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Getting an internship in the sport industry: The institutionalization of privilege

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Abstract

Unpaid internships are embedded in sport hegemony. These unpaid sport internships often offer less learning opportunities and foster an environment where interns feel like “second class citizens” in their organization. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the world of unpaid internships in the sport industry by exploring students’ perspectives of them as an institutionalized practice, as well as how privilege impacts their internship experiences. Grounded in institutional theory, data from semi-structured interviews with 17 sports management students were analyzed using the Gioia Methodology. Three themes emerged from the findings: the idiosyncratic nature of sport internships, the legitimization of unpaid internships in the sport industry, and the institutionalization of privilege spurred by such positions. Practical implications from the study include increasing sport organizations’ awareness of how unpaid internships disadvantage students from less privileged backgrounds, and may therefore result in a less socioeconomically diverse workforce in the sport industry.

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Getting an internship in the sport industry: The institutionalization of privilege

How does a job seeker get a job in a tight and competitive market? This research agenda has been at the center of sociology and organizational studies literature for quite some time (see Granovetter's 1995 book that has almost 7,000 citations). Collectively, theorizing among scholars in this area implies that "who you know" is equally (or even more) important than "what you know" in the labor market (Jackson, Hall, Rowe, & Daniels, 2009; Katz, Walker & Hindman, 2018; Mouw, 2003; Obukhova & Lan, 2013; Schaufeli & Vanyperen, 1993; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009). For instance, Hadani and colleagues (2012) conducted a study on hiring practices of university academic departments, finding that while merit-based criteria were relevant, an academic's network was especially significant to them getting a job.

More recently, discussion has centered on unpaid internships (including the legality of this work arrangement) as a part of the larger conversation on how to get a job (e.g., Fredericksen, 2013; Frenette, 2013; Greenhouse, 2010; Mazurak, 2013). This approach to finding a job (i.e., unpaid internships) has been long established in the sport industry. In sport, the notion of undertaking an unpaid internship seems to be embedded into the fabric of the sport industry. Deeply entrenched in sport industry hegemony is the norm that young people (i.e., students and recent graduates) must work multiple unpaid internships to have a better chance at being considered for full-time paid positions in sport (Parkhouse, 1987; DeSensi, Kelley, Blanton, Beitel, 1990; Petersen & Pierce, 2009). Sport industry internships are typically opportunities to work with sport organizations in which students may or may not receive academic credit (Parkhouse, 1987; Wong, 2013). The duties of an internship can range from making cold calls in

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sales, working on activation for the marketing department, or preparing an arena for game day as a member of the facilities and operations crew. Although students are often seeking networking opportunities and learning experiences in internships (Peretto Stratta, 2004; Koo, Diacin, Khojasteh & Dixon, 2016), sport organizations are often seeking inexpensive labor (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent & Turner, 2005; Burke & Carton, 2013). “Instead of hiring an assistant media relations director at \$35,000, an organization can pay an intern \$12,000 to complete a substantial portion of the same work” (Wong, 2013, p. 59). In addition, some sport internships suffer from an array of issues, including a lack of compensation and other monetary benefits (Peretto Stratta, 2004); little responsibility and an overabundance of busy work, which leads to fewer learning opportunities (Cunningham et al., 2005); unsatisfactory supervising (Odio & Kerwin, 2016); and work environments where interns feel like “second class citizens” within the company (Wong, 2013, p. 64).

The controversy surrounding unpaid internships is twofold. First, many unpaid internships are filled with work that does not develop students, nor does it prepare them for working in the sport industry (Cunningham et al., 2005). Also, many unpaid internships operate as a backdoor in which companies offer students the opportunity to earn course credit for their work. However, students must pay for these course credits, which often occur in the summer, a time when they normally would be working a paying job and earning money (Peretto Stratta, 2004; Burke & Carton, 2013). The burden of working an unpaid internship in sport then becomes exacerbated as the student must not only pay for the course credits but must also forgo a paid position for an unpaid internship in sport. Such an arrangement limits the viability of internship positions for

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certain students, as some may not be able to take on this financial burden (Peretto Stratta, 2004; Steffen, 2010). Students who cannot afford to fit into this institutional system of unpaid internships miss out on building a network in sport, which often leads to a lack of opportunities in the sport industry (Peretto Stratta, 2004; Odio, Sagas & Kerwin, 2014; Koo et al., 2016). In essence an “iron curtain” has been created, which divides the elite (i.e., sport organizations and financially privileged students and graduates) from socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

To that end, the purpose of this study is to investigate the important, yet often ignored, world of unpaid internships in the sport industry. The study examines sport management students’ perceptions of unpaid internships as an institutionalized practice, as well as how privilege impacts students’ internship experiences. An institutional perspective provides a useful way to study and understand this phenomenon. Therefore, theoretically, the paper draws on institutional theory tenets, namely legitimacy and institutionalization (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

This study has several contributions. One key point is that there is currently a dearth of sport-based literature pertaining to the institutionalization of sport (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Thus, it answers the call for more studies in this area. From an empirical standpoint, this study shows how students understand and accept the hardship of unpaid internships and how this institutionalization might lead to a selection bias for talent as only those with privilege can endure such positions. From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to the institutional theory literature by managing to separate legitimization from institutionalization, which are closely related concepts

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(Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). This institutional lens also sheds light on hegemonic authority by consent practice (Clegg, 2010; Suddaby, 2015; Tietze & Dick, 2013) within the sport industry. Specifically, it illustrates how unpaid internships rooted in privilege have become a biased norm of sport hegemony. Sport industry professionals and sport management educators will also find this study useful. Specifically, the study demonstrates that existing demographics of sport industry employees and leaders may be a result of unpaid internships. For example, if an internship is unpaid, it is unlikely that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will have the means to embark on the opportunity. The unintended consequence of this is that it produces a pool of aspiring sport professionals comprised of (mostly, not solely) the socioeconomically advantaged. Meanwhile, the study reveals that academic institutions play a role in the legitimization of unpaid internship through the offering (and sometimes requiring) of academic credit for internships, which furthers the financial burdens of students and raises questions about the roles colleges and universities should take in overcoming the hegemonic class privilege inherent in current internship practices.

