

Hungry for the job: gender, unpaid internships, and the creative industries

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Abstract: This paper examines the experiences of young Canadian women working in Toronto and New York who have undertaken unpaid internships in the creative sector. Interviews focused on their internship experiences, ability to secure paid employment, knowledge of the legal status of unpaid internships, and familiarity with emergent activism against unpaid internships. Findings reinforce the class-based privilege of unpaid internships in the creative sector. Despite the economic precarity of unpaid internships, the young women articulated strong desires to find meaningful, secure, and paid employment.

Keywords: internship, youth employment, class, labour law, women

Introduction

When you intern, the first couple of days you have a lot of questions, and one of the worst questions to ask is ‘when are we done?’ (Melody)

The topic of unpaid internships for university students and recent graduates entering the job market is proliferating in US and Canadian news and popular culture (Bellafante, 2012; Carey, 2013; Wayne, 2013; CBC News, 2014), especially related to their ethical and legal status. One humorous example is from HBO’s acclaimed series *Girls*, when twenty-something Hannah Horvath, approaches her boss Alistair at the New York magazine where she is an intern, and quietly declares: ‘My circumstances have changed, and I can no longer afford to work for free’. Perplexed, Alistair responds that her ‘quippy voice’ would have been perfect to ‘man our Twitter’. Failing to procure a paid position, Hannah laments, ‘I just gotta eat’ (Dunham, 2012). Lena Dunham’s depiction of the Brooklyn hipster Hannah – with her private college degree from Oberlin and aspirations for creative and fulfilling *paid* employment to support her livelihood as a writer – echoes for a generation of young women today.

Unpaid internships in various sectors – government, non-profit, law and policy, and especially the creative sector – have soared in recent decades. The

National Association of Colleges and Employers documented an exponential increase in internships in the United States from 17 per cent of graduating students in 1992 to over 50 per cent in 2008, with ‘some experts estimat[ing] that one-fourth to one-half are unpaid’ (Greenhouse, 2010). This trend is repeated in Canada, with Toronto lawyer Andrew Langille estimating 200,000 unpaid internships in Canada (De Peuter *et al.*, 2012), of which many are illegal in the Province of Ontario under the Employment Standards Act (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2014). Kamenetz (2006: n.p.) likens unpaid interns to ‘illegal immigrants ... they create an oversupply of people willing to work for low wages, or in the case of interns, literally nothing’.

What youth can afford to undertake an unpaid internship? Elitism reigns such that ‘students of privilege cluster in posh unpaid internships that open doors while lower-income students cluster in retail and food preparation jobs’ (Thompson, 2012: n.p.). Race, class, and gender are clearly implicated. Perlin, whose 2011 book *Intern Nation* catalysed a vibrant debate about the economics and ethics of unpaid internships, argues that ‘internship injustice is closely linked to gender issues, both because of the fields that women gravitate toward and possibly also because female students have been more accepting of unpaid, unjust situations’ (Perlin, 2011: 27).

This paper examines how young Canadian women experience unpaid internships in the creative sector. Through a series of interviews with young women, we sought to understand their internship experiences, their ability to secure paid employment in their ideal career, and their knowledge of the legal status of unpaid internships and familiarity with activism against unpaid internships. An objective of the research project was to provide an opportunity for young women to speak for themselves. Despite the plethora of news media covering internships, to date scant research has been undertaken in Canada that explores the experiences of interns to understand the gendered and class-based dynamics of such positions so as to better inform policy and activism. In its focus on gender and labour, this research thus adds to scholarship on labour capitalization in the digital economy (Neff, 2012); the feminization of temp work (Huws, 2003; Hatton, 2011); global studies on precarious work (Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Scholz, 2012; Standing, 2011); and the feminist political economy of communication (McKercher and Mosco, 2008; McKercher, 2014). This research is also a modest contribution to McRobbie’s (2011) entreaty to more fully account for gender in nuanced scholarly discussions of precarious, immaterial and affective labour.

