"What are we doing with our lives?" Work and normativity in day-to-day conversational accounts

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Abstract: *Daily conversations reveal the normative issues of societies through their topics, their modalities and their reception by individuals. Work has proved to be one of the essential normative realms in the conversational accounts we studied. Individuals singularize themselves through work and in conversations about work: it becomes an experience of status, but also an identifying, even an aesthetic one, insofar as it resonates more broadly with a way of life and experience of reality.*

Keywords: *Conversations; Workplace; Socialization; Normativity*

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1. Introduction

Daily conversations reveal the normative issues of societies through their topics – "provinces of significance" (Schütz, 1945) of daily life – and their modalities (i.e. "ethnomethods") (Garfinkel, 1967).[1] Daily conversations point to a precise and limited number of subjects and modalities determined by a set of social norms structuring exchanges, but also to more general and prescribed forms of sociality and individuality. Day-to-day interactions are indeed essential vectors of daily socialization (Berger and Luckman, 1986). Berger and Luckmann used the term "plausibility structure" to refer to the daily intersubjective world that we take for granted and use to suspend our doubt. Conversations are an integral part of these structures of plausibility, maintaining our relationship to the world, but also our very definition of reality. This concept of plausibility structure sheds light on the strong normative content of daily conversations, insofar as it delineates what is possible and impossible for individuals and situations.

As part of our research on conversational normativity (Labrecque-Lebeau, 2016), we collected daily conversational accounts from a variety of participants. We considered the following analytical categories: conversational content (which includes topics and modalities) as well as the individual reception of conversations. A specific type of research material, conversational accounts, was used. Participants were asked to pay attention to all their conversations over a specific period of time, and then describe them in a debriefing interview aiming to reconstruct the settings, situations and experiences of these conversations.

While the conversations reported by the participants implied several thematic realms (such as relation to oneself, relation to others, time and space, culture and society and leisure), the realm of work played an important role. Indeed, among these accounts there were a significant number of conversations that took place *in* the workplace, but which were also *about* paid work. Work is indeed an important realm of daily conversations and one of the main areas of conversations we have identified: indeed, people talk *about* work and people talk *at* work. Thus, our findings directly point to the social norms surrounding work, its social representations (Jodelet, 2003), but also its meaning in individual lives today. Therefore, it seems relevant for us to look at our data that specifically

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relates to the topic of work and analyze it as a significant subset of the broader material collected to explore conversational normativity.

We will start with a short theoretical problematization of conversations, work and socialization, and go on to detail our methodology and its specificities. We will then be able to present our results according to five main themes that emerged from the emergent qualitative analysis of the accounts of conversations at work and about work: 1) catching up; 2) work as self-revelation, self-definition and investment of self; 3) work as a set of problems in the daily lives of individuals; 4) work as a set of obligatory, utilitarian and daily relationships with colleagues; and finally, 5) work as a set of performative conversations (Austin, 1970) that transform exchanges into actions. This will be followed by a discussion of the results and we will conclude with the possible implications of studying norms at work and about work using conversational debriefing methodology.

2. Conversations, work and secondary socialization

2.1 Normativity, interactionism and socialization

Taking the analysis of the role of conversation in maintaining intersubjective reality as a backdrop and following the analyses of phenomenological sociology (Berger and Luckman, 1986; Schütz, 1945), we use the multiple contributions of interactionism (Goffman, 1973) and more recent sources on the sociology of the individual that have examined the major contemporary injunctions addressed to individual lives (Ehrenberg, 2010; Martuccelli, 2010; Otero, 2003).

Normativity refers both to the prescriptive nature of certain implicit social rules that guide the action of individuals, and the constant activity of transformation and circulation of these social norms. Normative refers to an ideal, a set of constraints and references. Conversational normativity thus refers to a set of constraints and possibilities of action for individuals within exchanges. This conversational normativity brings to light certain favorite subjects but also certain ways of conversing (Labrecque-Lebeau, 2015).

