"As a vegetarian, we never do well enough". Positioning in the normative landscape of meat consumption

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Abstract

Food is an area that receives little attention from psychologists, despite the fact that it provides many interesting situations and dilemmas through which human activity and development can be examined. Currently – at least in the WEIRD (western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic) countries (Henrich et al., 2010), – these activities are an important object of normative discourses and injunctions about how we should behave as consumers and how we should eat, notably when it comes to products of animal origin and meat in particular. In these countries, a large majority of people regularly consumes meat. Vegetarianism can be seen as a deviant behavior to this norm (Boyle, 2011), that provokes reactions as it questions the taken-for-granted normality and necessity of meat consumption (Larue, 2015). However, the issue of meat consumption also intersects with many other normative discourses, such as the imperatives to be an ethical consumer or to be a hedonist. In this paper, I examine how people orient themselves in relation to these norms and possibly take distance from some of them. More specifically I propose to do so through the notion of positioning. Position and positioning are notions that are increasingly used and discussed in psychology. The theorization of these notions is recent, and thus quite disparate (Gülerce et al., 2014), although a few scholars worked on possible synthesis of different traditions (Gillespie & Martin, 2014; Raggatt, 2015). I argue that examining positioning processes in relation to normative discourses and behaviors constitutes a way to understand the relation between the person and some social norms, and that this use will also contribute to deepen the conceptualization of positioning. I draw on empirical work conducted with people who recently changed their habits of consumption of food of animal origin. The questions I examine are: how do people position themselves in the normative and contested world of consumption of food of animal origin, and what are the processes possibly allowing them to question and transgress the norms in this area.

Keywords: positioning, norms, taking distance, meat consumption, vegetarianism

Introduction

Food is an area that receives little attention from psychologists, despite the fact that it provides many interesting situations and dilemmas through which human activity and development can be examined. In particular, one can find in the history of food habits many interesting examples of how humans creatively cope with the biological and environmental constrains of both eating processes and food production (Rozin, 2007). Currently – at least in the WEIRD (western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic) countries (Henrich et al., 2010), – these activities are also an important object of normative discourses and injunctions about how we should behave as consumers and how we should eat. The eater and consumer behavior might also be object of measurement, if we think for instance about the calculation of the Carbone footprint of certain diets, or devices allowing to count how many calories or proteins you need and consume. In the WEIRD countries, one area of food that is nowadays at the center of normative discourses and debates is the consumption of products of animal origin (and meat in particular). In these countries, a large majority of people regularly consumes meat. Examining the justification for meat consumption among those who eat it, researchers identified what they call the 4Ns: meat consumption is presented as necessary, normal, nice and natural (Piazza et al., 2015). Vegetarianism can be seen as a deviant behavior to this norm (Boyle, 2011), that provokes reactions as it questions the taken-for-granted normality and necessity of meat consumption (Larue, 2015). However, the issue of meat consumption also intersects with many other normative discourses, such as the imperatives to be an ethical consumer, to be a hedonist or to be coherent in one's choices. In this paper, I examine how people orient themselves in relation to these norms and possibly take distance from some of them. More specifically I propose to do so through the notion of positioning. Position and positioning are notions that are increasingly used and discussed in psychology, notably in Harré's Positioning Theory and in dialogical approaches. The theorization of these notions is recent, and thus quite disparate (Gülerce et al., 2014), although a few scholars worked on possible synthesis of the different traditions (Gillespie & Martin, 2014; Raggatt, 2015). I argue that examining positioning processes in relation to normative discourses and behaviors constitutes a way to understand the relation between the person and some social norms, and that this use will also contribute to deepen the conceptualization of positioning. The questions I examine in this paper are: how do people position themselves in the normative (and contested) world of consumption of food of animal origin, and what are the processes possibly allowing them to question and transgress the norms in this area. I draw on empirical work conducted with people who recently changed their habits of consumption of food of animal origin into vegetarism, in order to study the different aspects at play in the positioning process in relation to the identified norms.

Positioning or understanding how people navigate the world

According to socio-cultural and cultural-historical perspectives, understanding the dynamic interaction between the individual and his or her environment is a core issue. This has been theorized in many different ways, and I will focus here only on one particular concept that aimed at capturing these interrelations, namely positioning. This framing is based on Benson's (2001) work, which conceptualizes the self "primarily as a locative system, a

means of reference and orientation in worlds of space–time (perceptual worlds) and in worlds of meaning and place–time (cultural worlds)" (2001, p. 4).