Theoretical Framework

Hegemony and Privilege

Hegemony, first coined by Gramsci (1971) is the “literal and ideological forces that hierarchically organize and structure individual lives and social practices” (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 305). Often in hegemony, “members of both the dominant and subordinate groups consent to this hierarchical arrangement, as the ideological beliefs of the dominant group or ruling class have been disseminated, accepted, and naturalized” (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 306). Hegemony has been examined in sport in a

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variety of contexts, including gender, race and sexual orientation. From a gender perspective, hegemonic masculinity refers to the stratification of men and women such that men occupy the dominant position and women the subordinate position in the gender order (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity has been found in studies of athletic administrators in collegiate sport (Whisenant, Pedersen & Obenour, 2002; Price, Dunlap & Eller, 2017) and female men's basketball coaches (Walker, Bopp & Sagas, 2011; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity in sport has also been examined from a sexual orientation perspective, with heterosexuality occupying the dominant position and sexual minorities seen as the subordinate group. Anderson's (2002; 2005) work on gay male athletes demonstrates such hegemonic stratification. Racial hegemony, particularly in relation to the dominant white hegemony, has been examined in the sport context when examining progress towards racial equality in national sport organizations (Long, Robinson & Spracken, 2005), racism in soccer and cricket (Long & Hylton, 2002), and the intersectionality of black female athletic administrators (Price, Dunlap & Eller, 2017).

However, organizations are not just sites where hegemonic gender and racial ideology prevails, but hegemonic class ideology as well. Organizations have been described as "inequality regimes," responsible for the production and reproduction of inequities on the basis of class, race, and gender through their structures and practices (Acker, 2006). Current literature of sport industry internships supports the notion that unpaid internships create disadvantages for less privileged students (Peretto Stratta, 2004; DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). Yet, in the sport industry, it is less clear why socioeconomically disadvantaged students, as the industry's subordinate group, consent

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to such a norm. Certainly, privileged or financially able students, sport industry personnel, and wealthy sport organizations would support the norm of unpaid internships since they are the groups that stand to benefit. They are in essence the ruling class, which Gramsci spoke of in his 1971 depiction of hegemony. They have the power and privilege to replicate this institutional norm. However, in hegemony there are the privileged and the disenfranchised; through institutional theory, one can examine the role of both in legitimizing the norm of unpaid internships as a part of the institution of sport.

Institutional Theory

For almost 40 years, institutional theory has been a major player for organizational and management scholars seeking a better understanding of how and why organizations behave and the consequences of that behavior (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008). At its core, institutional theory is concerned with the following question: “why and with what consequences do organizations exhibit particular organizational arrangements that defy traditional rational explanation?” (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 31). Its ability to answer this and related questions has established institutional theory as, perhaps, the foremost analytical tool to study organizations (Washington & Patterson, 2011). As such, institutional theory is well-established in sport management literature as well (e.g., Agyemang, Berg, & Fuller, 2018; Cousens & Slack, 2005; Cunningham, 2009; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Kikulis, 2000; Silk & Amis, 2000; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). While there are various levels of institutional analysis, the field level is especially apropos for this study. This level of analysis allows scholars to examine the hierarchies of status between occupational communities (e.g., sport industry professional vs. unpaid intern) that influence hiring decisions (Greenwood

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et al., 2008). Specifically, as this study takes a critical management approach to uncovering biased norms in the sport industry, institutional theory allows for an understanding of the social pressures that influence norms that may defy economical rationality (Suddaby, 2015). If sport organizations seek to both hire the best possible talent and increase diversity, then how would an institutional norm that favored the financially privileged be so entrenched as part of this institution?

The next question would be to ask what an institution entails. Scholars have debated this very question for some time. While this debate goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that, for this study, the conceptualization of an institution resides within the neo-institutional tradition. The neo-institutionalism tradition defines an institution as: “More-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order” (Greenwood et al., pp. 4-5). This differs from old institutionalism (i.e., an organization infused with value; Selznick, 1957) in that an institution is not confined to organizational forms and boundaries. These institutions are not permanent and may change as a result of field or environmental forces (Reay & Hinings, 2005). Examples of institutions residing within the neo-institutional perspective include a handshake in Western societies, marriage, racism, and the presidency (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Each of these is (for the most part) taken for granted, has a sense of shared meaning amongst those who adhere to the institution, and has a sense of permanence. That is, it is virtually inconceivable that these institutions may have never existed (Palmer, Biggart, & Dick, 2008). In this case, the institution is the notion of how to get a job in a very tight and competitive sport labor

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market. Two institutional theory tenets are essential to this study: legitimacy and institutionalization, which are discussed next.

Legitimacy

Understanding legitimacy and institutionalization are central to identifying institutions in the neo-institutional perspective. Legitimacy is regarded as the most fundamental attribute of neo-institutionalism (Palmer et al., 2008) and a driving force behind the acceptance of an institution (Washington & Patterson, 2011). It is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity (i.e., structure or practice) are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Palmer and colleagues (2008) added that legitimacy “corresponds to the extent to which a structure or practice resembles an institution” (Palmer et al., 2008, p. 742). Furthermore, the extent to which the structure or practice is deemed to be legitimate by actors (particularly, authoritative actors) can be measured by examining its pervasiveness; if it is prevalent, it may be referred to as an institution (Palmer et al., 2008). Scholars have noted conformity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and even manipulation (Suchman, 1995) as antecedents to legitimacy.

Organizations may pursue legitimacy for several reasons. For one, legitimacy provides a safeguard from external pressures. Additionally, it affords protection from being questioned about behavior, while also being linked to the survival of the institution (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). More recently, discussion has focused on who confers legitimacy. This study centralizes professional legitimacy. This refers to professional groups who convey legitimacy as a result of their authority within an institution

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(Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). In this study, sport industry actors occupy this role, as they endorse current practices and perceptions.

Institutionalization

Meanwhile, institutionalization is the most fundamental process of neo-institutionalism tradition (Palmer et al., 2008). Institutionalization is, by definition, the process by which “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take rule-like status in social thought or action” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). This includes a three-step process. First, habitualization refers to formalizing the said institution. Second, objectification refers to collective agreement of the impending institution. Lastly, sedimentation is complete saturation of the institution (Palmer et al., 2008; Tolbert & Zucker, 1999). One may refer to something as institutionalized if it is commonly practiced by the masses without contestation, gives the impression of being perpetual, and if an alternative is inconceivable (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1983). What is also interesting is that because of its rule-like status, an institutionalized process does not command monitoring or policing. Furthermore, generations pass on the institutionalized act to one another, allowing preservation (Zucker, 1977). In sum, the link between legitimacy and institutionalization can be understood by the following: “The institutionalization of practices may be attempted by organizations [or an authority type] that desire an increase in legitimacy and ‘taken-for-grantedness’ where certain practices can be seen as the only natural way of action” (Washington & Patterson, 2011, p. 5).

To date, there are only a select few sport industry studies that have examined institutionalization of sport institutions (Washington & Patterson, 2011). For instance, Washington (2004) and Washington and Ventresca (2008) investigated the

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institutionalization of the NCAA and men's college basketball, respectively. Meanwhile, Cunningham (2008a) illustrated how gender inequality among sport organizations has become institutionalized. Cunningham (2010), in his multilevel approach to understanding the under-representation of African American coaches, also noted how racism is an institutionalized practice in sport. Meanwhile, Heinze, Soderstrom, and Zdroik (2014) noted how corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become institutionalized in the sport industry. Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) discussed the institutionalization of gender bias in men's sports. Lastly, Edwards and Washington (2015) studied College Hockey Inc.'s (CHI) (NCAA college hockey initiative) pursuit of legitimacy so as to compete for Canadian players who might otherwise play in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). Therefore, a chief aim is for this research to extend the study of institutionalization in sport.

