Decent Work and Representations of Work among Unskilled and Low-Skilled Emerging Adults in France

Trabajo Decente y Representaciones del Trabajo Entre Adultos Emergentes No Calificados y Poco Calificados en Francia

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Resumen

El contexto del mercado laboral actual se caracteriza por una diversificación de las formas de empleo, una transformación de las organizaciones del trabajo y una singularización de las trayectorias profesionales. Este artículo pretende analizar y describir la forma en que los jóvenes adultos conciben su futuro profesional y cómo definen un trabajo digno. Los datos se obtuvieron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas a diez jóvenes adultos. El corpus de las entrevistas se sometió a un análisis de contenido temático. Los resultados muestran que el trabajo es una

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necesidad para los jóvenes, sin ser *a priori* un fin en sí mismo. Algunos criterios de trabajo digno (OIT) están más extendidos que otros, sin embargo, los vínculos con el deseo de mantener una actividad y las dimensiones sociales y de realización tienden a mostrar que los modelos de un trabajo que integran la dimensión del desarrollo personal siguen siendo prevalentes. Este estudio conduce a una reflexión sobre el valor del diploma, éste no había tenido sentido en la escuela y ahora se presenta como un pasaporte para renovar la vida profesional. Es cierto que el adulto emergente encuentra trabajo, pero para aspirar a más tendrá que pasar por la formación, que ahora es esencial para el desarrollo personal y profesional.

Palabras clave: trabajo decente; significado del trabajo; jóvenes adultos

Abstract

The current labor market context is characterized by a diversification of forms of employment, a transformation of work organizations and a singularization of career paths. This article aims to analyze and describe how young adults conceive their professional future and how they define a decent job. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with ten young adults. The corpus of interviews was subjected to content analysis. The results show that work is a necessity for young people, without being *a priori* an end in itself. Some criteria of decent work (ILO) are more widespread than others, however, the links with the desire to maintain an activity and the social and fulfillment dimensions tend to show that models of a job integrating the dimension of personal development remain prevalent.

This study leads to a reflection on the value of the diploma, which had been meaningless in school and is now presented as a passport to renew professional life. It is true that the emerging adult finds work, but to aspire to more, he or she will have to undergo training, which is now essential for personal and professional development.

Keywords: decent work; meaning of work; young adults

Emerging Adults and the French Labor Market

The labor market is currently characterized by diverse forms of employment (Conseil d'Orientation pour l'Emploi [COE], 2014), changes in work organization and the individualization of professional trajectories. These characteristics are sources of uncertainty for many individuals (Castel, 2009; Lallemanent, 2018). Moreover, although downgrading is increasingly widespread, in France, a formal qualification generally ensures access to employment (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2006; Duru-Bellat, 2006; Joseph et al., 2008; Peugny, 2009). In this context, the emerging adult population is particularly vulnerable, especially those with low skills. In France, the estimated unemployment rate for 15- to 25-year-olds is 20.8%, 21.4% for men, and 20% for women (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). In 2016, the unemployment rate of emerging adults aged 15 to 24 with no or low skills was three times higher than that of young graduates (OECD, 2016). In 2018, the unemployment rate in France was among the highest in Europe, with 29.2% of young people who had not completed primary education being

unemployed, compared to an average of 22.5% in OECD countries. Unemployment among low-skilled young adults is higher, and their access to employment is more complex than the skilled population (Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques [DARES], 2020). Furthermore, employment status and prospects are linked to micro-level (e.g., personal circumstances) and macro-level factors (e.g., socio-economic conditions). The purpose of the present article is to examine young emerging adults' (Arnett, 2000) representations of work and 'decent work' in the context of France, based on the definition of the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2008, 2016) and the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016).

As suggested by Paugam (2000), employment and working are influenced by objective factors (terms of employment, working conditions), subjective factors (satisfaction), and their social impacts (nature and importance of relationships, independence, and autonomy). Work is perceived as an essential means of social integration and contributes to the economy (e.g., Blustein, 2008, 2011; Duffy et al., 2016). However, low-skilled emerging adults are likely to hold jobs characterized by difficult working conditions and low social recognition compared to their highly educated peers (Disquay-Perot & Egido, 2017; Inan, 2013; Kulanthaivelu & Thierus, 2018). Moreover, many of these jobs are fixed-term contracts, often part-time and/or poorly paid. Such conditions induce insecurity about the future, increased risk of social vulnerability, marginalization, and, more generally, the weakening of social ties (e.g., Bourdieu, 1993; Castel, 2009; Duffy et al., 2016; Durkheim, 1893).

