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Article

Framing Devices in the Creation of Environmental Responsibility: A Qualitative Study from Sweden

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between identity work for environmental responsibility and sustainable development in relation to an ecological master frame. The material is based on a case study with Swedish householders and focusses on the interviewees identity work in relation to specific and detailed environmentally friendly activities. The argument put forth is that individuals construct what is possible and reasonable by identifying themselves in relation to the multitude of others and by doing certain activities. The conclusions suggest that the householders consider themselves to have a responsibility for the environment, but that they do enough by performing specific activities such as recycling. Thereby the study shows how the individuals present their own ideas and actions in relation to an ecological master frame.

Keywords: environmental responsibility; framing device; Sweden; household; ecological master frame

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1. Introduction

It has been more than 20 years since the Brundtland Report was launched, which required lifestyle changes among the affluent segments of the global population [1]. Since then, consumption levels have continued to increase despite the environmental problems' rising legitimacy in international and

national policies, and despite efforts to change people's behavior to decrease consumption [2]. Ever since the Brundtland Report and the *Agenda 21,* there has been a strong focus on individual responsibility in environmental politics [1,3]. However, there can be discrepancies between individuals' understanding of their responsibility, and national and international objectives.

Most environmental issues have to do with the relationship between individuals and the common good, and in short, sustainable development deals with change [4]. Many environmental policies build on the idea of self-interest and voluntariness on how to change environmentally negative practices. In this article we will use a Swedish qualitative study to analyze the relationship between identity and sustainable development, and focus on how these Swedes construct their environmental responsibility in relation to specific environmentally friendly activities. We will analyze this relationship focussing on the householders' articulations of their environmentally friendly practices. An implicit aim is to understand what environmentally friendly practices people are willing to incorporate, what they already have incorporated, and which suggested changes they reject.

In Sweden, the government and parliament have expressed a will that environmental issues should be mainstreamed into all political areas. The former Prime Minister Göran Persson indicated, in the Government Declaration 1996, that Sweden will be "an actuating international force and a leading country in the endeavor to create an ecological sustainable development" [5] Persson's political vision of "the green peoples' home" relates to the householders' role in the creation of an ecological sustainable society [6]. Several researchers argue that the idea of the green peoples' home meant an acceptance of ecological modernization as an overall political strategy, *i.e.*, it has become a national environmental master frame for environmental politics [7,8]. This strategy implicates a change of prevailing control strategies and processes in environmental policies with the integration of responsibilities for environmental consideration within all social sectors [8]. In this article, we want to analyze Swedish householders' representation of themselves as ecologically responsible from a qualitative perspective of how they represent themselves in relation to their ideas about the environment.

Households contribute to half of the environmental stress in Sweden, and as in many other countries a lot is causally linked to modern household technology [9,10]. However, the "focus on individual consumers, detached from their everyday living, is still the most frequently used approach in consumer behavior research," as expressed by Shanahan *et al.* [9]. It is highly motivated to focus on householders' environmental action because the household constitutes the context in which a decisive part of the everyday environmental decisions are made. At the same time, the responsibility for the environment has been transferred in many areas from an aggregated level of national politics to the private sphere [11]. This indicates an individualization of responsibility regarding who is expected to take action, and a politicization of the private sphere [6,12]. In our study perceptions about responsibility, possibilities, and constraints have been investigated by interviews, and ecological impact is understood from the householders' perspective.

The research questions of this study were: how do the householders represent their responsibility for the environment? How do the interviewees relate their own environmental activities to those of others? What environmental activities do they mention that they perform, and what do they disregard? The attention was thereby on activities and how these are motivated or rationalized.

1.1. Method and Material

This article is based on 56 semi-structured interviews with Swedish householders performed during 2004–2008, with a total of 73 individuals. Even if the interviews were performed over a four-year period, there is consistency in the responses concerning how environmental responsibility is constructed. In the recruitment process, we did not specifically search for environmental activists. The overall approach in the recruitment process was to find *different* households in order to find diversity, and thus they differ in regards to composition of the household, type of dwelling, age, gender and geographical location in Sweden. Households composed of singles, couples and whole families were recruited to the study, and an equal number of men and women. In most cases, all members of the households participated in the interview since we searched for the household context, including negotiations between members [9]. Because of this, the youngest participant in the study was only five years old, while the oldest was 75 years old. Several studies have investigated the relationship between environmental commitment and aspects like age, gender, education, ethnicity, *etc.* [6,13,14]. Using type of dwelling as a criterion is built on the idea that different kinds of dwellings create preconditions for different kinds of environmental commitment [15]. These factors are not the primary interest in this article although they tell us something about the selection process and the spread among the householders. The names of the householders are pseudonyms for reasons of confidentiality.