The paper will first situate the vexatious reality of securing paid full-time employment for Canadian youth, briefly describe current North American debates about unpaid internships, and then delve into the findings based on our interviews, focusing on our interviewees’ experiences and perceptions of unpaid internships. After being in an unpaid internship for over a year, one woman summarized her frustration with the entire internship industry, ‘I think it’s classist, and it’s exploitative, it lets certain people rise in industries that many people want to rise in and other people don’t have access to that ...’ (Simone).

Youth un(der) employment and the new normal of unpaid internships

For many recent university graduates in North America, where the unemployment rate hovers between 14 and 19 per cent, the entry-level job *is* the unpaid internship. Canada's youth unemployment rate in 2012 was 14.1 per cent, with predictions that high youth unemployment emanating from the 2008 recession will result in 'wage scarring' – a loss of \$23.1 billion in wages over the next 18 years (CBC News, 2013). Alongside job precarity amidst higher student debt (CBC Doczone, 2013), Statistics Canada cites an unemployment rate of 16.5 per cent for Ontario youth under the age of 24 (Oved, 2013). Extrapolating from this data, a report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives detailed that Toronto youth (aged 15–24) had the highest employment rate in the province of Ontario at 43.5 per cent, and the widest gap – 21.8 per cent – between youth and adult employment in the province. More so than in other parts of Ontario, the report stated that Toronto youth have withdrawn from the labour force; one explanation is the rise in unpaid internships and other forms of unpaid labour (Geobey, 2013). Given that Toronto is a major Canadian epicentre for the creative industries (including design, fashion, publishing, film and TV, music, and commercial theatre), employing over 100,000 people (Invest Toronto, 2013), one can speculate that most of these unpaid internships in the creative sector are clustered in Toronto. The US Urban Institute posits that generational differences in precarious employment exacerbate wealth gaps, and that 'for the first time in modern memory, a whole generation might not prove wealthier than the one that preceded it' (Lowrey, 2013).

Precarious youth employment can be, in part, attributed to unpaid internships. In order to secure entry into the paid labour force by gaining work experience, many young people have accepted unpaid internships during their undergraduate and postgraduate years. These white-collar jobs are created by employers to ostensibly provide young people access to professional experience in various labour sectors, allowing the interns to achieve a competitive advantage for scarce paid positions in a contingent job market; yet too often labour standards are lax if not downright illegal (Greenhouse, 2010, 2012; Perlin, 2011; Oved, 2013; Thompson, 2012).

Unpaid internships are a routine component of college and university training in North America, where students receive academic credit (Neff, 2011). In Canada, internships have become so popular at colleges and universities that internship coordinators are hired to advise students on internships, help coordinate internship placements at organizations, develop relationships with partner organizations, and generally oversee students in internships (MacDonald, 2013). Allen *et al.* (2013) describe how in the UK, higher education employability strategies increasingly position young people in work placements, many unpaid, in order to gain experience, especially in the competitive creative sector. Inequality prevails: access to placements is classed, raced and gendered. As well, social class and geographical locale structure access to these opportunities,

affirming ‘the enduring significance of class, showing how family capital pertaining to creative careers significantly shapes young people’s capacity to inhabit the position of the creative, cosmopolitan worker’ (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013: 514). Securing internships is also an entrepreneurial enterprise; internship location site Intern Sushi targets young people, their parents and employers (their motto: ‘our philosophy encourages users to be as picky about their internships, or interns for that matter, as they are about their sushi’).

The uncritical endorsement of unpaid internships and the cavalier manner in which they are advertised has embarrassed some companies. Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s organization, LeanIn.org, backpedalled when their editor posted a call for an unpaid editorial intern: ‘Must be HIGHLY organized with editorial and social chops and able to commit to a regular schedule through end of year. Design and web skills a plus!’ (Goel, 2013: n.p.). This was a deliciously ironic position for Sandberg’s organization to take and unsurprisingly, the mishap was ridiculed on social media. Her bestseller, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, self-described as a ‘sort of a feminist manifesto’, entreated women to ‘lean in’ to reach their full potential and be leaders in their workplaces, and sparked an impassioned conversation about the status of women in the male-dominated workplace (Sandberg, 2013: n.p.).