It has been well documented that given the importance of work for psychological health and identity (Blustein, 2008), periods of unemployment (including transitional ones) lead to feelings of failure, a decrease in self-efficacy, depression, anxiety, and substance use (Demazière, 2006; Lucas et al., 2004; Vinokur et al., 2000). Moreover, perceived job insecurity (Paugam, 2000) is crucial in individuals' relationship to work (satisfaction) and employment (stability) and, therefore, entails health and social risks, with effects on their social and economic integration.

Rapid and frequent changes characterize the labor market. Emerging adults tend to navigate such a labor market by using the "zapping" technique in their job search, often prioritizing immediately available jobs (Institut national de la jeunesse et de l'éducation populaire [INJEP], 2011). Indeed, the notion of access to employment has changed: most young people enter the labor market with temporary jobs, although permanent contracts remain the norm, with 85% of the paid jobs (COE, 2014). Consequently, their relationship to job stability is likely to be modified. However, they perceived experiences resulting from multiple fixed-term contracts as beneficial (Cocandeau-Bellanger et al., 2018). Moreover, job precariousness does not necessarily imply that young people with little or no professional qualifications develop negative representations of work.

Pay levels or job security may no longer constitute central elements in their relationship to work. Other dimensions could be more significant and moderate the negative effects of job insecurity on

representations of work. For instance, the growing number of skilled workers switching to manual, agricultural or social- and care-oriented occupations (Cohen-Scali, 2017; Denave, 2015; Jourdain, 2014) may suggest that social protection, high-income, and social recognition are no longer sufficient to provide workers with satisfaction. Similarly, numerous recent studies on the concept of meaning (Bernaud et al., 2015; Blustein et al., 2016; Deranty & McMillan, 2012; Gómez Gonzales et al., 2013; Masdonati et al., 2014; Morin, 2008; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger et al., 2006) revealed increase expectations concerning personal development and social utility. According to Egido et al. (2018), being respected (70%), perceiving social utility in their work (41.7%), and personal interest (37.5%) are critical drivers of work meaning among young higher education graduates. What about their low-skilled peers? What are the meaning drivers among them? Do they feel respected?

Investigating individuals' relationship to work implies studying the representations of work, and beyond, decent work, by questioning what, from the workers' perspective, characterizes jobs that allow them to fulfill their needs and live accordingly with social standards, free from socio-economic and other contextual constraints. Knowledge about the representations of work could contribute to developing relevant public policies considering the needs of several populations, including low-skilled emerging adults. What are emerging adults' representations of the work? How do they envision their future career, and how do they define decent work? These are the research questions this study attempts to investigate.

Representations of Work: The Youth Perspective

Representations of work are strongly related to the context. Factors such as country and parents' occupation influence adolescents' choices and representations (Cohen-Scali, 2010; Liechti, 2012; Noël et al., 2017). First, a job should allow living according to standard contextual norms, guarantee social ties, and allow skill development. However, the perception and recognition related to occupations vary according to environments and cultures (Gaviria & Mélo, 2018). Thus, representations of work depend on socio-cultural contexts. Criteria such as the level of education, working conditions, employment, and job access are differently appreciated depending on the country and socio-economic conditions.

As mentioned above, emerging adults' access to employment and their perception of time differ from other categories of working adults. Growing up in unstable environments, emerging adults could experience job precariousness differently than previous generations. Permanent contracts are no longer the grail of skilled young people (Egido et al., 2018). What about those who experienced school dropouts? What do they expect from their job?

We hypothesize that basic survival, security, and social connection needs underlie their expectations. However, we assume that access to leisure (an essential cultural feature enhanced by working hours reduction in the 2000s) is as important for them as are basic needs (e.g., housing and food). Moreover, secure, long-term jobs may not be their primary targets as they may have been for previous generations.

Finally, investigating emerging adults' specific representations of decent work is of particular interest with consideration to the International Labor Organization's definition (ILO, 2008, 2016). Indeed, based on the above descriptions, we expect French emerging adults with little or no professional qualifications to have a specific view. More precisely, due to French social and health policy, it is likely that they will focus less on social protection. Similarly, we assume that physical security conditions, an essential feature within the French labor law (to be guaranteed by employers), will be secondary in their representations.

