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Difficulties in Positioning as Veg*an: Two Distinctions to Examine Positioning

Fabienne Gfeller 

Institute of Psychology and Education, University of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

Positioning and position are notions that are quite often used currently in psychology, mostly with reference to Dialogical Self Theory and Positioning Theory. In this article, drawing on these two approaches as well as on socio-cultural psychology, I elaborate an integrative understanding of positioning. It includes a distinction between the socio-material, socio-discursive and moral dimensions of positioning, as well as a distinction between microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic scales of positioning. I illustrate the hermeneutical power of this theoretical proposition through the presentation of a study of positioning regarding the consumption of products of animal origin. I present an analysis of data collected in 2016 in a Swiss canton with qualitative semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. I focus on difficulties in positioning and show how the classical approach in terms of I-positions, and analyses based on the two distinctions presented above, allow differentiated insights on dynamics underlying the difficulties to position as a vegetarian or vegan.

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Introduction

Positioning and position are notions that were integrated into psychology's vocabulary since the 1990s at least and are quite often used currently. Following Benson (2001), my interest in these notions is that they allow to describe and theorize the way individuals navigate the complex world in which they live. Hence, they provide theoretical tools serving the development of a global understanding of human beings in their environment, as pursued by sociocultural psychology.

The notions of positioning and position might refer to different theoretical backgrounds (Gülerce et al., 2014), where they imply diverse definitions and methodological choices. Researchers using these notions mainly draw either on Hermans and colleagues' Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001; Hermans et al., 1992), or on Harré and colleagues' Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré et al., 2009). Raggatt (2015) and Gillespie and Martin (2014) have considered these two approaches as complementary,

CONTACT Fabienne Gfeller  fabienne.gfeller@unine.ch  Institute of Psychology and Education, University of Neuchâtel, Espace Tilo-Frey 1, 2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

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and have made integrative theoretical propositions. In this article, I follow these propositions of an inclusive understanding of positioning, and I elaborate it further.

To provide an empirical exemplification, I examine the case of individuals changing their foodways in relation to products of animal origin. Examining such a complex domain of activities requires, I argue, a definition of positioning that is broad enough to include the diverse dimensions of food related activities, and precise enough to discuss the processes of change.

In what follows, I will first turn to Dialogical Self Theory and Positioning Theory. I will then move toward the literature in sociocultural psychology and highlight a few notions and principles that seem important when considering positioning, which will lead me to propose a working definition of this notion. In the second part of the article, I will focus on empirical material and analysis, in order to illustrate the hermeneutical power of the notion of positioning. I will present the data and methods I used, before moving to the results and the discussion. While the organization of the article follows the current standards, it does not reflect the unfolding of the research procedure. Indeed, the different elements present were elaborated through an abductive, iterative procedure (Valsiner, 2014) and the main purpose of the article is to present the inclusive definition of positioning that emerged through this process. The empirical part has an illustrative function.

Dialogical self theory and positioning theory

Both Dialogical Self Theory and Positioning Theory aim at developing a theorization that acknowledges the dynamicity and heterogeneity of human self. Dialogical Self Theory was developed in the frame of the study of the self. In contrast with previous approaches, anchored in individualistic and rationalistic traditions of thought, that focus mainly on the self's stability and homogeneity, Dialogical Self Theory proposes to consider the self as "a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the landscape of the mind" (Hermans, 2002, p. 147), where positioning plays a key role in the dynamics of the self. Positioning Theory considers the notion of positioning as an alternative to the notion of role in the field of "cognitive psychology of social action" (Harré et al., 2009, p. 5). It draws an immanent approach to language and focuses on dynamics and changes, while the notion of role refers to more static and stable aspects. Both approaches thus focus on dynamics, changes, fluidity and heterogeneity (for a discussion of the limits and risk of overemphasizing these aspects, see Blackman, 2005) in opposition to traditional approaches or notions presented by these authors as giving more space to what is stable and homogeneous.