Daily conversations accompany and renew socialization at all times. Indeed, it is through conversation and interaction that individuals "maintain reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1986), but also enter into intersubjective contact with others. Through all the normative movements specific to interactions, references are exchanged and constraints activated. By analyzing specific interactive situations, we aimed to observe how major normative references materialize and come to life in everyday life and in ordinary interactions between individuals. Indeed, the contemporary sociology of the individual has highlighted the rise of social norms

such as performance, autonomy, responsibility and adaptation (Ehrenberg, 2010; Martuccelli, 2004, 2010; Otero, 2003). This is what makes the study of workplace conversations so revealing, both of social norms in the workplace, and social norms surrounding the realm of paid work in contemporary individual lives.

2.2 Sociology and work

Contemporary sociology approaches work from the perspective of a great tension between the injunction to personal fulfilment which is intimately linked to professional activity (Ehrenberg, 1991) and the world of domination it constitutes and the suffering it generates (Dubet, 2006; De Gaulejac, 2011). Indeed, if work occupies a central place in terms of schedule, status and identity, it also causes increasingly acute problems in terms of individual psychological "fatigue", which materializes in various forms ("stress", exhaustion, harassment, depression, even suicide: Dejours 2000; Loriol, 2000). It is still a social realm solicited by individuals in different ways to define, identify and realize oneself.

Our secondary socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1986) is increasingly affected by the realm of paid work, which is subject to a massive "emotional reinvestment" (Otero, 2012: 15). The idea of secondary socialization, notably conceptualized by Berger and Luckmann (1986), refers to the process subsequent to primary socialization and which is a light version of it. The social division of labour spawns a secondary socialization which, according to the authors, is intended to perfect the individual's condition as a "member of society". Moreover, some authors assume that socialization is constant and lifelong (Becker, 1968). Conversations and their contents are examples of this continuous dimension of secondary socialization in everyday life. As far as conversational normativity is concerned, we will see that this socialization involves both constraints and references to action, which does create a certain ambivalence, particularly with regard to the world of work. The world of work has proved to be an essential normative realm in the conversational accounts we studied, amongst others such as time and space, self, others, leisure, culture, and society.

3. The method of conversational accounts

3.1 Data collection

Capturing spontaneous exchanges in so-called "natural" settings is the preferred methodology of traditional conversation analysis. This approach, followed by a literal transcription, produces material that shows turn-taking, linguistic

operations and "apparent" verbal exchanges. In contrast, the methodological tool we work with is conversational debriefing, inspired and adapted from the work of Dominique Boullier (2003). It consists of asking participants to tell the researcher the main topics of all their daily face-to-face conversations, based on memos taken during a pre-established collection period (in our case a week). During the meeting with the researcher, the participants use their notes to recount all the conversations in which they took part (excluding "mediated" conversations: telephone, text messages, e-mail, etc.). These interviews have been called "debriefing", in the sense that they differ in several respects from traditional qualitative interviews and consist of direct commentary on a material, the exchange they participated in. These data are thus "conversational accounts" and not conversations, since they are necessarily made up of fuzzy, differential applications of instructions, interpretations and selection by the participant, as well as experiential objectivation.

This method differs from conversational analysis in that there is no literal transcription of the exchanges; there is therefore no need to establish truth or objectivity, in that it is not what "really" happened that interests us, but what remains of it for the participant. This methodology proved to be relevant to our study for several reasons. First, it focuses on recent experiences of socialization in the lives of participants and captures what has left a trace in normative, cognitive (Dubois, 2003) and emotional (Lahire, 2001) terms. Second, the interview is not structured around the researcher's thematic program as in the case of a qualitative interview; instead it allows us to open up to "what is being said" in general without pre-formatting it. Finally, the method of conversational debriefing makes visible internal conversations (Archer, 2003) that accompany interactions and partly constitute their "active" reception. It also makes it possible to capture different levels of the account (the conversation with the researcher; the conversation that is reported; the conversation that is reported in the reported conversation, as well as the temporality of the reception (upstream of the exchange, in act and presence, and downstream of the exchange).

