers, the purpose of nondomestic work is not self-development but to contribute to the household budget (Kimoto, 2005, p. 19; Suzuki, 2007, p. 11; Tachibanki, 2010, p. 256). Thus, marriage, motherhood, and occupying a position of economic dependence on a male breadwinner are still central components of emphasized femininity.

The unequal nature of the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity manifests in several interrelated ways. First, housewives are financially dependent on their husbands, so marriage becomes *eikyû shûshoku* ("lifetime employment") for many middle-class women (Iwao, 1993, p. 156; Tachibanaki, 2010, p. 157). Indeed, a housewife’s livelihood is often entirely dependent upon a male breadwinner, so she must never divorce and her quality of life depends upon her husband’s salary (Yamada, 2001, p. 171). Therefore, allegiance to the model of housewife emphasized femininity incurs risks. Second, whereas salaryman masculinity is constructed through individual accomplishments and successes, housewife femininity is constructed through supporting others’ achievements. Consequently, a woman’s femininity is validated through and perhaps con-
tingent upon her husband’s professional and children’s academic success. Third, married working women are expected to perform the *second shift* (Hochschild, 1989) of domestic work and childcare irrespective of their non-domestic responsibilities. In addition to discriminatory workplace practices (Kimoto, 2005; Ogasawara, 1998; Tachibanaka, 2010), this cultural norm makes it difficult for women to build successful careers and conceivably makes fulltime domesticity more appealing than balancing the double burden of domestic and nondomestic labor. Some women even regard the choice to opt out of the labor force after marriage as their unique gendered privilege because the option is unavailable to men (Holloway, 2010, p. 11).

The construction of salaryman masculinity and housewife emphasized femininity entails the mobilization of gender practices that constitute a hierarchical, if complementary, relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity. Salaryman hegemonic masculinity is superior to housewife emphasized femininity as men accrue material wealth and social power while women partake in an unpaid and arguably undervalued “labor of love.” A woman’s social status is not only dependent upon her husband’s social position but also rests on his decision to share material wealth and decision-making authority with her (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 38). As the accomplishment of housewife femininity involves occupying a position of dependence on a male breadwinner, it marks subordination to salaryman masculinity.

**Contemporary Salaryman Masculinity and Housewife Femininity**

Masculinities are never static and ahistorical but fluid and transhistorical, so hegemonic masculinities shift over time and vary by social setting. Contemporaneously, non-hegemonic *oppositional* masculinities emerge which challenge the authority of hegemonic masculinity and sometimes undermine unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt, 2000, p. 12). The combined effects of a prolonged economic recession and shifting sociocultural norms have drastically impacted salaryman hegemonic masculinity (Dasgupta, 2009, 2012; Taga, ed., 2011). Simultaneously, non-hegemonic masculinities are emerging which significantly depart from and at least somewhat undermine salaryman hegemonic masculinity (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 80; Napier, 2011, p. 165).

Despite the long-established authority of salaryman hegemonic masculinity, sociocultural changes have reduced the salaryman’s previously ascendant position. The 1990’s and ensuing decades have witnessed an extended period of economic stagnation which has resulted in corporate restructurings and downsizing as well as an overall decrease in the number of permanent employment positions (Dasgupta, 2009, pp. 83-84, 2010; Taga, 2011a, p. 11). This period of low economic growth, rising unemployment rates, and resulting sense of rising apprehension and uncertainty is commonly referred to as Japan’s “lost decade” (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 79). Increasing numbers of younger men are unable to secure permanent employment and are forced to accept nonpermanent forms of employment (Dasgupta, 2009, pp. 83-84, 2010; Hidaka, 2010, p. 89; Mathews, 2004, pp. 123-127; Taga, 2011a, p. 31). Consequently, not only is their access to an affluent lifestyle severely curtailed, but also their masculinity is threatened due to the strong relationship between paid labor and masculinity (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 85).