Research Questions and Study Context

Based on the theoretical framework, this study sought to answer to following research questions:

1. How do sport management students explain the norm of unpaid internships in the sport industry?
2. How do sport management students perceive privilege as impacting the unpaid internship experience in the sport industry?

The study examines these questions within the context of one institution: the sport industry in the United States. For the context of this paper, the scope of the sport industry includes organizations involved in the business of competitive sport at the amateur, scholastic, and professional levels. Examples of organizations in this industry include

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community sport programs, athletic departments, teams, and leagues, as well as other businesses operating to support such organizations (e.g., a sport marketing firm).

Methods

Considering the purpose of this research was to understand social processes involved in the institutionalization and privilege of unpaid internships in the sport industry, an inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews is the most appropriate method of inquiry. Specifically, this study employed use of the Gioia methodology. The Gioia methodology, developed to provide “qualitative rigor,” employs a systematic approach to data gathering, organizing and reporting (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Beyond the technical aspects of handling data during research, the Gioia method provides a canvas for theory development and exposing new boundaries in theory that many other qualitative methods may not support. Key to this methodology is the resulting data structure that emerges from the analysis, illustrating the first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. Although not used often in sport management literature, the Gioia methodology provides deep understanding of organizational phenomena. The method involves capturing concepts relevant to the human organizational experience in terms that are adequate both at the level of meaning of the people living that experience and adequate at the level of scientific theorizing about that experience (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). In this case, the Gioia method illuminated the institutionalization of unpaid internships, by allowing an understanding of both the participants’ (sport management students) personal experience on internships, as well as how those experiences are theoretically relevant in respect to the research questions. To accomplish these aims, the researchers devised a systematic inductive approach to

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concept development. In essence, the Gioia method provided a holistic approach to inductive analysis used in the qualitative traditions, while also providing rigor (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

Procedures

Graduate and upper-level undergraduate (i.e, senior and junior) sport management students were recruited for participation via email using convenience sampling methods at two universities. Both universities were large institutions (i.e. 30,000 or more student populations), located in the United States (one in the South and one in the Northeast) with traditional sport management programs holding strong reputations. These two institutions were targeted for their large student bodies, as well as to provide geographic diversity, thus reducing potential biases resulting from regional cultures. The sample represented most regions of the country in having participants from California, Florida, Massachusetts, Texas, Louisiana, Illinois, and Oregon, to name a few. One program was housed inside a business school, while the other was housed inside a kinesiology program, allowing for additional diversity of student experiences. Once students received the recruitment email and informed consent, they were instructed to contact the researchers to schedule a preliminary meeting and interview. The preliminary meeting took place in person or via email. Its purpose was to ensure that the student read and understood the informed consent form, was in their third or fourth year of coursework or in graduate school, and had worked at least one paid or unpaid internship. Once the individuals met this criterion, an interview was scheduled.

Participants and Data Sources

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In order to reveal the process by which unpaid internships have been institutionalized in the sport industry, researchers conducted one-on-one, in-person interviews with participants (i.e., juniors, seniors, and graduate students) on the role of internships in the sport industry, and the process by which they have become institutionalized. Understanding the process of such a deeply entrenched institutional practice necessitated investigating the phenomenon from the perspective of those closest to the internship process: sport management students. The research team interviewed 17 participants for the study (see Table 1 for a description of demographic information and Table 2 for detailed description of internship types), after which point data analysis revealed that theoretical saturation had been reached and additional participants were not needed (Charmaz, 2014). Each interview lasted between 40 and 86 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Member checks were performed, with participants asked to review transcripts for accuracy (Neuman, 2000). Pseudonyms were given to each participant to provide anonymity, while data was stored in password protected files to protect confidentiality.

[INSERT TABLE 1 AND 2]

Analysis

In applying Gioia methodology to the data:

We have worked out procedures that not only guide the conduct of the research itself in a way that imposes qualitative rigor, but also encourages the presentation of the research findings in a way that demonstrates the connections among the data, the emerging concepts, and the resulting grounded theory. (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, p. 3, 2012).

Following the Gioia method in analyzing the data provided rigor, consistency, and trustworthiness. Analysis began with first order coding. In this step of analysis, the

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participant's (i.e., informant) words are of most importance. Therefore, researchers maintained the integrity of their language and words and did very little to condense the number of themes that may emerge. The second order analysis began with axial coding, which reduced the number of themes or categories, to a much more manageable number (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this second order analysis, the goal was to merge raw data from participants' voice (i.e., first order analysis) with theoretical underpinnings in organizational theory and sport. Specifically, the researchers looked for terms that jumped out of the data, in hopes of identifying a new understanding of the phenomena. As Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012) put it, "We focus particular attention on nascent concepts that don't seem to have adequate theoretical referents in the existing literature (i.e. "identity ambiguity" from Corley & Gioia, 2004), or existing concepts that 'leap out' because of their relevance to the new domain" (p.6). Finally, once data saturation was met with second order themes, those themes were reduced down to aggregate dimensions. Aggregate dimensions are rooted in theory and based on second order themes. These first order codes, second order themes and aggregate dimension form the foundation of the study's data structure. The data structure is a visible aid that explains how researchers moved from raw data and verbatim quotes, to aggregate themes rooted in theory. The final step in analysis was to revisit data, which was then viewed through the lens of the data structure (see Table 3) and additional literature, which was inherently gathered, as researchers sought to understand the data. Conversations between the researchers continued until a consensus decision was made.

Findings and Discussion

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The findings from this study indicate an institutionalized, idiosyncratic nature of sport internships that has created a greater disenfranchisement of sport management students compared, from the viewpoint of participants, to their non-sport management peers. The culture of underpaid, low value internships has become legitimized by the implicit acceptance of sport management students, as well as the participation of academic institutions who enable internships to be taken for credit. This, in turn, has created an institutionalization of privilege, whereby only students with financial means are able to access the unpaid internships necessary to be competitive job applicants upon graduation (See Table 3 for a detailed summary of these themes). In this way, the sport industry is supporting a hegemonic class ideology, which reproduces socioeconomic inequality among sport management students and, by extension, sport industry professionals.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Idiosyncratic Nature of Sport Internships

Interviews with students revealed that while internships in the sport industry share many commonalities with those in other fields—including a perceived essentialness to eventually gain employment after graduation and sometimes the fulfillment of academic requirements—sport management students perceive a contrast between their internship experiences and those of their peers. While sport is certainly not the only industry with unpaid internships, students often compared themselves to peers in business majors with paid internship positions, rather than to their peers in other academic majors (e.g., education, kinesiology) who may also complete unpaid internships. As the students see it, sport internships typically involve no pay, long hours, and little educational value. They

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describe a parasitic relationship in which sport employers view interns as free labor rather than a mutually beneficial relationship in which interns enter a recruitment pipeline for future employment. In this way, sport management interns, even more so than interns in other fields, become disenfranchised through a wide power imbalance between sport organizations and interns.