Decent Work

The Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016) is based on decent work features derived from the International Labor Organization's definition of decent work (ILO, 2008, 2016). According to this theory, factors related to the specificities of the labor market and public employment policies play a central role and largely determine access to decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). These factors hinder access to decent work and, consequently, the benefits it can provide. Such a context could also influence emerging adults' representations of decent work.

To explore these representations, we conducted a qualitative study with ten low-skilled French emerging adults. Several objectives have been defined:

- Identify the reasons for dropping out of training
- Identify their relationship to work, i.e., (a) their expectations about work, (b) their perspective regarding what characterizes a "good" job and a "worst" job, and (c) how they perceive their current job
- Identify their life prospects (personal, social, and professional)

Method

Participants

Ten emerging adults aged 20 to 25 (*M* = 21.6; *SD* = 1.50), including six men, responded to a semi-structured interview. They were selected based on several criteria: age between 16 and 25, being employed and/or having worked during the last six months, having no diploma, or being low-skilled. Their income comes mainly from their employment. Their characteristics are listed in Table 1.

Procedure

Due to the difficulty in accessing potential participants, the initial selection criteria have been relaxed. For example, few young people without a diploma are unemployed. Moreover, some of them hold informal jobs. Finally, once contacted, some young people often declined participation in the study as they felt uncomfortable talking about their background. Consequently, the final criteria for selecting participants are the following: age between 16 and 25, being employed and/or having worked during the last six months, not having a diploma, or having interrupted their training before developing necessary skills. Seven of the participants were recruited through master's student networks. Three other participants were recruited through social structures supporting the integration of young people who drop out of school or training.

Table 1

Information on Participants and Their Job

Participants	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Current occupation	Short description of the current occupation	Information about the employer
Florian	M	22	IV	Hotel receptionist	Customer reception, invoicing, booking, service and cleaning breakfast/drinks	Hotel Group - Suburb
Paul G	M	22	V	Multipurpose worker	Maintenance of outdoor and indoor spaces, small maintenance, diving	Technical college- rural area
Hélène	F	22	V	Hosting Agent	Maintenance of premises (collective areas and rooms), breakfast service in room, setting up dining room, dives	Public nursing home - rural area
Xavier	M	22	V	Social facilitator	Administrative tasks, reception and homework support, social activities	Social Assistance Center
Eva	F	21	IV	Commercial	Customer reception, invoicing, quote, contracting, inventory	Building equipment rental company - metropolis

Participants	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Current occupation	Short description of the current occupation	Information about the employer
Paul P	M	20	V	Social service agent	administrative tasks and reception	Social Assistance Center
Sylvain	M	20	V bis	Server	Diving, setting up / storing the dining room, serving dishes	Family restaurant - rural area
Felix	M	22	IV	Road (event handler)	Loading / unloading truck, assembly / disassembly scene	Company with less than 10 employees, Arts and Entertainment sector - metropolis
Rebecca	F	20	V-Vbis	Saleswoman in a sex shop	Shelving, sales, customer advice	Company with less than 10 employees, Arts and Entertainment sector - metropolis
Mirabelle	F	25	VI	hairdresser	hairstyle	Company with less than 10 employees in hairdressing salon - metropolis

Note. F = Female, M = Male. The Level of education is based on different criteria in various countries. We have used the French system to describe the characteristics of the participants. For information, "VI" refers to a total lack of diploma. Therefore, the lower the number (Roman), the higher the level of qualification. Thus, level "I" reflects a Master's degree or Ph.D. qualification, level "IV" reflects a High School Graduation, and level "V" or "Vbis" reflects the qualification of students who have been in high school or who have obtained a professional diploma, such as those preparing for craft, maintenance or secretary jobs.

Instrument

An interview questionnaire based on five main themes was developed in collaboration with partners from the countries involved in the comparative study of representations of decent work among low-skilled emerging adults. The first theme was related to general perceptions of decent work. The second theme was related to participants' evaluation of their work (decent or not) based on the ILO criteria. The third theme explored their perception of their current job and work situation. The fourth theme aimed to describe their educational background and other aspects of their lives. Finally, the last theme focused on their identity and their perceived perspectives about their future.

