The social construction of workaholism as a representational naturalization

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ABSTRACT

Workaholism, a term borrowed from the language around alcoholism, first appeared in academic writing in the late 1960s. This article addresses the following questions: How has the concept of workaholism evolved in scientific literature and in society? How do people who identify as workaholics represent and communicate work addiction, and how do they identify it as their lived reality? Drawing on the concept of naturalization as a process of social representation, we argue that workaholism has been constituted as a naturalized object, and we consider the ways in which it is reproduced in everyday life through communication and experience. We situated the definition of workaholism within the scholarly literature. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven individuals who self-identify or have been diagnosed as work addicts. Our research shows that representational naturalization began when workaholism first became a recognizable reality as a result of changes in the world of work. Naturalization was then achieved by eliminating contradictions through the process of decoupling the positive features of workaholism from the overall concept. Our results demonstrate how this naturalized representation of workaholism is reproduced through the communication and lived experience of "workaholics."

1. Introduction

The meaning of work has undergone significant social and cultural changes over the last few decades. One of the major shifts has been the move away from traditional, formal employment arrangements and toward more flexible, self-employment or freelance work [1]. This change has been facilitated by technological advancements that have made it easier for people to work remotely and to connect with clients and customers all over the world. At the same time, these changes have also led to an increasing emphasis on productivity and to the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life [2]. The rise of the gig economy and the increasing use of technology to stay connected to work have created environments in which individuals feel like they are always "on the clock" [3].

This new organization of work has shaped not only the conditions of work, but also, inevitably, the identity and representations of workers [4]. The "Protestant work ethic," which emphasizes hard work, discipline, and a strong sense of duty, has long been a cultural value in many Western societies [5–7]. Past studies have shown how this value has been constructed and transmitted by shaping beliefs about the role of work in personal and social life. However, recent studies tend to observe how the influence of this ethics on the meaning of work has diminished somewhat in recent decades, as people have begun to prioritize other values such as creativity, self-expression, and personal fulfillment [84]. While many people still value hard work and the sense of accomplishment that comes

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with it, they are also increasingly looking for ways to find meaning and purpose in their work beyond just earning a paycheck. Overall, scholars have observed a shift toward a more individualistic and flexible understanding of what it means to work, with an increased emphasis on personal fulfillment [1,8]. The Protestant work ethic is thus no longer the dominant cultural value it once was. Understanding these changes in the cultural meaning of work can help explain why people place such high importance in their work on aspects such as achievement, happiness, satisfaction, and enthusiasm. It can also help scholars understand the rise of what is called "workaholism," which is seen as an excessive and compulsive preoccupation with work that leads to neglect of other areas of life, such as family, social relationships, and personal health.

Workaholism, a term borrowed from the model of alcoholism, first appeared in academic writing in the late 1960s. Wayne Edward Oates, a psychiatrist and pastor, introduced this concept in his 1968 article "On Being a Workaholic" and in his 1971 book *Confessions of a Workaholic: The Facts about Work Addiction*. Oates, a self-confessed workaholic, defines it as a compulsion and uncontrollable need to work [6].

Since those publications first appeared, numerous researchers and health professionals have addressed the subject of workaholism, some characterizing it as a form of addiction [9] with certain symptoms and criteria associated with the behavioral addictions listed in the DSM [10]. As with all behavioral addictions, efforts to define, codify and measure work addiction have not produced a consensus, and several definitions have been successively proposed. As early as the 1990s, the ambivalent nature of workaholism as an addiction fueled debates about its definition, which continue to this day. Disagreements remain regarding its inclusion in diagnostic manuals such as the DSM-5 and ICD-11. The lack of scientific consensus around the definition of these non-substance addictions is reflected in the difficulty in measuring their prevalence [11]. Although there are no studies to date on the prevalence of workaholism in the Canadian population, Canada's General Social Survey on Time Use [12] estimated that nearly one third (31%) of Canadians aged 19 to 64 self-identified as workaholic.

While there have been many studies of non-substance addictions, for example, addiction to sex, the Internet, gambling, or sport, little social science research has focused on workaholism as a form of work-related ill-being. Moreover, existing studies on workaholism tend to adopt a psycholocial perspective by defining it as a compulsive need to work and by describing the negative impacts of this behavior on individuals, on their families [13,85] and on their psychological and physical well-being. Along these lines, studies have shown how workaholism can lead to greater levels of work-life conflict, as well as stress, burnout [14], depression, anxiety, and physical health problems [15]. These studies, and many others like them, highlight the negative impact of workaholism on individuals' well-being, relationships, and overall quality of life and also provide insights into the causes and consequences of workaholism. However, few studies have examined the social and cultural factors that contribute to workaholism, which can provide a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. In this paper, we consider how social representations, which are shared understandings, beliefs, and values that shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors, can influence how individuals interpret and respond to different phenomena [16], including workaholism. Indeed, few studies have considered the social representations of workaholism and how the representations permeate the way that individuals respond to this addiction. For example, some social representations of success may be tied to long hours and to overwork, which can contribute to workaholic behaviors among individuals who aspire to these ideals. In this article, we ask the following questions: How has the concept of workaholism evolved in the scientific literature and in society? How do people who identify as workaholics represent and communicate work addiction, and how do they identify it as their lived reality? Based on the concept of naturalization as a social representation process, we argue that the workaholism was constituted as a *naturalized* object, and we explore how it is reproduced in everyday life through the communication and experience of people who self-identify as being addicted to work.