This idiosyncratic culture of internships appears widespread across the industry, suggesting this inequitable treatment of interns is institutionalized. The 17 students interviewed for this study took a combined 21 unpaid internships in the sport industry (plus one additional unpaid internship which was turned down by the student), compared to nine paid internship positions in sport. Six of the students worked a combined seven internships outside of the sport industry, all of which were paid positions.

As in many other academic programs, the sport management students in this study viewed internships as an essential, if not required, part of their college experience (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Participants were required to complete either an internship or an academic alternative as part of their degree program. However, all students reported being strongly encouraged by faculty and staff, to begin the internship process as early as the summer following their first year. Yet they drew a contrast between their internship experiences and those of their peers in other academic majors, particularly in business programs. The most prevalent distinction students drew was the lack of financial compensation for sport management internships. In speaking about his classmates in other majors, Rupert stated, “I’m happy for them because they’re my friends so I don’t care, but it’s incredible how the change of major

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and a change of what you want to get into has so much money involved.” John Ryan felt a bit of resentment towards his business school peers, saying,

I feel like it’s unfair, but I know that’s the way things work and there’s nothing I can do about it so I won’t complain about it. But when I hear my friends are getting \$18/hour to go and sit in an office, it really bugs me knowing the same opportunities aren’t on the table for me.

Frustration with the pay disparity compared to other industries and their peers outside of sport management was widespread. Anne often referred to wishing she had changed her major to provide more options to make better money after graduation. She said,

It’s very frustrating because it’s not like they’re smarter than me. It’s just that they’re lucky that they’re interested in things like finance and business strategy or whatever, and willing to work in that industry while I am not.

Jim discussed how his dual major in finance has allowed him to feel a level of comfort. If he does not get a paid job or internship in the sport industry, he will accept one of the paid finance jobs, which he has already been offered. Other participants echoed this sentiment. Mia’s experience also led her to question whether unpaid internships are warranted in sports. “We all kind of joke oh, you know, a financial services company or wherever it may be, even some of the non-profits that were looking for consulting work, can scrape up the money. Why can’t a [sports] marketing agency?”

Rupert pointed out just how widespread unpaid internships are in the industry, saying,

You look through and almost all of them [sport industry opportunities] are unpaid, but you’ll be able to get credit. Even the summer internships that are full-time, 40 hours a week or more, are unpaid. I think when it gets to that point it’s tough.

Michael, who experienced internships outside of sport, sustained this notion that unpaid internships are a cultural norm in sports organizations:

It’s interesting, it’s a cultural difference. People in sports feel like you have to earn your way. Every internship I’ve had outside of sports was paid. And many of them paid generously. So it’s kind of like a different standard between the

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industries. It's almost like in sports, you have to earn your way and prove yourself to get in, and even when you get in you have to prove yourself. In other industries, they believe "we wouldn't choose you if we thought you had to prove yourself by working hard for no pay."

Saber also felt that industries see more value in their interns than in sport. He talked extensively about how his peers were being recruited by accounting and financial firms, while he was being used for free labor, with very little educational gain during his unpaid internship with a minor league baseball team. He said,

In non-sport internships I think there's an equal emphasis on the company trying to recruit you. In sport internships, I feel like it's much more of a parasitic relationship where the sport organization is using you for labor and is not as involved in recruiting you back to the company.

Other students echoed the lack of educational value they received from their sport industry internships, complaining, for instance, of not learning anything except how to toss t-shirts and set up inflatables. Prior research has suggested that such a lack of educational value leads to students feeling exploited as cheap labor, thus lowering their anticipated career satisfaction, a feeling echoed by participants in this study (Cunningham et al., 2005).

This institutionalized culture of unpaid interns working long hours in exchange for little educational value has resulted in the disenfranchisement of sport management interns. While a power imbalance between employer and employee exists in any work relationship, the students in this study repeatedly mentioned a feeling of powerlessness that resulted from the internship culture; in other words, they lacked the agency to advocate for change. For instance, John believed that, "it's so competitive; if you're not willing to do it, someone else is. You are so easily replaced that basically you have to do it if you want to get the job." These students are, in essence, the disenfranchised. They

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lack power and the financial privilege to act out against the sport industry norms. This disenfranchisement plays a key role in the next theme from the data, as it contributes to the ways in which students participate in the legitimization of unpaid internships.

Legitimacy and Maintenance of Unpaid Internships

As suggested in the theoretical framework, legitimacy is one of the most powerful constructs used in establishing and maintaining an institution (Palmer et al., 2008).

Specifically, legitimacy is sought by the actors of an institution to confirm their norms and myths, which usually are embedded in self-interested motivations. The findings from this study reveal that sport management students contribute to the legitimization of unpaid internships through conformity and implicit acceptance. Sport management students are usually aware of the inequity of unpaid internships, but they conform, both out of a feeling of powerlessness and in an effort to find their place in the sport industry. They also apply business and economic logic to justify sport organizations' decisions not to pay interns, and suggest that the current system of earning academic credit offers a cover for the sport organizations.

Feeling Powerless

As suggested by Palmer et al. (2008), legitimacy is measured by the pervasiveness of the practice. Every student interviewed who had completed an internship in sport had worked (or in one case, turned down) at least one unpaid internship. Unpaid internships are truly threaded in the fabric of the sport industry. Furthermore, the conformity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and even manipulation (Suchman, 1995) of employees to accept without question, unpaid internships, legitimizes its place in the institution of sport. Students implicitly conform to the institutionalized norm of unpaid internships by not challenging

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it, which occurs in part because they are the disenfranchised group in the sport industry-intern relationship. As John Ryan put it in the quote shared in the previous section, “I know that’s the way things work and there’s nothing I can do about it so I won’t complain about it.” Students expressed awareness that the situation was unfair to them, but felt they lacked the power to affect change. When asked about the prevalence of unpaid internships, Saber said, “Seems to be the industry norm, but I don’t think it’s a good thing. I don’t think anyone can do anything about it. Hopeless. That would be the buzzword for my response.”