In an interdisciplinary context, it is vital to pay attention to epistemological approaches. We assume that methodology and theory are closely related and difficult to distinguish. The overall methodological approach for the study was qualitative and is based on interviews, thus we do not measure nor predict behavior, but interpret what the interviewees have said. Both in the outline of the study, and in analyzing the interviews concerning everyday life, we have assumed that there is a dual relationship between actors and structures [16]. Structures open up certain possibilities of action at the same time as they restrict others—they are both enabling and constraining [16]. We further adhere to a symbolic interactionism approach, which focuses on social interaction [17]. The face-to-face interaction is seen as the primary unit from which all other social levels (society, culture, structures) can be derived [18]. The interviews are therefore not only a method for gathering information about how the informants interpret their own actions and opinions in relation to others in other situations, it is also an interaction and a situation in itself, where the informants interpret and reflect upon actions and meanings. Symbolic interactionism has been used in previous studies of identity, and thus we find it useful when analyzing the identity work for environmental responsibility [19]. Collective behavior and meaning making are prominent areas of attention, and the main research approach uses qualitative methods. Identity can be both individual and collective and we are particularly interested in the interplay between individuals and the collective, *i.e.*, society [20].

We take interviews to be a situation when the researcher invites the interviewees to reflect on their everyday activities. Since environmental responsibility can be viewed as a moral issue, the presence of the researcher influences the interviewees. However, our idea of interviews also implies that it is never possible to find a true answer, since the interviewees construct identity during the interview and in relation to the researcher [21]. Our theoretical framework will be outlined in more detail below.

The interviews were analyzed concurrently with, and informed by, the reading of theoretical literature. The aim was to identify routine ways used to answer or describe certain situations, matters

that are raised spontaneously, and implicit norms to which the interviewees relate. It was from the reading and interpretation of the interviews that we were struck by the positioning against other citizens when discussing and motivating what environmental activities they said that they could do, which is a form of (post-)rationalization of action. In the analysis, we were also interested in searching for contradictions between the stated ideals and actual practice, the motives the householders give for their behavior. These stated motives enrich our understanding of why the householders act as they do. The analysis has been "brought forward in the interplay between reflection and thought, between empirical material and theory" [22]. Writing is central, "and it is through the text that the interpretation is made possible" [22,23]. In the presentation, it is fruitful to give rival interpretations to strengthen the analysis and results.

1.2. Theoretical Framework for Studying Environmental Responsibility from a Qualitative Perspective

Taking as a point of departure that individuals have been given increased responsibility for the environment, which has been described as politicization of the private sphere, it becomes interesting to analyze how this is perceived and described by individuals themselves [6,24]. Here, we will realize the construction of individual environmental responsibility in relation to self-representation and self-appraisal. Unlike the concept 'ecological identity' used in several environmental psychology studies that refers to the different ways people perceive themselves in relation to the Earth [25], we are interested in the ways people represent and appraise their own practices and standpoints in relation to the environment [26,27]. In this sense, environmental responsibility is a matter of identity work through self-narration [18]. We have disregarded discussions like deep ecology, where humans are only one among several other species [28,29], since we focus more on an aspect of political identity that is constructed in relation to human responsibility for the environment. We acknowledge that this disregard could be considered as a neglect of insights from philosophy of science that focuses on dichotomy making between nature and culture.