Data Analytic Technique

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Data were content analyzed using a thematic approach (Bardin, 1977/2013). The central themes presented in this paper are (a) representations of work, (b) the characteristics of the job performed in relation to perceptions of decent work, and (c) career prospects. Sub-themes were derived from each theme based on corpus categorization. Indeed, the corpus was first read by the first two authors and then coded. Each step of data processing was performed separately and then compared for adjustment. Sub-themes were categorized based on frequency computation, and similar sub-themes were grouped together. A sub-theme is more critical the more frequent it is (Bardin, 1977/2013). Therefore, the sub-themes were presented according to their frequency so that significant elements could be identified quickly.

Results

The first theme, representations of work, included different sub-themes: the means of living, the social aspects of work, development possibilities, and personal fulfillment.

For all the participants, work should be a means of living as it should allow satisfying survival needs: "It's a need, something you can't do without... to live basically" (Sylvain); "It's necessary to live [...], anyway, staying at home doing nothing, I don't think it's a good solution. Even from the moral and physical point of view, in addition, we need money too, just simply" (Paul G).

Moreover, for eight out of ten participants, work must also contribute to living happily, notably by providing pleasure. Only Mirabelle and Rebecca did not mention this notion of pleasure in their general representation of work. Were these two young people in a more precarious situation than the others? Although they did not clearly express precariousness, the working conditions they mentioned tend to suggest it and raise some doubts regarding contract regularity (partially undeclared work). However, although mentioned by all, the financial aspect related to work did not appear to be central. Thus, when the young people were questioned about what they would do if they won the lottery, half declared that they would continue working even without financial constraints. They mentioned the desire "not to be bored" (Sylvain) or even the beneficial effect of "staying active" (Felix). In addition, Felix mentioned social protection: "at least for social security contributions". Others

hesitated, such as Eva, "except perhaps to maintain relationships with colleagues", or Hélène, "To maintain social ties…to avoid, yeah, sinking into our money and locking ourselves in, and to not see other people, to maintain a social link, yeah that's mostly that... not to earn money since I would have some, but to keep in touch with the outside world, my friends, my family, to see other people ".

In the absence of any financial constraint, two emerging adults considered renegotiating their working conditions: "I would reduce my working hours" (Hélène), "I would negotiate my hours […], or I would set up my business" (Florian). Others would also maintain an activity: "but I would produce something else" (Xavier), "I would travel to discover the world" (Paul G), highlighting the social and self-accomplishment needs that work could allow to satisfy.

The second predominant sub-theme (9 out of 10 participants) was related to the need to exist in society, the notion of recognition, one's place and role in society, and the social utility of one's activity. The social dimension was emphasized as Paul P illustrated: "it's a job you like [...] where you feel useful and where you can help people, where you can be of use".

The third main sub-theme referred to the means of self-accomplishment and development. Within this third main sub-theme, the links between work, on the one hand, and self-accomplishment, on the other, and becoming an adult emerged. For emerging adults, it is a question of "growing up", blossoming and becoming independent, and developing and using their skills. What interests Xavier in working is "progressing by performing tasks and learning; and

feeling useful as well ", which also relates to the previous theme. Hélène's comments also reflected this sub-theme: "A pleasure, basically anyway...And a way to earn a living... because it's true since I work, I wouldn't have been able to buy all my little things, phone, high-tech... that's it... because I still live with my parents and it allows me to contribute to the shopping and all that, that... Afterward, I could have gone to live on my own, but for the moment, I prefer staying there... but still, I participate... and it's sure that if I didn't have my salary, I couldn't participate in the shopping and the household chores, it's true that it's... it allows me to be independent anyway. If I didn't have a salary, I would be completely dependent on my parents, but that's not the case. [...] to enter the world a little bit... it allows me to see a little bit if I were on my own, the kind of expenses I would have, the groceries, the rent and all that... Yeah, so it makes you grow up too, I think". Hélène also emphasized the importance of hanging out with friends, made possible by her salary.

The second theme, job characteristics and perception of one's work, includes two sub-themes: the perception of work as decent and what characterizes good and worst jobs. The job held, the working environment, and the associated assignments are summarized in Table 1. Each of the two sub-themes presented several categories that would allow refining the representations of decent work.