Benson's approach is constructed on the assumption that location is fundamental in the development and functioning of the self, as "[w]ithout being placed or located I would not be, and where I find myself implaced influences not just the fact of my being but also its nature. Where, when and who are mutually constitutive" (2001, p. 3-4). Location implies both a material dimension that refers to the place occupied in space time, and a symbolic dimension that refers to the way the person is situated or situates her or himself regarding different discourses. At this level, the world is conceptualized as constituted by meanings, and this is the main area of interest for cultural psychology, although, obviously, material and symbolic location are interdependent and happen simultaneously. It is to study in particular the orientation and location in the symbolic world that Benson (2001) refers to the notion of positioning, and more precisely that he draws on Harré and his colleagues' work labelled Positioning Theory.

While the notion of positioning was originally used to provide a spatial description of a point in a configuration, it became more widespread as a term in psychology notably through Davies and Harré's (1990) work (Gülerce et al., 2014; Raggatt, 2015). Their approach is anchored in discursive psychology and focuses mainly on interpersonal verbal interactions. Moreover, positioning is understood in this frame as a form of interpersonal negotiation of rights and duties (Harré et al., 2009). Positioning theory and the term positioning were developed as an alternative to the more static notion of role (Davies & Harré, 1990), as "the concept of positioning, anchored in a fine grained analysis of discourse, reveals that people give, receive, resist, and claim subject positions, often all within a short space of time or while they are ostensibly in the same role" (Gillespie & Martin, 2014, p. 73). However, discursive psychologists are not the only ones using the notion of positioning. Dialogical approaches constitute another theoretical tradition that refers to positioning and positions, and among them Dialogical Self Theory is particularly well-known with its notion of I-positions (see Hermans, 2001; Hermans et al., 1992). According to this theory, the spatial dimension of the mind is a metaphor (Gülerce et al., 2014) allowing the description of intrapersonal psychological movements between different positions in what is called the landscape of the mind. According to Hermans, "the dialogical self can be described as a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the landscape of the mind" (2002, p. 147). Moreover, "the I has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time" (2001, p. 248). Several authors see these approaches as complementary, mainly because the first one, Positioning Theory, focuses more on interpersonal dynamics, while the second one, Dialogical Self Theory, concentrates on intrapersonal movements. Thus, Raggat (2015) argues that both should be used in order to get a more comprehensive analysis of a situation. Gillespie and Martin (2014) also propose a combination of both, but integrate in addition an ontological developmental perspective, highlighting how material and social positioning movements constitute the basis for perspective taking and thus for more abstract forms of positioning across ontogeny.

Based on this literature, and in particular on distinctions proposed by Benson (2001) and Raggatt (2015), I propose here to understand positioning in the following way:

> Positioning designates the way the person relates to (socio-material and discursive) elements that constitute the world (notably objects, behaviors, institutions, persons – including him or herself,

discourses). It implies that this element exists in the subjective landscape of the person. The relation notably takes the form of a recognition or denial of its importance and/or of its value (Gfeller, 2020, p. 96).

Moreover, I consider that humans position themselves and are positioned by others at different levels, notably:

- Socio-materially, by which I refer to the position in place-time (see Benson, 2001) but also to the activity in and on the concrete material world (see Gillespie & Martin, 2014);

- Socio-discursively, through verbal interactions, notably through the way the person presents her or himself or the way she or he speaks about something. This might be more or less closely related to a rather stable social role (as in Gillespie & Martin, 2014) or take a more dynamic and changing forms (as in Davies & Harré, 1990);

- Morally, by which I refer to the dimension of the positioning that relates to (often implicit) evaluations and assessments about what we should do or not, what is good/bad, what is important/unimportant (Benson, 2001), which has also been theorized by Harré and his colleagues (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré et al., 2009) as rights and duties.

