

Matters of the Flesh:
Japanese Herbivore Men and the Asexuality Umbrella
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1 Introduction

As birth and marriage rates have plummeted over the past few decades in Japan (Statistics Bureau, 2015; The World Bank, 2015), the public is expressing its concern regarding its future in a rapidly-aging world. Numerous studies and books have been published reporting this decline and hypothesising its causes and explore the possible tactics that Japanese society can employ to alleviate it, such as changes in public policies and labour conditions, as well attempts to raise consciousness regarding private life, sexuality and gender relations (Atoh, 2001; Coulmas 2007; Miyamoto, 2002; Miyamoto, Yamada, and Iwagami, 1997; Ueno, 1998).

Such observations of the private life of Japanese people have led to the emergence the *herbivore men* buzzword, whose exact definition varies considerably, but is generally used to describe young Japanese men who are not interested in pursuing relationships. Coined by Maki Fukasawa (2006), the term *herbivore man*¹ quickly caught on in Japanese women's magazines and newspapers, and has become the topic of an increasing number of articles, papers, and books (Chavez, 2011; Haworth, 2013; Neill, 2009; Otagaki, 2009; Wakatsuki, 2015). Multiple attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon from a socio-economic and gender perspective, supported by lived experiences and observations on the construction of masculinity in Japanese society.

In contrast to the sensationalist coverage of herbivory, a new sexual identity quietly emerged in the early 2000s, shaped by personal narratives and online transnational communities. Sometimes referred to as 'The Invisible Orientation' (Decker, 2014), *asexuality* is a sexual orientation characterized by a persistent lack of sexual attraction towards any gender.

Though socio-economic factors and gender politics can be linked to asexuality, members of the asexual communities insist that asexuality is a matter of natural orientation, rather than intentional behaviour. People in the communities have identified multiple subtypes of asexuality, leading to the use of the term *the asexual umbrella* to describe the spectrum (The Asexuality Archive, 2012).

This article aims to explore the possibility of the herbivore men's¹ presence under the asexual umbrella, as well as the potential that this classification can have in empowering the subjects as active participants in a culture of resistance. Part 2 will describe the history of asexuality as an identity and its characteristics. Part 3 will use previous studies to analyse the discourse on herbivory and construct a more palpable image of herbivory. Part 4 will draw parallels between the two groups in an attempt to encourage discussion of herbivory as a potential orientation and culture of resistance.

Przybylo (2011) notes that 'it is the work of cultural investigators [...] to consider not only what stories are being told but also how they are being told and who does the telling' (p. 1). What will become apparent throughout this paper is the contrast in the manner in which the identity of asexuals and the label of herbivory are constructed: one is self-proclaimed and community-based, whereas the other is a buzzword which has been mostly defined based on non-participant observation and stereotypes regarding gendered behaviour. We take on the premise of sexuality as a product of discourse, as promoted by the social constructivist school of thought promoted by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jeffrey Weeks. Thus, we will focus on the discourse surrounding the two groups and the manner in which different modes of discourse have influenced the formation of two groups who are similar from an essentialist standpoint².

2 The Asexual Umbrella

2.1 The Emergence of Asexuality as Identity

Originally an 'X' on the Kinsey scale (Kinsey, Wardell, and Clyde, 1948) and officially introduced on a formal sexuality scale by Storms (1980), asexuality has been the target of increasing attention in the past decade, with an increasing number of people 'coming out' as asexuals. The 'coming out' stories are usually told in online transnational communities, where they discuss their sexual desire—or lack thereof—, its manifestation, and its effect on their everyday life. The Internet was the starting point of the movement, but in recent years asexuals have begun advocating for recognition in the offline world, and asexuality began receiving media and academic coverage (AVEN, n.d.; Bogaert, 2004, 2006; Chasin, 2011; Pacho, 2013; Prause & Graham 2007; Przybylo, 2011; Scherrer, 2008).

Though details, manifestations, and sexual behaviour vary among subtypes and individuals, an asexual person is most simplistically defined as a person who does not experience sexual attraction, regardless of gender or orientation (The Asexuality Archive, 2012). Additionally, an individual who does not experience romantic desire is described as 'aromantic' (AVEN, n.d.). In addition to the 'pure' form of asexuality, '*gray asexuality*' as a term was coined in 2006, and refers to people under the asexual umbrella who, while not meeting the standards of 'ideal' asexuality, experience sexual attraction sporadically or only under certain conditions: a prominent group within the gray asexuality spectrum consists of *demisexuals*, who experience no sexual attraction to a person with whom they have no emotional bond (Demisexuality Resource Center, n.d.; Hezekiah, 2013). As the asexual community is composed of individuals with eclectic sexual interests, varying levels of sexual desire, diverging attitudes and multiple means of 'coping' with their orientation, it has come to be described as an 'asexual umbrella', as it houses numerous microcommunities under its spectrum (The Asexuality Archive, 2012, p. 63–64). People belonging to all

sexual / romantic orientations and gender identities can identify as asexual (Miller, 2012).