The legal status of unpaid internships has particularly impacted the creative industries. In the US, Fox Searchlight was sued by two former interns for violation of minimum wage, overtime, and the lack of educational experience under current labour laws (Gardner, 2012); this has since become a class action suit to encompass all unpaid interns that participated in Fox Entertainment Group’s internship programme (Gardner, 2013a, 2013b). The viability of class action suits is problematic, as the case of Xuedan Wang illustrates. Wang, a strategic communication graduate and unpaid intern for *Harper’s Bazaar* fashion magazine, filed a lawsuit against parent company, Hearst Corporation, alleging violation of federal and state wage and hour laws because the internship was not paid, despite 40–55 hours of work per week (Greenhouse, 2012; Randall, 2012). In seeking class action status for other unpaid interns across the Hearst magazine spectrum (20 US titles and 300 international editions), it was argued that not only were interns denied wages, but also Social Security, unemployment insurance, and workers’ compensation benefits. Despite a 2013 ruling from a federal district court judge rejecting the request for class action certification because of a lack of similarity across the class members’ tasks and internship venues (Graumlich, 2013), the case, nonetheless, raises critical questions about the legality of unpaid internships in the creative industries. The US situation resonates in Canada, with the Ontario Ministry of Labour shutting down several unpaid internship programmes in the magazine industry (McKnight and Nursall, 2014). As we discuss in our conclusion, recent policy initiatives address the regulation of unpaid internships in Canada.

Young women dominate unpaid internships in the creative industries: arts, fashion and media (Bellafante, 2012; Figiel, 2013; Hatton, 2013; Schwartz, 2013;

Seaborn, 2013; Wayne, 2013). Addressing the Ministry of Ontario, the University of Toronto Students' Union (2013) noted this gender difference:

This disparity sees students in engineering, computer science, technology and business management programs receive paid remuneration more often than students in design, communications, the humanities, the arts or marketing. Students in these programs are finding it increasingly necessary to engage in unpaid labour post-graduation as a precursor or prerequisite to finding paid employment.

In a study conducted for the Canadian Intern Association, Attfield and Couture highlighted the race, class and gender dimension of their findings, derived from a voluntary online survey and telephone interviews: 'underpaid internships are more likely to be taken by those who are from high income, non-visible minority backgrounds . . . because survey responses seemed to indicate that more females commit to underpaid work than males, it could slow the closing of the income gap between males and females, or even cause it to grow' (2014: 14).

Bovy argues that young women are perceived to be easily exploitable: 'the problem with unpaid internships isn't that entitled young women are just hanging out in lieu of getting a job. It's that a certain, mostly-female population is signing up for what seems like on-the-job training, with no job in sight' (2013: n.p.). Ross comments that the post-recessionary climate has exacerbated precarity in the cultural sector, with internships a form of 'terminal limbo' characterized by 'a clear class divide' and a gender divide, as 'women are more socialized in the customary ways of doing sacrificial work' (2013: 177). In many instances, our findings confirm this claim.

Research design

For our study, we conducted semi-structured interviews in the summer of 2013 with twelve Canadian women aged 21 to 29 years old. All of them lived and worked in Toronto, with the exception of two women who worked in New York City. A contextual interview guide was prepared with broad and exploratory questions. Interviews took place either offline in a face-to-face context or online using Skype, depending on the informant's location and preference. The interviews were approximately one hour in length. The researcher took notes during the interviews and the audio-recordings were transcribed using a professional transcription service and checked for accuracy. The respondents were encouraged to explain their interning experiences in as much narrative detail as felt comfortable, rather than being restricted to simplistic yes–no answers. The young women were extremely eager to share their stories and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to reflect on their internship experiences.

The twelve respondents had diverse work experiences and were at different stages of their career. Four participants were currently completing their post-secondary education and the other eight participants were either in a job or searching for full-time work. The youngest interviewee was completing her undergraduate degree and the oldest interviewee was in a doctoral programme. All

of the participants had some level of post-secondary education, ranging from 3-year college programmes, postgraduate diplomas, 4-year undergraduate degrees, master's, to a PhD.