However, there are some differences between these two theoretical approaches. Dialogical Self Theory, focuses mainly on intrapersonal dynamics, even though it recognizes the importance of social and cultural environment and considers internal positions as tidily linked to social roles and others (Hermans, 2001), Positioning Theory focuses on interpersonal interactions, as it considers that "positioning is something which happens in the course of an interaction" (Harré et al., 2009, p. 10). Nevertheless, the type of interactions considered is not restricted to an exchange between a certain number of people in a well-defined time-space (see for instance Benson, 2010). Moreover, this approach highlights the importance of moral components of positioning,

as positioning is understood as a negotiation and attribution of rights and duties (Harré, 1993; Harré et al., 2009). Thus, both approaches can be considered as complementary, notably because internal dialogues draw on and are nourished by external dialogues and conversely (Raggatt, 2015; on the blurring of borders between internal and external dialogues, see also Machková, 2023). Moreover, they can also be considered as complementary on the ontological and developmental level, as internal dialogues and more abstract forms of perspective taking develop from interpersonal and concrete position exchanges (Gillespie & Martin, 2014).

A sociocultural psychological approach

Sociocultural psychology examines psychological phenomena and human activities by focusing on the interaction between the person and their social, cultural, material and historical environment. While some of the above-mentioned authors explicitly take a sociocultural perspective, others are more anchored in social or discursive psychology. Drawing on a sociocultural approach leads to orient the gaze on some particular aspects of positioning. I will discuss those in this section.

Firstly, sociocultural psychologists invite us to question what we usually consider as I-positions and as others, and notably not to limit ourselves with the identification of social roles such as teacher, child or citizen when studying interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues (Zittoun, 2014). The elements that are constitutive of the stream of consciousness and that participate to positioning are considered as more fluid and (at least sometimes) difficult to identify in terms of I-positions (Gülerce et al., 2014; Zittoun, 2014). Others with whom we dialogue notably include generalized others, objects, and situations (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Grossen, 2010). From this point of view, studying positioning requires much more than identifying a series of well identified positions in relation to clearly defined social others. Rather, this perspective invites to consider positioning as a never-ending process of dialogue between the person and their environment, in which the heterogeneity of the words used (Salazar Orvig, 2021), the sometimes monstrous dimensions of the interlocutor (Last, 2013) and the ineffability of some aspects of experience (Benson, 2003) have as consequence that the dialogue to some extent escapes to the speakers and to the researcher and involves much more than identified and recognized social roles. This environment is constituted by a diversity of elements (persons with different roles and opinions, objects, discourses,...) that can be more or less identified. This dialogue might take place at both an interpersonal or intrapersonal level, while the borders between external and internal dialogues might sometimes be blurred.

Secondly, sociocultural psychology invites us not only to consider local interpersonal interactions, but also the more global frame and dialogical context in which development (or in the present case, positioning) occurs (Perret-Clermont, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). This assumption leads to potentially include a very broad (if not infinite) range of phenomena. Here, the distinction between sociogenesis, ontogenesis and microgenesis (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990) might help to analyze the phenomena we study, classifying them according to different timescales. Sociogenesis is the broadest scale and includes dynamics of change in the social and cultural environment, at generally rather large time scales; ontogenesis points to changes at the scale of the person's life trajectory;

and microgenesis designates a smaller timescale of analysis, focusing on specific situations and encounters. The three levels are tidily intertwined (Zittoun, 2019). This distinction invites us to examine the in-/stability of a positioning at different scales.

Thirdly, the level of ontogenesis might be of particular interest to developmental psychologists, as it is the level at which a positioning might participate to identity construction and self-creation (see Benson, 2001). Considering the scale of ontogenesis makes it possible to examine the relative (un)stability of a positioning in the life trajectory of the person. The notions of rupture and transition might inform our understanding of the ontogenetic dynamics. Ruptures are defined as moments when the taken-for-granted and the habitual are put at stake.

A rupture signs the end of a mode of adjustment; [...] a rupture is a call for new ideas, new solutions, or new ways of acting or thinking. If life always requires regular change, as in transitive processes, a rupture calls for more, deeper, more substantive changes; in that sense a rupture is a catalyst for intransitive change (Zittoun, 2009, p. 409).

A rupture calls for a transition, a process that leads to “a new sustainable fit between the person and her current environment” (Zittoun, 2009, p. 410) and that implies meaning-making, learning and identity processes that might be understood in terms of (re)positioning (Zittoun, 2006). In other words, positionings are always part of a person’s life trajectory and might be part of a transition process that also implies learning and meaning-making.