We take environmental responsibility to be part of the way the householders present themselves, as part of their identity work. Identity has become the center of attention in social sciences. However, it is a concept which is laden with multiple meanings [30]. It can concern both individuality—what makes an individual distinct and *unique*—as well as a *quality of sameness* concerning how individuals identify with a group or a collective. Individual identities are constructed and maintained in relation to others, through socialization, where humans learn and incorporate or challenge the values and norms of society [31]. It is through interactions and socialization, influenced by structures, that people learn and recreate or challenge what is recognized as individual and collective responsibilities, legitimate civic interaction, and their own role in politics and society [32-34]. Through the concept of identity, it is possible to investigate how individual and collective behavior are connected. "There appears to be widespread agreement on the assumption that the human identity both motivates behavior and is used as a basis for interpreting, explaining, and predicting one's own and other people's behavior and actions" said Stier [30]. We focus on identity work to emphasize that we are interested in the process of self-narration. Identity work is both an individual and a group process [35]. Identity work provides individuals and groups with motivation, which influences individual and collective behavior [30]. But identity is never an accomplished product, it is dynamic [36]. In the process of identity work, it is

possible to state that gender, ethnic, religious, national, and class identities intersect, and that people have multiple identities [37]. In interactionist studies of identity, a person is viewed as situated, and involved in social relations where identities constitute and are constituted by social structures [19]. Interactionist studies stress the importance of defining others, which is a motivation for using symbolic interactionism in this article. "Culturally and historically specific normative definitions prescribe which roles and identities are appropriate in a given kind of situation" [19]. We view the ecological master frame as a culturally and historical normative context. People identify with socially constructed groups ("us") and present identities through narratives of self, and in their presentation they choose and frame information in certain ways, and attempt to maintain coherence. Interactionism can take a more situational or a more structural approach to the "source" of identity, we adhere to the latter structural approach.

"The connection between ecology and identity has been established in recent theoretical discussions on modernity and the idea of the modern self, where ecology appears as a strategy for the reorganization of self and identity in modern society", Eder concludes [38]. Individualization is part of the modernization process, and is related to ideals for a good life and self-realization. In order to realize yourself and satisfy the quest for pleasure in our current modern society, people often need money and material security [14,39,40]. The quest to be unique in this "self-realization" mostly results in consumption [41]. Individualization further means that individuals have an obligation to motivate their decisions, like a person who works for a company that is causing environmental harm [42]. As people categorize themselves in relation to others, identity becomes a reflexive project and what Giddens calls "rationalization of action" [16,36]. A policy relevant question concerns how to make people identify more with environmental lifestyles or with "the natural world" [43].

Several scholars have pointed out that emphasizing care of the environment has become something that involves broader segments of society and is no longer just something for a small group of radicals [38,44,45]. Previous sociological studies about environmentally friendly behavior tended to focus more on "lifestyles" among certain social groups rather than on identity work concerning how environmental responsibility is constructed and motivated [32,46]. The complexity of activity patterns, however, makes it difficult to connect a social group to a specific lifestyle [44]. Spaargaren [47] suggests that "lifestyle segments" could be a viable concept to deal with all the environmental effects from several different domains of daily life—for food, shelter, clothing, travel, sports, and leisure, which form a complex whole. Here we consider that identity work is a dynamic analytical concept. According to Eder [38], ecology has become a "master frame in modern public discourse". In a similar way, Harper talks about how an environmental master narrative organizes political practices [48]. A master frame contains *framing devices* [38]. Unlike Eder, we do not apply a cognitive approach. However, we find a framing device a useful concept to analyze how the interviewees describe and legitimize their own practices and responsibilities in relation to others. We will argue that the householders discuss and legitimize their everyday practices in relation to an ecological master frame. Discourse and practices are thereby intertwined. In line with Mills, the master frame can be described as consisting of heterogeneous statements (framing scale, global division, different activities and influence on others) that "constitute the parameters within which Swedes can work out their own sense of identity" [49].

A master frame can connect individual articulations with the larger social context, through a discourse, and it can help to understand patterns in the way the householders express themselves about their environmental responsibility [50]. Ecological master frames have an attributional function that gives them an "interpretive medium" through which actors assign blame for who is responsible for the problem that has to be resolved [51]. In this article, we see the master frame as a set of meaningful relations in which practice is placed and understood. A specific attitude does not *per se* lead to a specific behavior, but the master frame, and specific "framing devices", offer a way of interpreting different actions as, for example, good or bad for the environment. In order to understand how people discuss whether and why they act environmentally friendly or not, we need to focus on accepted social practices [47,52].