Based on the proposed definition of decent work, nine participants said they consider their job decent work.

Consistent with the representations of work defined above, the main characteristics of a good job are, in the

first place, to be fulfilling (8/10). This category is established from the following sub-categories: work that is meaningful (or valuable, from the ILO perspective), "useful", "helpful" (4/10), which allows "enjoying oneself" (6/10), "[self-] fulfillment " (Florian), including self-expression and skill development (5/10). The second quality of good jobs lies in their social dimension (6/10) in terms of organization, functioning, and working conditions. Young people are looking for a "good atmosphere" (all), a "team" relationship, and "cohesion". Finally, a good job is reassuring (5/10). This refers directly to the conditions in which it is carried out, i.e., the activity itself, the place, and the environment that provide the resources and the means to work. A good job is one adapted to the skills acquired, and that is "clear" (Sylvain), and where the "boss" is flexible and helps in learning. A good job allows one to enjoy it and develop oneself in a favorable social environment (atmosphere) and safe working conditions. This reflects Florian's comments: "[It's] work that provides social ties and work that is fulfilling in terms of skills, which allows you to create or improve your skills ".

It should be noted that only three participants mentioned salary as a good job characteristic. Working must allow one to live and earn a sufficient wage. However, that doesn't make it a good job. For the young people interviewed, the worst jobs are related to a dysfunctional organization or hierarchy, poor working conditions (8 out of 10 participants), and conflicting relationships (7 out of 10 participants). The dysfunctional organization is due to the absence or lack of recognition, perceiving the hierarchy as incompetent or illegitimate, inequity, the

absence of a framework, and unsafe working conditions; for example, being recruited for a job without having the required skills or resources. Working conditions also refer to difficulties of the job (6 participants out of 10 mentioned hours, the climate, the workload, and the difficulties encountered) and, to a lesser extent, insufficient pay (3 participants out of 10). Finally, the worst job is characterized by a lack of cohesion and poor working relationships. This underlines the importance of the social dimension of work in the eyes of the young people interviewed. Thus, the interpersonally and physically safe working conditions as characteristics of decent work emerged clearly from our participant's representations of work.

The third theme, career prospects, included two sub-themes: job prospects and the dream job envisaged by the young people.

All of them mentioned plans and were confident about finding a job. Their job search took no more than a month. Here are examples of what constituted a dream job for them: "well-known bartender in Ibiza" (Sylvain), car mechanic "in a luxury company" (Paul G), working in "a luxury hotel" (Hélène), "business class" (Florian), "famous actor", gaining "notoriety" (Paul P), "comic book designer" (Xavier), opening "a huge night bar" (Eva), "policewoman" (Rebecca, referring to the American "profilers" of TV series). It should be noted that these dream jobs were mentioned as being accessible, sometimes in the long term, and were generally related to their field of study or employment at the time of the interviews. However, the young people seemed to have positively integrated the need for time and training necessary to achieve

their dream job. Returning to training for a goal they will be pursuing makes sense. The short-term career prospects, on the other hand, are less clear.

Discussion

The elements of the discourse related to the representations of work were in line with motivational theories. Indeed, work should allow individuals to meet survival, sociability, and growth needs (e.g., Alderfer, 1969, 1972). Work is, therefore, primarily a means and not an end for young people. Similarly, although all mentioned the financial benefit of employment, it turns out that four of them spontaneously envisaged continuing to work even if they no longer faced financial constraints, and seven of them imagined minimal activity.

For the emerging adults interviewed, work is about more than just satisfying basic needs and getting adequate pay. The need for social recognition and self-fulfillment was indeed very present in their statements. As emphasized by Koekemoer et al. (2018), work progression and skill development opportunities fulfill individuals' self-determination needs. Moreover, research by Duffy et al. showed that even when a job is initially unmotivating (e.g., precarious, low-paid work), it can become satisfying in the eyes of workers, especially if it allows them to develop skills and/or progress. Such a situation enables workers to find meaning in their work and increases their employability. Furthermore, social relations lead to meaningful work and contribute to self-determination by generating the motivation and energy necessary to perform work-related tasks, even when they are of little interest. The notion of pleasure highlighted supports the idea that satisfaction is part of workers' expectations.