2. Theory

Our analysis is based on the theory of social representation, more specifically on the model of representational naturalization [17]. Social representations refer to systems of values, ideas, and practices that impose an order, which makes social reality familiar and controllable, and provides the necessary code for naming and classifying this reality [16].

The theory of social representations has a long tradition of studying how the public understands and adopts scientific concepts and theories. The inception of this theory by Serge Moscovici was possible thanks to the study, in his original work "La psychanalyse. Son image et son public," of the different types of communication leading to the transmission, diffusion and transformation of psychoanalytical concepts into common-sense knowledge at the time when psychoanalysis was becoming popular in French society [29]. Moscovici's study of the communication of scientific knowledge in society made it possible to examine the relations between the common-sense system of thought and the scientific system of thought. The theory of social representations subsequently inspired a plethora of researchers ([18–25] to name just a few) who sought to better understand the problem of the relationship between scientific theory, learned knowledge, expert knowledge and common-sense knowledge [26]. This interest has led to a redesign of the framework used for analyzing the transformation of abstract scientific categories, which are limited to the reified domain of researchers, into objects that are recognizable in everyday social reality.

The theory of social representations has thus participated in the questioning of the traditional model of scientific communication, called the "information deficit model" [27], according to which scientists transmit knowledge to an ignorant public who must accept it as scientific truth. At the same time, this theory puts the binary division between "public" and "scientists" into perspective. In reality, science itself takes place within a social context and is developed by individuals, the researchers, who do not escape social relations and group effects. On the one hand, society determines the objectives of science, provides objects of study, contributes to the formulation of research questions, and influences the results obtained and their interpretation [19]. On the other hand, however, scientific knowledge is not static; it evolves according to the results of research and the demands of society—and also according to the group dynamics

among the researchers [28] and the power relations within the scientific field [86]. Social representations thus provide a better understanding not only of how scientific categories are understood and assimilated by the public, but also, and more importantly for our study, of how these categories come to life by becoming, after their adoption by common sense, social realities [29,30].

Moscovici describes two communicative processes that lead to the genesis of social representations: anchoring and objectification [29]. Anchoring consists of inscribing the new social representation within a network of representations already constituted and shared by a given group. In this sense, workaholism would be anchored in the idea of alcoholism, or addiction in general. As addiction is a reality well known by the public, it is easy to imagine that the social representation of workaholism would be anchored in the representational universe of addiction. Objectification, on the other hand, is the transformation of an abstract idea into a concrete object of representation. For example, workaholism, like alcoholism, can be represented as the condition of a suffering person, a person with a psychological or even physical problem. Through several stages, the process of objectification leads to the naturalization of the representational object, which is itself a process by which workaholism is transformed from a scientific concept into a concrete and palpable reality that ordinary people can experience or recognize in others.

Naturalization is an important step in objectification because it plays a key role in the construction of objects as social reality [17]. Once naturalized, "ideas are no longer perceived as the products of the intellectual activity of certain minds, but as the reflection of something existing outside. There is a substitution of the perceived for the known" [29]; (p. 109). The scholarly concept of workaholism, once naturalized, loses its theoretical character and, through communication and people's experiences, becomes their palpable and recognizable everyday reality, "a 'natural' fixation in people's minds" [31]; (p. 6).

The results of the present study allowed us to observe this reification process and its performative character, which we will discuss by drawing on Butler's theory of performativity. The notion of performativity in its postmodern sense is attributed to the work of Austin, Derrida and then Butler; it focuses on the active force of words, the *speech act.* Focusing specifically on the notion of gender, Butler's theory has, among other things, highlighted the performative effects of heterogendered social categories. The theory of performativity shows how naturalized knowledge about gender, under the substratum of the description of human categories, preemptively compartmentalizes the social reality associated with it:

"To the extent the gender norms (ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and feminity, many of which are underwritten by racial codes of priority and taboos against miscegenation) establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be "real", they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression." [32]; (p. xxiv-xxv).