The percentage of asexuality within the general population is difficult to estimate. In 1994, a survey regarding sexual behaviour was carried out in the United Kingdom ($N = 18,876$) which included a question on sexual attraction, to which 1% ($n = 195$) of respondents stated that they had 'never felt sexually attracted to anyone at all' (Bogaert, 2004). As this is the only large-scale survey carried out among a random sample, it has led to the assumption that asexuals represent 1% of the population until more information is made available³. Another issue which can be raised regarding this survey relates to the fact that the question implies a permanent, unwavering lack of attraction, thus excluding gray asexuals and leaving open the possibility for a higher percentage. In an online survey conducted among self-identified asexuals ($N = 3,436$), 56% identified as asexual, 21% as gray-asexual, 21% as demisexual, and 2% chose 'none of the above' (Miller, 2012).

2.2 Born With It: Essentialist Asexuality and the Biological

The blunt definition of asexuality as an inherent lack of sexual attraction can be seen as an essentialist interpretation of sexual identity. As was the case with many deviant sexualities before them, initial observations of asexual behaviour were pathologised (Kinsey, Wardell, and Clyde, 1948), and asexuals have been the subject of multiple medical studies in order to see whether their lack of sexual attraction is physiological (Scutti, 2015; Sundrud, 2011).

According to self-identified asexual people, and supported by empirical research (Bogaert, 2006; Chivers, Seto, Lalumière, Laan, and Grimbos, 2010), asexual people are not physiologically incapable of experiencing sexual arousal, and asexuality is therefore not a sexual dysfunction. According to current research, it is not recommended that self-identified asexual

people be subject to pharmaceutical / hormonal intervention, as is the case with sexual dysfunction patients, and studies have not found a significant difference between asexuals and non-asexuals regarding sexual inhibition levels or desires / abilities to masturbate; 18% of the respondents in the survey reported by Miller (2012) were sexually active at one point or another (Chasin, 2011; Prause & Graham 2007).

According to Chivers et al. (2010), 'the human sexual response is a dynamic combination of cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes'; They refer to the relation between cognitive and emotional factors (subjective experience, or self-report) and physiological response as 'subjective-genital agreement' (p. 5). Asexuals are reported as physiologically capable of sustaining sexual relations, but their cognitive and emotional factors prevent them from desiring to do so, either permanently or unless certain conditions are fulfilled. Following clinical studies and increased input from self-identified asexuals, the DSM-V (2013) officially recognises asexuality as an orientation, rather than a psychological disorder.

The separation between physiological and cognitive / social response can lead to confusion when viewed from an external perspective. As guides to asexuality constantly stress, asexuality is about attraction, rather than action; an asexual does not partake in sexual activity because they do not feel the need to, not because they are voluntarily celibate for ideological reasons, or are having 'a dry spell' due to a lack of potential partners. Though individuals can voluntarily choose (or are forced under certain conditions) to be celibate, they still experience sexual attraction—they simply choose not to act on it. Similarly, asexuals can engage in sexual behaviour for a variety of reasons, but it does not change the fact that they do not feel sexual desire in the first place (The Asexuality Archive, 2012). Asexuals—especially male asexuals—often report stigma in their everyday lives, as they realise their difference from what constitutes 'normal' development (Pacho, 2013; Przybylo, 2014).

2.3 Deconstructing the 'Natural': Subverting Sexusociety

Mirroring heteronormativity on the sexuality axis as an institutionalized structural construction of sexual behaviour, Ela Przybylo (2011) coined the term *sexusociety* as an attempt to 'mark the centrality of sex and sexuality in our culture and the ways in which we have come to organize our practices of joy and loving, life and fulfilment as well as institutional structures around conceptualizations of the sexual imperative':

The sexual imperative is a term that [...] relates, as I understand it, to a four-tiered functionality of sex in our culture, wherein: (1) sex is privileged above other ways of relating, (2) sexuality and the self are fused, (3) sex is configured as "healthy" (in particular, culturally designated contexts), (4) sex remains genital, orgasmic, ejaculatory, and in the case of heterosex, coital (Przyblo, 2013).

As sex is seen as a fundamental part of sexuality and human relationships within *sexusociety*, asexuality is deviant in its indifference towards it. Prior to being observed on the Kinsey scale, asexuality was invisible. Silenced by *sexu* societal values, asexuals unfamiliar with the orientation report feeling a sense of inferiority or inadequacy, and attempts to 'pass' as sexual are common (The Asexuality Archive, 2012). ' [People who are] unfamiliar with the existence of asexuality lack the ability to conceptualize anyone cogently as asexual' despite exhibiting the traits which would otherwise classify them as such (Chasin, 2011). Though their desires and attractions (or lack thereof) manifest identically, non-self-identified asexuals and self-identified asexuals feel differently towards them due to their ontological position dictated by their access to information regarding their orientation.