Working appeared to contribute strongly to independence by providing sufficient salary to leave their parents' "house", live on their own, and bear the expenses related to housing and food purchases. Working also allows for learning and growing, and more broadly, autonomy, a necessary component of emerging adults' quest for independence. For example, Rebecca explained that work is crucial because it "allows her to stop living with [her] mother", while Sylvain developed once he left school: "In addition, it [working] made me grow".

Emerging adults expect to be respected (by employers, co-workers, and clients). Therefore, working conditions should be physically and psychologically acceptable. However, we have noted evidence of adjustment to constraints. Thus, in the event of winning the lottery, the young people interviewed mentioned that they would be entering into negotiation on their salary, hours, and tasks. The absence of an obligation to work (e.g., enough income secured) increases potential negotiations within their contract. This seems to be in line with observations among young university graduates who expect a level of remuneration, activities, and social recognition commensurate with a high level of qualification (Egido et al., 2018). However, the intended benefits from income vary according to the level of qualification. While in Egido et al. (2018), young university graduates in transition to employment could be satisfied with a job that facilitates a real estate investment, the low-skilled emerging

adults in our study mentioned the pleasure provided by the possibility of affording objects such as a cell phone, hanging out more freely with friends or even renting an apartment, and thus, becoming independent.

Finally, the effect of the level of qualification indeed lies in the expectations regarding work and working conditions, which low-skilled emerging adults would express less.

The young people interviewed mentioned they were not worried about their ability to access employment despite their low skills. Regardless of the area, urban or rural, these young people found a job within one to two months. However, they knew their salaries were insufficient to guarantee their independence unless they were in a relationship. However, they did not question the adequacy of their income with the work performed. On the contrary, they seemed to believe that their level of qualification justified their low pay. Felix, for example, considered his salary as "pocket money" but also stated that his "[his] salary could be increased but was related to the labor market". Overall, salary was perceived as insufficient but fair, except for Mirabelle, the only one considering her work as indecent. Indeed, parts of her activity might not be declared. She mentioned being paid directly by clients, at their discretion: "We have a 10-hour contract per week, after which you are paid according to the number of heads combed. […] I keep half of the hairstyle". There is no more protection here, and she did not consider her salary fair, depending on clients. Her situation deprived her of one of her children (living in Cameroon, her country of origin), and working at the hairdressing salon, in addition to the transportation

constraints, reduced her presence at home (end of the day at 9 p.m.). This illustrates a link between precariousness and decent work: "Precariousness is the absence of one or more securities allowing individuals and families to assume their basic responsibilities and to enjoy their fundamental rights" (Wresinski, 1987, p. 14).

The dimensions cited by the young people captured partly decent work features as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2008, 2016) and the Psychological Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016). Indeed, we identified the following criteria in their response except for access to social security: (a) adequate compensation; (b) safe interpersonal and physical working conditions (linked to the dimensions of atmosphere, safe relationships, and assigning tasks adapted to acquired skills); (c) working hours that provide time for rest and leisure; (d) organizational values that complement family or personal values (what the emerging adults pointed as essential to them). Consistent with our hypothesis, the French social system, as guaranteed for all, could explain why our participants did not mention access to social security. Taxes and employee/employer contributions ensure a partial redistribution of wealth to people in need. Therefore, not referring to this feature could be interpreted as a lack of concern.

Considering reports highlighting unfavorable employment conditions of low-skilled emerging adults and those with no professional qualifications, might there not be indirect indicators of concerns about employment in the discourse of our participants? We believe it may be a sign of concern about the future, over which they have very little control. They did not complain

about their condition. However, their jobs did not provide them with independence, and they expected improvements without being able to project themselves precisely in the short term.

By examining what our participants had not expressed, we can explore more deeply their expectations and what is meaningful to them. Apart from Mirabelle, most of them stated that they could easily find a job, were not worried about finding a job, and did have decent jobs. Conversely, they did not explicitly mention that they lack recognition, that they did not have a defined and oriented career project, or that they were dissatisfied with their employment conditions. However, some of these elements showed up indirectly. Indeed, everyone would like to earn more (certainly later, in a more qualified job). Likewise, they expressed a need for recognition. The mentioned dream jobs indicated that they project themselves onto positions that could be described as ideal, implying high social recognition and even notoriety. Finally, there was no complaint but no realistic short-term project either. With these low-skill job characteristics, can they project themselves into the future? We think not, as they live with their parents, not earning enough to be independent. They live in the present, enjoy pleasures (hanging out with friends, iPhones, pocket money), and are satisfied with their working conditions, which are perceived in line with their level of qualification. However, their awareness of the importance of being highly skilled contributed to/ and enabled a desire for more comfortable jobs. These experiences, therefore, led to a reflection on the value of a diploma, which, the students are not concerned about in earlier stages of schooling. Emerging adults indeed find work, but to hope for better, they will have to attend training, which is essential for professional development.