Fourthly, sociocultural psychology, at least in its recent developments, stresses the importance of the material and embodied dimensions of human activities. Many authors agree that positioning includes also material, enacted, embodied dimensions (see notably Gülerce et al., 2014; Harré et al., 2009). Benson (2001) in particular underlines the situatedness and embodied dimension of any human activity and thus of self and positioning.

Where and when, place and time, are the conditions of existence. [...] Without 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 (Benson, 2001, p. 3-4).

However, most of the empirical and theoretical work on positions and positioning focuses on verbal phenomena. In order to give more space to material and embodied dimensions, I propose to distinguish *socio-material positioning*, which refers to embodied and concrete activities through which a person acts on their material environment, from *socio-discursive positioning* (I borrow this term to Raggatt in Gülerce et al., 2014), which refers to positioning mediated by language, including inner speech, and *moral positioning* (Benson, 2001), which refers to the (often implicit) way the person situates themselves in the landscape of valuations about what is important, good or right. These different forms of positioning might happen simultaneously (Benson, 2001).

An inclusive definition

Based on these theoretical elements, I consider positioning as a description of the way a person relates to elements of their environment and dialogues with them (see also

Gfeller, 2020), in a dialogue performed both at interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. These elements notably include objects, behaviors, institutions, persons (including themselves) and discourses. The others toward whom one positions oneself might be *in presentia*, *in absentia*, or generalized, and they might not necessarily be human individuals or clearly identified people (Marková, 2003; Zittoun, 2014).

Positioning might be socio-material, socio-discursive and moral. These different forms of positioning can be enacted simultaneously within a single activity (Benson, 2001), implying interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues to diverse extent (see also Gfeller, 2020). The dialogues through which positionings are performed can be observed at different timescales, and following Zittoun (2019), I distinguish sociogenetic, micro-genetic and ontogenetic levels of analysis. In particular, positionings are always part of a person's life trajectory, and repositioning processes are notably an important aspect of transition periods.

In the second part of this article, I will illustrate the heuristic power of the notion of positioning, drawing on its diverse aspects in order to examine the case of people who change their foodways. I concentrate in particular on changes related to the consumption of food of animal origin; the fact that these types of food currently are the object of societal debates for several reasons provides an interesting opportunity to study positioning dynamics toward them, as that the socio-cultural context is likely to trigger rupture and transition processes that entail repositioning (Zittoun, 2006). Moreover, this empirical choice follows recent calls for a psychology focusing on people's everyday activities (Højholt & Schraube, 2016). As positioning might be very diverse and is happening constantly, I choose to focus on moments when a certain positioning, that of positioning oneself as a vegetarian or vegan, seems to be hindered or threatened. Before moving to this empirical part, I present a few elements regarding the consumption of food of animal origin and its avoidance, that is veg*ism. I use the spelling veg*ism and veg*an in order to designate the different forms of vegetarianism and veganism.

Veg*isms and becoming veg*an

Rozin (2007) presents many reasons for psychologists to study food related activities. In particular, they constitute a complex experience at the crossroad of cultural, symbolic, biological, social and evolutionary processes. It is widely recognized that food consumption is a highly cultural and social part of human life (Anderson, 2005), while it is also strongly related to personal and collective identity (Di Giovine & Brulotte, 2014). Social scientists highlighted that food production, processing and consumption imply important dynamics of socialization, of knowledge and of power (Mintz, 1996) and that food production underwent important changes during the twentieth century implying notably a massive industrialization of animal farming and an increasing distance between consumers and producers in so-called WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic; see Henrich et al., 2010) countries (Larue, 2015). Importantly, food production and consumption cannot be properly understood without framing them in the current context of neoliberalism (Mentinis, 2018) and its discourse on individual consumer responsibility (Austgulen, 2014). Another central component of food consumption is of course pleasure (Moulin, 1995). Finally, animal farming in particular currently raises important debates and worries regarding its environmental

impact (Gerber et al., 2013), the ethical issues related to the condition of raising and killing animals (Porcher, 2011) and its sanitary consequences (Grauerholz & Owens, 2015). This literature informs us on dialogues and current positions valued and/or questioned at a sociogenetic level.

