

Japan's 'herbivore' men

Name:

Class:

Number:

TOKYO, Japan (CNN) -- They are young, earn little and spend little, and take a keen interest in fashion and personal appearance -- meet the "herbivore¹ men" of Japan.

Author and pop culture columnist Maki Fukazawa coined the term² in 2006. She used it to describe some men who she said were changing the country's ideas about just what is -- and isn't -- masculine.

"In Japan, sex is translated as 'relationship in flesh,'" she said, "so I named those boys 'herbivorous boys' since they are not interested in flesh³."

Typically, "herbivore men" are in their 20's and 30's, and believe that friendship without sex can exist between men and women, Fukasawa said.

The term has become a buzzword⁴ in Japan. Many people in Tokyo's Harajuku neighborhood were familiar with "herbivore men" -- and had opinions about them.

Shigeyuki Nagayama said such men were not eager to find girlfriends and tend to be clumsy in love, and he admitted he seemed to fit the mold himself.

"My father always asks me if I have a girlfriend. He tells me I'm no good because I can't get a girlfriend."

Midori Saida, a 24-year-old woman sporting oversized glasses and her dyed brown hair in long ringlets, said "herbivore men" were "flaky and weak."

"We like manly men," she said. "We are not interested in those boys -- at all."

Takahito Kaji, 21, said he has been told he is "totally herbivorous."

"Herbivorous boys are fragile; they do not have a stocky body -- skinny."

Fukazawa said Japanese men from the baby boomer generation⁵ were typically aggressive and proactive when it came to romance and sex. But as a result of growing up during Japan's troubled economy in the 1990s, their children's generation was not as assertive and goal-oriented. Their outlook came, in part, from seeing their fathers' model of masculinity⁶ falter even as Japanese women gained more lifestyle options.

Former CNN intern Junichiro Hori, a self-described herbivore, said the idea goes beyond looks and attitudes toward sex. "Some guys still try to be manly and try to be strong, but personally I'm not afraid to show my vulnerability⁷ because being vulnerable or being sensitive is not a weakness."

Older generations of Japanese men are not happy about the changes. At a bar frequented by businessmen after work, one man said: "You need to be carnivorous when you make decisions in your life. You should be proactive, not passive."

Fukazawa said the group does not care so much about making money -- a quality tied to the fact that there are fewer jobs available during the current global economic recession. Even Japan's economy recently saw its largest-ever recorded fall and has shrunk for four straight quarters. Companies Sony, Panasonic, Toyota and Nissan all reported losses in May, and most are forecasting the same for the current year.

Hori agreed economics has played a role. When he finished university, "a lot of my friends were trying to work for a big company that pays well and I wasn't interested in that. I am kind of struggling financially and my father is not very happy about it," he said. →



¹ herbivore – an animal that only eats plants (Ex. Herbivores eat plants, carnivores eat meat.)

² "coined the term" – created the phrase

³ flesh – meat or skin of an animal

⁴ buzzword – popular phrase that is used often

⁵ "baby boomer generation" – time after WWII when many babies were born

⁶ masculinity – characteristics usually belonging to men (Ex. Usually, men are masculine and women are feminine.)

⁷ vulnerability – showing others that you are not always strong, showing emotion or sensitivity

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

(7)

Fukazawa estimated some 20 percent of men are what she would call "herbivorous" and said their attitudes were influencing others. Indeed, she said, it was a return to the norm for Japanese men, rather than a departure.

"It was after World War II and the post-war economic growth that Japanese men gained the reputation as a sex animal through the competition with the West. Looking back beyond that time, older literature talks a lot about men with the kind of character we see in the herbivorous boys."

Nonetheless, Japan's image of masculinity is changing. ❖

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

True or False: Answer **T** for true of **F** for False.

- _____ The phrase "herbivore men" has existed for several decades.
- _____ 25, 26, and 32 are common ages for "herbivore men."
- _____ "Herbivore men" can't get girlfriends.
- _____ According to the article, the baby boomer generation was typically stronger and more manly than today's men.
- _____ Herbivores tend to show more emotion and care more about appearance than their fathers did.

Short Answer: Read the following questions and answer in your own words.

- What is a "herbivore man?"

- Does Midori Saida like "herbivore men?" Why?

- "You need to be carnivorous about life." What does this statement mean?

- According to the article, what happened in the 1990's to create "herbivore men?"

- What did it mean when Fukazawa said, "Herbivore men is a 'return to the norm.'"?

YOUR OPINION: What do think about "herbivore" men? Are you one? Do you like them? Do you agree with this article? Do you agree with the older generations of men? Do you think Japan's image of masculinity if changing? **(50-100 words)**