Gender, feminine or masculine, is not a simply identificatory social category, but corresponds much more to a set of norms that are then performed and ritualized by individuals, groups and communities. Without addressing the subject of work addiction in a simple analogical way, we nevertheless argue that the study of the representational naturalization process allows to better grasp the performative character of social representations and its effects on the construction of social and individual identities.

3. Material and methods

We have conceptualized representational naturalization as a process that occurs in four phases [17]: 1) the recognition of specific traits by association following a significant social change, 2) the elimination of contradictions through decoupling, 3) instrumental use in communication, and 4) validation through experience.

To understand this process of naturalization in relation to workaholism, our first objective was to determine if there was a significant social change over the decades that produced a shift in social representations of work (phase 1). We then sought to determine if, and understand how the current concept of workaholism has evolved from an ambiguous and still contradictory incipient representational category into a stable and coherent naturalized representational object (phase 2). In other words, how has the concept of workaholism evolved over the years? In order to achieve this first objective, we analyzed the 37 scientific texts on workaholism that were most often cited during the period from 1968, when the concept first appeared, until 2019. We situated the definition of this concept within the scholarly literature on the evolution of the social representation of work. Our second objective was to understand how the concept of workaholism comes to life in daily discourse and experience. To this end, we interviewed people who self-identify as workaholics to examine how they communicate (phase 3) and live (phase 4) the reality of being a workaholic.

The first step of our methodology was to identify the most cited publications on workaholism. To do this, we entered the keyword "workaholism" into the academic search engine Google Scholar, which resulted in 25,300 references. We organized those references in chronological order and then, within each ten-year interval, we sorted them according to their relevance. For every ten years since the publication of Oates' article in 1968 until 2019, we selected no more than ten texts most relevant to our research from those cited at least fifty times according to Google Scholar. We eliminated texts that neither had the concept of workaholism as their primary focus nor defined that concept. We selected only texts written in English. This strategy allowed us to identify the 37 most relevant texts on workaholism since the concept first appeared (see Appendix 1 for details). We then identified the elements of the definition of workaholism within these texts and analyzed how they evolved over time. Finally, we situated this evolution in the context of the transformation of the social representation of work.

The second step of our methodology was to conduct and record semi-structured interviews, face-to-face or virtually, with eleven people who self-identified as work addicts or were so diagnosed by a health professional. As with all behavioural addictions, efforts to codify, measure and define work addiction have not been unanimous, and several definitions have been successively proposed. As early as the 1990s, the ambivalent nature of this addiction fueled debates about its definition, which still persist today. Currently, work addiction, like all behavioral addictions, is widely debated within the psychological and medical scientific community, in terms of its etiology, definition, and management [33–39,91]. Disagreement remains regarding the inclusion of behavioral addictions in

diagnostic manuals, such as DSM-5 and ICD-11, and to date, only gambling addiction is included in DSM-5. The lack of scientific consensus around the definition of these non-substance addictions is reflected not only in the difficulty in measuring their prevalence, particularly in relation to work addiction, but also in the fact that most people will tend to self-identify as "addict," without necessarily having consulted a health professional [87]. This self-designation should not be considered a methodological bias; on the contrary, it shows how an informal category that medicalizes and pathologizes a form of behavioral difference can become "naturalized" over time.

Given that people living with a behavioral addiction are often unlikely to consult a health professional, we favored recruitment via the Internet, which made it easier to find them [88] through social networks, discussion forums and emails sent to work-addiction support groups. A total of nine women and two men between the ages of 22 and 55 agreed to participate in this research. The interview grid contained topics such as the definition of workaholism, its signs and symptoms, the role of the social environment, the impact of workaholism on daily life, and coping strategies.

We analyzed the interviews using analytical questioning [40]. We began by formulating several explicit or implicit initial questions related to the instrumental use of the notion of workaholism in communications and the confirmation of this concept by experience. The analysis proceeded through successive readings and re-readings of the interviews to generate new analytical questions to branch out and refine the investigative framework. The analysis was considered complete when the answers to the analytical questions no longer generated new questions about the material and were thus deemed to be satisfactory. For example, an initial question was: How did individuals come to define themselves as workaholics? From one reading of the interviews to the next, this question branched into sub-questions such as, do they identify the onset of their addiction as being within a specific time period? Has it always existed? Did an event change their perspective on the problem? What was the role of those around them in this "realization" or change of representation? The answers to these and other questions in the final investigative framework provided the results that allowed us to identify and characterize the final two phases of the representational naturalization process of the concept of workaholism.

This article is part of a larger research project on the sociology of behavioral addictions, funded by the Social Science Research Council of Canada. The data collection methods were approved by the University of Ottawa's Ethics Board (certificate no. S-06-18-738). Informed consent was obtained from all research participants.