These different levels might overlap and interact (more or less harmoniously). For instance, a person might order the vegetarian menu (socio-discursive and material positioning) and explain to the people eating with her that she is vegetarian because she thinks that the suffering following from the meat industry is intolerable (socio-discursive and moral positioning). In the following, my aim is to turn towards the study of concrete everyday activities in order to test the heuristic power of this theoretical proposition, with the assumption that understanding the conduct of everyday life is a necessity for psychology if it wants to escape to an (epistemologically problematic) worldlessness (Teo, 2016). Moreover, I consider that the worlds navigated by humans are – at least to some extent – normative. On one hand, patterns (recognized by humans or even created by them) allow humans to find some stability which will allow them to orient themselves in the world (Valsiner, 2008). This relates to the notion of normativity as what is "normal", what is statistically the most probable. On the other hand, humans also tend to produce moral norms establishing what should or should not be and evaluate themselves and their actions according to these norms (Brinkmann, 2016). Norms will thus play the role of indicators showing in which direction to navigate. Although the authors quoted above on the notion of positioning did not, as far as I know, refer to norms, they acknowledge that the world in which the positioning is done has a certain structure, regularities and (in particular for Harré and Benson) a moral charge. This constrains, orients and limits the individual's power to elaborate his or her own positioning. From the point of view of a psychological approach that is sensitive to the first person's perspective and to concrete everyday activity, the question that arises then is how this positioning concretely happens in everyday activities, and more specifically how the relation to norm(s) is subjectively experienced and negotiated in a case where the person questions a dominant norm?

Meat consumption as a norm

I argue here that food related activities provide a particularly fruitful area in order to study these dynamics of positioning and its challenges (Rozin, 2007 proposes a similar argument, but more broadly regarding psychology). Indeed, food related activities are at the same time responding to individual nutritional necessities and highly symbolic, socially shared systems with a moral component (Anderson, 2005; Mintz, 1996). As food related activities encompass a very broad range of issues and activities, I will focus on the consumption of products of animal origin in what follows (with meat playing a central role among these products). Products of animal origin indeed constitute a particularly interesting category of foods as they are most likely to be either central in a culinary system (a dish is traditionally organized around meat) or linked to disgust and taboo. In addition to that, I will concentrate on the situation in Switzerland, where products of animal origin, and meat in particular, are traditionally a quite important part of food culture, but at the same time there are currently debates questioning this habit.

The critics against meat consumption (and sometimes more generally against products of animal origin) that can be found in Switzerland currently articulate around three main issues: animal ethics, the environmental impact of the production of food of animal origin and the impact on health. Regarding each of these issues, a variety of positions are represented, covering the whole range of possibilities between advocating strict veganism and pro-meat arguments. The means for provoking a change are also an object of debate between those who argue for civil disobedience, those who favor traditional political tools such as popular initiative and those who argue that this is a personal choice that should not be politically regulated.

Despite of these debates and an increasing presence of vegetarianism and even veganism in the public sphere (in what follows, I use "veg*ism" in order to designate the whole range of diets that are usually considered as forms of vegetarianism and veganism), meat consumption stays a largely dominant norm among the Swiss population generally speaking. I argue that this normativity presents different aspects. First of all, there is a statistical dimension. The data concerning meat consumption and vegetarianism clearly show that meat consumption is "normal" in the sense that it is largely part of the population's habits. In 2016, the average consumption of products of animal origin per person was of 315 kg, which corresponds to 863 grams per day. Among these, they were 49 kg of meat and 8 kg of fish, thus slightly less than 1 kg of meat per person per week (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2018). Despite of a small decrease over the last years, the average consumption stays largely above the national nutritional recommendations (Office fédéral de la sécurité alimentaire et des affaires vétérinaires, 2017). On the other hand, 5.7% of the population declares eating meat less than once a week, which represents a clear minority (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2019).

A second (obviously related) dimension of the normativity of meat consumption was highlighted with the notion of carnism, initially proposed by Melanie Joy (Larue, 2015). According to her,

> "we don't see meat eating as we do vegetarianism – as a choice, based on a set of assumptions about animals, our world, and ourselves. Rather, we see it as given, the ´natural´ thing to do, the way things have always been and the way things will always be. We eat animals without thinking

about what we are doing and why because the belief system that underlies this behavior is invisible. This invisible system is what I call *carnism*" (Joy, 2011, p. 29).

In a similar way than the notion of patriarchy aimed at designating, making visible and thus possibly challenging a largely unquestioned organization of the world, this word carnism was proposed as a way to make visible the taken-for-granted nature of meat consumption and thus to question it.