Participants were recruited using social media, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn. A simple text update was publicly posted on the social networking sites requesting that women who have done an unpaid internship contact us. Interestingly, some people went further to also post current news articles about unpaid internships, which points to their interest in the topic. Others reposted the message on their own social networking page to further spread the call for participants. Many of our participants found the posting directly on the social media platforms. The call for participants was advertised to women who had completed or were currently doing an unpaid internship. As some internships offer a small stipend, such as \$100 a month to cover travel expenses, women who received a small honorarium were also permitted to participate, in an attempt to gain diversity of experiences. However, most of the interns received no compensation whatsoever.

Within the context of studying unpaid work, an important research design decision was made to provide modest compensation to show that the researchers appreciated and valued their time. Participants were thus offered an honorarium for participating: a \$15 gift voucher to Starbucks or iTunes.

The next sections detail what our participants told us regarding the economic climate and their prospects and experiences for finding paid work, in addition to their perceptions of their internships.

Class matters

In each interview, a topic repeatedly mentioned by participants was the importance of parental support during their unpaid internship. This was articulated most clearly by one participant who stated, 'There's no way that I could have done an internship without my parents' support. I'm speaking from a place of privilege' (Talia). Participants spoke of the liberty to accept an unpaid internship as a 'luxury', a distinction from the self-entitled characteristics often associated with Gen-Yers (a popular North American term to describe those born from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, also known as Millennials). As Talia exclaimed, 'I realize that I'm incredibly lucky that I actually had the option...'. Others spoke of being 'fortunate' for their family support.

Parental financial support often began well before the start of the internship and extended beyond the end of the internship. Even though participants were not specifically asked about their financial arrangements with their parents, many explained that they received parental support during post-secondary education and were thus not burdened with paying for their tuition and shackled with insurmountable debt immediately after graduation: 'I was lucky that I didn't have any student loans' (Kym). Because student loans accrue interest from the day a student graduates, many recent graduates are forced into the first paid job they can find in order to begin paying off their debt, even if the job is not aligned

with their career aspirations. For these students, electing to complete an unpaid internship to help them in their careers is simply not a feasible option.

An unpaid internship does not easily lead to a paid full-time position. Many of the women we interviewed had cycled through various unpaid internships in an ongoing attempt to gain an entry-level position in the industry of their choice. The quest for paid employment typically extends over a year, and can consist of multiple unpaid internships (the typical internship is 4 months) strung together with periods of searching for employment. As a result, the young women are financially dependent on their parents for longer periods of time.

The vast majority of the interns lived at home with their parents during the unpaid internship. One participant stated, 'My parents were like, "this is the experience that you need. As long as you're at home we'll support you until you can support yourself"' (Cara). Another recollected, 'I didn't have expenses, like I didn't have to pay rent or pay for all my groceries at that time' (Naomi). The women questioned how people who do not live at home could possibly intern without family support: 'But if it wasn't for them [my parents] and that support I would not be able to be doing an internship. I don't think anyone would' (Grace). Parents provided different levels of financial support, ranging from allowing their child to live at home for free to full financial support. The women expressed empathy towards classmates and colleagues not as fortunate; 'I know some parents after university just let their kids go. I had that support. Otherwise, I don't know, it would have been a lot harder' (Cara). Parental support thus provides young people with the necessary stability they need during such precarious economic periods.

Throughout post-secondary education, students are encouraged to gain experiential training and for many the unpaid internship provides this pragmatic experience. This is especially true of the creative industries, as discussed by Isabella: 'I have been able to pursue these creative industries and rely on them [my parents] when I've needed to, but I know people who haven't been as lucky and that's not very fair'. Students with the same degree qualifications often find that they are not treated equally or fairly in the job market because many companies require students to have prior job experience, which internships can provide evidence of. Students who cannot accept an unpaid internship can thus be at a disadvantage. One of the interviewees stated:

I'm a privileged person. My mum was able to support me during that time in my life. I didn't have to not be able to do it because she could help me. But there are a lot of other kids who couldn't do it and then they wouldn't be able to get either the grad school spots they wanted or the career they wanted after college, because maybe they were working full-time when in college because they needed the money to pay for their living. I didn't have to do that. It's a privilege to be able to take an internship like that. It's not something everyone was able to do. (Melody)

Even though all of our interviewees received financial support from their parents, many also worked part-time in minimum wage positions, such as in the restaurant industry or as a swim instructor. One interviewee was attending school,

working part-time as a waiter, and also doing an unpaid internship, which meant she worked over 80 hours a week.