Applying Business Logics

Students also legitimized the institutionalization of unpaid internships by applying business logics as justification for sport organizations deciding not to pay interns, such as supply-and-demand economics and financial-based decision making. For example, even if a group of students decided to rise against the system, participants perceived that the supply of students who want to work in the sport industry far outweighs the demand for jobs (Wong, 2009). Therefore, any student deciding to forgo an unpaid opportunity would quickly be replaced. As Mia explained,

These companies know that there is always going to be demand – it’s the sports industry. So even though I think the onus needs to be on them, the company, to craft an internship that is meaningful and paid, I think that a lot of, you know, enterprises can get away with the fact that, shoot, we post an unpaid internship and we’ll get 100 applications.

Larry echoed the decision to conform based on supply and demand:

We accept it, and I’ve never thought about it as being any other way, it’s just the way it’s supposed to be. I personally don’t see a problem with it because of how little need there is [for sport interns] and how many applicants there are, this clearly shows they don’t need to pay [interns]; they’re just playing the market. That’s just smart business.

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Anne also noted the financial implications for sport organizations that offer unpaid internships, saying, “Why change it if it’s working out well for their [sports organizations’] bottom line? What’s their motivation to change?”

Prior research has indicated that having a high demand for a job does not justify underpaying or not paying a fair working wage (Brenke, 2012; Palmer & Eveline, 2012). While this article does not dive into the ethical implications of the sport industry, students certainly question the moral compass of those sport organizations that are unwilling to pay student interns even though they have the financial means to do so. As Larry, a graduate student who comes from an impoverished background stated, “My perception of sport managers is they acknowledge there’s a problem there and it’s not quite right and ethical, but they’re businessmen. You hate to quote Adam Sandler but ‘business ethics, not quite linear.’” Another student, Michael, pointed to another (though arguably more high profile) unpaid role within the sport industry—college athletes—to express why he was not surprised that interns are not paid: “...we see these college athletes not even getting paid, so why are the interns going to get paid when the people putting on the show are not getting paid?”

Larry and Michael’s thoughts align with scholars who view the ethical concerns with respect to unpaid internships revolving around “whether or not the relationship is exploitive or mutually beneficial and symbiotic” (Burke & Carton, 2013, p. 121). While the ethical debate continues with individuals and organizations on both sides of the argument justifying their positions, Larry and Michael’s quotes demonstrate that interns themselves do often view these practices as unethical.

Sacrificing for Future Success

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Students also conformed to unpaid internships because they view them as a means to an end; a sacrifice along the road of pursuing their dream job in sport. Research demonstrates that both students and employers share a belief that internships—and even multiple internships—are necessary for future career success (e.g., DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; DeSensi et al., 1990; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). As Rupert suggested, “I don’t think that it’s necessary for it [not paying interns] to change because, I mean, the teams know they are going to get the interns no matter what. They know the kids know they need that [an internship] in their resume.” Data confirms prior literatures’ findings that students perceive an importance of internships as the basis for networking and resume building, particularly for internships with higher profile sport organizations (e.g., Koo et al., 2016; Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014). This was due to the perception that the experience of working for certain sport organizations was worth more than any amount of money a paid internship could offer them. Rupert explains this institutional pressure:

The flip side of this is that if I had not worked with them [sport organization] I could have worked on campus and made a lot more money. I could have made the money part, but I would not have made the resume and experience building, which at this point is what I really want.

Fulfilling Academic Requirements

Students’ conformity to unpaid internships due to their disenfranchisement, business logics, and career pressures has led to a lack of sustained challenge to the institutionalized practice of unpaid internships. As a result, any changes to the current system are not related to financial compensation, but another apparent exchange of value: academic credit. As Mia explained,

The way a lot of them get around it is by offering academic credit, so there’s the consideration, the value that’s being exchanged. So you see a lot more organizations maybe moving down that path, okay we have to give them

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something so let's give them academic credit. Which isn't that much, especially if you have to pay for it anyway. So that's the change we are seeing now in terms of the organizations' reaction. In terms of getting paid, I don't think there's much pressure being put on them.

Mia's quote suggests that it is not only students who add legitimacy to unpaid internships in sport, but academic institutions as well. Sport organizations use the academic credit offering as a substitute for payment, thereby legitimizing the lack of pay. Considering the disenfranchisement of the student interns renders them unable to contest sport organizations, this suggests that pressure could come from another source: universities and colleges. Indeed, prior research has shown the pervasiveness of offering or requiring academic credit for internships stretches back decades in sport management programs, with 1986 NASPE Task Force on Sport Management recommending that "the internship should be a self-contained course taken for credit" (Parkhouse, 1987). Students in the present study also pointed to academic credit as problematic for its role in the final major finding from this study, institutionalized privilege.

Hegemony and Legitimization

Students' feelings of being powerless, or beliefs that there are economic or academic justifications for unpaid internships, can be tied to the hegemonic nature of internships. This hegemony arises from the notion that internships are highly sought after, yet difficult to obtain, which ensures that the organizations who create internship opportunities hold the all the power (Scheuer & Mills, 2015). Complicating the internship relationship further is the belief that interns must demonstrate to future prospective employers that they are willing to pay their dues and that they can prove they are ready for, and deserving of, full-time employment (Scheuer & Mills, 2015). These discourses suggest that students pursuing internships are not subjecting themselves to unpaid

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internships by choice, but rather as a result of the legitimation that has been given to these hegemonic internship practices. This study's data, as represented by the aforementioned quotes in this section, demonstrates that students recognize this dynamic and that they play a role in sustaining it. However, as Suchman (1995) suggests, students are passively offering legitimacy to the organizational practices of the unpaid internship rather than actively supporting it, as their acceptance stems from a belief that the practice is logical. In other words, the taken-for-granted nature of students' approval of the status quo regarding unpaid internships in sport organizations emanates from a belief that it makes sense that such organizations would not pay interns if they are not required to and that students need internships to gain work experience and network connections. In this way, the hegemonic nature of internships, in which organizations hold the power and interns passively accept the status quo, can be linked to the legitimation and maintenance of unpaid internships.

Institutionalized Privilege

The institutionalization of unpaid internships in the sport industry, and the legitimation of the practice aided by the conformity of disenfranchised students, has resulted in, albeit seemingly unintentionally, institutionalized privilege across the industry. Participants identified the financial burdens of unpaid internships, stretching beyond the lack of wages to include the cost of academic credits, living expenses, and opportunity costs from forgoing paid work or working a second job. These burdens create a barrier to entry for those students without independent means or family support, a barrier that is particularly high for taking unpaid positions with high profile sport organizations. As a result, sport management students perceive a potential division into

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two classes as they enter the job market upon graduation: one class who could afford to take unpaid internships with high profile organizations, and one who could not, which can impact career trajectories.

The data from this study does not show that privilege acts as institutional work to perpetuate the cycle of unpaid internships (Edwards & Washington, 2015). Rather, privilege (which can be operationalized as socioeconomic status, class, and affluent family circumstance) is an unintended consequence of the institutionalization of unpaid internships. Only students who have some level of financial privilege can afford the cost of accepting a prestigious, but unpaid internship.