"This vision of the world is so anchored, so familiar, that nobody thought about giving it a name. As invisible as was patriarchy before feminists named and fought it, carnism escapes to any critical examination exactly because of its omnipresence" (Larue, 2015, p. 9-10, my translation).

Carnism is based on implicit and arbitrary distinctions between animals that we can eat and animals that are not edible, as well as on the ignorance or the underestimation of the animals' suffering and/or the environmental impact of meat (Larue, 2015). Based on that, some authors suggest that we (at least in the so called WEIRD countries, see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) live in a carninormative world (Bramble & Fischer, 2016).

Thirdly, in addition to this taken-for-granted nature of meat consumption, a moral dimension might also sometimes be highlighted. This is the case notably when there is a reference to a certain order of the world, such as the idea that humans eat meat because this is how it is and should be. To that extent, meat consumption is inscribed in a certain understanding of the universe and of the place humans occupy in it (Larue, 2015). One example of this type of position could be to state that human should eat meat because it reminds them of their belonging to the animal kingdom and thus of their mortality (Lestel, 2011). Authors also point toward the role of religions, in particular Christianism, in the shaping and spreading of the idea that (some) animals are "made for" being eaten or (today more acceptable) that it is in the natural order of the world for humans to use/exploit animals (Larue, 2015).

Piazza et al. (2015) conducted an empirical study showing that these different dimensions can be found in people's justification of their meat consumption. Interested in the so-called meat paradox (the moral conflict between enjoying meat and the wish to avoid harming animals), they examined the way meat eaters rationalize their meat consumption. They showed that to the instruction "Please give three reasons why you think it is OK to eat meat" (Piazza et al., 2015, p. 116), the most frequent answers could be associated to the categories meat is necessary (nutritional argument), natural (ontological statement about human beings), normal (everyone does it) and nice (tasty), which the authors call the four Ns. Thus, in addition to the different dimensions of normativity presented above (which are also those highlighted by Joy, 2011), Piazza et al. (2015) add the importance of taste.

If meat consumption is a norm in all these different ways, veg*ism on the opposite can be seen as a questioning and critique of this norm, through action and/or through words. "In front of a vegetarian or a vegan, the carnivore person must notice that there is an alternative and that he might henceforth choose to kill or to spare animals, to destroy or to preserve nature" (Larue, 2015, p. 256, my translation). In other words, veg*ism questions the taken-for-granted habit of meat consumption through the existence of another way of eating. Beyond the displaying of an alternative, this also implies important dynamics of

interpersonal moral judgement (Minson & Monin, 2012) as well as broader representations of humans, animals and the world they live in and are part of, as underlined by Larue:

> "the debates arising from this diet thus whip up an unexpected number of concerns on the human being, on his origin, on his prerogatives and on his duties, on his place in the universe, on the needs of his body, on the rushes of his soul" (2015, p. 12, my translation).

As a psychologist, my interest is in understanding how people navigate this carninormative world and how they might question and/or transgress the norm of meat consumption.

Methods

I conducted a study on positioning towards vegetarianism between 2015 and 2020 in the French speaking part of Switzerland. Its aim was to provide a socio-cultural psychological perspective on the issue of meat consumption and vegetarianism, based on the acknowledgement of meat production and consumption as an important societal challenge and increasingly debated issue in this historical-cultural context. Moreover, the choice of the topic was motivated by the interest of food related activities as one domain where the articulation between the person and her or his environment is very deeply at stake in multiple ways. Participants were 10 adults, six women and four men, aged between 25 and 67. The main criteria of selection was that their foodway trajectory was marked by an important change in food habits in relation to the consumption of products of animal origin. Moreover, at least some aspects of this change had to be recent or even still ongoing. The change in food habits is considered here as a form of repositioning. Beyond these criteria, the changes were various, and included for instance changes from carnist to more or less strict vegetarian diets, from vegetarian to carnist diet, or from vegetarian to more or less strict vegan diets. The way participants labelled themselves (vegetarian, vegan, flexitarian,…) or resisted to do so was not a criteria of selection.