4. Results

4.1. Systematic review of the most influential scientific literature on workaholism

4.1.1. The emergence of the concept of workaholism in scientific literature and popular culture

For a period of time after the term "workaholism" was coined in 1968, there was little interest in the concept. The first empirical study on the subject was released only several years later as part of a doctoral dissertation at Yale University. That study found that the consequences of workaholism vary from very negative to very positive. It identified six manifestations of workaholism mediated by variables that differentiated between "fulfilled and frustrated workaholics" [41]. Referring to that study [42], maintained that "workaholics work hard—and love it. They derive a great deal of happiness and satisfaction from work and would rather spend all of their time working than doing anything else" [42]; (p. 64). He viewed workaholism as a phenomenon that has both positive and negative manifestations, with more emphasis on the "stressed" character of those affected. Another seminal text from this period [43] discusses two key aspects of workaholism—career commitment and obsessive-compulsiveness—and proposes a typology of workaholism that differentiates between, among other things, workaholics with "high job satisfaction" and those who are "work addicts," thus including both positive and negative characteristics in the definition of workaholism. This trend changed with the publication in the 1990s of a widely cited article by Spence & Robbins [44]; who presented workaholism as the extreme position on a continuum of work engagement. In their typology, the concept of workaholism is distinguished from "work enthusiasts and other individuals" and no longer includes positive manifestations of hard work. In another article that was well received by the scientific community [45], clearly differentiated the concept of workaholism from extreme commitment to an organization or an extreme form of involvement in work. They proposed a definition that attributed three specific types of behavior to workaholism: compulsive dependence, perfectionism and achievement orientation. This tendency to isolate the manifestations of workaholism that are considered positive from its overall definition continues in subsequent works [10,46–50]. As also noted by Di Stefano & Gaudiino [9] in their systematic review and meta-analysis, definitions in recent years increasingly emphasize the pathological aspects of workaholism and refer to addiction as its key feature. Authors have pointed to individual and sociocultural risk factors while emphasizing the negative consequences of workaholism, including depression, burnout, poor health, life dissatisfaction, and family/relationship problems [10,48,89]. More recent research has linked workaholism to impaired health and well-being as well as work-life conflicts [51–53,90].

Our literature review also revealed that the concept of workaholism has had a remarkable career in popular culture and everyday discourse. In movies, popular television and radio shows, novels and the media, workaholism quickly established itself as a commonly understood concept. Indeed, researchers regularly mention that "over the course of several decades, workaholism has become a commonplace term used in popular culture" [54]; see also, for example, [41,55–59]. This popular use of workaholism has existed since the concept first appeared, becoming more commonplace over the years, especially from the 1990s onwards.

4.1.2. The evolution of the organization of work and of the social representation of work

The evolution of the concept of workaholism is linked to wider structural transformations of work since the 1970s. For Scully-Russ and Torraco [60] the structural context fostered the emergence of a new world of work that resulted in a radical transformation of organizations [61] and in the emergence of a functionally flexible workforce with a "responsible autonomy" [62,63]. Organizations

displayed a willingness to empower employees to exercise individual discretion and self-management simultaneously [64]. This new organization of work not only shaped the objective conditions of work, but also, inevitably, the identity and representations of workers [4]. For Scully-Russ and Torraco [60] it was the emergence of a new class of workers who value flexible, enjoyable and fulfilling work [65] that facilitated the affirmation of this new world of work. However, for Mercure and Bourdages-Sylvain [66] it was structural change that mobilized the subjectivity of employees, which is increasingly sought after in the new enterprises.

One of the key effects of this transformation of the world of work is a new way of representing and experiencing work. The social representation of work has undergone a cultural transformation linking work with not only income, but increasingly, the expectation of pleasure and fulfillment. The vast majority of studies since this period indicate that there has been a shift from a representation of work as being manual, tiring, constraining and physical, to one in which work is seen as being a pleasant and fulfilling activity [67].

Our data revealed that the concept of workaholism has evolved in relation to this shift in the representation of work through a naturalization process comprised of the two initial phases described below.

4.1.3. Recognition of specific traits of workaholism following a significant social change (phase 1)

In phase one, workaholism became a recognizable reality following the transformations of the world of work in the 1970s. Significant social change is that which produces contradictions and tensions in the organization and functioning of societies. The concept of workaholism was introduced and developed by Ref. [6] in one of these critical moments. That historical change was the transformation of the world of work and the appearance of new, flexible organizations. It also coincided with a growing view of work as a form of self-fulfillment and personal achievement. This social change is significant because it implied the re-reading by society of the individual's involvement in work, a change in the meaning of work in society and in the realm of common understanding. In this new social context, work became an activity sought after not only for its extrinsic characteristics, as a source of income, but also for the meaning and pleasure it produces. Working a lot is now seen as an excess, the abuse of a pleasure, and judged like any other addiction [17]. When work is viewed as pleasure, work addiction thus becomes possible and raises collective concern.