Affording Living Expenses

As a whole, participants maintained that unpaid internships were a financial burden to those who did not “come from money” or have the financial support of their family. Even students with financial means recognized this challenge for their peers. Conway, who feels financially stable and is a senior undergraduate sport management student warned his peers of working in the sport industry:

I would have to say, no matter what, have some kind of financial backing before you jump into it [working in sport industry]. If you go into it with \$100 to your name, you won't survive that long, and that's the truth. If you go in there with \$100 to your name, it'll be tough to get to the next step. Doing everything well is great, but you can't give 100% attention to it if you're trying to survive, so you won't do well.”

Students felt challenged by the cost of living associated with taking unpaid internships with sport organizations, which often required relocation during the internship. As prior work has shown, such factors impact students' decisions about whether or not they will accept an internship position (Peretto Stratta, 2004). Not only must students forgo pay, they must also have the resources to pay for rent, food, and transportation. Anne, who is a

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graduate student with moderate means, explained the choices she felt she would have if she took an unpaid internship:

I think sort of an overall concern about how am I going to get to where I want to get without starving. I mean, what do I have to give up? If I have to work another job on the side, that means maybe I don't participate in a sport, or I see my friends less, or I live in a cardboard box or something.

Even those more financially privileged students felt the burden of working unpaid sport internships. Often times, these unpaid internships came with the expectations that you would use your personal car and gas to drive long distances, and work long hours, all unpaid. These jobs rely on privileged students and their affluent parents to support this institution of unpaid work in sport. Alexi, whose family is financially stable and receives a stipend from her parents while in school of \$1,000 a month, still feels the pressure of unpaid internships:

It wasn't the best feeling ever having to pay for your own gas, having to drive as far as western side of New York State is not ideal for a student. But you have to do it for the experience, so I guess I was thankful, in a way, that I had the opportunity, but the fact that it was unpaid made it a burden not only on me but also on my family.

Forgoing Paid Employment

While this financial burden exists for all students, it may be bearable for students with greater financial means. For less privileged students, the expense may not be an option, as Rupert explained,

Some people that do need to support themselves in school, it kind of gives them the unfair advantage or disadvantage in terms of applying for [unpaid] internships because they might have to work a job along with school and so if they're working a job they probably are not going to have time for an internship, especially if its unpaid.

Anne, as a 28-year-old graduate student, felt the pressure of needing both an internship and an income. She was only able to secure one unpaid internship and no paid

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internships, due to working 20-plus hours a week and completing her master's degree as a full-time student. In her aforementioned quote, she sarcastically remarks on how she and other students work second jobs to survive but miss out on the valuable social networking outside of work with their peers and colleagues. Multiple studies have pointed out the value of internships for networking (e.g., Koo et al., 2016; Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014; Peretto Stratta, 2004); thus, less privileged students experience another opportunity cost by having to work a second job.

Paying for Academic Credit

Even the substitute exchange of value offered by sport organizations contributes to students' financial burdens. While academic credit, as discussed in the previous section, offers legitimacy to unpaid internships, it adds to students' costs. Students expressed it was at times an insult to pay for the college credits, work 40 hours or more a week, and not receive any financial benefits. Mia, a sport management graduate student with a dual master of science/master's in business administration degree, explained how expensive academic credit can be:

Having to pay for those credits was over \$1000. Paying for the privilege of being an unpaid intern. That's tough, but I know that's part of our curriculum and I am a firm believer in practical experiences. It's just a little tough. I made it through the first year fine, but then to begin your second year and to have that financial set back, especially when you're starting to think about careers. You never want a decision about a career, at least I think if you have the right values, to be about money.

Selecting Prestigious Opportunities

The burden of unpaid internships also affects students' decision-making process in terms of deciding which organizations they can afford to intern with (Peretto Stratta, 2004). Students from less privileged backgrounds discussed needing to turn down unpaid

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internships with high profile sport organizations in favor of positions with local, lower profile organizations because they could not afford to live away from home without compensation. Jim, a senior, undergraduate sport management student, who has only been able to get one unpaid internship, described his frustration with how much influence privilege has on a career in the sport industry:

I would just say the people that don't have enough money are disadvantaged. Say you're a job interviewer and you can chose between person A that worked for the Colts or myself that worked for the local youth city football league, you're probably going to pick the Colts experience. So while everyone can get an internship, not all internships hold the same weight. It's kind of like when you get a car, do you want a Toyota Corolla or do you want a Mercedes?

Jim is using the comparison of an economy and luxury car to internships with small local organizations and national powerhouse organizations, usually accompanied by national and international notoriety. Although Jim was offered internships with very prestigious organizations, he was unable to accept them because he simply could not afford the three-month relocation burden. However, many of his classmates who were from a higher socioeconomic class were able to accept those positions with national and international organizations, thereby, giving them an advantage in getting a better, higher paying job after graduation. Even though Michael comes from an affluent family, he still had similar experiences with internships in sport. He said,

...that's very unfair for, let's say, any student who wants to get into sport and they interview outstanding, have great grades, and then gets an offer from a team in New York. How the heck are you going to live up there if you're from Texas? That's what I'm concerned about right now. We have alumni with the Jets and Giants; I'd love to work for both of those organizations, but how am I going to afford a place in New York. I'm planning that I can sleep on my cousin or friend's couch that are all working consulting or Wall Street jobs.

Impacting Career Trajectories

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This institutionalized privilege has resulted in the creation of two classes of students entering the job market upon graduation: those who could afford to take unpaid internship positions with high-profile sport organizations, and those who could not. Many participants said there is no way they could be a sport management major and have any shot at a decent job after graduation, without having financial, social, or class privilege. Other students stated that their families funded their internships with professional and collegiate organizations, with parents paying \$5,000-10,000 per summer to cover the cost of living (i.e., food, housing, travel, networking outings, etc.) in a major city such as New York City or Chicago for three months. Others, who identified as not socioeconomically privileged, had to forgo offers from major sporting organizations to work at a local high school or small college, because they simply could not afford the unpaid, but institutionally necessary, internship. The effects of such class separation stretches beyond graduation into students' careers: there was a consensus amongst both students who considered themselves privileged and those who did not that the culture of unpaid internship may be creating a homogeneous wealthy group of sport industry workers. Rupert, who has an affluent family that supports him while he finishes graduate school, explained his advantage when he enters the job market:

I will take a job in which, if I can be unpaid for a year will set me up with a paid job and then maybe move forward into a higher position...that's the difference between not having loans and having loans.