The method consisted in the combination of three research settings: a narrative interview, a dialogical experiment and a filmed observation. As a complement, I also collected material (newspapers, flyers, pictures of graffiti…) available in the public space related to meat and veg*ism. As what I present here is based only on the analysis of the narrative interview and the dialogical experiment, I will focus merely on these two settings. They were used with all of the participants. The narrative interview aimed at provoking and collecting the narration of the change(s) as the person experienced it (or them) subjectively (drawing on Schütze, 1983). It allows me to access to data related to change on the ontogenetic level. While the initial focus of my question (to the interviewees) is on events and practices related to the foodway, I am also interested in the meaning of these for the interviewee and, more globally, his or her opinions and reasons. The aim of the dialogical experiment was to prompt socio-discursive positioning, in relation to different positions regarding meat and vegetarianism. Participants were asked to imagine that they participated in a dinner, during which two of their neighbours would express contrasting points of view regarding a specific aspect of meat or vegetarianism. These were provided under the form of short written texts, which I consider as expressions of positions (based on de Saint-Laurent, 2018). I asked them to share with me what they think about them, what they were likely to respond an the extent to which they were familiar with this position. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the data allowed me to identify the topics that are relevant to the participants (e.g. animal

ethics or environmental impact). This analysis was enhanced with the coding of the person's positioning regarding these topics as well as the identification of tensions between diverse positions (inspired by Aveling et al., 2015). Based on this, I conducted a more detailed analysis of some particular positioning movements and tensions, identified as particularly representative or as contrasting or extreme cases. In the next section, I will present a few ways in which participants position themselves in discordance with a dominant norm and briefly discuss them. This analysis is structured by the four N's and centred around the issue of meat consumption. However, I argue that with this approach, important dimensions of the positioning process stay unaddressed. In the following section, I will thus examine some other aspects of the positioning process that are less directly related to meat consumption, notably participants' considerations about knowledge production, coherence or normality.

Voicing alternative discourses to the four N's

The analysis of the data collected provides material based on which I can now examine what allows the participants to develop an alternative positioning to the normative one of the meat eater. I will use the four N's in order to structure my argument, using selected extracts in which participants challenge one of the norms. All of the four norms were challenged by at least some participants, but not all of the participants positioned critically towards all the norms. The extent to which they take distance from the norm might also vary. In the first extract, the participant is challenging the representation of meat as natural.

> Extract 1:
> "what bothers me in fact is uh (.) it- it's mainly uh the way animals are treated, (.) let's say, uhm: (.) it's the fact of producing meat like plastic in fact it's like one would produce uh shoes or t-shirts or whatever (.) there is this whole production line that must be as profitable as possible, (.)" [Léa, narrative interview]

In this extract, Léa presents meat as the product of an industrial system, "like plastic" or "shoes", thus something artificial that cannot, to her, be considered as natural. Further in the interview, she also argues that life deserves more respect, thus drawing on an opposition between life, which can be associated to what is natural, and the industrial production system to which she associates meat. Thus, she does not question the idea that meat consumption is natural in an absolute way, but limits her questioning to the industrial production of meat. The moral positioning ("this form of production is bad") stays largely implicit in this extract, however she expresses her disagreement when stating that this bothers her.

In extract 2, the participant goes against the idea of eating meat as being something normal. In Piazza et al.'s (2015) definition, the term normal is specifically related to the idea of the majority, thus to a statistical dimension of normality. However, it is precisely on the issue of the number of people that Gaël draws in order to explain his choice to avoid meat.

> Extract 2:
> "when I stopped eating meat, it was also for environmental reasons, […] for me yeah the question of how we would do for all of us to live (2) uh (.) because clearly we could not all of us the whole planet be nourished by eating meat" [Gaël, narrative interview]

Gaël draws here on the issue of the resources that are necessary in order to produce meat, a problem that was already raised in the 1970's (see Lappé and Hahn's *Diet for a small planet*, 1971), but that is still a critical challenge (Gerber et al., 2013). Thus, for this participant it is exactly the fact that meat consumption is normal (in the sense of being the diet of a large number of people) that is problematic and this lead him to avoid this product. He links his specific socio-material positioning (to stop eating meat) with an understanding of collective possibilities ("we could not all"), implicitly related with a moral positioning regarding social justice (what one should do – a position that is explicit in other parts of the data).

In extract 3, Aurélia positions herself against the idea that eating meat would be necessary for nutritional reasons.