Researchers highlight the long history of the debate related to veg*an foodways (Spencer, 2000) and the heterogeneity of the terms, definitions, arguments and behaviors related to it (Maurer, 2002; Ossipow, 1989). Several authors also underline that it is perceived as being more than a diet (Maurer, 2002; Ossipow, 1989). In terms of positioning, this implies that the categories used might sometimes be unclear, which is in line with the first point mentioned in the section on sociocultural psychology.

Among psychologists focusing on the topic, Carmichael (2002) examined dynamics at stake in vegetarianism from the angle of a discursive-rhetorical approach, while Tan et al. (2021) examined the relations between vegetarianism and personality traits. A few other researchers addressed vegetarianism from the angle of moral psychology, notably as a form of moral decision-making in children who become vegetarian (Hussar & Harris, 2009), or with a focus on interpersonal interactions, examining how meat-eaters react to vegetarians (Minson & Monin, 2012). These studies provide interesting insights on the socio-discursive and moral dimensions of positioning, however they always focus on one of these aspects at the time, and none of them addresses socio-material positioning.

Some researchers identified variables correlated with the strictness of a vegetarian diet, namely “higher centrality of being a vegetarian to one’s overall self-concept, greater disgust toward meat, lower liking of meat, longer duration of following a vegetarian diet, and considering oneself to be a vegan” (Rosenfeld, 2019, p. 38) as well as pro-environmental behavior (Krizanova et al., 2021). Other researchers identified the “support for protection of native species, subjective health, perceived environmental efficacy, gender, and political orientation” (Milfont et al., 2021, p. 7) as corelated to transitions to veg*ism. Another study identifies a variable correlated to lapses from veg*an diets, namely conservatism (Hodson & Earle, 2018). While all these studies use large scale samples and work with pre-identified variables, established on the literature, I propose to address a similar question but with an approach that is more bottom-up, based on people’s narration of their relation to foods of animal origin and veg*an diets. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I thus open the possibility for other analytical categories to appear (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Moreover, addressing foodways in terms of positioning allows an understanding of psychological processes that goes beyond the causality assumption of approaches based on variables. Finally, I will not focus on transitions to or away from a veg*an diet, but I will consider all types of difficulties that people evoke regarding their trajectory in relation to veg*ism, whether it lead to a change of diet or not.

Methods

I will draw on research data and an analysis elaborated in the frame of my PhD thesis. Data collection took place in 2016 in a Swiss canton. I conducted a qualitative study with 10 participants who recently changed their consumption of products of animal origin or for whom the change is still ongoing at the time of the data collection.

The change might be from a carnist diet to a type of vegetarian diet, from vegetarianism to veganism, or the other way around. It is not necessarily their first dietary change regarding products of animal origin. The fact that people did or were changing their diet was the only criterion of selection; the way they presented themselves (“I am vegetarian/vegan/flexitarian” or “I don’t like to use these labels”) was therefore not a criterion. As a result, people from diverse age (25 to 67), gender and socio-economic background participated. Participants were found through a snowball sampling, and a small number of participants was preferred so as to construct a deepened understanding of each situation and to conduct detailed qualitative analyses notably in the form of case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stiles, 2013).

The data analyzed here was gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Each interview contained two complementary phases. The first phase was based on a classical narrative interview (Schütze, 1983, 2008). It focused on the person’s history regarding the consumption of products of animal origin and aimed at gathering information mainly about ontogenetic dynamics through questions regarding the person’s life trajectory with focus on foodways, but included reflexive thoughts and micro-dialogues (Raggatt, 2015) informing on microgenetic dynamics of positioning. The second phase was based on a dialogical experiment, a form of qualitative experiment (Wagoner, 2009) developed by de Saint-Laurent (2018). This part of the interview was framed as a fictional dinner where the people sitting next to the participants would make statements related to the topic of meat consumption and veg*ism. Participants were asked to answer to these statements (express agreement/disagreement and interest/disinterest, say why, and clarify whether they are familiar with this type of statements). The statements were constructed by the researcher based on material collected in the socio-cultural context of the study, such as newspaper articles. They related to 6 topics: the environmental impact of products of animal origin, animal ethics, health issues, taste and pleasure, financial aspects (knowing that in Switzerland products of animal origin, and especially products that are local and/or organic and/or respecting specific criterion linked to animal ethics, are expensive), and the nature/culture/humanization debate. The aim of this phase of the interview was to provoke positioning toward the different topics and thus to gather mainly microgenetic movements of positionings, which were provoked through the interview setting. Interviewees were not invited to speak about their microgenetic movements. Rather, these movements were identified as parts of their answers. The extracts of data presented here, originally in French, were translated by myself. The original extracts are in [Appendix A](#) and the conventions of transcription in [Appendix B](#).