Social norms for interaction shape what activities individuals consider reasonable to engage in for the common environment. Individual identities are maintained and constructed in relation to others and to different symbolic activities, which are made reasonable to engage in from the individuals' point of view. First we will investigate how the interviewees position themselves in relation to the multitude of others, *i.e.*, how they represent themselves through identity work by referring to others and then how they relate to different activities that they perform.

2. Differentiate among the Multitude of Others

This article focuses on the construction of environmental responsibility. Through having responsibility for someone or something, boundaries are created between, for example, different groups or communities. These boundaries reveal how the householders view themselves in relation to others, and create a sense of collective belonging (identity) to certain groups in certain situations and activities.

Environmental responsibilities extend both upwards, with de-territorialized globalized citizenship, and downwards to the family and relationship with a partner [53,54]. Here we focus on how the householders have discussed what their collective is, in the sense of expressing responsibilities towards the multitude of others.

2.1. Framing between the Irresponsible Other and the Fanatical Other

The first thing we will discuss is how the householders construct their environmental responsibility in relation to others. Our interviews show that the majority of the householders position themselves between what we categorize as "irresponsible other" and "fanatical other" when presenting their environmental responsibility. By discussing how others behave as fanatical or irresponsible, the householders outline what they consider is *reasonable* for them to do, and where the *limit* for their individual efforts lies. In the interviews, it was obvious that this positioning is done towards various others: from family members to neighbors and other inhabitants in the municipality, to the nation, as well as other nationalities. Through the categorization of others, environmental responsibility could be organized, defined, and legitimized.

The irresponsible others were sometimes fellow municipal inhabitants, like house owners who leave all their garbage at undesignated places such as the recycling depots in order not to have to pay for waste management. There were numerous descriptions of irresponsible others who "free ride" the

system out of economic interest, who littered and left recyclable goods at other places than at the designed depots. Irresponsible others were also neighbors whose wood heaters produce irritating smoke in areas of detached houses. The irresponsible others who litter at the recycling stations were frequently mentioned by the householders, as they were believed to discourage more people from starting recycling. By describing these irresponsible people, they could simultaneously frame themselves as better, and more environmentally responsible.

At the other end of the categorization scale was a stereotypical individual committing her or his whole life to environmental matters, this person was often called fanatic, which is why we have called this category the "fanatic other". An illustration of this typical way to position oneself to others was given by Burt and Beatrice, a middle class couple in their 50s:

> Interviewer—What does the environment mean to you?
> Burt—We do think about it. We are not fanatical, like those who devote their whole life to doing the right thing every second, but we are not bad.
> Beatrice—No, not that bad.

This is an illustration of how the portrayal of the other creates a backdrop against which they represent, or frame, themselves and construct their own identity. Being fanatical or radical was described in terms of never purchasing anything produced with petrol, never travelling by car or airplane, or never buying any new clothes. Consumption or possession thereby stated how to identify themselves, and to abstain from material consumption is a symbol for the fanatic other. It is noteworthy that "never" was used to describe the fanatical person.

While the majority of householders in the case study talked about the limit to which they were willing to go for the environment, Hanna and Henning, a couple in their 30s, claimed that they were "environmental nerds". This is interpreted as if they consider themselves to be different in comparison to the perceived typical Swede due to their possessions and activities. Perhaps one could say that they believe that they *are* the fanatical others, and they explained that it was their bags made of cloth they bring to the store to avoid disposable plastic bags, that gives them away. They identified with the fanatics—different in relation to the perceived majority.

2.2. Framing by Age

When expressing motivation as to if, and why, we need to care for the environment, many of the householders referred to their children and grandchildren. This complies with a discussion as to whether individuals care about the environment for egotistical or for altruistic reasons, which is a common area for analytical concern among scholars [55]. Thereby it connects back to the central issue in sustainable development—the motivation to care for our common future. The collective that the householders expressed that they have responsibilities towards, and in a sense whom they identify with, can be made up of different groups of people, from the family to workers in other parts of the world.

When focusing on the issue of *for whom* one should care about the environment, the environmental consequences of individual activities stretch out into time and space. Householders act in different roles in different situations, and they motivate many activities with concern for children, partners, or other family members. This is one dimension of how the householders have expressed that they have

responsibilities towards family members rather than global and distant citizens through their everyday life and household responsibilities, which the notion of, for example, ecological citizenship stipulates [56].