Another interrelated consequence of an increasingly unstable employment environment is that younger men of the *shinjinrui* (“new breed”) generation are un-
willing to exhibit complete devotion to an organization, yet they still subscribe to a preeminently work-centered lifestyle (Dasgupta, 2009, pp. 83-84; Hidaka, 2010, pp. 178-181). A desire for self-fulfillment and greater autonomy is replacing older workplace norms of selfless corporate dedication and obedience (Sasaki, 2011, pp.183-185; Murata, 2011, p. 89). In contemporary Japan, changing jobs and even careers are commonplace practices (Murata, 2011, pp. 82-89). Although shinjinrui men appear to reject the dominant total devotion to work trope that was normative during the previous generation, men still spend considerable amounts of time at work (Higashino, 2011, p. 35; Murata, 2011, pp. 70-75; Sasaki, 2011, p. 164). Furthermore, the replacement of the seniority system of advancement with performance based assessment requires that men toll long hours at work in order to receive a positive performance and ultimately promotions (Higashino, 2011, pp. 44-49). Despite changes to existing employment structures, professional success is still a central component of contemporary salaryman masculinity (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 90, 2010; Hidaka, 2010, p. 163; Taga, 2011b, p. 117; Tokuhiro, 2010, pp. 55-58).

The passage of gender equality legislation and subsequent dissemination of the notion of gender equality is a further factor that has contributed to the reconfiguration of salaryman masculinity. Consequently, contemporary wives expect their husbands to actively contribute to domestic life (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 90; Higashino, 2011, p. 5; Taga, 2011c, pp. 146-148). Hence, a new gender division of labor is emerging where husbands entrust prime responsibility for housework and childcare to their wives during the week and then make limited domestic contributions on evenings and weekends (Sasaki, 2011, p. 178). It is not uncommon for contemporary fathers to express feelings of anxiety and internal conflict regarding their inability to adequately balance the demands of the workplace with those of the home (Taga, 2011b, pp. 99-102).

**HERBIVORE MASCULINITY**

The emergence of this new generation of salarymen is not only a response to the economy but also a reflection of the East Asian region where “soft masculinity” has had a long history. Kam Louie (2003, p. 10) argues that since the time of Confucius, Chinese masculinity is construed from the binary forces of *wen* (cultural and mental accomplishments) and *wu* (martial and physical accomplishments). Although masculinity is comprised from a balance of both elements, *wen* is awarded primacy in Chinese culture (Louie, 2002, pp. 17-18). Similarly, Korean *seonbi* masculinity which emphasizes scholastic achievement rather than physical virility is similar to *wen* masculinity (Jung, 2011, p. 27). *Seonbi* masculinity remains idealized in Korean culture and has influenced the development of soft masculinity in Korea (Jung, p. 28).

The cultural idolization of soft masculinity has a long history in Japan. Male kabuki actors frequently blur gender boundaries through cross-dressing, and *bishônen* (“beautiful boys”) are idealized in *anime* (“animated films”) and *manga* (“comics”) (Darling-Wolf, 2004, p. 361). A number of *bishônen* pop idols such as the bands SMAP and Arashi have contributed to the dissemination of mediated images of soft masculinity.

Herbivore masculinity exemplifies a soft oppositional masculinity that was arguably influenced by the stagnant economy, shifting sociocultural values, and dissemination of media images (Chen, 2012). With salaryman masculinity
reconfigured in the wake of the shifting sociocultural landscape, herbivore masculinity represented a non-hegemonic oppositional form of masculinity that significantly departs from salaryman hegemonic masculinity but does not represent a more egalitarian masculinity.

Herbivore masculinity extends to areas of wage labor, body grooming, interpersonal relationships, and sexuality. Professional success and material wealth are not central components of herbivore masculinity while crucial to salaryman masculinity (Chen, 2012; Hidaka, 2010; Taga, 2006, 2011; Tokuhiro, 2010). Although many individuals practicing herbivore masculinity are apparently unwilling to display total devotion to a corporation, many are unopposed to stable, permanent employment. The key difference from their salarymen predecessors is that work performs the instrumental function of supporting their lifestyles, while they define their masculinity through alternative social practices.