4.1.4. Elimination of contradictions of workaholism through decoupling (phase 2)

In phase two, contradictions were eliminated by decoupling the positive features of workaholism from the overall concept. When workaholism was first studied by the scientific community as a relevant research problem and disseminated in popular culture and common understanding, the concept was ambivalent [68] because of its both positive and negative traits. In the first empirical study of workaholism, Maschlowitz described workaholics as both competitive or productive individuals, namely the fulfilled workaholics, and as suffering addicts, "the frustrated workaholics" [41]. In a highly cited article by Spence and Robbins [44]; the positive dimension of working hard already began to be decoupled from the definition of workaholism. The latest influential works on workaholism [10,47, 48,50,53,57,69] point to its negative aspects, for example, psychological distress, imbalance between different spheres of life and physical health problems. By decoupling workaholism's positive attributes from its negative effects, people who meet the expectations of the new work organizations can more easily identify with conceptual categories such as heavy work investment, work devotion or work engagement. In contrast, the concept of workaholism is associated with people who do not succeed in adapting to the expectations of the new work organizations, experience distress, limit their social relations or fall ill.

We therefore argue that the concept of workaholism was constituted as a naturalized object during these first two phases of the naturalization process. In the empirical research that is the subject of this article, we examine the modalities of its reproduction in everyday life through the communication and the experience of the people who claim to be addicted to work.

4.2. Analytical questioning of interviews

4.2.1. Workaholism in everyday communications

This and the following subsection focus on data from semi-structured interviews with people who were identified or self-identified as workaholics. Work addiction is described by the participants in terms of certain traits that they believe are most characteristic of this condition. Whether it is a problem related to the management of work-related stress, the detrimental effect of time spent at work on interpersonal relationships, or the inability to take advantage of time off—all the respondents focused on what allowed them to distinguish work addiction from what they perceived as a healthy or correct investment in work:

> In my opinion, work addiction is when you give too much importance to work and then … you don't manage your time well as a family, hobbies, and your work. (E01) [Translated from French]

> Work addiction is when you focus so much on your current job, on requests and updates that come from that job—that it affects your relationships with either family, peers, or whatever. (E04) [Translated from French]

> If you're never able to disengage; I think that's where … that makes you maybe addicted. Yeah. You think about it all the time. (E09)

The focus here is not on assessing the validity of the items highlighted by the respondents, for example, in terms of their scientific veracity. What is more important is that the respondents' comments clearly show that they accept the existence of this condition. As we will see below, this does not prevent the participants in our research from adding certain more nuanced elements to the definition of work addiction. These nuances, however, do not call into question in their eyes the very existence of the condition.

When asked about their first contact with the concept, participants usually said that they had heard about workaholism for the first time through common sources such as the media, educational institutions or a specialist, such as a doctor or counsellor:

> I think the first time I heard about the idea of being workaholic was really through the … CBC or something like that, reports where they were raising awareness. (E08) [Translated from French]

> Oh boy, it's been … it's been a long time … Like reports or things like that on TV, on the radio. (E11) [Translated from French]

The role of people's social environment is also highly significant in the process of shaping the social representation of workaholism through communication. The instrumental use of this concept in communications was evident in the respondents' accounts of their discussions of work addiction with people in their social environment:

> I have definitely talked with people about it. I don't remember a whole lot about it. But it is a recognized problem … (E02)

> Well, often it's because people tell me so, "Well, Brigitte,[1] you're a workaholic." (E03) [Translated from French]

This last statement also shows that instrumental use refers not only to the categorization function of social representations, but also to their performative function. We will come back to this point later.

Despite this, we also identified several nuances in the way the problem was defined, and even some questioning and signs of ambivalence regarding the concept of workaholism. In particular, some participants displayed a certain resistance to the ways in which the effects of workaholism were characterized, especially the strictly negative evaluation of this condition and the misunderstandings that it may foster. These nuances and questions, however, do not cast doubt on the existence of the condition per se. For example, one respondent explained a nuance regarding the source of work addiction, which she believes is not the work itself, but the social recognition it provides:

> No one likes to be at work at 11 o'clock at night, doing audit tests. But it's more like you're addicted to the recognition that comes with it. (E06) [Translated from French]

Later in the interview, however, this same respondent said, "but everyone knows what a workaholic is." (E06) [Translated from French].

These testimonials show that although various elements of the definition and characterization of work addiction are debatable for the respondents, they do not question the very existence of the addiction. The negotiation, or the doubt, is not formulated as, "Does this problem exist?" but rather as "Am I really affected by this problem?"