However, another common character was parents who portrayed their children as mostly irresponsible when it came to environmental practices, which further showed how they negotiate within the household. Talking about others as irresponsible thereby had a generational aspect. In the families, children were sometimes portrayed as irresponsible when being lavish with the use of hot water and energy. The irresponsible young people were positioned against more responsible older generations, by claiming that elderly generations do not litter, for example. This is illustrated by Ärnst, a man in his late 70s, who said as follows:

> Ärnst: You would never see someone who is 70 years old throw a beer can from the car.

Similarly, Regina, a woman in her early 40s, said:

> Regina—Younger people hardly seem to consider environmental issues at all. I believe that young people of today think it is too big, and that there is nothing they can do. But we have to start somewhere and our generation has sorted the garbage for quite some time.

Apart from reasoning about the generational aspect and how young people do not care about the environment, it is curious to note that the generational positioning dealt with how acting responsibly implies to recycle and not to litter.

2.3. Framing by Global Divisions

Since many environmental problems transcend national borders and do not always appear where they are created, it is interesting to notice how the householders reason about global and local environmental responsibility, especially in relation to justice. *Agenda 21* [3] and *Our Common Future* [1] have a global justice perspective that connects the affluent north and the less affluent south. Citizenship is a form of political identity that traditionally has used the nation as a political "container". In documents on sustainable development and the theory of ecological citizenship, however, the political collective is extended beyond the national borders, and citizens are expected to consider present as well as future generations, as well as the environment. It contributes to discussions about interconnectedness, and the matter of inter-generational, intra-generational, and international aspects of sustainable development, and who are incorporated in the community [57,58]. The normative theory of ecological citizenship expects altruistic citizens to consider the environmental consequences for other global citizens.

In the categorization of environmental actions, householders positioned themselves in relation to people from different communities. For example, while the irresponsible others are found on many different levels, the fanatic and radical others mainly seem to be Swedish, and Sweden is considered as a responsible nation in relation to other countries. It was even common to describe how other nationalities influence the Swedish environment in a negative way. This is distinct from the social justice approach that is promoted in sustainable development. An elaborate illustration of this was given by Ragnar and Regina, a couple in their 40s when they said the following in relation to a question about who is responsible for environmental problems:

> Ragnar—It is pretty strange with emissions. We are paying a lot of taxes for the environment in this country. And the people on the other side of the Baltic Sea just emit whatever they feel like, and it doesn't cost them a single penny.
>
> Regina—When they drive into Sweden, when the Estonian and Russian trucks come off the ferry, and puff away into Stockholm, they don't use any environmental diesel or things like that, it is just spewed out into nowhere.

Here, they acknowledged the transnational character of environmental problems, even if the "nowhere" is a specific Swedish place. However, Ragnar and Regina did not reflect on their own environmental influence when they drove off the ferry and puffed away into Riga, for example. In the householders' expressions, Sweden is portrayed as an international leader, which, on the whole, is doing very well in environmental terms—complying to the vision of a green peoples' home. Thereby they are members of an environmentally responsible community, and the political community towards whom they have a responsibility is the nation state since they pay taxes. Just like many other householders in the study, it is during their vacations abroad that they have noticed that other countries have not "come as far" in terms of environmental practices and policies, as Sweden.

Nevertheless, many householders focused spontaneously on the poor situation for workers in China when asked about whether there are any products that they do not purchase due to how they are produced. Some questioned whether it was morally defensible to purchase products stating, "Made in China". Thereby they oriented their attention to the global level and social justice.

The transnational character of environmental problems connects the local and global. Sweden is considered as clean and good in relation to other countries which the householders have experienced, especially when on vacation. It is interesting to note that they have paid attention to "visible" problems like littering. This is while they symptomatically do not consider their own influence in other countries while on vacation there. In this sense, it is portrayed to be worse to throw litter on the streets than travelling by plane to distant locations. It is a question of what is seen as possible to do something about.