As previously discussed, there is a social trend of increasing individualization and declining corporate loyalty in Japan (Chen, 2012, p. 295). Nevertheless, careerism is a gender practice that is central to contemporary salaryman masculinity, yet a much more peripheral part of herbivore masculinity. As the attainment of professional success and material wealth are practices unassociated with herbivore masculinity, men practicing herbivore masculinity occupy a less privileged class position than their salaryman counterparts.

Herbivore masculinity is much more aesthetically-oriented than either traditional or contemporary salaryman masculinities and related to the body-management practices of dieting, hair styling, eyebrow grooming, and adherence to skin care regimes (Chen, 2012, p. 286; Ushikubo, 2008, p. 49). Even though personal grooming and an overall investment in personal appearance are becoming part of contemporary salaryman masculinity (Dasgupta, 2010), these practices are much more central to herbivore masculinity.

The formation of intimate friendships with women is another practice which underpins herbivore masculinity and subverts salaryman hegemonic masculinity. Herbivores enjoy bonding with their female friends through talking and engaging in mutual activities such as shopping, cooking, or dining out (Fukasawa, 2009; Morioka, 2009; Ushikubo, 2008). More strikingly, herbivores often travel and share the same hotel room with their female friends, although relationships would remain strictly platonic. The formation of close relationships counters the notion that men are emotionally inarticulate and thus unable to form emotional bonds with others. On the contrary, herbivores’ relationships reach a level of intimacy which arguably equals or even surpasses physical intimacy and counters a dominant heteronormative assumption that heterosexual desire is the structuring agent of most male-female relationships.

Herbivore masculinity further departs from salaryman masculinity in the areas of romantic relationships and sexuality. Purveyors of herbivore masculinity purportedly possess attitudes toward romantic relationships ranging from a strong desire to cultivate long-term heterosexual relationships to a commitment to permanent singlehood. A common herbivore masculinity practice is to assume a more passive, stereotypically feminine role in romantic relationships (Chen, 2012, pp. 286-287; Morioka, 2009, p. 12; Ushikubo, 2008, p. 73). Accordingly, some men deflect the leadership role to women and expect them to serve as decision makers regarding matters such as the location of dates. Nonetheless, herbivore is a heterogeneous category, so some herbivore men find it difficult to ask women to...
go out on a date or express their romantic feelings while others are involved in stable monogamous relationships.

Aggressive heterosexual prowess is not as central to hegemonic masculinity in Japan as in Western cultures; nevertheless, salaryman masculinity is strongly tied in with heterosexuality and the formation of romantic relationships (Castro-Vazquez & Kishi, 2003; Hidaka, 2010; Taga, 2006, 2011; Tokuhiro, 2010). While some men who practice herbivore masculinity are involved in long-term heterosexual relationships, others reject this practice and instead fulfill their sexual desires through pornographic media. Consequently, the consumption of pornographic magazines, as well as erotic DVDs, websites, and computer games, are practices constituting herbivore masculinity. Ushikubo’s (2008, p. 58) informants described sex as “a habit, duty, and troublesome” and some were sexually uninvolved with their current partners.

**Herbivore as an Oppositional Form of Masculinity**

Herbivore masculinity’s resistance to the previously discussed heterosexual patriarchal family ideology which defines men as *daikokubashira* (“family breadwinners”) represents a significant departure from contemporary hegemonic masculinity. The above discussion illustrated that while lifetime employment in a single corporation is less central to contemporary salaryman masculinity, professional success remains a key component of this form of masculinity. In contrast, corporate advancement and material wealth are nonessential elements of herbivore masculinity.