Analysis procedure

The analysis consisted of an abductive process of iteration between theoretical propositions and the empirical material. Data from the two phases of the interview and from all participants were considered as a single set of data and analyzed as a whole. It was organized in categories following a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, pieces of data that were particularly illustrative of typical or atypical movements of positioning were identified, based on a global analysis of the data and on the relevant literature. Those pieces of data were then analyzed according

to a qualitative, dialogical and socio-cultural approach, in the line of a case study approach (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Marková, 2017).

Context

In Switzerland veg*ans are estimated to represent 1 to 5% of the population (depending on sources—see e.g., Office fédéral de la statistique, 2018). They are thus clearly a minority. In average, a Swiss person consumes around 49kg of meat and 8kg of fish per year (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2018), which is approximately 3 times more than the official dietary recommendation in this country (Office fédéral de la sécurité alimentaire et des affaires vétérinaires, 2017). Due to geographical conditions, Switzerland's agriculture is to a large extent turned toward animal farming. As a consequence, the calls for supporting local farming through eating their products might enter into tension with adopting a veg*an diet. In the context of this canton, I observed an increase in marketing for products explicitly labeled as veg*an and in the presence of debates regarding the conditions and consequences of animal farming, while the consumption of products of animal origin did not change in a significative manner.

Three types of tensions

In what follows I will focus on difficulties in positioning, firstly because—as mentioned above—positioning processes are happening permanently and it was thus necessary to select some of these movements, secondly because these difficulties imply tensions that are of interest in developmental dynamics (see Grossen, 2010). Moreover, these difficulties were rarely studied as such (see however Panagiotou & Kadianaki, 2019).

The aim of this section is to enrich the theoretical proposition made above with an empirical illustration. In moments when the positioning is experienced as difficult or painful (according to the narration by the participants) or is avoided, an analysis in terms of the theoretical proposition made above allows to identify several types of tensions. I considered in particular the following indicators: expressions of feelings of unease, dissatisfaction, feeling lost and looking for answers, feeling of incoherence associated with negative emotions. I identify avoidance of a position based on each participants' narration. It corresponds to the situation in which a person adopted a position or mentioned that she would like or should not adopt it, but—at a more or less important scale - does not do so.

Tensions between different I - positions

Some of the difficulties expressed by participants might be read in terms of relations between different I-positions, drawing on Dialogical Self Theory. In the following extract for instance, Gaël explains why he moved back from a vegetarian diet (that he followed during a few years) to a diet including meat.

Extract 1, Gaël, narrative interview:

I realized that well while working a bit on that, that (2) for me, it was uh still a uh a privation [not to eat meat]. (.) it was a process that was very uh: philosophical, (.) [...] that

was really a mental process, I was not disgusted by the taste, it was rather even the opposite, I always liked uh good food, uh a good meal, (.)

In this extract, Gaël defines himself as someone who likes good food, a good meal. Elsewhere in the interview, he also presents himself as a “bon vivant”. In the construction of his narration, this *I as a bon vivant* is in tension with the *I as a vegetarian*, which he associates with the idea of privation. He resolved the tension by moving back to a diet with meat, which however lead to the emergence of a new tension between *I as a bon vivant* and *I as someone who still thinks it is better to be vegetarian from an ethical point of view*. At the time of the interview, he tries to conciliate both thanks to the meta-position (the “standpoint from which other positions and the relations between them can be perceived at once”; Glăveanu, 2020, p. 99) *I as partly incoherent*, stating that it is impossible for a human being to be completely coherent. While the positions draw on social discourses (e.g., what it is to be a bon vivant and the fact that it is valued), these are internalized as the person speaks of him or herself and defines him or herself through these discourses.

The meta-position partly allows Gaël to resolve the tensions he experiences. However, the expansive work of explanation of these tensions, as well as his hesitations and reflexions on incoherence, seem to indicate that something is still at work between these different (meta-)positions.