4.2.2. The experience of workaholism

The respondents' testimonials show that, beyond spending many hours at work, it is the negative aspects of the condition that play a decisive role in the validation of work addiction through lived experience. Indeed, several participants recognized the negative effects of work addiction in their experience and associated it with particularly painful experiences such as burnout or depression.

> This is not okay. You need to make time for yourself and enjoy your life and not overwork. This is not healthy; this is not smart. (E02)

Other respondents focused more specifically on the negative impacts of work addiction on the quality of their interpersonal relationships, particularly marital and romantic relationships: "It was impacting my marriage. That's definitely the biggest one." (E05).

Finally, as in the previous subsection, many respondents recognize the traits associated with work addiction, but do not always view them as negative characteristics. They expressed some nuances and reservations with regard to associating work addiction strictly with a problem. For example, they stressed that this condition had also brought them several gains over time, such as the development of good stress-management skills or an ability to persevere. Several respondents also emphasized recognition from peers at work and from bosses and explained that their condition led them to cultivate a feeling of "a job well done." Nevertheless, even when respondents expressed this type of ambivalence about the negative characterization of workaholism, they recognized that, normatively, they had a problem. In other words, respondents recognized the specific traits associated with work addiction in their experiences. Their ambivalence and nuanced observations were not about the work addiction itself, but about the normative judgment attached to it. In both cases, work addiction is a social reality with recognizable features in everyday life, features that are consistent with expected social practices:

> Q: Do you have any idea what makes (other people) think that (you are a work addict)? A: Apparently, it's … because of the number of hours I work. And I'm not able to sit and watch a soccer game, or sit at a picnic table on a Sunday and talk for 3–4 hours because in my head it's a waste of time. (E07) [Translated from French]

These observations indicate that work addiction is a social role that is learned, as is indeed the case with other deviances [70,71]. In the same vein, the validation of work addiction in the respondents' experience shows that workaholism is integrated into their identity. This is the result of an evolutionary process, a learning process that has taken place in stages and is then periodically reconfirmed:

> Since I know that I'm a workaholic, I've self-diagnosed that, so I give myself tests, I ask myself … "Are you able to do nothing one night? Are you capable of not working? Are you able to take time for yourself when your brain is going 100 miles an hour?" […] I test myself. (E03) [Translated from French]

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[1] Participants' first names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

So I wanted denial at that time, and then after that until I realized that … It's a bit of an adjustment, and I had to work on myself to … to change my ways. And that's it. And after that, it's acceptance. You go from denial to acceptance. (E04) [Translated from French]

Once again, we see that the role of the social environment is a major factor in this social learning process—it both feeds on the confirmed naturalization of work addiction and stimulates that naturalization:

At one point, for example, the people around me started to tell me that I was working too hard. […] My friends, my father, my mother also told me. Uh, my aunts that I see… often. Everybody. Everybody agreed that I was someone who worked too much (E06). [Translated from French]

My friends told me to stop. […] They tell me, "You are alienating us. We are alienated; you talk about it too much; it's unbearable; you do it all the time. […] Don't bother us. Change your lifestyle." (E10) [Translated from French]

The respondents' comments show that it is largely through the eyes of those around them that they have come to modify their own opinion of their relationship with work. The gaze of significant others communicates the expected standard of investment in work, which the respondents have come to endorse.

I've never seen that as a flaw, and I've never … I've never thought I was working too hard. Maybe because I like to work. That's why it's … when … maybe when I worked too much it was when others told me so. (E07) [Translated from French]

These empirical data on communications around and experience of workaholism allowed us to observe phases three and four of the representational-naturalization process of workaholism, which are described below.

4.2.3. Instrumental use of workaholism in everyday communications (phase 3)

According to our data, workaholism, as a social reality recognizable in everyday life and consistent with social practices, no longer needs to be questioned as it simply exists. Thus, in communications, the reality of workaholism is confirmed by a purely instrumental use of its social representation. Each instance of such instrumental use reconfirms the symbolic reality of the object "workaholism" for individuals and society. Our results also show that the nuances, reservations and ambivalent positions expressed do not call into question the very existence of work addiction, thus confirming the role of naturalization as a process of social representation.

4.2.4. Validation of workaholism through experience (phase 4)

Naturalized social representation is not only reproduced through communication, but is also reconfirmed as a palpable reality with material effects on the lives of individuals. The respondents' testimonials show that, despite all their ambivalence about integrating the negative judgement that accompanies the social and scientific definition of work addiction, the validation of this condition in their experience also involves an important performative exercise. In this way, in this phase, the representation of workaholism obtained a performative character [32]. Thus, workaholism as a reality experienced by many people in our contemporary society is constantly subjected to the test of this practice.