One possible interpretation of this phenomenon is that the lost decade has induced an overall reduction in employment positions, so permanent employment is not always a contextually available masculine resource. From this perspective, more leisure-oriented herbivore masculinity does not represent authentic transgression *per se*, but simply follows broader sociocultural patterns. As a result, herbivore masculinity is constructed from alternative gender practices such as narcissistic body-management, a primacy of consumption, and the formation of intimate opposite-sex friendships.

More optimistically, one can view herbivore masculinity as rejecting the careerism trope and as constructing masculinity from alternative gender practices. While contemporary salaryman masculinity departs from traditional salaryman masculinity in the sense that corporate loyalty is unvalued, the attainment of professional success is an arduous process which requires the exertion of a significant amount of time and effort. Not unlike their predecessors, contemporary salarymen inevitably spend a substantial amount of time in the workplace. Conversely, herbivore masculinity is associated with striking a healthy work-life balance and consequently avoids the detrimental health effects induced by overwork.

Body grooming is another area where herbivores diverge from traditional salaryman masculinity, yet as argued this practice also reflects the current generation and cultural idolization of soft masculinity in East Asia. The results of analysis of salaryman publications indicate that contemporary salarymen are expected to exercise, sport a trendy hairstyle, and thus appear well-groomed and exude heterosexual appeal (Bardsley, 2011; Dasgupta, 2010). In fact, these manuals contrast the sober image of an overweight, unstylish, *kareishu* (“aging body odor”) dowdy salaryman with that of a physically active, well-groomed, fresh-smelling young
man. Furthermore, the cultural preference for a “softer” form of masculinity once again reflects the exalted status of soft masculinity in East Asia, particularly in the wake of the 1990s. Based on these inferences, we can surmise that personal grooming is a gender practice central to both contemporary salaryman and herbivore masculinities rather than a marked departure from hegemonic masculinity.

An element of herbivore masculinity that notably departs from both contemporary and traditional salaryman masculinity is the formation of intimate friendships with women. As flagged above, cultural norms no longer excuse husbands’ domestic nonparticipation, but expect a limited degree of domestic involvement. Relatedly, current sociocultural norms no longer associate masculinity with emotional reticence and non-communicativeness, so the emotionally inexpressive, domestically uninvolved husband is a relic of the past. The herbivore practice of forming intimate opposite-sex interpersonal relationships directly challenges the heterosexist assumption that heterosexual desire structures male-female relationships. In this way, herbivore masculinity can be viewed as contributing to democratizing hierarchical gender relations.

Resistance or indifference to active heterosexuality represents resistance to a cornerstone element of salaryman masculinity. Nevertheless, a tendency to avoid the formation of committed romantic relationships is not necessarily a subversive practice that contributes to equalizing gender relations. Ushikubo (2008, pp. 68-69) makes the salient point that in an era of greater gender equality the achievement of sexual intimacy requires men to expend a degree of time and effort, which some herbivores regard as mendokusai (“troublesome”). Kimmel (2008, p. 205) echoes Ushikubo’s point with his assertion that many younger men in the United States are unwilling to enter committed monogamous relationships because they regard such relationships as overly time consuming and work intensive. From this viewpoint, men relinquish a degree of patriarchal power when they attempt to engage women in sexual relationships. In contrast, some adult websites and forms of pornography construct a submissive virtual female sexuality which is entirely oriented toward fulfilling men’s sexual fantasies and thus far removed from the effort and open communication required to sustain a healthy and mutually satisfying sexual relationship. Instead of participating in negotiations with women, individuals who practice herbivore masculinity turn to virtual media and pornography to satisfy their sexual desires and affirm their masculinity.

**DISCUSSION:**

**PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF ACCOUNTS OF HERBIVORE MASCULINITY**

*Herbivore* is a problematic category because as it encapsulates men who utilize different gender practices to construct their masculine identities. Morioka (2009) provides a more nuanced account of herbivores through creating a typology of herbivores allowing diversity and variation within the same form of masculinity. For example, he distinguishes between the unassertive, stereotypical herbivore and men who exude herbivore aesthetic appeal yet aggressively pursue women.