When non-self-identified "asexuals" encounter asexuality for the first time, they gain access to the cultural resources and discourses

of asexuality. The order of possibilities they can access expands to include asexuality and they are able to frame their experiences in new ways. [...] This is one way that asexual identification differs from other sexual identifications: people of other sexual identifications typically live in a cultural context where it is possible for them to frame their sexual attractions and desires (and lacks thereof) in meaningful ways (Chasin, 2011).

Thus, access to information regarding alternate manifestations of sexualities and peer support can help individuals achieve a higher level of self-satisfaction and offers them the ability to partake in a community bound by common traits. In 'coming out' with their personal narratives and working towards establishing a sexual identity, asexuals 'fundamentally disrupt [...] and question [...] the notion of a universal innate sexual drive' (Pacho, 2013, p. 13), and, in doing so, attempts to redefine sexuality as hegemonically constructed by sexsociety. Where asexuality can be seen as an essentialistically-defined orientation that one is born with, as a deviant sexuality it challenges the hegemonic essentialist premise of sex as 'a natural force' at the foundation of social life and institutions (Scherrer, 2008).

Though an impediment to its advocacy, the invisibility of asexuality in public consciousness has had a hidden advantage: asexuals, through having to discover their difference individually and forming their own communities, were free to construct their own labels. This places the identity building process of asexuality in stark contrast to herbivory.

3 Herbivore Men

Where asexuality is shaped by individuals coming to terms with their sexual identity, herbivory is so far a label shaped by mainstream discourse. Though the term was only introduced in 2006, it can be seen as a result of the

discussion surrounding young Japanese men as ‘tenderhearted’ (Ito, 2005) as well as of a long string of attempts to explain the decline in birth and marriage rates in Japan. Coined by a woman and picked up by sensationalist media and public discourse, the term itself is rather ambiguous, has taken on multiple meanings and characteristics over the years. While Fukasawa’s article was concerned solely with the herbivore men’s lack of concern for relationships, secondary characteristics such as a heightened interest in personal grooming and traditionally feminine pastimes, passive behaviour among their peers, tenderheartedness, a lack of interest in career advancement and financial well-being, etc. have become part of the herbivore ‘package’ (Ichibancho Herbivore and Carnivore Research Centre, 2009; McCurry, 2009; Morioka, 2009, 2013; Ushikubo, 2009).

3.1 A History of Herbivory

Before they were called herbivores, Japanese youths were attracting concern due to nation-wide tendencies to delay the age of getting married, the declining birth-rate, and the lengthening of the ‘moratorium period’ due to increasingly harsh socio-economic conditions following the burst of the economic bubble. Miyamoto (2002) traces the evolution of this phenomenon from the early 80s to the start of the millennium, attributing the lengthening of the post-adolescent period and phenomena such as increasing unemployment, delaying marriage, *parasite singles* (*parasaito shinguru*) and *noble bachelors* (*dokushinkizoku*) among youths to Japan’s economic decline and their exclusion from institutionalised courses of life. The label of *herbivore men* can be seen as a continuation of the trend, and poor financial status, lack of desire to advance in their career, or a preference to split the bill on dates has become associated with herbivorous behaviour (Morioka, 2009; Ushikubo, 2009) — a purely economic approach blames the herbivore men’s lack of romantic interest on their inability to pay for increasingly expensive dates (Willy, 2014).

As marriage rates have dropped considerably among Japanese men aged 25–29 throughout the decades, from 65% in the 1950s to 30% in the year 2000, Miyamoto (2002) blames the current values tied to the institution of marriage for deterring young Japanese people from wanting to partake in it, either as a means of protesting against the restrictions imposed by traditional gender and family-roles, or because they feel that they do not meet the high standards necessary to start a family. While it is true that one's financial situation provides the basic preconditions and limits for the organisation of sexual life (Weeks, 2003), it should be noted that many members of the pre-2000 groups described by Miyamoto had romantic partners (p. 34), or were actively interested in people romantically; this separates them fundamentally from herbivore men, who have little to no interest in romance in itself, despite many of them eventually wanting to get married or start a family (Ushikubo, 2009, p. 37).

According to *The Fourteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey* (2011) ($N = 10,581$), though 86.3% of the interviewed unmarried men aged 18–34 expressed their desire to marry eventually, 61.4% were not engaged romantically at the time, and 27.6% expressed no desire to pursue romance at the time. Moreover, according to a survey ran by the Meiji Yasuda Institute of Life and Wellness (2014), over 40% of Japanese men in their 20s had never been romantically involved, and Kitamura (2011) reports that 17.7% of Japanese men aged 16–49 ($N = 3,000$) have little to no interest in sex (p. 19). Thus, there is a clear separation between marriage and family as an institution and romantic engagement in the minds of young Japanese men, and their lack of romantic engagement is not necessarily a sign of their protest towards the institutions themselves. This is where herbivory begins to differentiate from previous buzzwords: though socio-economic constraints explain the declining marriage rate, they do not necessarily explain the declining overall interest in romance and sex.