We are witnessing a change of reference through experience. If the parental model is based on the ability to access employment without a diploma, it may not enable projection into the future and independence. Thus, working experience can allow a posteriori engagement in training that was mentally impossible until then. While work can reveal "meaning inhibitors" in young graduates transitioning from university to work (Cocandeau-Bellanger et al., 2018), it can show the value of training among low- or unskilled young people. The school-to-work transition produces unique changes in identity and attitude toward the world, events, and what does or does not contribute to stability (Parkes, 1971; Schlossberg, 1984).

Furthermore, the analysis of participants' responses suggested that precarious work made it possible to overcome financial need but not enough to allow projecting themselves into the future, giving new meaning to the mentioned dream jobs. Luxury and notoriety were crucial characteristics that echo the idealized occupations mentioned by young people (aged 11 to 13) about thirty years ago (Dumora, 1990). Indeed, prestige was associated with certain occupations (Gottfredson, 1981). Idealization, prestige, and difficulty of projecting into the future that characterized adolescents at that time could also apply to low-skilled emerging adults today. Could this be the mark of this population's lengthening time to adulthood?

Implications for Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice

Working is a necessity for young people, without being an end in itself. Some decent work features (as defined by ILO) are more significant than others. However, the desire to maintain activity and the social and fulfillment dimensions tend to reflect models that consider work crucial for individuals' development. Indeed, the social dimension of work remains central. Work is a means of existing in society, even if the financial aspect does not force one to work. Similarly, we noted the generalized importance of relational dimensions. Finally, even if individuals get unchosen jobs, they allow them to meet survival needs and perceive social utility. However, it is still being determined whether jobs held by low-skilled young people will enable them to reach fulfillment. At least, their desire to stabilize employment —renewing fixed-term contracts or seeking permanent contracts— shows their will to get out of precariousness by accessing other forms of employment. Finally, our participants' expectations about life, work, and recognition at work, either in their current positions or in general, got our attention as they referred to luxury and notoriety.

Limitations and Further Directions

The specificities in accessing our research population and the existing French youth profiles explain the adjustment to the level of education/training. Before our study, it was challenging to understand emerging adults' representations of work, particularly decent work. Likely, the young people interviewed were not among those facing more difficulty in the target population.

There are limits to be considered, such as those related to representations influenced by young people's support (from parents, social institutions, and personal networks).

Most of the young people interviewed stated they were confident about their employability. However, caution should be observed regarding our sampling as we had difficulties accessing the targeted population. Moreover, while salary is perceived as fair by most, it generally did not allow emerging adults to be independent enough, which is a barrier to individual development. Finally, we questioned findings that could be obtained with unskilled emerging adults who are not in employment, or the "invisible" members of this population, whether they were those who declined participation in the present study or those we could not reach.

From our experience, conducting research with this population segment requires developing different strategies to reach them due to local specificities. It doesn't seem easy to compare the representations of unskilled young people from other countries using the recruitment criteria we initially chose. Indeed, only a few young people are without a diploma in France because of the educational policy. Working conditions, quality of life in the workplace or in general, social policies, and the level of training have essential effects on representations –as investigated in comparative research– but also on the easiness of conducting such a study. There may be a form of shame among the unskilled young people in France, which explains the problematic access to this population. Future studies should consider such methodical issues. It could be necessary to develop tools and methods adapted to

each country.

Furthermore, low-skilled emerging adults are less accustomed to expressing themselves than their skilled peers and could be challenged by semi-structured interviews or questionnaires (Disquay, 2015). Therefore, the interview grid, and even the data collection methods, could be reviewed and made more flexible to avoid any suggestion or direction that may enhance difficulties in expressing themselves.

Finally, it should be noted that despite a sensitive social context and initial observations of high feelings of insecurity, the young people interviewed expressed satisfaction, suggesting that the youth in France keeps hoping in general.

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