An issue regarding the secondary sources surveyed so far is that *herbivore* is applied to men who mobilize different gender practices to construct their masculinities. These divergent gender practices center on consumption practices, interpersonal relationships, and sexuality. Herbivores are contemporaneously portrayed as thrifty and hedonistic consumers (Otake, 2009; Ushikubo, 2008, pp. 100,
In one account, herbivores are bargain shoppers due to their limited amount of disposable income. In another account, herbivores purchase nonessential commodities in order to showcase recent fashion trends. This latter depiction is inconsistent with the description of herbivores as “working poor” (Chen, 2012, p. 292) who lack the requisite disposable income to engage in hedonistic consumption. Although cosmetics, clothing, and skincare treatments are relatively inexpensive purchases in comparison to cars and frequenting expensive drinking establishments, it is questionable that financially disadvantaged individuals possess the requisite income to make these nonessential purchases. In summary, popular writers and media inconsistently construe herbivores either as economizing or self-indulgent consumers. The latter account is particularly contentious given that herbivore masculinity emerged in the wake of a prolonged economic recession.

Herbivores are inconsistently portrayed either as skilled communicators who cultivate intimate opposite-sex friendships or deficient communicators who are timid and feel intimidated by women (Morioka, 2009, pp. 20-21; Ushikubo, 2008, pp. 138-139). In the first depiction, herbivores subvert the image of the reticent salaryman who is largely uncommunicative with his family. The second portrayal parallels the introverted *otaku* (“geek”) who prefers cyber-mediated relationships. Unlike their salarymen counterparts, displayed heterosexuality is not a source of masculine capital for herbivores. Like class position, herbivores are contradictorily portrayed as both effective and ineffective conversationalists.

Herbivores are consistently represented as heterosexual, yet their sexual practices range from the formation of stable monogamous relationships to practicing celibacy (Morioka, 2009, p. 12; Ushikubo, p. 6). For instance, Ushikubo (p. 10) maintains that herbivores prefer shared-breadwinning marriages, but she somewhat contradictorily proposes that they are unable to assume leadership roles in relationships (Ushikubo, p. 73). Morioka (2009, p. 21) claims that some herbivores fear rejection and consequently hesitate to actively pursue women. Popular news articles and Fukasawa (2009) construe herbivores as uninterested in forming romantic relationships (Lim, 2009; Neil, 2009; Otake, 2009). The reasons provided for their rejection of romantic relationships include insufficient financial resources and a preference for pornography (Chen, 2012, pp. 286-287, 302; Otake, 2009). Paralleling consumption practices interpersonal relationships, herbivores are inconsistently portrayed as both sexually active and inactive.

The contradictory and inconsistent elements of herbivore masculinities demonstrate the necessity of conducting empirical research in order to expose the fluid and diverse nature of herbivore masculinities. Interviews with herbivore men could provide important insights into the lived realities of men who practice this emergent form of masculinity. The absence of herbivore masculinity empirical research represents a gap in existing masculinities research.

Related to the earlier discussion of practicing gender, the process of categorizing certain forms of masculinity or femininity is also a practice. *Hegemonic, oppositional,* or *herbivore* are not neutral terms but carry certain semantic connotations and assumptions. Fukasawa’s categorization of herbivore masculinity reflects the interrelationship between active male sexuality and masculinity. As discussed, herbivore translates as *relationship in flesh,* so herbivore connotes these men reject the *normative* masculine practice of heterosexual prowess. Despite herbivore masculinities’ oppositional elements and potential to challenge unequal gender relations, the term indexes the firm relationship between heterosexuality and
hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, the categorization of “herbivore” masculinity reifies rather than undermines heteronormativity. Before classifying herbivore masculinity as a more democratic form of masculinity, we must first critically interrogate this non-hegemonic masculinity and distinguish those gender practices which legitimate hierarchical gender relations from social actions which inconsequentially depart from or in fact reaffirm hegemonic masculinity. Oppositional masculinity is a broad term and may include gender styles which reject elements of hegemonic masculinity yet nonetheless are built upon toxic gender practices such as committing crime (Messerschmidt, 2004, 2010). On the other hand, the category can encompass those masculinities that oppose the unequal relationship definitive of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, challenging and potentially dismantling hierarchical gender relations.