Twenty individuals from the Greater Montreal area (eleven women and nine men) reported their conversations with the help of memos for one week (seven days) and then met with the researcher to share their account of those conversations. Data was collected from the fall of 2011 to the spring of 2012, with a second phase in the fall of 2015. We targeted the so-called "active" Montreal population (active on the labour market) by using snowball recruitment, thus opening up participation to a wide range of individuals. We were interested in the general experience of conversation for a population considered "conformist"

in the Mertonian sense (Merton, 1965). It should be mentioned that for Merton, conformity is one type of individual adaptation, which is overall conformity with the aims and means of a given society. The analysis therefore focuses on conversational normative activity as embodied in a relatively small number of particular cases but seeks to illustrate the transversal nature of experiences. Our corpus, then, consisted of typical cases that had a connection with our research problem (Pires, 1997). Our aim was to create a dialogue between our research topic (conversational normativity) and our sample (twenty individuals in the labour force with various sociodemographic characteristics), without imposing a numerical or cultural generalization based on sub-population (e.g. Canadians).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Fictitious name	Gender	Age	Civil status	Highest degree obtained	Profession
Manuel	M	30	Single	Professional master's degree	Video game designer
Amélie	F	28	Single	Undergraduate degree	Project coordinator
Benoît	M	33	In a relationship	Undergraduate degree	Computer programmer
Marie-Josée	F	25	In a relationship	Undergraduate degree	Sales representative
Laurence	F	32	Married	Professional master's degree	Journalist and flight attendant
Mélissa	F	30	In a relationship	Master's degree	Engineer
Alain	M	32	Single	College degree	Architectural Technician
Caroline	F	32	Married	Undergraduate degree	Probation Officer
Annie	F	30	In a relationship	Master's degree	Criminologist
Andrée	F	67	Married	Master's degree	Retired (social worker)
Virginie	F	35	In a relationship	Undergraduate degree	Medical Delegate
Nicole	F	49	In a relationship	High school diploma	Ticketing manager
Michelle	F	55	Married	Master's degree	Health Promotion Consultant
Agnès	F	41	Single	PhD	Researcher
Luc	M	32	In a relationship	Master's degree	Teacher
Philippe	M	39	Single	Master's degree	Musician
Louis	M	65	Married	High school diploma	Sales Representative
Denis	M	40	In a relationship	Undergraduate degree	Biologist
Julien	M	33	In a relationship	Undergraduate degree	Financial analyst
Jean	M	34	In a relationship	Medical degree	Doctor

The sample is therefore intended not to be statistically representative, but to illustrate a number of undifferentiated cases to compare and contrast (Pires, 1997). Participants are between 25 and 67 years of age, with an average age of 38 years; the average highest level of education is higher than the Quebec average, and more than half of the participants have at least an undergraduate degree. This predominance is partly due to snowball recruitment and is a limitation of our study. Our attempts to recruit participants from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds came across several obstacles. Many of the individuals we sought to recruit did not think they had "conversations"; indeed, our representations of ourselves as inclined or not inclined to "communicate" largely

influence the decision to participate in this type of study or not, and even our ability to consider the possibility of participating (Zakahi, 1989).

These data are thus "conversational accounts" and not conversations (Boullier, 2003), in that they are necessarily made of fuzzy, differential applications of instructions, prior interpretations by the respondents, and the choices they make. Obviously, participants only tell and report what they want to share, and to this end they necessarily filter information about the conversations they have had in order to protect their personal space. The effects of social desirability may also affect our findings according tobecause of participants' expectations of what a conversation "should be".

3.2 Data analysis

The conversational accounts were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed using emerging categories (Glaser et al., 1967; Paillé et al., 2012) and analyzed in the light of our research questions, through qualitative content analysis using NVivo software. Content analysis seeks to establish meaningful sets within the material (Paillé and Muchielli, 2012: 75).[2] The approach focused on the subjects and modalities of conversations present in the material, what the participants used, what works for them, and hence their normativity. In order to identify the various conversational elements selected by participants, we started with the vernacular meanings themselves. Thus, when participants used the words "tell" or "share", we constructed these verbs first as categories, in line with our perspective that individuals are the main experts on their realities, their daily lives and their intentions. We then made a deeper analysis to compare and contrast the participants' words with concepts stemming from theory and sociological analysis.

After some read-throughs (Paillé et al., 2012) of our research material, we defined three questions to structure our analysis: 1) what are the participants talking about?; 2) how do participants talk about it?; and, finally 3) how do participants receive these conversations[3]? The answers to these questions constituted our first units of meaning[4] (axes). In response to the first question (what are the participants talking about?), eight themes emerged: the immediate environment, everyday life, relation to oneself, relation to others, work, leisure, society, and culture and the media. Our three axes are not mutually exclusive

2 For more methodology specifications, see Labrecque-Lebeau, 2015.

3 This third axis of analysis used reception theory to analyze the reception of conversations by participants. See Labrecque-Lebeau, 2016.