Another privileged student, Saber, a graduate student who self-identifies as having an affluent background, has had two paid internships in sports. His uncle is a vice president of an NFL team that has won a Super Bowl in the last five years. His paid internships have been with his uncle's team. Nonetheless, he recognizes how difficult it

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would be to get a paid internship, if not for his uncle. Simply put, his privilege set him up not only with paid internships but with a resume that will be attractive to future employers. By contrast, Larry, who accepted local internships in his rural hometown in Maine, recognized his disadvantage. He realized that his experience, interning for the local high school, will not launch him into his dream job as a NCAA Division I athletic director, but he felt he had no choice. He knew he had to get as many internships as possible, because that is what his supervisors have all said to him. But he also knew he needed the money and could not afford to spend the summer in New York City, working for the NFL or other professional sports league offices, like many of his classmates. Meanwhile, Mia, the dual M.B.A./M.S. graduate student, decided to choose a job outside of sport after graduation because she said much of what she was being offered in the sport industry were additional under-paid or unpaid six-to-nine-month internships, which would not cover her cost of living and the price of paying back her student loans.

Thus, not only does privilege impact students' decisions about internship positions, but compounds with their internship experiences to impact decisions about career paths following graduation. While existing literature supports the finding that students view internships as shaping their career paths (Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014), this study finds that privilege plays a role in shaping first the internship path and then the career path of students. Research has found that early career underemployment impacts future career success (Verbruggen, van Emmerik, Van Gils, Meng, & de Grip, 2015), and that organizational practices, including recruiting, hiring, networking, and pay structures, reproduce socioeconomic class inequalities (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020). While it may seem counterintuitive to consider individuals in entry-level sport industry positions,

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notorious for their low pay (Garrett & Pierce, 2017), as privileged, entering such positions requires the privilege of being able to complete unpaid internships, as well as the privilege of being able to afford to live on such little compensation following graduation. Without the financial support of their families during college (and sometimes after graduation), sport industry internships and jobs may be out of reach.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the impact of hegemony and institutionalization on sport management. Specifically, it suggests that the sport management students in this study have accepted unpaid internships as the unopposed norm, despite the role unpaid internships play in upholding inequalities in the field. Unpaid internships have been institutionalized through their perceived importance to the college experience – in which they are either academically required or strongly encouraged by professors and college-aged peers alike. Overtime, the culture of sport management has become undeniably trademarked by the internship experience. The institutionalization of the internship in sport management, coupled with the imbalance of power between intern and organization, lends itself to hegemony – students accepting their disenfranchised role in a system that has inequitable outcomes, strongly dependent on socioeconomic privilege.

Theoretical Implications

As the findings from this study suggest, unpaid internships are the norm in the sport industry, and sport management students perceive the ability to receive, accept, and complete such internships as crucial to their future career aspirations. A host of sport management programs require sport industry internships as a critical part of their curriculum. Similarly, sport industry scholars and popular text spend significant time and

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print space discussing the importance of sport industry internships (see Wong, 2013). One book title goes as far as suggesting that sport internships are, indeed, “How to Survive in the Industry” (Jarvis, 2018). Therefore, this investigation and those that may follow are important for all who are invested in the sport industry (e.g., students, scholars, professors, instructors, managers). Also, this critical examination of institutional theory allowed for the illumination of sport hegemony, as it has not before. This research suggests that hegemony of sport favors the economically privileged by offering unpaid internships, even when it not economically necessary. Surely, profitable sport organizations, such as major league professional sport teams, could afford to pay a handful of interns. However, the norm of unpaid internships has prevailed, benefitting those with financial privilege, thereby creating an economic barrier to career entry in the sport industry. The results of this study support several contributions to sport.

To begin, this study adds to the scarce literature on institutionalization in sport, answering the call for more studies in this area (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Theoretically, the study contributes to the institutional theory literature by managing to distinguish differences between legitimization and institutionalization, which are closely related concepts (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). This study suggests that students perceive that the norm of unpaid internships have been institutionalized in part by organizations taking advantage of the surplus of sport management students that have entered the sport industry in recent years, as well as by universities offering (or requiring) those same students to take for-credit internships. Specifically, the large influx of sport management programs at colleges and universities have led to more students studying

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sport management and entering the sport industry with very specific knowledge and skill sets. This influence has made getting a job in the sport industry very competitive.

Meanwhile, in order to combat the hypercompetitive environment in sport, students use unpaid internships to legitimize their qualifications. The more internships they have, the more qualified they are deemed by sport organizations. Also, the more prestigious the sport organization, the more likely they are to develop networks that can positively influence their careers in sport (see Rivera, 2011 for an explanation on how prestige impacts employment). The number of internships one has, coupled with the level of prestige those internships hold in the sport industry, become a form of capital that may catapult them to positions of power and influence in the sport industry. Therefore, working unpaid internships has been institutionalized by the market, but legitimized by the need for students to differentiate themselves and compete, coupled with the need for many sport organizations to capitalize on free, specialized labor. However, an unintended consequence of this institution of unpaid internships in sport is that a socioeconomic elite group of interns are surfacing as the face of sport industry jobs.

The study also connects legitimization to hegemony in sport, by demonstrating that students' passive legitimization (Suchman, 1995) of unpaid internships stems both from their feeling of powerless and from their acceptance of the institutionalized practice as normal business operations. Students, as the subordinate group in organization-intern relationship, simultaneously accept the status quo and feel unable to change it, which are characteristics of the reproduction of hegemonic power (Donaldson, 1993). Thus, hegemony acts to induce passive legitimization as described by Suchman (1995), which involves the acceptance of practices deemed normal or logical.

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Practical Implications

This study offers implications for sport practitioners through the awareness it brings to the institutionalized privilege resulting from unpaid internships. As discussed, privilege does not appear to be an intentional consequence of unpaid internships, and as such, sport organizations may be unaware that they are excluding certain students from these positions. By offering fair compensation, organizations can attract students regardless of socioeconomic status, deepening their candidate pool. This can result in hiring not only high-quality interns, but a more diverse group of interns as well. Such diversity would not only be realized on the basis of socioeconomic status, but likely race and gender, as these are inextricably linked to class (Acker, 2006). Research has shown that sport organizations realize positive outcomes from diversity (e.g., Cunningham, 2008b). Therefore, sport organizations should recognize the potential positive benefits of offering paid internships that would increase the quality, quantity, and diversity of their intern candidates, and by extension, their future employees.