Sometimes, acting environmentally friendly was portrayed as an altruist standpoint, rather than a result of being personally affected by environmental risks and problems. Nevertheless, hardly any of the householders commented on their role as what Dobson [56] calls post-cosmopolitan citizens. Apart from the workers situation, there were only a few explicit examples that connected to global justice and the environment. The global north was portrayed as using and consuming an unfair share of the natural resources, but no one explicitly stated that we create more environmental problems. It is a moral issue they know of and relate themselves to. But they do not necessarily act or rearrange their everyday life in line with their awareness. Here we recognize that by being able to talk about the situation for workers in China, they portray themselves as knowledgeable. Being able to express oneself about problems, *i.e.*, to be "environmentally aware", can in this sense be seen as a part of how to be environmentally responsible.

2.4. Packages of Environmental Activities

Among a myriad of environmental friendly alternatives that the householders could pursue, they focused on describing how they perform activities at a detailed level, which we have come to term

"symbolic activities". What they have explained as reasonable—and in a sense normal—to do, is to recycle, purchase free range eggs, and drive "ecologically". These examples can be compared to "lifestyle segments" that Spaargaren talks about [47]. Some of these activities are connected to everyday practices and thereby become an integrated part of their everyday life. It is important to investigate how the general goals that most of the householders agree on and express; of decreasing energy use, using public transportation or eating more ecological products, are transformed into concrete and specified practices. Many of these activities have technological solutions that are not very expensive. Others are things that help the householder save money, like saving energy. Saving energy was a general and abstract vision that the householders expressed that they wanted to contribute to. In their descriptions of what they are willing or not willing to do for the environment, the householders constantly referred to certain activities in their construction of environmental responsibility. In this section we have identified three different ways of relating to activities that are shaping identities: what is "reasonable", what we call "symbolic" activities, and how to influence others to act more environmentally friendly. We will discuss these three points in more detail below.

2.4.1. Reasonable Activities

There is a limit to what is considered "reasonable" when it comes to acting environmentally friendly. Adapting the whole lifestyle for the environment was considered as radical and unrealistic. What was reasonable was partly communicated through the expressions about the perceived fanatic other. This was mostly done by giving examples of environmentally related activities that they know of, but finishing off by saying "there is a limit to what I am willing to do". Thereby they pointed to the activities they actually considered that they could carry out among the ones they know of. Many of the participants in the study stated that they were "environmentally conscious", but that there is a limit and "one doesn't have to exaggerate". This means that everyone does not need to do everything they know is environmentally friendly. It also concerns the norm of individual liberty: the right to choose among alternatives. Environmental responsibility is permeated by moral considerations and especially bad conscience, which turned up constantly. A common way to recognize the moral implications was when they said that they were "cheating" on environmentally friendly activities that they knew about. However, observing others who did not carry out these activities relieved them of their bad conscience. Not doing reasonable activities is seen as ignorant, or the opposite of being "conscious".

Going so far as having compost was a limit spontaneously expressed by several householders. One woman described how her household had watched a TV program where a woman who led a very environmentally friendly life was portrayed. She commented that the way of living that was represented concerning meticulous composting, recycling, and home production must be very time consuming. It gave her "a bad conscience", but at the same time she thought that it would take too much time and commitment to be reasonable for her.

A common way to deal with the moral implications prompted Evald, a man in his 40s living with his wife and son in a three room apartment, to talk as follows:

Interviewer: So it's in the basement that you are storing the compostable material for collection?
Evald: Yes and well, it is not really compost, but rather a paper bag where you throw it. But no one does.
Interviewer: Is that something you have talked about with each other in the house, or how do you know?
Evald: No, not really, I have noticed that there are never any bags in it [*i.e.*, the receptacle for compostable material]. But … we got special bags to use, but we never got around to doing that. So this is something we are cheating on.
Interviewer: It feels like cheating?
Evald: A bit.
Interviewer: Why does it feel like cheating?
Evald: Well, one could possibly do it. But then it is a question of whether there is space in the cupboards, and there is plainly not enough room. And then, if you gather everything … one has to draw the line somewhere.

This excerpt relates to various interesting aspects: how Evald has been observing others and the interaction; how the fact that others do not act relieves him of the responsibility to act; the cheating, which has a moral dimension; and, of course, what is deemed reasonable and where he "draws the line."