4 The whole research looked at all of these units of analysis; in this article we present our analyses of the work-related portion of the conversational accounts.

insofar as we allowed ourselves to cross analytical parameters. However, for each of these three axes, the sub-categories are mutually exclusive. We will focus here on results referring to conversations in the workplace and/or about work, although these results may contain elements of the other two axes (modalities and reception).

Table 2. Codification tree

Axes	Sub-categories	
Conversational subjects	Environment	
	Everyday life	
	Relation to self	
	Relation to others	
	Work	
	Leisure	
	Society	
	Culture	
Conversational modalities	Sharing	
	Telling	
	Explaining	
	Positioning	
	Affect	
	Remembering	
	Acting	
	Orienting	
Conversational reception	Upstream reception	
	In act and presence	Immediate reception
		Collective reception
		Internal conversation
		Omissions
	Downstream reception	

4. Results

Five main themes inform us about the representations of work in the conversational accounts: 1) catching up, about work and/or in the workplace; 2) work as self-revelation, self-definition and investment of self; 3) work as a set of problems in the daily lives of individuals; 4) work as a set of daily, obligatory and utilitarian interactions with colleagues; and finally 5) work as a set of performative conversations (Austin, 1970) that transform exchanges into actions.

4.1 Catching up, about work and/or in the workplace

As paid work is now a central part of our lives, catching up with one another often implies catching up on news about work. Discussions that focus on work, whether in or outside the workplace, often start with the intention of catching up. At work, participants inquire about how things are going, often in terms of workload and workflow.

- When I walk around the room, I always go to see other colleagues, I talk to them all, so I ask them: "How are you? Are you having a good week? "Then: "What are you working on right now?" You don't necessarily talk about work, but you talk about work more like, as observers. Like, "Oh, are you all right, do you have a lot of work to do?", "Yes, lot of work, and my colleague is on holiday", "Ah well I don't miss him!" (laughs) (Alain)

- I also asked about how his work week went, last week, when I was not there. She told me that she had been overwhelmed and had had a lot to do. (Annie)

People catching up on news about work in the workplace but also outside of it, mainly with family and friends. As work occupies most individuals' active time, it is with this perspective that they inquire about one another once the day is over or when they want an "update". Whether these conversations take place on or off the job, transitions between positions present opportunities to ask questions and give updates, prospectively (what will come), retrospectively (what has just happened) or hypothetically (what opportunities may arise).

- I told all my colleagues that day that I was leaving, so they asked me about the new job, the interview, how it went, the setting, and the people I will work with. (Mélissa)

- We also talked about job opportunities: "Maybe we could change jobs at some point, do something else, go into construction, work more with our hands." (Alain)

The participants themselves acknowledge the centrality of work in their conversations and, by extension, in their lives. Participants find that they talk a lot or exclusively about work. Indeed, work is an unavoidable topic, individuals "obviously" talk about work and they talk about it "a lot".

- We talked about work. Obviously. A lot. (Agnès)

- I had a conversation with another co-worker, but at home. [...] We talked about work (laughs). Obviously. Actually, we talked about people at work. (Alain)

Catching up on news about work is "obvious". Thus, it is a constitutive element of the "maintenance of reality" as Berger and Luckman (1986) would say: that is, it is a way of confirming correspondence between the subjective reality of individuals and the objective reality surrounding them. People speak "through" their experience to preserve social reality. The realm of work and its changes are stable and common references and give us access to the daily life of others.

4.2 Self-realization

In the accounts, work is presented as a constituent element of self-revelation, self-definition and investment of self.

Self-revelation, first, is a result of choosing the best work to highlight one's personal characteristics and individuality. Work is a precise revealer of certain traits of personality and singularity (Martuccelli, 2010). Individuals' jobs must suit who they are, must be as unique as they are. People try to make their work reflect who they are as much as possible, even if it means relying on a personality test or assessing how much their work reflects their values.