5. Discussion

As we explained above, naturalization is a particular process in the construction of social representations. According to Moscovici, naturalization constitutes one of the phases of objectification, a process specific to the genesis of social representations that makes it possible to transform an abstract idea into a concrete object. This is what the naturalization process is all about in the stages we have focused on in our systematic literature review. In the case of workaholism, the naturalization process got underway at the stage of recognizing specific traits following a significant social change, the transformation of the world of work in which work became a source of fulfillment and pleasure. Then the process continued at the stage of eliminating contradictions by decoupling the positive traits of workaholism from the overall concept of workaholism and links to distress and sickness. The data we collected from people who self-identify as work addicts allowed us to observe the process of representational naturalization. Specifically, we observed the instrumental use of the naturalized object in communications and finally, its validation through lived experience. Let us recall here that naturalization

[…] involves the commodification of elements to which one attributes properties and characteristics independent of the context from which it emerged. […] With naturalization, new phenomena are no longer perceived as the products of human activity, but as the reflection of something that exists outside of all human action. [72]; (p. 89, translated from French)

We have seen that workaholism has, in fact, gone through a process of representational genesis and naturalization that ultimately allows this notion to be integrated into and inhabit the common understanding of groups and individuals. They then refer to it as a reified element of their daily reality that allows them to make sense of it.

The point of view of individuals who self-identify as workaholics sheds an interesting light on the performative character of the social representation of work addiction, in particular regarding the distress expected from workaholic individuals. This reminds us of the preface to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, where Butler explains the initial questions that led her to develop her theory of performativity in the following terms:

> The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender […] an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. [32]; p. xv)

It is important to note that the performative character of a statement such as "I am a workaholic" is distinguished from the constative one, which refers to "statements that merely describe some state of affairs from utterances that accomplish, in their very enunciation, an action that generates effects" [73]; (p. 3). Hence, the idea of performativity also goes beyond the act to provide reflections of an identity and heuristic nature. To quote Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995), "performativity has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes" (p. 2). Validation, in the lived, everyday experience of people who are identified and identify themselves as work addicts, is thus a performance of that same reified and naturalized object, namely work addiction. As we saw in the previous section, the naturalized and reified notion of work addiction provokes identity changes in people who self-identify as suffering from the condition, despite all the ambivalence that arises in their discourse.

This ambivalence recalls the links that Butler [32] highlights between performativity and masquerade, links that are also underlined by Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995) in relation to the vicinity of performance when it is theatrical. It also aligns with the notion of infelicity proposed by Austin et al. [74]. Beyond the debates, for example linguistic and categorical, that the notion of performativity can lead to (see Austin et al. [74] for a good example of a discussion on the categories of statements), ambivalence highlights the importance of repetition when it is a question of validating a symbolic reality in everyday experience. Moreover, this reflection is reminiscent of Harrison [75] remarks that the ways of apprehending everyday experience have traditionally been turned towards a fixist reading of events (taken in a broad sense). This then translates into a semiotic limit of the language that forces the use of the past participle to speak of experiences that continue into the present time. The importance of the ritual aspect of performativity in the construction of meaning is also an element that Butler [32] has helped to clarify, pointing out that

> […] performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (p. xv).

In this respect, Butler's theory of performativity is in line with one of the important premises of the theory of representations and Moscovici's initial intentions:

> I wanted to redefine the problems and concepts of social psychology from this phenomenon, insisting on its symbolic function and its power to construct reality. [29]; (p. 16, translated from French)

Adding the perspective of performativity and its ritualistic aspect to the social-representations approach to the construction of social reality has important theoretical implications. Indeed, it helps to put forward and operationalize this heuristic purpose, which, in Moscovici [29] own words, has been historically underrecognized in many studies on social representations, which have been more concerned with their identification as fixed concepts.

Moreover, this performative character of social representations is particularly enlightening with regard to the role of the social environment in the process of the representational naturalization of workaholism, as emphasized by the people we interviewed. It should be remembered that most of these people highlighted the major role played by their social environment (family, spouse, friends, colleagues) in recognizing the situation and defining it as a problem. "You are a workaholic," a sentence directed at several of the people we met, is a *performative utterance* in that it classifies as well as dictates a certain way of acting [74]. It is a statement about the behavior of others, a *speech act* [74]; (p. 241) involving several "implicit truths" that are included in the naturalized representation of work addiction, including the distress experienced by the person with this "addiction." Indeed, when those in one's social environment use a phrase such as "you are a workaholic," they are proclaiming in the same breath to the person concerned that they *should* recognize their own distress.

We can therefore see that the distress and negative aspects associated with work addiction are constitutive of the social expectations linked to this problem. Performativity is achieved through social expectations regarding the distress experienced by people with a work addiction. People who learn to self-identify in this way come to integrate this distress into their identity as workers following a power dynamic [76]. The negotiation of this aspect is indicative of this expected performativity. Thus, for many people, this expected performance, where the individual experiences distress related to their condition, is nevertheless inconsistent with several aspects that they consider to be positive.