3.2 What Makes a Man an Herbivore?

Despite the ambiguous definition of what herbivory entails, it is considered a common element of contemporary Japanese society (Fukasawa, 2006; Morioka, 2009; Ushikubo, 2009), with some surveys having up to 60–70% of Japanese men identifying as herbivore, or ‘herbivore, rather than carnivore’, though such numbers are only possible thanks to the ambiguity of the term (Deguchi, 2009; Morioka, 2009, p. 54). Contrastingly, Kitamura (2011) defines herbivore men as people who either have no interest in sex, or who actively despise it, and estimates that they make up 17.7% of the population based on his survey, which avoids the use of the word ‘herbivore’ (p. 19).

The ambiguity is a result of sensationalist media coverage, as well as informal attempts to categorise people as herbivorous based on observed behaviour. Perhaps the epitome of the sensationalistic and detached perspective on herbivory is represented by the ‘finger comparison’ method devised by Takeuchi Himiko (2010), wherein one can tell whether a man is herbivorous or not based on the proportions of their fingers.

Ushikubo (2009) attempts to find universal characteristics of herbivore men by interviewing over 100 people who identify as herbivorous. Similarly, The Ichibancho Herbivore and Carnivore Research Centre (2009) interviewed 24 self-identified herbivore men for the same purpose. The amount of characteristics that they describe as belonging to herbivore men is astounding; *The Herbivore Men’s Diagnosis Manual* (2009) has a list of over 700 traits, and readers are invited to check the ones that they identify with; if selecting over 400, they are informed that they are ‘completely herbivorous’; *The Herbivore Men’s User Manual* (2009) also features over 800 traits. Though still an attempt to categorise herbivorous men based on observed behaviour and adding to the increasing amounts of characteristics which enhance the ambiguity of the term, it is of note that self-identified herbivore men become involved in the process of definition. Additionally, characteristics which are more prominent are presented with

a larger font and bolded, whereas ones which applied to fewer interview participants are presented in small font. Thus, characteristics such as liking J-pop are presented as less important than complaints that girlfriends are not necessary or that masturbation is better than sex. This leads to the possibility of separation between herbivory as an essential lack of interest in sex and relationships, and the secondary characteristics which have been attributed to it, mainly based on stereotypes of feminine and subordinate masculine behaviour; the arbitrary attribution of secondary characteristics is amplified by such comprehensive guides, pop culture analysis, and even the cover images that these books choose to use⁴.

Professor Morioka Masahiro brings a new view to the definition of herbivory, as he identifies as 'a late-blooming herbivore' and uses his personal narrative, as well as interviews with other herbivore men, to explore the formation and characteristics of alternate masculinity in Japanese society. According to Morioka (2009, 2013), herbivory is a matter of internal thoughts and feelings — a personality trait, rather than a socio-economic response. To him, socio-economic factors contribute to the negative reception of herbivory, rather than to its formation (2009, p. 13; 2013, p. 6) : however, he blames the hegemonic construction of a society that he describes as carnivorous for many of the secondary characteristics of herbivore men and other deviant sexualities. According to him, as some men grow up, they realise that they are incapable of adapting to ideal images of masculinity and develop a deep inferiority complex which leaves them incapable of accepting their own bodies and desires, leading them to repress their sexuality and turn towards alternate means of manifestation (2005 / 2013, 2008, 2009). Though he bases his definition of herbivory on an inherent lack of interest or pleasure in sex, he also attributes personality traits to herbivore men such as 'a gentle nature', 'not being bound by manliness', a lack of aggression when it comes to romance, and a penchant for gender equality (2009, p. 17–21). In his attempts to improve the image of

herbivore men in general, Morioka ends up making the same generalisations that seem to follow the image of herbivory, and though he focuses on the positive aspects of the herbivorous personality, they are still deeply rooted in stereotypes belonging to subordinate masculinities. It should be noted that throughout his books, Morioka makes no reference to asexuality; while he considers that these men's lack of sexual pleasure via traditional means is intrinsic (though not biological), he focuses on their behaviour as a backlash towards hegemonic masculinity in Japanese society, what he refers to as the 'carnivorous world'.

Morioka states that there is more to the carnivorous / herbivorous dichotomy, and lists 8 possible subtypes based on their experience (2009, p. 29). Additionally, terms such as 'rolled cabbage men' (*roru kyabetsu danshi*) and 'bacon asparagus men' (*asupara bēkon-maki danshi*) have emerged to describe people who 'look' herbivorous but are secretly carnivorous, and vice-versa ('From carnivores to herbivores: how men are defined in Japan', 2012). Of note is that these assumptions separate *action* from *orientation*, and question how much herbivory / carnivory can be defined based on past experience and observed behaviour. Given the ambiguity of the term, which causes such a large part of the population to be labelled as such, it is of no surprise that there is much variety among individual herbivores. However, many of them express no sexual interest whatsoever. While masturbation seems to be common (Morioka 2009, p. 196–197), intercourse is 'troublesome' and they do not particularly seem to enjoy it (Ushikubo, 2009, p. 35–36), though some report engaging in sexual intercourse with their girlfriends in order to please them (Morioka 2009, p. 128). Kitamura (2011) also contrasts the 17.7% of the male population who not interested in sex to a different survey ($N = 200$) where 90% of the respondents declared that they masturbate once a week or more (p. 50–55).