- She told me that she had taken a personality test, she told me her results, and mentioned that she was a little disappointed. She said: "I'm not an artist. I was really disappointed to hear that." (Amélie)

- He said: "You should change jobs because you work for a magazine that sells beauty products, promotes beauty products, but you don't really use those products yourself." (Marie-Josée)

Self-definition, secondly, is how work redefines the individual in terms of identity. In conversational accounts, work largely defines who people are today. Hence the question "What are you going to do with your life?". Self-definition often presents a person's main occupation or employment in terms of a coherent long-term project. However, this relationship can sometimes be questioned by individuals.

- We talked about a nephew who is in Africa right now, and who is coming back, but we really don't know what he is going to do with his life when he will come back. He had been gone for about a year, he wasn't doing much here, we don't really know what he did in Africa, and what he is going to do when he will come back. (Nicole)

- We were talking about careers and thinking, "What the hell are we doing? What are we doing with our lives?" It's funny because it's a question that we should have had at thirty years old and all the people around me are

forty or fifty years old, and we're still stuck with the same problem, which is: what are we doing with our lives? (Agnès)

+ We were saying that what we do is not what we "are". (Laurence)

Investment of self is the third sub-theme that emerged. The theme of personal satisfaction at work is a central conversational reference point: work is expected to bring fulfilment and value. This investment of self represents the sum of energy, time, emotions (in short, the very material of "self"), devoted to work. In particular, it is an important parameter to consider when it comes to projecting oneself in relation to a specific job.

+ We also talk about my work in computer science [...]. She asked me if I like it. I told her that it was good, but I would prefer to make a living translating and writing. (Benoît)

+ If someone tells me they want to be a marketing manager, I find it weird. I think it's sad (laughs). "What's the point?" I said, "It's not like you have a sense of accomplishment doing that!" (Amélie)

As far as job satisfaction and self-definition through work are concerned, domestic work is largely unrecognized and is presented as provoking domestic conflict. In relation to the paid labour market, domestic work remains a devalued realm. In this excerpt, the participant mentions that household tasks are not "her work" or "what she likes to do", contrasting with the sphere of domestic obligation and responsibility.

+ My spouse works, and I am on maternity leave. So I do more housework than he does, but that doesn't mean I like it, doing housework, even if I have more time than he does, it's not my dream, spending my time emptying a dishwasher, emptying a washing machine. It's always the same argument, he says: "You have time, I don't", and then I say: "Yes, but it's not my job, it doesn't bother me to do more, but I don't want to do everything, I hate it." (Laurence)

In assessing their work and how well it corresponds to who they are, participants refer quite conventionally to objective working conditions. Job stability remains a more traditional aspect which often raises questions among participants, but they also mention the qualitative and experiential elements of work (schedule, environment, dress code, feeling of freedom, recognition, relation to hierarchy). There are some general expectations about the realm of work and its importance.

+ We talked about life as a self-employed worker, beginnings are complicated, but it's really fun, you can work in your pajamas. (Amélie)

> ✦ She was telling me about her distress, working for people who don't give a damn about her job, and she's basically paid to do nothing. (Agnès)

Participants refer to their own work ethic, which is based on personal values (for example, not counting their hours).

> ✦ I had a hard time with my boss. Of course, it was bound to happen. [...] She made it clear to me that I had to ask for permission if I was absent. It puts me in an unbelievable state, because I work forty-five hours a week, and I never declared those hours, considering that it's my job, that's the way it is. I love my work. Except that if she starts playing with that, I'm going to have to count my hours. But I don't want that accounting logic. (Agnès)

Work involves skills and competencies mentioned by participants: for example, delegating tasks, knowing oneself, being organized in one's workspace, preparing evaluations or asking the right questions during the hiring process. These skills all have to be learned for a successful professional life.

> ✦ We were talking about personnel management, our difficulty in delegating work, we found it hard [...] it's about loss of control, when you actually move up in the hierarchy, you have to delegate, (…) and I have trouble delegating, because I'm not used to that, and because I want to keep control over my thinking. (Agnès)

As we can see, conversational normativity regards achievement at work to be a central issue, whether it is self-revelation, self-definition or investment of self. The injunction to find fulfilment in the workplace and through what we do at work is a major element of conversational normativity. There is indeed a strong call for achievement, which defines individuals by allowing them to "realize themselves" – a call that correlates with the critical role of work on the three levels that we have identified. It can be assumed that these three parameters of self-realization at work can be handled differently depending on individuals and their adherence to normativity.