In addition, this study shed light on implications for sport management educators and academic institutions. First, the findings revealed the role that colleges and universities play in legitimizing unpaid internships as an institutionalized practice in the sport industry, not only by requiring or encouraging students to pursue such positions, but through the offering of academic credit for internships. While such credit may be intended to provide value to the students, sport organizations use this credit as a substitute exchange of value in lieu of compensating student interns. Further, academic credit may create additional financial hardships for students already struggling with the loss of wages associated with unpaid internships, as they must pay for the credits. While

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some schools may offer scholarships or stipends to select students to ease the financial burdens associated with taking unpaid internships, such programs only benefit a small percentage of students (Steffen, 2010). In addition, these programs do not solve an important conundrum: since the sport organization still does not need to pay the intern, the academic institution is still (and perhaps even further) offering legitimization to this practice. Colleges and universities, compared to students, have relatively more power in their relationship with sport industry power, and should consider how they may use that power to pressure sport organizations to fairly compensate their student workers. Second, the findings of this study are important for educators because they highlight a need for bringing awareness to the ways that sport organizations may be reproducing socioeconomic inequalities through their internship practices. A recent study by Amis, Mair, and Munir (2020) called on business school educators to bring conversations about organizations' roles in societal inequalities into the classroom. Sport management educators, too, can foster these conversations with their students, broadening their awareness of these issues and preparing the future leaders of the industry to work toward solutions for a more diverse and equitable workforce.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limitations of this study begin with data collection. Clearly, previous research has suggested the intersectionality of class with race and even gender in various contexts (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Gillborn, 2015; Gopaladas, 2013). However, the researchers did not purposively sample participants for race and gender, so very little conclusions can be made with regards to those constructs due to the minimal diversity of the sample. In addition, this study focused on the perspectives of sport management students, but future

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work may explore the topic from the perspective of sport organizations and academic institutions, which the study revealed play important roles in legitimizing unpaid internships. Also, future research should examine sport organizations and the occupational turnover intentions of unpaid interns. Specifically, many of the participants in this study suggested leaving the sport industry because they could not afford the burden of working multiple unpaid internships. Research examining occupational turnover intentions of sport management students working internships would contribute to sport industry literature, as well as inform practitioners about an important part of their workforce. Additionally, the study revealed the role of academic credit in legitimizing unpaid internships and privileging wealthier students. Future work should further examine the role of academic institutions on the practice of unpaid internships, including exploring whether school-sponsored scholarship and stipend programs effectively negate financial burdens for students. Also, while we did not ask directly for intern perspectives on the ethical concerns or morality of the organizations who hire unpaid interns, this would be a fruitful area to investigate in a future study. Finally, future research should examine the impact of unpaid internships on perceptions of diversity and inclusion in sport. If students recognize the advantage that socioeconomic privilege plays in a sport industry career at an early stage in their studies, self-selection out of sport management may further decrease the amount of diversity in sport.

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Appendix

Table 1

Participant descriptions

Name	Age	Gender	Race	Family's SES	Student's SES	Supported by Family	Classification
Isaac	22	Male	White	Middle Class \$200k/year	None	Yes	Senior
Seth	23	Male	White	\$24k/year	\$14k/year	No	Recent graduate
Ashley	22	Female	White	N/A	None		
Alexi	20	Female	White	\$350k/year	\$8k/year	Yes	Junior
Larry	25	Male	White	Poverty	Poverty	Yes	Grad Student
Jim	22	Male	White	Middle Class	None	Yes	Senior
Chris	22	Male	White	Middle Class	None	Yes	Senior
Anthony	22	Male	Multi-racial	Middle Class	None	Yes	Senior
Anne	28	Female	White	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	Yes	Grad Student
Brian	21	Male	White	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	Yes	Senior
Saber	26	Male	White	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	Yes	Grad Student
Conway	21	Male	White	Upper Class	Working Class	Yes	Senior
John Ryan	23	Male	White	Upper Middle Class	None	Yes	Senior
Jenny	30's	Female	Asian	Middle Class	None	Yes	Grad Student
Mia	25	Female	White	Wealthy	Poverty	Yes	Grad Student
Michael	22	Male	White	Wealthy	None	Yes	Senior
Rupert	22	Male	Black	Upper Middle	None	Yes	Grad Student

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Table 2

Participant, internship type, and perception of one's own privilege

Name	Sport Internship History	Sport Internships	Non-Sport Internships	Affordability Influence Decision	Privilege Influence Decisions	Are you privileged?
Isaac	Local	Paid-None Unpaid- 3	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 0	Yes	Yes- negatively	Yes
Seth	None	Paid-None Unpaid- Did not accept any	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 0	Yes	Yes- negatively	No
Ashley	Local	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 0	Yes	Yes- negatively	Yes
Alexi	Regional	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	None	No	Yes- positively	Yes
Larry	Local	Paid- 3 Unpaid- 1	None	Yes	Yes- Not sure how	No
Jim	Local	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 1	None	No	Yes- negatively	Yes
Chris	Local	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 2	None	No	Yes- not sure	Yes
Anthony	Local	None	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 0	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anne	Local	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	None	Yes	Yes- positively	Yes
Brian	Local	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 3	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saber	Regional	Paid- 2 Unpaid- 0	None	No	Yes	Yes
Conway	Regional	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 2	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
John Ryan	Regional	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	None	No	Yes	Yes
Jenny	National	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	None	No	Yes	Yes
Mia	International National, Regional, Local	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 1	Paid- 2 Unpaid- 0	No	Yes	Yes
Michael	Local	Paid- 0 Unpaid- 1	None	No	Yes	Yes
Rupert	Local	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 2	Paid- 1 Unpaid- 0	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Table 3

Data Summary

First Order Concept	Second Order Themes	Aggregate Dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I think generally for other majors, internships are a financial gain ▪ I got paid internship, but not for sporting business, but for IT ▪ It's way more work (than 3-credit class), and tedious ▪ You don't get paid; may get college credit, but you pay for that credit ▪ The amount of time outside the normal 9-5 business hours is hard to deal with ▪ The hours were crazy! On the weekend, we were working from 6:00AM-11:00PM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Often for college credit rather than pay ▪ Pay disparity compared to other fields ▪ Over-worked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Idiosyncratic Nature of Sport Internships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It's definitely important to get experience and meet the right people ▪ The most important thing is making connections for your career ▪ It's extremely important to have one, and I would say it's pretty difficult to get one ▪ There is limited supply and excess demand, and there's no strong legal enforcement ▪ It's a cycle; you go from unpaid internship to job, and then people in jobs view it as acceptable because it is what they did ▪ Bosses and professors always talking about how you need to meet people who can help you down the line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived importance of internship for networking ▪ Demand for internships exceeds supply ▪ Reinforced by stakeholders of norm (professors, organizational managers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legitimacy and Maintenance of Unpaid Internships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I definitely think there are more kids from higher income families in these internships ▪ I could do the internship, because I had privilege I could take it ▪ Less privileged students will be more stressed by potentially have to work another job since internship is unpaid ▪ (Student) had to turn down dream position with NY Knicks due to expenses of living in NY ▪ Don't have as wide of a net of internships to apply to and thus are less likely to get internships ▪ It's an institutionalized norm that should be changed, but won't because orgs know they will get the free labor no matter what 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater barriers for less privileged ▪ Unequal opportunities-based on wealth and privilege ▪ Institutionalized norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalized Privilege