The discourse on herbivory has been eclectic and subject to much informal debate, leading to the current ambiguity of the label. However,

the development described by Morioka can be seen in both his interviews and in Ushikubo (2009) and the The Ichibancho Herbivore and Carnivore Research Centre (2009) 's font patterns; despite the plethora of secondary characteristics attributed to herbivore men, a lack of interest in sex and relationships is present. This paper takes on Kitamura (2011) 's definition, and proposes that the lack of sexual attraction is the primary characteristic of herbivore men, with its secondary characteristics correlated or developed as a consequence of perceived inadequacy with hegemonically constructed masculinity, which is based on the sexual imperative.

3.3 Deconstructing the 'Manly': Subverting the Carnivorous World

Traditionally in the form of the 'salaryman doxa', as defined by Roberson and Suzuki (2002), dominant hegemonic masculine discourse in Japan traditionally took the form of salarymen as loyal productive workers, economic providers for the household, reproductive husbands, and fathers (Hidaka, 2010) within a corporate framework. Post-bubble disillusionment in traditional corporate career and increasing economic instability have slowly changed the definition of dominant masculinity by preventing the institutionalisation of the same values in Japanese youths. Supported by the emerging field of men's studies, which was established in the 1980s, this has allowed marginalised men to enter mainstream discourse (Dasgupta, 2005; Taga, 2005). However, Morioka (2009) considers that mainstream masculine discourse continues to cater almost exclusively to carnivorous men (p. 13).

Ito (2005) states that despite their gentle appearance in an era of tenderhearted men, traditional stereotypes of masculinity and gender roles persist in contemporary Japan — rather, young men are simply reluctant to express their views openly. However, Morioka (2009; 2013) makes repeated claims that herbivore men are moving gender equality forward due to the deconstruction of gender expression provoked by young men accepting themselves despite external pressure to be different. He suggests that

giving a voice to men who deviate from traditional masculinity, who accept their bodies and sexuality, will lead to a new generation of men who are more accepting, more in favour of gender equality, and who live more fulfilling lives. An important difference between Ito's observation and Morioka's is the passage of time and emergence of the *herbivore* label; Moreover, Ito speaks as a detached observer, whereas Morioka speaks as a representative.

The difference between observed behaviour and true feelings is important when separating the herbivore label from the individual. Morioka (2005 / 2013) considers that for the men who become 'frigid'⁵, ejaculation is a mere bodily function which brings no pleasure in itself (p. 37), though it does not stop them from masturbating or seeking out sexual encounters, and it bears no effect on their ability to be sexually excited. Thus, it is not a matter of biological frigidity, so much as a discrepancy with hegemonic constructed notions of sexuality, which indicate that ejaculation should be their main source of pleasure (2005 / 2013, p. 42–46). If sex is subordinate to sexuality, which manifests as a combination of individual preferences and responses to the socially constructed values of its time (Foucault, 1976 / 2006), then the 'frigid' men's sexuality ends up finding more satisfaction in fantasy rather than physical sex, given his inability to adapt to the hegemonic discourse on sexuality in twenty-first-century Japan, and the herbivore men renounce sex for the same reason.

4 The Intersection Between Herbivory and Asexuality

One major gap in the research on herbivory is the lack of mention of asexuality; asexuality as a sexual identity has not penetrated mainstream discourse in Japan, even among the LGBTQ communities, which is one possible reason for the lack of correlation between herbivory and asexuality. One of the few asexual communities on the Japanese Internet feature herbivory on their website, only to dismiss the association: 'The situations

of asexuals, who do not feel sexual attractions, and herbivore men, who feel sexual attraction but are not crazy about romance, are considered separate' ('What is asexual', n.d.). This is influenced by the coverage that the buzzword has gotten, which have moved the definition from its primary characteristic to its associated behaviour, and not all asexual community members agree with the division (Queenie Of Aces, 2012).

This paper considers that herbivory would fit under the asexual umbrella, and that it has a potential to become its own culture of resistance within Japan if its members manage to 'take back' the label and redefine it according to their own terms. To prove this, we will trace out the common points between both the essentialist elements of asexuality and herbivory (lack of sexual attraction) and the hegemonic discourse which socially constructs their images.

4.1 Images of Action and Identity of Attraction

Asexuals and herbivore men share the common characteristic of an inherent lack of sexual attraction; this is a strong tie from an essentialist perspective. As previously mentioned, asexual people are capable of physiologically experiencing sexual arousal, and demisexuals are capable of experiencing sexual attraction after fulfilling a certain emotional requirement. Similarly, Morioka mentions that his idea of male frigidity is psychological, rather than physiological (2005 / 2013, p. 43–44), and many herbivore men are portrayed as becoming romantically interested in women after a long friendship, much like demisexuals. Both groups report masturbating. Thus, they can be said to be prone to low subjective-genital agreement as their lack of interest in sex is caused by non-biological reasons.