4.3 Work is about problems

Individuals encounter problems at work. Work is a world they must protect themselves from and for which they must be prepared. A vocabulary of adversity is present in this type of conversation: there is a lot of talk about work in terms of strategies. Sometimes people need to consult their family and friends, to ask them for advice on how to solve problems at work. Participants seek advice from those around them about different aspects of work (difficult relationships with colleagues, self-presentation, evaluation mechanisms, salary, resignation, etc.).

Seeking advice is self-evident in conversational expectations: participants are frustrated if the person opposite them does not provide advice or if, conversely, a relative has not consulted them about their work.

- The other negative point is that I have a very controlling immediate superior. And I can't stand it. We talked about the communication strategy with my boss. I was a little frustrated because I expected him to take my side (laughs), which he didn't do, so I was actually looking for advice. (Agnès)

- We discussed team problems, dynamics, with a colleague, and I told him some details of a fight she had had with me; I had suffered very, very much from it. I talked at length with my husband about my situation with this colleague, and then he gave me some advice, some strategies to avoid getting backstabbed. (Michelle)

People experience intense days, which are demanding on many levels (long days, amount and intensity of work, "stress"). Moreover, work is physically imprinted in their bodies in the form of various illnesses, which sometimes lead to a career shift, and sometimes lead to more important health problems. A clear link is made between bad work experiences and their physical consequences.

- The girl in question is in transition. I asked her about it. In fact, she has physical problems, which is why she is reorienting her career. (Annie)

- He has a lot of worries, health concerns, professional concerns, some of which are probably related to each other (laughs). (Agnès)

Work and work problems mainly revolve around relationships with colleagues and health concerns. The effects of these two types of day-to-day problems extend well beyond work life and are described with harsh vocabulary ("backstabbing", "strategy", "control", "suffering", physical afflictions). Individuals face various obstacles that require them to develop action strategies and protective mechanisms. Consequently, work is a relatively hostile world which individuals must protect themselves from, but which they must also embrace in the interest of personal fulfilment.

4.4 Work is about colleagues

Working is about colleagues, insofar as it is about managing all the forms of sociability that emerge around professional tasks. Discussions at work occur in specific places, at specific times (near the water dispenser or coffee machine, in the elevator, in the hallway or at reception). Lunch time is still the best time for

exchange with colleagues. These various low-tension places and conversations constitute the ordinary activity of the workplace, its essence, its daily life.

  * Elections... we talk about it at the office of course, at lunchtime, or even just by the coffee machine, it's a topic that comes up all the time. (Nicole)

  * That day, I didn't break for lunch, so there was no discussion. At the office. (Caroline)

Work is described as the organization of a world of sociability (Christmas parties, birthday parties, love stories between colleagues, meals to celebrate events such as the end of a job). However, relations between colleagues are characterised by their obligatory and constrained nature, which is an unstable basis for interaction.

  * She was really nervous about her Christmas party. This is the first time in fifteen years that she's going. She said: "I want to look chic..." I said: "I think you will!" (Amélie)

  * At work, in the afternoon, we asked everyone for their birthdays, because it was a colleague's birthday earlier. (Mélissa)

  * Another colleague told me about a love story she had had with another person where I work. (Annie)

Work is an environment where you find yourself "having to" talk and interact. It imposes certain contexts in which interaction must fill the space, whether at the office, on the way to the office or during cigarette breaks. These interactions can also be part of the work itself, such as in customer service.

  * I didn't feel like talking to anyone, so I pretty much locked myself in my office. (Michelle)

  * We were driving with my boss, so I was a little uncomfortable, because I didn't know what to say to her, [...] I thought it was going to be a long road, because I wouldn't know what to talk about with her. (Amélie)

  * I'm a flight attendant, and it's like a kind of confessional, people will say just about anything, and then you never see them again. (Laurence)

There are crossovers between conversations about work and more personal topics of discussion. Discussions at work require a certain degree of personal investment to colour utilitarian relationships: one can imagine that conversational normativity at work must involve other realms in order to enhance relationships and ambiences.