The women expressed concern about balancing an unpaid internship and part-time work: 'I know a lot of people that wouldn't be able to do that [an internship] because they'd need that extra time that they'd be spending at the internship to be at their job' (Kaylee).

The interviewees clearly articulated that their unpaid internships aligned with their career aspirations, whereas their paid positions were merely a way to make money for basic necessities. As a result, a binary emerged: skilled unpaid work versus less-skilled paid work. 'Some people will do their internship and also work four nights a week at a restaurant or serving or bartending or whatever it is they have to do, which sucks, but some people just take it for what it is and say, "I just have to do it"' (Naomi).

Family members were also important in providing contacts to industry professionals and in a competitive job market, parents can enable opportunities for their children by linking them with industry professionals and providing them with nuanced knowledge of how the professional and creative sectors operate. Several of the interviewees were given the opportunity to interview with a company because of their parents' business contacts. One interviewee said, 'I talked to different family and friends about what I wanted to do, and they helped me a lot with people they knew' (Cara). Youth with parents in the professional sector thus had a distinct advantage over youth whose parents work in the service sector.

'Paying our dues'

All the women we interviewed recognized the ruthless nature of the current economy and the difficulty in securing paid work. The internship market is equally competitive. The women were determined to succeed in their careers, often sacrificing personal money, such as transit costs to the intern site, and committing a significant amount of time to their internships. One woman, who has already completed a few internships and needs to find another internship to complete her postgraduate certificate, said, 'It's super competitive. You really have to learn how to manage your expectations. But I never really imagined it could be this hard ... looking for an internship. Looking for a job is my full-time job right now. I've had a lot of disappointing moments' (Isabella).

The young women conveyed an individual sense of autonomy and responsibility to get ahead. They set realistic expectations and did not express self-entitlement: 'I didn't expect to find a paid position without additional training and also an internship or two' (Talia). Their rationale for seeking an internship and accepting an unpaid internship varied from gaining hands-on experiences, to building contacts in the industry, to merely having the line on their résumé. One interviewee stated that she did an unpaid internship because '... I feel like the only thing that would put me ahead is really that experience part' (Kym).

Another interviewee, who had a negative internship experience with work that was not intellectually challenging, said that the real value of the internship was merely the ability to add it on her résumé afterwards: 'So it was not even like it actually prepared me. I really don't think it did, but the point is that I had it, and I could say that I had it' (Talia). The internship was thus perceived as a necessary step or rite of passage into the paid workforce, irrespective of the skills acquired or training received.

The young women extensively discussed investing in the future by 'paying their dues': 'If you wanted a chance at being an interesting competitive person in any job market I think the onus was on you to ... play that game' (Melody). Paying your dues implies a recognition that everyone has to start 'at the bottom' and work their way up the organizational hierarchy. The internships were equated to an initiation or a pledge to a fraternity/sorority (social organizations for undergraduate students): young pledges need to prove their worth by the sacrifices they are willing to make in order to gain acceptance by and entrance into the group. Many of the women we interviewed even expressed a need to gain hands-on experience *before* they were entitled to paid work.

After years of education and internships, many of our participants expressed frustration because they still could not secure a paid position. As a result, several have been forced to continue to accept multiple unpaid internships in an attempt to build their résumé and become more employable. One woman who completed three unpaid internships said, 'I feel like I have paid my dues and I need a full-time job. I can't live off the salary of not paid' (Cara). Another respondent stated:

I think pop culturally there is this attitude ... we don't want to work and we don't accept these internship positions as happily as we should be. We should just be happy for the work and that we complain. Really what it is, is that all of us have to accept the crappy time in our lives to get to the better positions. I think that's unfair. I've certainly, with all my internships, I have really never worked with what I would call lazy people – which is sort of like the way we get stereotyped. I think most of the problems people had with it were just how expensive it is to live that way. It's not easy and when it doesn't feel rewarding, it sort of extra pisses you off because you're skimping by to try and do this for your future and, sometimes when it feels like there isn't a benefit, it can just be infuriating. (Melody)

Another young woman said about her job search, 'I've done everything in the book and it hasn't worked' (Isabella). While young graduates do not assume their career path will be easy, they are disappointed and feel let down by perpetual rejections and unemployment despite having 'paid their dues'.