> Extract 3:
> "but I know that there are many more proteins in vegetables than we think, (.) and uh (2) so it's it's a wrong idea to think that there is only meat and that that: you absolutely need to eat meat in order to be in good health or whatever" [Aurélia, narrative interview]

In this extract, the dominant discourse presenting meat as necessary is addressed in a very direct and explicit way, perhaps because Aurélia encountered this discourse regularly (as many other participants did) and that she spent quite a lot of time investigating the issue in order to be able to provide an argumentative answer and develop her socio-discursive positioning as a vegetarian. Finally, the fourth extract illustrates a discourse that is clearly not considering meat as something nice.

> Extract 4:
> "it was horrible to make a roast, this huge quantity of meat, (.) that smelled:: after each meal of roast: uh I washed my hair changed my clothes, ((laughing))" [Marilou, narrative interview]

Marilou highlights the disgust she experiences when preparing a roast, which lasts after the preparation and meal itself through the smell in her hair and clothes. Nevertheless, during the period she is talking about, she prepared roasts almost on a weekly basis, as it was the habitual Sunday meal in her family, which her husband and children enjoyed.

In these four extracts, the participants position themselves in ways that are divergent from the majoritarian discourses on meat consumption. Regarding extracts 1 to 3, it is clear through the larger analysis of the interviews that the participants became familiar with alternative discourses as they encountered them (sometimes actively looking for information) in their environment. The question of how and when a certain alternative discourse becomes particularly relevant to a person goes beyond this paper, however this allows to underline the role of the presence of a plurality of discourses (see also Billig, 1988; Zittoun, 2013) in the possibility of emergence of alternative positionings on the microgenetic level and of new positions on the ontogenetic level. However, regarding extract 4, this explanation is not convincing (also when examining more broadly the data related to this person). Moreover, in the case of this person and based on the data collected with her, there seems not to be anyone who could have played a role in a form of socialization of taste (Ochs et al., 1996). The emergence of such an experience of disgust stays difficult to understand, however it highlights the role of subjective embodied experience in the development of alternative voices to the dominant discourse. Regarding positioning processes, it is also interesting to notice that participants take distance from the

dominant norms in different ways, based on shared knowledge (extract 3) or based on feelings (extract 4), attacking the presuppositions of the norm (extract 1), the consequences we draw from it (extract 2) or whether its content is right or wrong (extract 3). Given the interview situation, all of them position themselves on the socio-discursive level, however socio-materiel and moral positionings can also be evoked.

To sum up, when trying to understand the issue of positioning regarding norms, I identified a dominant discourse tidily related with a practice that is largely shared and taken-for-granted (in the Swiss context) and I showed that some people, drawing on their personal experience and the alternative discourses they encountered, position themselves in ways that are not aligned with the dominant discourse and practice. However, the analysis of the data presented here lead to identify several other aspects in the positioning process that seem to play an important role, but that are not directly related to these discourses and arguments.

Beyond meat and its impact: some other aspects in the experience of positioning

I will focus in this section on one participant, Aurélia, in order to illustrate a few other aspects that seem to play a crucial role in the positioning. Interestingly, these are not specifically related to the debates on meat and its implications. Indeed, during the interviews and the dialogical experiment, all the participants spent also an important amount of time speaking about social relations, about what they consider as normal, possible and/or easy, about knowledge and about coherence (with oneself). I argue that the presence of these aspects in the data shows the importance they have subjectively for the participants, and more specifically that they convey other norms that articulate in the positioning movements of the person with the one's more directly related to products of animal origin.

Aurélia has a vegetarian diet for 4.5 years. She currently follows this diet in a strict way, however this has not always been the case and the change of diet was progressive. She also avoids other products of animal origin, although not systematically, and aims at following a strict vegan diet in the future. She calls herself a vegetarian and says she would like to become a vegan. Her trajectory of practices (socio-material positionings) is thus rather linear and is oriented towards a progressive avoidance of all products of animal origin. The main reason she gives for this dietary change is related to animal ethics, and she seems to have a rather stable and clear moral and socio-discursive positioning regarding the consumption of products of animal origin: it is bad and should be avoided. The following extract comes from her reaction during the dialogical experiment to the texts on the environmental impact of meat.