  * All day long I was in a meeting with two co-workers, so what we had to do mainly was, at the work level, to develop strategies for the second half of the year. We talked about our budgets, we talked about action plans,

planning all that, and then through that, of course, we talked about other things in our lives. (Virginie)

The conversational accounts attest to an accumulation of statuses where friendship and work meet. In a world of obligations such as work, participants try to position certain relationships as more intentional, wanted, more specific to a bond of friendship. The overlap of two provinces of significance must then include certain precautions to protect faces (Goffman, 1973a) and statuses. Relationships with colleagues, based on the constraint of place and the obligation to interact, seek their refuges and facilitators in different ways, such as certain forms of sociability and the introduction of discussion topics external to work.

4.5 To work is to talk

In terms of social definitions of work that emerge from the conversations, we can affirm that working is talking: we see a certain performativity (Austin, 1970) in conversations, which transforms words into actions. "Working" means coordinating, communicating, giving feedback on work done, on a client, on objectives. To some extent, we can say that to work is to talk.

+ I congratulated her on her good work and told her about the two touch-ups we will do. She shared her doubts, I told her that everything was really very good. (Benoît)

+ We were talking about the factors that could have made us less proactive, and he said, "We're going to fix it this year." Then he checked our objectives, if we had achieved our objectives, and he said: "But we achieved our objectives!", so we high-fived. (Marie-Josée)

+ There have been conversations in which I have tried to raise the entrepreneur's awareness in a positive way. (Alain)

Participants also share their expertise outside of work: they compare certain external situations with their own employment issues. Work and off-work life are therefore mutually nourishing, and it sometimes becomes difficult to separate them. These conversations are also a way of promoting one's status outside the limits of employment.

+ In the evening, with my spouse, we talked about the father on the news who killed himself and his two children. We have both worked in those types of circumstances as social workers, and it was terrible: couples who were torn apart for years after they separated, children who were suffering irreparable damage. (Andrée)

5. Discussion

Daily conversations are an ordinary ingredient of socialization and permeate social relationships. These attributes make them an exemplary form of continuous socialization. The realm of work is an important topic of day-to-day conversations and takes the form of news gathering and definitions of meaning of work for participants. The injunction according to which one should be fulfilled at work and through work crosses the conversational normativity present in the accounts. Indeed, the call for achievement is strong; individuals can "realize themselves". This call correlates with the critical role of work on three levels. Revelation, first of all, consists of choosing the work best able to highlight one's personal characteristics and singularity (Martuccelli, 2010). Definition, secondly, is the means by which work redefines the individual in terms of identity. Finally, work is characterized as an investment, understood as the sum of the energy, time and emotions devoted to it. These three dimensions of self-actualization at work are handled differently by individuals and their adherence to certain norms. Individuals use a variety of tactics on a daily basis to navigate these conversational injunctions.

Working is also about colleagues, insofar as it is about managing all the sociabilities involved in professional tasks. Finally, work is about problems: participants face different obstacles that require them to develop action strategies and protective mechanisms. Consequently, work is a relatively hostile world which individuals must protect themselves from, but also embrace in the interest of personal fulfilment. The methodology used – the analysis of conversational accounts – helped capture the ambivalent nature of contemporary relationships to work insofar as it gave access to the participant's reception of the conversation, to their inner conversations, as well as to the process of subjectivation of their experience. Indeed, through the conversational accounts we have observed both the concrete shaping of norms in interaction and the multiple forms of adherence to these norms.

Work is a shared experience and a strong common reference that can be solicited and detailed during conversations. Secondary socialization takes place, more than ever, in the workplace and about work. Work is an important dimension of daily life and an essential conversational realm, which involves operators such as sharing and consulting, thus realizing the ordinary regulation of socialization. The constant consultation of others (colleagues or entourage) in conversations is an important interactional support: Martuccelli refers to "niches" (2010: 139) to designate certain protective interstices of contemporary societies.

Work is also a conversational realm that illustrates conversation as permeating social relationships and situations.

The realm of work materializes the multifaceted nature of normativity and socialization: as a topic of conversation, work constitutes a set of constraints, but also possibilities. While work is a source of obligations, frameworks, and "problems" for people's daily lives, it also provides meaningful language for people to define and mobilize themselves. Individuals singularize themselves through work and in conversations about work: it becomes an experience of status, but also an identification, even an aesthetic one, insofar as it resonates more broadly with a way of life and an experience of reality.

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