Alongside a recognition of the fierce competition in obtaining an internship, the young women also considered the companies to be in positions of power and believe that employers take advantage of the competitive climate for internships: 'I think people are seeing the possibility of making a living in a creative industry nowadays, and these companies know that they can get away without paying people because there's always going to be someone to do it unpaid' (Isabella).

Echoed Scarlett, 'I think especially in the media industry there are always people willing to do the work for less money. It's extremely competitive now'.

Kym suggested that because companies know that parental support is necessary for many youth to take on an unpaid internship,

... there's huge potential for our generation to be exploited. We have all been told that the economy is terrible, that there aren't enough jobs for us, that it's really hard for us to find jobs ... there's a billion people applying for that one job. A lot of us have the support of our parents and so ... companies think it's okay for us to take those jobs because we still have the support of our family, plus we're not really going to get paid jobs anyways. That seems to be the thought and I think that puts us at a higher risk.

Despite their frustration, the interns did not blame the individual employers; rather they were frustrated by the capitalist system. One woman stated, 'I don't think it's fair, but I don't even know how one would begin to address this problem, because I think the problem resides at such a high level that it would require re-designing, I don't know, the entire economic infrastructure or something like that' (Talia).

Circuits of credentialism

After years of post-secondary education, many young women are seeking scarce unpaid internships to position themselves for elusive entry-level positions. As a result, the young women believe the value of a post-secondary degree is becoming discounted as the standards for employment continually increase. As Jess stated:

We are being exploited you know, our generation is extremely educated so there is the under-valued and under-employed ... and you spend thousands and thousands of dollars for an education because you think it's going to get you somewhere, but then you get in to the workforce and you're like ... why don't I have work?

The undergraduate degree, coupled with the internship, is now the minimum expectation for employment. One woman explained:

So many people have these really down-trodden experiences and in my own job hunt it just made me spin into a life crisis. Oh my god, sending all these applications for things that you know you're right for. You can see and it's evident in your resume that you're qualified and you just don't hear anything. It's just like you throw all of your time and all of your resumes into this vortex of a black hole basically. It's the most disappointing, disheartening experience. And I think it leaves a lot of people really desperate. (Grace)

While the young women acknowledged the importance of post-secondary education, they also recognized that a mere undergraduate degree was insufficient to secure a paid position. To differentiate themselves from other applicants, many of the young women pursued postgraduate degrees. After completing a professional master's degree, Grace remarked that 'you're supposed to be this magical information professional who is so skilled and wonderful and in demand. That's just not [the] reality of the job market, I don't think'. The interviewees were frustrated

about how the current labour market and creative industries devalue education: 'It's totally fair [to] think you work really, really, really hard at school and that education shouldn't be discounted because you don't have actual work experience' (Jess).

Because of the competition for internships, employers receive applications from highly qualified applicants with both undergraduate and master's degrees. One respondent stated, 'I think the talent pool they [employers] get is hugely talented and they're just getting so much great resources for free basically' (Grace). Ruefully, the interns were frustrated about the devaluation of their work, but believed that there is nothing they can do about it.

Some interns disavowed extreme menial labour in internships and purposefully sought internships that promised genuine work experience: 'I had an interview at a PR agency before I got this internship and she said to me on the phone, "you're going to be an intern and you're basically going to be like grabbing coffees and making sure the kitchen's clean and such and such" – I didn't like that' (Jess). Others expected coffee-runs and other menial tasks unrelated to the job to be an inevitable part of an internship. However, the young women were also assertive in expressing what they thought was acceptable and unacceptable forms of labour and workplace treatment. One woman emphasized that 'If you're unhappy with the way you're being treated at the workplace you can do something about it, search somewhere else for a different career path. At least that's what I would do' (Madison). Another stated: 'The moment I felt I didn't [get something out of the internship] I quit ... That was the moment that I realized that my bank account was almost empty, and that I wouldn't be hired' (Simone). While the vast majority of the young women completed their internship contract, a few left the internship because they recognized that they were not gaining any valuable experience.