2.4.2. Choosing the "Symbolic" Activities

Certain activities seem to have a stigmatizing effect in the sense that an individual will be questioned if the specific and "reasonable" activity is not carried out. Since these activities are specific, and not part of a whole environmental lifestyle, we call it a symbolic activity. These specific and symbolic activities were often questioned in relation to what was perceived to have the biggest environmental impact, or whether it was efficient. This perspective is illustrated in the following interview excerpt from Karl and his partner Kristel, when the interviewer asked what obstacles they considered existed to making changes towards a more sustainable everyday life pattern:

Karl—My friends—city-people many of them—always drank carbonated water, but now all of a sudden it has to be tap water, and so you focus on this thing with carbonated water… but there are a billion other things.
Kristel—They travel so much […] It is weird to focus on this one thing.
Karl—It gets so twisted—they yell at me because I happen to use carbonated water.
Kristel—…but we ride our bikes to work every day, which has to be better than driving a car.

Measuring and comparing the environmental efficiency of singular everyday activities in relation to others, was common, as illustrated above. It is possible to state that the symbolic, individual activities—like choosing tap water instead of bottled carbonated water—are disentangled from a larger context, where what has the largest environmental impact is considered, as in riding bikes instead of driving a car. Evaluating others' choice of "symbolic" activities, and the legitimacy of being criticized as Kristel and Karl expressed, is part of the environmental identity work and the interaction between individuals.

The prevalent expression among the householders having a bad conscience, and further criticizing each other for the choice of environmental activities, are considered here to be an illustration of the conviction that one *should* take responsibility for the environmental consequences of individual actions, but there are constraints to changing all the practices to more sustainable alternatives. However, to act environmentally friendly is described by many of the householders as something relative. There are always those who are worse or better. By comparing one's own behavior with other individuals as well as companies, or even nations, their own behavior can be explained and legitimized. The following quotation by Marcus, a man in his 20s, illustrates this way of reasoning when asked what possibilities he considers and what he could do:

Marcus—Comparing an individual human being to the industry and all that…or all those people who drive cars—if you don't drive a car you feel like you're already a step ahead.

From this point of view, it is possible to choose certain actions and routines and, thereby, also disregard others. A positive self-image is created in relation to others.

A few of the participants in the study were vegetarians, which means that their food consumption requires less agrarian land in comparison to meat consumption, and care for animals. Hanna and Henning, however, described how they went from being vegans to vegetarians since it was very strenuous to be a vegan, a lot to keep in mind, and because Hanna felt like they placed themselves "outside of society". This is an example of how consumption habits are part of wider social contexts and interaction with others. They experienced that society is not constructed for vegans, which made their everyday life as vegans more complex. The structures do not enable this activity pattern. By becoming vegetarians they found a new group of people to identify with.

One of the most important roles identified by the householders when they described their environmental activities was as a consumer, *i.e.*, what they decided to purchase or not. Douglas and Isherwood have commented that it is curious that we do not know *why* people want goods [59]. We agree that consumption is not only dependent on the price of products. People consume based on past experiences, advertizements, word of mouth, consumer education, cultural awareness and identity communication and often a desire to be cool [41,60]. We take consumption to be strongly connected to modernity, where modernity is categorized as a permanent revolution by which humans have learned to make every effort to voluntarily strive for constant change, and to be up-to-date on the latest fashion or new technologies [61]. The levels of consumption, though, have implications for the environment.

Even Henning and Hanna, who described themselves as "environmental nerds" emphasized that the "consumer culture" is a problem against acting more environmentally friendly.

Henning—It is a lot easier to think the thought than to actually carry it out.
Hanna—The most difficult is stuff like books and records and so on.
Henning—Because they are so nice to have.

A way to deal with the negative aspects of consumer culture was to emphasize that they purchased organic or fair-trade products. The majority of the interviewed householders did not practice reduced consumption, even if some mentioned it as something good, but rather they choose better alternatives by purchasing ecologically labeled products through *buycott* [62]. Buycott is not about abstaining, but choosing a better alternative from a similar product group. The examples that they gave concerned

particular and reasonable activities that they have decided to perform among others that they know of. The general idea among these householders was that they have a responsibility as global citizens through their role as consumers, with a possibility to influence the workers' situations in poor countries, for example.