> Extract 5:
> "I used to eat avocados, […] people who eat meat in general they say yes, (.) but avocados, : (.) it wreaks devastation in Mexico, : because : (.) it's not wrong, now but (.) I have the impression that (.) as a vegetarian we never do well enough, (.) and we always have uh : we will never be perfect in fact in fact they expect us to be perfect […] while we just try to : to be a bit : more a bit more kind and to do good around us, but it's never enough, […] and if it's not at the level of food one will say that we take the plane, : and that this is polluting, : and that we have a car and so we will never : we will never be perfect also [...] " [Aurélia, dialogical experiment]

In this extract, the way social interactions can be challenging for vegetarians clearly appears. She reports the (generalized) voice of "people who eat meat" and highlights how she perceives this voice, in particular the perception and the expectations that are articulated by it, according to her. The "it's not wrong, now but (.)" indicates a tension that is not a strict opposition, but that leads her to discuss perfection, an issue that is not explicitly raised by the reported voice. Through the notion of perfection, she introduces a discussion on what is enough, to what extent a person should be coherent and what is actually possible. Those are all related to moral norms stating what should be done, and in this extract, she positions herself socio-discursively towards them, discussing what we should do in relation with what we can and could do. Is it enough to be vegetarian if one can also avoid buying food that is not local? If one refers to environmental arguments in favor of vegetarianism (socio-discursive positioning), is it allowed to take the plane (a socio-material positioning which has a high environmental impact) and thus not to be fully coherent regarding one's environmental impact? What are the limits of one's possibilities, and thus what imperfection can we tolerate – or in other words how do we articulate what we can, what we could and what we should do?

The next extract follows almost immediately extract 5, and Aurélia is now speaking more specifically about herself, using the pronoun "I".

> Extract 6:
> "I do my best, well I try to I try to separate: [waste] I try to not to consume too much well then it's an approach uh (.) well I try to do uh (2) to do uh as much as possible, [..] after there are things I don't know yet that it's maybe not good, […] but there I try to stay informed : (.) about all that," [Aurélia, dialogical experiment]

In this extract, she elaborates on her positioning as a vegetarian, in answer to the voice of the "people who eat meat". She defends her position despite its lack of perfection in several ways. First of all, the phrases she uses "I do my best" and "as much as possible" carry the implication that she has limits. In other words, she makes an ontological statement about human being which excludes perfection, again articulating implicitly "could's" and "should's". Secondly, she draws on intentionality ("I try to", a socio-discursive and moral positioning) rather than performance ("we don't *do* well enough", a socio-material positioning). Thirdly, she points to a lack of knowledge as an explanation for her imperfection (which can also be seen as one specific limit of human beings and thus related to the first point). Finally, when she uses (in extract 5) the words "a bit more kind", she actually introduces an alternative reference point of evaluation to "perfection". Indeed, implicitly, these words imply a "more kind than someone" and thus allow her to present the vegetarian positioning as more valuable than when using "perfection" as a reference point. Thus, we can observe in these two extracts that the positioning as a vegetarian is not only related to debates regarding meat and its impact, but involves also various other issues that appear to play a quite central role in the way the positioning is elaborated during the interviews and experiments. Moreover, the fact that participants spent a significant amount of time on them during the interview and experiment lead us to argue that they occupy an important place in the subjective experience of positioning. The distinction between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positionings allows us to identify tensions and interplays between these different types of positionings.

Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed to use the notion of positioning in order to examine the way individuals orient themselves in a field where a clearly dominant norm exists - namely meat consumption in the context of Switzerland – and the way people adopting a veg*an diet navigate this field. In order to do so, I focused on people who take distance from this norm, through their practices and discourse. Before I moved to the data presentation and analysis, I clarified different dimensions of this norm: the statistic dimension, the fact that it is largely unquestioned and the moral aspect. Then, firstly, I used examples in which people clearly question one of the arguments that is usually evoked in order to justify meat consumption. Through this, I underlined the importance of the presence of alternative discourses on which to draw in order to take distance, but also the necessity to consider individual embodied experience (in this case, of disgust). Secondly, I examined in more details the way a person elaborates her positioning regarding meat consumption and vegetarianism in dialogue with others, and highlighted the importance of other dimensions in the positioning process than the arguments usually considered in the debates around meat consumption. I underlined notably the relation to perfection and human limits, the relation to knowledge and the focus on intention rather than performance. I argue that all of these dimensions are related to a normative aspect, a "should", and thus that the person elaborates and defends her position in a complex and subtle way, articulating socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positionings, at the crossroad of different "should's" and "could's" (implied notably when discussing the limits of human possibilities).

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