An approach based on the analysis of I-positions is quite usual and developed in psychology (e.g., Konopka & Zhang, 2021; Ligorio, 2010; Uriko, 2019), and I will thus not deepen it here. Instead, I will move to the distinction between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positioning, which, I argue, allow a complementary understanding of the possible nature of the tensions at stake.

Misalignment between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positions

The feeling of incoherence that is present in the previous extract, which Gaël made explicit elsewhere in the interview, appeared in the interviews of several participants in more or less implicit ways. It points to a difficulty largely related to moral positioning and to the question “what should I do”, more specifically a difficulty to align the socio-discursive and socio-material positioning with a specific value expressed as a moral positioning. Again, the negotiation of whether being veg*an (and the different ways this is enacted, defined, and defended) is “coherent”, “enough” and/or “relevant” might take place on the interpersonal and/or intrapersonal level. The following extract illustrates these difficulties.

Extract 2, Aurélia, dialogical experiment:

I used to eat avocados, [...] people who eat meat in general they say yes, (.) but avocados, (.) it wreaks devastation in Mexico, (.) it's not wrong, 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 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,;

In this extract, words like “enough, always/never, perfect, a bit more, do good” evoke a scale according to which people are evaluated and judged, with a strong

moral component (elsewhere, I discussed these dynamics in terms of norms; see Gfeller et al., 2021). In other words, there is a negotiation around what is done (by veg*ans in general or by Aurélia in particular) in relation to what should be done (moral positionings by others and by Aurélia herself). Interpersonal relations are at the core of the extract, but simultaneously Aurélia is also positioning herself toward the positions that she reports, trying to clarify her own position, a clarification that necessitates internal dialogues. The small hesitations are traces of the (re)construction, in the interview situation, of her positioning. While the whole extract revolves around the position *I as a vegetarian*, an analysis in terms of social roles does not, in my view, reach the heart of this extract as, be it on the intrapersonal or interpersonal plane, what is at stake is the (mis)match between what should be done (moral positioning), what is done (socio-material positioning), and how one speaks about it (socio-discursive positioning) when positioning (taking the I-position) as a vegetarian. In this case, an analysis in terms of moral, socio-material and socio-discursive positioning allows to get insight into the tensions in and around a specific position.

Articulation between microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic dynamics

Difficulties might also appear in the articulation between microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic dynamics, an issue that notably concerns whether a certain position stabilizes over time and between contexts or not. A participant that illustrates well this difficulty is Lisa, who became vegetarian 5 years before the interview, mainly for reasons related to animal ethics. For a while, she had a strict vegetarian diet, even tending toward a vegan diet. When she became pregnant, 3 years before the interview, she started to eat meat again from time to time, which she continued to do after her pregnancy and after stopping breastfeeding. Since then, she still tends to present herself as vegetarian and thinks that it is better to avoid the consumption of products of animal origin for ethical reasons. However, she feels uncomfortable about this and asks herself a lot of questions regarding whether she is still vegetarian and what it means to be vegetarian, as the following extract shows:

Extract 3, Lisa, narrative interview:

maybe I have to decide I'm a vegetarian or not. (.) Because at some point I cannot say to people yes I'm a vegetarian but then I (.) I don't know I invite people over and so we serve salami and before they arrive yes I can just have one but not in front of other people so I mean it doesn't make sense

While this can be related to the issue of coherence between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positioning, which I mentioned above, it is also a matter here of the articulation between a positioning that is stable over time and contexts, at the scale of ontogenesis (*this person is vegetarian*) and positionings that the person adopts in specific situations, such as when Lisa eats a piece of salami when she invites people, and thus that are at play at the microgenetic scale. This is a tension that appears when focusing, in the analysis, on the temporal dimension.

While in the case of Lisa, the tension appears mainly between ontogenetic and microgenetic dynamics, the next extract, from Léa's interview, illustrates a situation in which the tension is mainly situated between sociogenesis and ontogenesis.