Arguably, individuals practicing herbivore masculinity utilize narcissistic body management and consumption as gendered resources to engage in same-sex competition. As work is sometimes a contextually unavailable masculine resource, men who practice herbivore masculinity use their knowledge of the latest fashion and other trends to occupy a more refined position in relation to other men. Likewise, the cultivation of an appealing corporeal aesthetic can be seen as a rich source of “body capital” (Holliday & Cairnie, 2007) which men utilize to create and sustain a superior position vis-à-vis other men. Paralleling how a lean, muscular body represents masculine superiority in many Western countries, Asian cultures extol slenderness (Coles, 2009; Miller, 2006). Like salarymen who utilizes professional success and social position as gendered resources, men who practice herbivore masculinity mobilize narcissistic body-management for a similar purpose. As a result, the shift from a production to consumption oriented masculinity does not represent a significant departure from salaryman masculinity.

The formation of intimate relationships represents substantial transgression of salaryman gender codes and potentially contributes to equalizing the relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity. Most notably, this practice challenges the heterosexist assumption that heterosexuality is the structuring agent of gender-dichotomized relationships rendering men and women unable to form authentically platonic relationships. The practice also challenges popular gender difference discourses that are built upon essentialist assumptions about biological differences being the root of male-female miscommunication (Cameron, 2009; Gray, 1992; Tannen, 1990).

Regarding romantic relationships and sexuality, herbivore masculinity can be viewed as simultaneously reifying and eschewing salaryman masculinity. Rejection of committed romantic relationships requiring expenditure of time and effort is not an indicator that herbivore masculinity is more egalitarian than alternative forms. Conversely, we can view this rejection as a strategy to maintain power in an era where men possess less patriarchal authority than their salaryman predecessors.

Alternatively, a commitment to permanent singlehood represents a direct challenge to the heterosexual patriarchal family ideology and sociocultural mandate that individuals marry and reproduce. From this interpretation, herbivores disrupt heteronormative conceptualizations of men and women as complementary opposites fused together by heterosexual desire.

Not unlike the “new man” discourse that emerged in the United Kingdom during the 1980s, herbivore masculinity superficially appears more egalitarian than
conventional and contemporary salaryman masculinities. The new man is often portrayed as sensitive, emotionally astute, respectful of women, supportive of gender equality, and attentive to personal appearance (Gill, 2003, p. 37). Thus, the new man superficially appears less macho and softer than previous constructions of masculinity. Nevertheless, men who practice elements of this form of masculinity do not necessarily subscribe to an ideology of gender equality.

Herbivore masculinity initially appears less authoritarian than salaryman masculinity, but it remains uncertain whether or not purveyors of this form of masculinity are actually committed to equalizing the relationship between masculinity and femininity. Ito (2008, p. 21) points out that many male college students are reserved, gentle looking, and hesitate to express their opinions in class, yet they still subscribe to an ideology of male supremacy. Likewise, Taga (2011d, p. 203) found that many younger married men express a desire for their wives to work outside the home. Nevertheless, they support their wives’ employment less for their personal fulfillment or development than as a means to relieve some of the pressure induced by serving as primary family breadwinners. In a study by Nemoto, Fuwa, and Ishiguro (2012), participants subscribed to the traditional ideology of a male breadwinner and female caregiver. Finally, Fukasawa (2009) posits that many younger men who are involved in relationships appropriate their leisure time for personal pursuits. These examples represent part of a growing body of research that interrogates the practices of men and masculinity. These findings thus illustrate that the mere reconfiguration of conventional hegemonic masculinity to “softer,” seemingly more egalitarian forms does not necessarily result in equalizing the relationship between masculinity and femininity.