Gender matters

There is a palpable recognition that unpaid internships are a gender issue and a continuation of the devaluation of women's work. Unpaid internships are also implicated in a larger and messier precarious contemporary economic structure where free labour is an increasingly routine – and normalized – aspect of the creative sector. As DePeuter *et al.* (2012: n.p.) argue, 'unpaid internships are not an isolated issue. They're one of many forms of free labour flourishing in the most celebrated quarters of the creative industries'. Interestingly, few of the young women we interviewed explicitly mentioned gender in discussing their unpaid internships. However, any time anecdotes about other interns were mentioned, they were generally female.

The gendered nature of unpaid internships was largely ignored by our participants, which may point to the insidious gendered nature of unpaid internships and the repeated history of devaluing women's unpaid work. Yet their perception is that within the creative sector, internships, and specific tasks, are disproportionately gendered. One interviewee who interned in the publishing industry

stated, ‘... the whole industry is mostly women ... The intern before me was a woman, the intern after me was a woman ...’ (Talia). Another interviewee recognized differences between the tasks that male and female interns were given: ‘The things that I would be asked to do early on were definitely different than what the male intern was asked to do’ (Melody). For example, at the beginning of the internship she was asked to go and buy coffee for a meeting, while the male intern was asked to take the meeting minutes, which the interviewee identified as a gendered difference. This interviewee said that because of her training in gender studies at university she is acutely aware of the gendered dynamic of work.

Similarly, another hidden gender bias emerged in the interviews: when a specific parent was mentioned with regards to providing the intern an industry contact, the interviewees always spoke about their father. For example, ‘My dad introduced me to a contact in communications when I was in my undergrad’ (Isabella), and ‘... it turns out that my dad had known someone who worked for [company]’ (Madison). This perhaps echoes the traditional gendered binary of men in the public workplace and women in the private home.

Women’s employment in the creative industries has been widely reported and anecdotally experienced by the young female interns we interviewed. They interned in various creative sectors including advertising, fashion, publishing, music, radio, television, film, social media, marketing, PR, and communication industries. Henry (2009) argues that women are well-suited to work in the creative industries. Rather than considering women innately well suited for a career in creative industries, some of the young women considered themselves creative types, but more importantly wanted to find meaning and a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work. It was felt that the challenging and fast-paced work environment in the creative industry would allow for this as the industry rewards creativity and ingenuity, and our participants expressed a relentless desire to excel and move up in the industry based on their talents. Gill (2002) found that people are attracted to the creative industries because of the perceived trendy workplace coupled with a flexible lifestyle. Our participants were drawn to the creative industries for various reasons based on their individual interests and skill set. Scarlett reflected on the cool environment of her unpaid internship, ‘There was always a bunch of celebrities around; it was a very high calibre environment’. With regards to the creative industry lifestyle, Isabella notes that in the creative industry there is a blurring of one’s personal and professional life. While working in the creative industry may be appealing, the creative industry also takes advantage of this reputation, as expressed by Melody: ‘The more creative it is the less likely you are to get paid as an intern. The more the industry is focused on finance the more likely you are I think or technical’. Problematically, even though more women are entering the creative industries, it remains the case that women are not seeing increased financial gains and professional stature in comparison to men in the field; however, this disturbing reality was not explicitly expressed by our participants (Henry, 2009).

Unpaid intern rights

Some of the women we interviewed were aware of the legal status of unpaid internships, gleaning information via newspaper accounts, or social media, such as Twitter. Others, mindful of current debates, were unaware of the specific legal implications of unpaid internships. As Cara remarked, ‘People are like, “internships are slave labour.” It’s a vague stigma about it. Are you overworking your interns? You’re not paying them and they’re doing the same amount of work. There’s a lot of controversy around it, but I don’t know the legalities of it’.