Extract 4, Léa, narrative interview:

well they [her boyfriend's parents] prepare something to eat and there is just meat that is: (2) in fact they are people who tal- who ask a lot of questions, °and it pisses me off to have to justify myself all the time° because I don't want to eat meat, and: it's true that it happened once, twice, the meat still came on the table, and finally well: (2) well you eat it a bit,

As it becomes clear through the narrative interview, Léa would like to follow a strict vegetarian diet. In other words, she wishes that this socio-material and moral positioning becomes stable in her ontogenetic trajectory. However, this extract illustrates the difficulties she encounters, as she is confronted to her boyfriend's parents' questions and behavior. Elsewhere, she reports similar difficulties with other people. What is of interest here is that these people position themselves, socio-discursively and/or socio-materially, in line with what can be identified as the dominant discourse in the current sociogenetic dynamics in the context of this study. However, we also observed with other participants that the discrepancy between these sociogenetic dynamics and ontogenetic dynamics are not necessarily experienced as a difficulty. The frame of this article nevertheless prevents us from exploring these differences further.

Discussion

In this article, I propose to deepen the current understandings of positioning processes, based on Dialogical Self Theory and on Positioning Theory, drawing on socio-cultural psychology, in particular through two distinctions. The first one is a distinction between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral forms of positioning; the second one is a distinction between microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic dynamics of positioning. The results section was separated in three sub-sections, reflecting different lenses of analysis: an analysis in terms of I-positions, an analysis of the different dimensions of positioning (socio-material, socio-discursive and moral) and an analysis of the different spatio-temporal scales of positioning (microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic). Those analyses are not exclusive but are considered as different lenses allowing to grasp different aspects of positioning dynamics. A single movement of positioning can be considered through the three different lenses and each of them can enrich the analysis. However, I argue, some tensions become more visible through one of the lenses.

The analysis in terms of I-positions corresponds to the current habitual way of analysis in Dialogical Self Theory. It allows to identify tensions experienced by people and their attempt to solve them through the elaboration of meta-positions. Such analysis is interesting to perform regarding veg*ism, as it allows to understand the heterogeneity and dynamicity of veg*ism. Indeed, approaches traditionally used to study vegetarianism tend to with the presupposition that a person can be identified with a more or less clear category, that is, at the level of intergroup or interpersonal dynamics (or try to do so despite the obvious limitations of this presupposition; Maurer, 2002;

North et al., 2021), but almost never in the intrapersonal realm. The contribution of this approach to the debate on veg*ism is that it shows how different positions exist in the person's landscape, and allows to identify their content and sometimes the social roles and others to which they are related. However, as highlighted by Baerveldt, the risk is to artificially reduce the complexity and the thickness of dialogical activity (Baerveldt in Gülerce et al., 2014), lose the temporal dimension and the non-discursive dimensions of positioning (Adams, 2010).

The analysis in terms of misalignment between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positionings, allows to consider different facets of human experience, beyond the well-studied (socio-)discursive positioning. Socio-material positioning leads to pay more attention to embodied, and more globally, the material dimensions of human activities, in line with the recent turn in social sciences toward socio-materiality and embodiment (Brown et al., 2011; Schraube & Sørensen, 2013). Moral positioning sheds light on aspects of positioning that often stay implicit, although morality and values constitute an essential, often neglected, aspect of human psychological life (Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Brinkmann, 2011). Looking at the articulations and misalignments between these different dimensions of positioning allows to identify tensions at work in both inter- and intrapersonal dynamics in the person's everyday food related activities.

The distinction between micro-, onto- and sociogenesis introduced the question of the spatio-temporal scale of the analysis. Several ongoing or recent studies examine the relation between the three scales (Gfeller et al., 2021; Zittoun, 2019; Zittoun & Levitan, 2019). They show the analytical potential of this distinction in understanding how change happens in human life. The sociogenetic level leads to consider the historical, socio-cultural environment as an integral component of a psychological study. The ontogenetic level invites to make sure that the person's life trajectory, and thus developmental processes, are taken into account, while the microgenetic level sheds light on the concrete, specific and situated processes through which changes happen and the different level interact. The consideration of these levels is in line with Bakhtin's assumption that a specific situation, a word, a sentence, carry meanings, and are inscribed in dialogues that go far beyond this specific element (Bakhtin, 1981). Moreover, the microgenesis/ontogenesis distinction in particular allows to conceptualize the constant play between stability and change in people's life course and the difficulties it may involve (Zittoun & Grossen, 2013), thus contributing to the understanding of developmental processes. It might notably contribute to an analysis of how certain I-positions emerge, stabilize and change over time. On the other hand, the inclusion of tensions implying the sociogenetic dimension inscribes the person's development in the socio-cultural historical context.