Asexuality guides constantly stress on the irrelevance of sexual experience in defining oneself as asexual, and gray asexuals change their sexual behaviour over time. According to asexuals, this does not affect

the legitimacy of their orientation, as 'It's about attraction, not action', and labelling one's orientation based on external observation is a denial of the individual's subjectivity (The Asexual Archive, 2012). Herbivore men would understand this feeling, as herbivory has been constantly redefined by observations of their appearance and external interpretation of their behaviour. Where asexuality is an identity, herbivory is still a label.

Using the essentialist standpoint to advocate for legitimacy is a common tactic for sexual minority groups, and asexuals have taken on this tactic to establish the validity of their sexuality (Pacho, 2013; Scherrer, 2008). However, prior to discovering asexuality and starting to identify as such, asexuals report commonly having their orientation denied by those around them, who disregard it based on their past behaviour or future expectations to conform to the sex imperative. This is where the social construction of sexual identity enters the discussion.

4.2 Sexusociety and the Carnivorous World

Chodorow (1994) describes feminist and gentle men as expressions of subordinate (alternate) masculinity, compared to the hegemonic masculinity which is endorsed by mainstream society (p. 80). If sex is a tool of reinforcing dominant hegemonic masculinity, then a man who is not interested in it can be seen as forsaking his own masculinity and becoming subordinate in the power relations dictated by compulsive heteronormativity. Initially described by Connell (1984), the hegemonic masculinity power matrix involves a dominant and a subordinate type of masculinity, the dominant one being considered superior to the other from a cultural, psychological, and sexual point of view. Hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated by compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality (Butler, 1990 / 1999, p. 31), using heterosexual desire and the exchange of women as means of reinforcing one's own dominance. Desire is thus integrated into the heterosexist matrix, which is defined by Butler (1990 / 1999) as 'the grid

of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised' (p. 208). Individuals are expected to conform to these norms in order to contribute and perpetuate their existing society.

Sexusociety and the carnivorous world are defined by the same premise of the sexual imperative. By building society and the idea of masculinity around mandatory sexual desire, asexuals and herbivores become invisible—at least until they begin affecting demographics; after all, discussions on young Japanese men's sexual behaviour only began as a reaction to declining birth and marriage rates. As mentioned in Part 2, asexuals only realise that they belong to a different orientation once they have become aware of its existence; similarly, the amount of men identified as herbivore skyrocketed after the term was popularised.

Herbivores and the asexuals share their status as deviants within a sexual framework: both are criticised for their lack of interest in sex; both are identified based on their sexual actions (or lack thereof); both raise questions regarding their mental or physical health due to their lack of interest in sex; despite possibly being interested in alternate manifestations of sexuality, both suffer due to rigid definitions surrounding the sex act. However, the acknowledgement of their existence is a *de facto* question of the 'naturalness' of sexual desire (Pacho, 2013; Przybylo, 2011; Scherrer, 2008; Scutti, 2015). Much like how heterosexuality was only offered a name and definition after homosexuality emerged as an identity (Katz, 1995), sexusociety emerges as a concept as a response to the emergence of asexuality, and the term *carnivore* emerges to contrast the herbivores—before, they were considered a universal standard.

4.3 Constructed Sexualities and Cultures of Resistance

Whereas 'frigid' men begin hating their bodies due to their 'frigidity' (Morioka, 2006, p. 170), asexual people report feeling that there is something 'wrong' with them due to their lack of sexual desire (The Asexuality Archive,

2012, p. 118). Herbivores, 'frigid' men, and asexual men alike feel alienated from hegemonic masculine discourse, can be ridiculed by their peers, or have their manliness questioned. In Ushikubo (2009) 's list of herbivore traits, many herbivore men report being called 'girly' (p. 11), and asexual men report having their masculinity constantly questioned; members of both groups have had their heterosexuality questioned (The Asexuality Archive, 2012, p. 100; Ushikubo, 2009, p. 66). While 'frigid' men struggle with their inability to conform to mainstream masculine standards, herbivore and asexual men who have accepted themselves as different seem 'resigned' to the fact that they simply express their sexuality differently. This difference brings us to the matter of self-identification and the power of identity politics.

Cultures of resistance, as defined by Jeffrey Weeks (2003), are identities whose subversion of established sexual moral codes could potentially lead to the evolution of institutionalised sexual behaviour. As Foucault (1976 / 2006) and Weeks (2003) state, sexual identity is constructed by discourse, and new identities emerge as a result of ostracisation from hegemonic expressions of sexuality. These are not fixed, biological, identities; rather, they evolve in response to how their desires are perceived by hegemonic discourse. Construction of identity is a continuous process (Hall, 1996), and this can be seen in the rapid emergence of new subtypes of asexuality based on personal experiences described in the ever-growing asexual communities. This paper suggests that herbivore men also have the potential to empower themselves by bringing in their personal experiences, taking the label of *herbivore* and redefining it as a means of empowerment.