2.4.3. Influencing Others

This far we have focused on how the interviewed householders positioned themselves against others in their construction of environmental responsibility. Through the semi-structured interviews, another aspect of the social interaction became evident, and that was the social norms for trying to influence others to take environmental responsibility. This can be done in a direct way, or an indirect way. The direct way of influencing others' irresponsible practices was perceived as important, but offensive, and thus something the interviewees refrained from doing since it was not considered as legitimate. The indirect way they described was to act as a form of a role model, instead of telling people face-to-face what to do. These descriptions of what the householders could potentially do for the environment was related to what we conceptualize as an ecological master frame. For example, many of the householders were concerned about irresponsible car drivers who let the engine idle. This raised more concern than the *amount* of trips by car. Even if many of the householders stated that it is important to try to influence others to act more environmentally friendly, the social norms for interaction were sometimes believed to stop them from doing so. Fredrik, a man in his 70s, expressed this in an illustrative way after the interviewer had asked him and his wife what environmental activities they could do:

> Fredrik—If I told others to stop running their engine after the allowed minute here in Gothenburg, they would call me a policeman, and I would not want that, so I simply don't tell them.

The norms for when and how it is possible to persuade others to act more environmentally friendly, concern what can be termed interactional situations that are influenced by cultural structures. If Fredrik would tell the irresponsible car drivers, he would run the risk of being considered as a fanatical environmental activist. However, he would be backed by a municipal policy. It is through this daily interaction that the legitimate boundaries for civic activities like environmental responsibility are created and recreated. Some of the interviewed persons explained that they get mad when someone does not turn the light off when they leave a room, or wash dishes under running water, and that they think it is important to take up the conflict with family members or others to make them more environmentally conscious. These are all illustrations indicating how responsibility and legitimate interaction are interrelated, and how householders can justify their influence on others in their everyday interaction in many different places and situations. We argue that it is through the descriptions of these interactions that they stress what is considered as important to attend to. The focus on irresponsible others can be interpreted as a way to portray themselves as more responsible, and to present themselves in a positive manner.

It is also interesting to notice how the Swedish householders tried to influence the situation for others in more distant places. When arguing on behalf of purchasing fair trade labeled products, for example, and the working conditions of banana and coffee producers, the householders directed their

attention to global justice and workers rights and tried to influence this by making the "right" choice in the store. Several women in the study circled back to their family though, and said their purchases of ecological products were motivated as they are healthier for their own children. Another central tenet was to connect care for the environment with care for animals, and not necessarily for other global citizens.

3. Conclusions

Drawing conclusions from the material, it became evident that Swedish householders position themselves in relation to a multitude of others in their self-representation and self-appraisal concerning environmental responsibility. Normality and responsibility for the environment are created by individuals positioning themselves in relation to others. In their descriptions, the householders have related to norms for social interaction with others when they have valued their own ideas and their own actions in relation to an ecological master frame.

Most householders in this study expressed that they, as individual householders, are responsible for causing environmental problems of today, and they gave various examples of how to contribute to solving them. Focusing on how other people neglect to act responsibly, in the sense of participating in solving the environmental problems, was common. We interpret that to mean talking about others' responsibility may be considered as a way to relieve themselves of liability, at the same time as it contributes to their own construction of environmental responsibility.

If people believe that they do enough, or that they act responsibly for example by recycling, they do not need to incorporate additional environmentally friendly activities in their everyday life—like reducing their levels of consumption. Naturally, the householders act from what is seen as reasonable in relation to other (personal) goals and demands in everyday life. However, this study shows that another important factor is their view of themselves—their identity and self-representation. Some of the activities that the householders considered as environmental actions were strongly routinized and a part of everyday life. Others were portrayed as more stigmatizing, like littering, or not recycling. At the same time, there are conflicting identities and responsibilities, like being a good ecological citizen and a good parent.

A conclusion from this study is that it is difficult to categorize the householders in specific "lifestyles" categories, since the householders are doing "a little bit of everything", and risk awareness and knowledge do not always motivate environmentally friendly behavior. Although, there are ecological discourses that offer devices for how to interpret, motivate and represent others practices, as well as their own. By presenting themselves as environmentally conscious through their everyday practices, mainly by recycling, the householders can frame themselves in a positive manner between the irresponsible and the fanatic others. The representational devices thus enable categorizing people into different groups due to what they do.

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