As mentioned above, working with these distinctions requires methodological choices that will allow to capture the different dimensions and scales of the phenomena under study. In particular, it may lead to orient interview questions in certain direction, but also to work with methodological settings that combine diverse methods, such as observation, experiments, and ethnographic approaches. It may also lead to more innovative choices (see for instance Gillies et al., 2005). In the present article, I focused on verbal data produced in the frame of interviews—which may constitute a limit to capture the socio-material positioning (see for instance

Brown et al., 2011). However, the research project in which the data was produced also included filmed observations and the gathering of complementary data (desk research), which certainly nourished the quality of the verbal data produced as well as the analysis conducted.

Moreover, the approach developed here also takes distance from theoretical lines that consider tensions as necessarily problematic and/or assuming that people systematically try to resolve them. Rather, it follows a line of research that takes a more open stance, observing and describing the tensions and their evolution (Benson, 2001), considering them as essential components of psychological dynamics (Grossen, 2010; Marková, 2016) and of learning (Akkerman & Bakker, 2019; Engeström, 2001).

Openings

The aim of this article is to deepen the conceptualization of positioning through an integrative definition, notably drawing on Dialogical Self Theory, Positioning Theory and socio-cultural psychology. Moreover, it introduces, on the one hand, a distinction between socio-material, socio-discursive and moral positioning, and on the other, a distinction between microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic positioning. Such integrative understanding of positioning, I argue, makes the concept broad enough to consider complex dynamics involved in everyday dilemma and decision making, such as the one involved in foodways, and precise enough to shed light on dynamics of change within. Foodways are taken here as one illustrative example of a both complex and basic—in the sense of everyday and inevitable—human domain of activities. But how to understand the relative weight of the multiple positioning dynamics people engage in, in a given situation? An analysis of power relations, still missing in our analysis, may open new routes for exploration.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Fabienne Gfeller  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6634-1399>

Data availability statement

Extracts of the data and of the data collection material are available here: <https://doi.org/10.23662/FORS-DS-1309-1>. The data is not completely available so as to respect the agreement concluded with the participants.

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Appendice A – Original interview extracts

Extract 1

j'me suis rendu compte en voilà en bossant un peu dessus, que (2) pour moi, c'était euh quand même une euh une privation [de ne pas manger de viande]. c'était un processus qu'était très euh: philosophique, (.) [...] ouais qu'était un processus mental vraiment, j'étais pas dégoûté par le goût, c'était même plutôt l'inverse, j'ai toujours aimé euh la bonne chère euh la bonne table, (.)

Extract 2

moi j'mangeais des avocats, [...] les gens qui mangent d'la viande en général ils disent oui, (.) mais les avocats: , (.) ça fait des ravages au Mexique, (.) c'est pas faux, hein mais (.) j'ai l'impression que (.) en tant qu'végétarien on fait jamais assez bien, (.) et: on a toujours euh: on sera jamais parfait en fait en fait on attend d'nous qu'on soit parfaits (.) alors qu'on essaie juste de: d'être un peu: plus un peu plus bienveillants et pis de faire le bien autour d'nous, mais c'est jamais assez, et si c'est pas au niveau d'alimentation on dira qu'on prend l'avion,: et pis qu'ça pollue,:

Extract 3

[This interview was in English; the extract presented is already the original one]

Extract 4

L: ben ils [parents de son compagnon] préparent à manger et il y a juste la viande qu'est que: (2) en fait c'est des gens qui par- qui posent beaucoup de questions, °et ça m'fait chier d'me justifier tout l'temps ° parce que j'ai pas envie d'manger d'viande, et: c'est vrai qu'c'était une fois, deux fois, la viande elle venait quand même toujours sur la table, et finalement ben: (2) ben: ouais on la mange un peu, (.)

Appendice B – Conventions of transcription

Based on the conventions of Jefferson's (1985) conversational analysis.

'	Raising intonation
.	Fall in the intonation
?	Interrogative intonation
(.)	Small break (one second or less)
(2) or (3)	Break (number indicates how many seconds)
:	Prolongation of the sound
°	Whispering
[]	Added or suppressed by researcher