Przybylo (2011) notices asexuality's power of unsettling the cohesiveness of the the heterosexual matrix, which is kept in place by the trifecta of normative sex-gender-desire, by eliminating one of its main components in its entirety (p. 123). How far the subversion goes can only be assumed, but its impact on society could be considerable. Herbert Marcuse (1955)

states that 'change in the value and scope of libidinal relations would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which the private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family' (p. 201), and Gayle Rubin (1975) theorises in that the subversion of the heterosexist matrix has the potential to lead to the corollary breakdown of gender itself.

Asexuality and herbivory have stayed invisible due to their deviance from hegemonic masculinity, as they have either passively removed themselves from hegemonic discourse, or performed their masculine role in order to avoid ostracisation. However, as herbivory and asexuality have become more common terms, members of these groups can see themselves reflected in public discourse. This has allowed herbivore men to 'resign' themselves to the herbivore status, and has released the pressure to meld themselves to the hegemonic masculine image as they are becoming more commonly recognised. Asexuals have actively involved themselves in identity politics, calling for a spot on the LGBTQ acronym, forming online communities, and announcing the world of their presence and freedom to behave in a manner more true to themselves.

Herbivory is a label constructed by mainstream discourse to describe the young Japanese men who deviate from hegemonic masculinity. The manner in which such deviant behaviour is constructed as herbivorous also serves to construct what constitutes 'normal', —carnivorous— behaviour. One considerable difference between asexual and herbivore men lies in the method of identification; whereas asexuals are almost entirely all self-identified and using platforms such as the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) to establish asexuality as a valid sexual identity, herbivore men have had a rather passive role in establishing the herbivore identity, usually being described as such rather than taking pride in their identity — with the exception of bitter exclamations of 'that's because I'm herbivorous' to explain 'strange' behaviour (Ushikubo, 2009, p. 39). Morioka (2005 / 2013)

uses his personal narrative as an example to inspire other men to accept and talk about their sexual identity, and mentions that after publishing *Confessions of a Frigid Man* he was flooded with reactions by men who were grateful to have found a peer (p. 221). Similarly, asexuals who have taken the time to write about their own experiences often express their first encounter with the asexual community as the relief of knowing that they are not individuals with 'something wrong with them'. Becoming part of a community and establishing an identity lessens the burden that the individuals hold in being unable to accept themselves.

One of the first steps of forming such communities and leading to discourse lies in what Foucault (1976 / 2006) refers to as confession (p. 59), in which individuals shape their sexuality by 'confessing' their desires and thus manifesting them. Whereas the asexual community now hosts multiple platforms in order to help asexual people interact with one another, how much herbivore men assert their status rather than allow themselves to be categorised is questionable. Morioka was the first herbivore to actively confess, at first regarding his fetishes and 'frigidity' in *Confessions of a Frigid Man*, then depicting his experience as a herbivore man in *Herbivore Men Will Bring Your Last Love*, thus setting the ground for more herbivores to bring forth their own stories. People are born herbivorous or asexual, but only by choosing to represent themselves and actively partake in the discourse which shapes them do they take on an identity (Hall, 1996).

The power that discourse plays in shaping sexual identity can be observed in the history of homosexuality. Early discourse on homosexuality was profoundly negative, pathologising it and attacking it as a form of deviant sexuality; however, entering public discourse is what allowed it to develop as its own identity, rather than as an invisible aspect of society. Taking the discourse which had marginalised it and claiming it for its own, homosexuality as an identity was allowed to emerge and begin claiming its rights and recognition (Foucault, 1976 / 2006). A similar event is occurring

with asexuals and herbivores; before, they were simply invisible or marginalised categories, thrust aside by hegemonic heterosexist discourse. As the 2000s have identified both groups' behaviour as collective and unified to a certain extent, they can emerge as new sexual identities and fight for their acceptance. As cultures of resistance, they have the power to challenge hegemonic discourse and redefine it for the future generations to come, but for now they are only budding movements.

5 Conclusion

This paper's purpose was to lay the foundation for the link between herbivory and the asexual umbrella, and recognise their common features, not only as sexual orientations, but as subversive discourses of sexuality and potential status as cultures of resistance. Despite both groups having a considerable amount of variation regarding definition, expression, and characteristics, a few common features could be observed:

From an essentialist perspective, herbivore men can be found under the asexual umbrella due to their lack of interest in sex. From a constructivist view, both asexual men and herbivore men deviate from prescriptive norms of sexuality and hegemonic masculinity, belonging to subordinate manifestations of masculinity due to their removing one of the main means of asserting dominance; furthermore, asexuality as a whole goes against the underlying heteronormative principles which define modern society, as well as against the essentialist notion of sex as an intrinsic desire of humanity (Scherrer, 2008). Though currently they are both restricted to small communities and use of confession as a means of expressing, developing, and accepting their sexual self, as groups which have emerged in the past decade and saw quick considerable growth, they have the potential to become recognised as cultures of resistance when assumed as a self-identified sexual identity, as they subvert compulsory heteronormativity by removing one of its main acts of reproduction, as

their members are uninterested in 'matters of the flesh'. Despite their lack of interest in sexual or romantic matters, members of both groups have exhibited attempts to partake in them, motivated by peer pressure or the desire to start a family, as seen in personal narratives described in current literature, a pressure which would be removed if they became accepted as valid expressions of sexual identity.