In this way, beyond the number of hours or criteria such as the lack of balance between private and professional life, it is the distress that these people experience that allows them to concretely represent the problem in a manner that gives it the character of an addiction. In their lived experience, the distress, so to speak, becomes the criterion that allows workaholism to be represented concretely. It is also in the excess and, more implicitly, in the lack of self-control that the problem is recognized, factors which also depend first and foremost on the individual and their perception of the problematic nature of their own behavior [77].

Butler [32] in reference to the notion of gender, showed the split between the essentialist reading of identities and the experience of people on the margins of heteronormativity. Analogously, the process of representational naturalization of workaholism contributes to the invisibility of the normative injunctions that operate in the construction of this social reality [78]. Through decoupling, positive features are thus excluded from the notion of work addiction, thereby rendering invisible the effects of the relatively new normative expectations linked to individual actualization in the professional sphere. In the same way, the notion of addiction, because it refers first and foremost to an individual problem, contributes to rendering invisible the role of factors pertaining to the organizational context in the reification of this symbolic reality and in the daily experience of individuals. As with other works that are part of a

problematic and symbolic rereading of social reality, the detailed study of the process of representational naturalization of work addiction allows us to take a step back from our world to remember that "things could have developed quite differently" [79]; (p.10).

This study has some limitations. Our systematic literature review did not include all existing publications on workaholism. However, our method allowed us to identify the most influential texts in each decade. Also, the texts studied had varied influence, ranging from fifty citations to several thousands. Some texts that were widely cited were not retained because we wanted to identify the influential texts in each decade, not in general.

Our sample of participants for the second step of our methodology does not cover the full range of professional and organizational contexts, which could affect the scope of our analysis. Furthermore, the profile of participants is relatively limited in terms of gender, with an overrepresentation of women, while cultural and gender minorities are not represented in the sample. Nevertheless, since our objective was not to seek representativeness but rather to achieve a satisfactory theoretical saturation, our sample provided sufficiently rich and valid data. We made methodological choices that were most relevant to and best responded to the objectives of our study.

6. Conclusions

In this article, we have studied the process of the representational naturalization of workaholism. The representational naturalization began by workaholism becoming a recognizable reality following the changes in the world of work and then by contradictions being eliminated through the decoupling of the positive features from the concept. Before work came to be regarded as a source of pleasure and self-fulfillment, work addiction as a concept did not make much sense: one can be addicted only to an experience that produces pleasure. Our analysis then focused on the reproduction of this naturalized representation of work addiction in the communication and lived experience of the people who self-identify or are identified as work addicts.

The results of this study demonstrate an instrumental use of the concept of work addiction in the discourse of these people. While attributing to work addiction indisputable distinctive characteristics, such as distress, their first encounter with this phenomenon as reality is nevertheless located, not in individual experience, but in expert discourse or other authoritative societal sources such as the media. This representation is then confirmed by those around them, leaving little room for doubt. Even apparent disagreement with the hegemonic representation is framed in a way that does not challenge the very existence of work addiction.

It is only after this stage of instrumental communication that workaholism is recognized in the participants' lived experience. This new stage of representational naturalization corresponds to the validation in lived situations and events of the distinctive characteristics of work addiction, generally perceived as negative. Even pleasure or other rewards for hard work, such as recognition from employers, were recognized as problematic because they were experienced as normatively vicious. The recognition of workaholism in the participants' experience was thus learned and gradually integrated into identity.

This last point sheds light on the performative dimension of naturalized representations. The experience of work addiction in everyday life is facilitated through the performance of a social role that produces identity changes in these people—hence the importance of practice (learning the role well)—and of the people around them (the validation of the performance) for this last stage of naturalization. Thus, performance becomes an act, and work addiction becomes a reality.

These results will help researchers to better understand the social dimension of behavioral addictions such as workaholism. The naturalized representation of workaholism contributes to the invisibility of the paradoxical injunctions associated with the new world of work and its negative impacts on the mental health of workers. On the one hand, people are encouraged to work hard, but on the other hand, society also gives them the message that it is undesirable to exceed certain boundaries. In this context, it would be interesting to pursue research that takes a more in-depth look, in organizations, at the influence of the organization of work on experiences of workaholism. Further comparative analysis would also deepen our understanding of the representational naturalization in other contexts of behavioral addictions such as gambling, sex or sport addiction.

Author contribution statement

Lilian Negura; Dahlia Namian: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.
Nathalie Plante: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

Data availability statement

The data that has been used is confidential.

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Declaration of competing interest

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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