**CONCLUSION**

This review has provided an initial investigation of herbivore oppositional masculinity across domains of wage labor, body grooming, interpersonal relationships, and sexuality. The results of the analysis suggest that while herbivore masculinity notably transgresses hegemonic masculinity through the rejection of a work-centered lifestyle and formation of intimate opposite-sex relationships, many practices that underpin herbivore masculinity actually represent accommodation with hegemonic masculinity. Herbivores masculinity’s simultaneous resistance to and compliance with hegemonic masculinity indicates that masculinities and femininities are never neatly classifiable as either progressive or regressive but instead shift between exhibiting various degrees of accommodation and resistance in relation to the hegemonic status quo.

An implication of the emergence of non-hegemonic, oppositional masculinities such as herbivores is that gender relations have been in a state of flux since the onset of the lost decade. My analysis indicates that while herbivore masculinity appears more egalitarian, it ultimately sustains a fundamentally unequal relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and therefore fails to contribute to the formation of a more gender equal society. Individuals practicing herbivore forms of masculinity may not draw on the patriarchal dividend in the sense that they do not accrue material wealth and social power. Nevertheless, as the relationship between masculinity and femininity is fundamentally unequal (Connell, 1995, pp. 77-81; Schippers, 2007, p. 91), herbivore masculinity occupies a dominant position in relation to emphasized femininity.
My analysis of herbivore masculinity sheds light on nature of the relationship between masculinity and femininity. As discussed, emphasized femininity is embodied through assumption of a complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity; practicing this form of femininity is fundamentally disempowering. As individuals practicing herbivore masculinity are marginalized on the basis of their class position and heterosexual passivity or inactivity, herbivore masculinity is subordinate to hegemonic masculinity. Nevertheless, masculinities occupy a superior position vis-à-vis femininities (Connell, 1995, p. 83). While practicing emphasized femininity provides women with a socially legitimated identity, it disempowers women and for this reason can be seen conferring a paradoxical privilege.

The emergence of oppositional herbivore masculinity indicates that while gender relations are in a tenuous, uncertain state, they remain far from egalitarian. Men who practice herbivore masculinity can be seen as attempting to exercise a very limited degree of patriarchal power in a social climate where professional success and material wealth are oftentimes contextually unavailable gendered resources. Future empirical research on herbivores and other non-hegemonic forms of masculinity will inevitably shed additional light on the shifting genderscape in Japanese society.

REFERENCES


Coles, R. (2009). Negotiating the field of masculinity: Production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities. Men and Masculinities, 12, 30-44.


Murata, Y. (2011). Kyaria patan no jizoku to henyou—“Shin jinrui” sedai ikou no jirei kara [The continuance and change of career patterns: Case-studies from the “new breed” generation]. In F. Taga (Ed.), Yuragu sarariiman seikatsu (pp. 65-98). Tokyo, Japan: Minervashobo.


Taga, F. (2011a). Yuragu roudou kihan to kazoko kihan—Sarariiman no kako to genzai [Uncertain work and family models; Salaryman past and present]. In F. Taga (Ed.), *Yuragu sarariiman seikatsu* (pp. 1-33). Tokyo, Japan: Minervashobo.

Taga, F. (2011b). Ikuji suru sarariiman—Ikuji ga dekinai tsurasa, shigoto ga dekina tsurasa [Childrearing salarymen: Distress caused by the inability to devote oneself to childrearing or work]. In F. Taga (Ed.), *Yuragu sarariiman seikatsu* (pp. 35-63). Tokyo, Japan: Minervashobo.