Social pressure is unlikely to disappear anytime soon, as concerns regarding the ageing population force public discourse to take a negative stance regarding asexuality and herbivory. However, neither group is entirely averse to romantic love, nor to procreation, so perhaps more acceptance regarding their identity would allow these groups to integrate better in society and become more capable of finding suitable partners for their own sake, rather than out of social obligation.

Future research needs to delve deeper into their mentality and see how it can reach more acceptance in mainstream discourse. Rather than ostracise them for their lack of participation in the system of reproduction, they should, as Morioka states, find a niche within society where they can develop freely and live in a manner that is true to themselves. As asexuality makes its way into Japan, herbivory as a manifestation of sexuality can reach new depths.

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Footnotes

- ¹ The terms *soushokudanshi* (herbivore men) and *soushokukeidanshi* (herbivore-type men) are sometimes used interchangeably and at other times carefully differentiated, but as the former has seen predominantly more usage (Morioka, 2013), this paper will use *herbivore men*.
- ² Here, we refer to the 'essentialist' as the school of thought which believes that 'certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, and biologically determined', as opposed to social construction, which considers that 'reality is socially constructed and emphasizes language as an important means by which we interpret experience' (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998). The paper covers the similarities between the two groups from both perspectives.
- ³ Of note is the fact that this question specifically uses the term 'lack of sexual attraction' as a permanent factor throughout one's life, which can explain the difference in percentage when compared to Kitamura (2011), which asks 'are you interested in sex?', to which 17.7% of respondents answer positively.
- ⁴ Morioka (2013) mentions that slenderness was permanently associated in the public mind with herbivory based on the random drawing on the cover of his 2008 book, *Lessons in Love for Herbivore Men* (p. 5).
- ⁵ Initially, Morioka (2005 / 2013) began his research with 'frigid' men, men who retreat into sexual fantasies involving animated characters, young girls, schoolgirl uniforms, and other fetishes, as a result of their inability to achieve sexual gratification from conventional means of sexual expression; However, he points out that herbivore men and 'frigid' men have the same sexual identity formation background as a reaction to their inability to conform to hegemonic masculinity (2005 / 2013, p. 216), even though their final manifestation differs. As both 'types' describe Morioka's personal sexual identity building, and are positively correlated when it comes to the matrix in which they are restricted, the social conditions which lead to their establishment and marginalisation from hegemonic masculinity, it can be assumed that 'frigidity' was Morioka's early explanation for herbivory.

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肉を避ける人々：草食男子と無性愛 フォタケ・イワナ

本稿は草食男子と無性愛の共通する特徴を説明するものである。

無性愛は少しずつ性的指向として西洋の言説の中で受け入れられ始めている。他方、草食男子は日本のメディアにおいて注目を集めている。

筆者は草食性に関する先行研究を見直し、無性愛の特徴と比較することで、草食男子と無性愛に共通の基盤を見出すことが出来ると考えている。それを明らかにすることで、無性愛と同様に草食性が異性愛中心言説に対して抵抗的なアイデンティティ・ポリティックスとなる可能性を秘めていることを提示出来るのだ。

現在の強制的異性愛中心主義の社会は、ジュディス・バトラー（1999）が定義した「異性愛的マトリックス」によって保たれている。このマトリックスはジェンダー・セックス・欲求の相関関係によって成立するが、草食男子や無性愛者はこの相関関係から「欲求」を欠落させている。このことから、彼らは既存の支配的マトリックスを破壊し、男らしさの言説を再定義する可能性を持つと考えられる。すでに、先行研究では、無性愛が自然な行動異で、性愛中心主義に対して抵抗出来る可能性を持つと論じられている。しかし、無性愛と草食性の共通性は未だ考察されていない。その結果、草食性は異性愛中心主義に抵抗する可能性を持った性的志向としてではなく、日本社会への社会経済的反応として研究されてきた。草食男子のインタビューによると、彼らは根本的にセックス、または恋愛に興味がないことが明らかとなっている。これは無性愛者の定義そのものである。無性愛者コミュニティの「傘」の下に彼らの居場所を見出すことで、草食男子は自らのセクシュアリティや行動をより理解出来るようになると思う。

Keywords:

草食男子, 無性愛, セクシュアリティ, 性的欲望, アイデンティティ・ポリティックス