Unpaid interns are taking over many of the workplace responsibilities previously performed by paid employees. Some companies accept a large number of unpaid interns that are continuously cycled through because basic tasks need to be completed. Despite this, our participants still believed that they gained more from the internship than the company did, which may have to do with their perception that they had to persevere, and be lucky, to obtain the unpaid internship. However, the women also placed trust in the system itself by expecting and hoping that their employers and coordinators would act fairly and legally. Kaylee remarked, ‘I never ... [felt] uncomfortable or over-worked ... I didn’t need to worry about the laws’.

At the time we conducted our interviews, our participants expressed little knowledge about emergent activism around unpaid internships. Indeed, heightened media and policy attention to the regulation of unpaid internships occurred just after we concluded our research. In Canada, as in the UK and US, vibrant youth advocacy against unpaid internships is emerging. Intern Labor Rights, a subgroup of Arts & Labor, a working group formed during Occupy Wall Street, targeted unpaid internships in the fashion industry; during Fashion Week 2013 the New York group produced robins-egg blue boxes with swag including buttons, paper slips with Twitter hashtags and information flyers about their campaign. Intern Labor Rights has since petitioned New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio to comply with labour laws that make unpaid internships illegal, and to extend sexual harassment and other anti-discrimination laws to unpaid internships (see <http://www.internlaborrights.com/>). Alongside creative endeavours, policy interventions, such as contributing to budget consultations to the Province of Ontario have been made by Students Against Unpaid Internships Scams (see <http://payyourinterns.ca/>)

Moving forward

Overall, the young women we interviewed in our small study articulated a relentless desire to push themselves towards a future goal of secure and meaningful employment in the creative sector. Unpaid internships were seen as an instrumental way to further their career aspirations. Our interviews affirmed that class differences are perpetuated in the system of unpaid internships as upper-class youth with family support were able to take advantage of intern opportunities.

The young women's acquiescent position that unpaid internships are an integral aspect of 'paying our dues' complicates how one can research the nature and degree of 'exploitation'. Siebert and Wilson's (2013) research into unpaid work in the UK creative sector highlights how, given the exclusionary characteristics of unpaid work, only 'surveying those who participate in it is missing the perspectives of the excluded' (2013: 719). Frenette's study of the experiences of unpaid interns in the music industry echoes the need for further research to explore inequality in the cultural industries. Does the 'provisional labor' of unpaid internships: 'a liminal and indeterminate period during which aspirants form a reservoir of excess workers before potentially getting hired as paid employees' (Frenette, 2013: 372), lead to further entrenched inequalities?

Another challenge is determining the parameters of the cultural sector and what constitutes creative economies. Canada, compared to other countries such as the UK, has slowly adopted the concept of the creative economy as a facilitator of economic growth. Sectors that comprise the creative industries include the media, television and film, museum and arts organizations, advertising and public relations, publishing, design and fashion, and videogame and digital arts. Mapping this sector is difficult because of a lack of standardization as labour jurisdiction resides at a provincial level with some federal sharing (Gollmitzer and Murray, 2008).

Labour participation statistics are also out of date; the latest figures on employment in the cultural sector derive from the federal government's Labour Force Survey (LFS), 1996 to 2002. This survey revealed that employment for men in the creative sector (51 per cent) was higher than for women, but when compared to the overall employment in Canada (47 per cent), more women were employed within the cultural sector (49 per cent). Within the cultural sector women were more likely to be situated within support (68 per cent) and production (52 per cent) activities while men were active in manufacturing (62 per cent) and creation (60 per cent) activities (Singh, 2010). As well as lacking currency, these figures do not even account for youth activities in the creative industries and how young people's activities may necessitate a broadening of the traditional notions of creative work (Campbell, 2013).

Challenges to mapping labour participation in the cultural sector are technological and ideological. The sector has transformed to comprise new industries because of globalization and digitization (for instance, the steady growth of the videogame sector in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal). As well, the federal government, under the austerity measures of the Conservative majority, has curtailed the collection of socioeconomic data, with major funding cuts incurred by the primary agency Statistics Canada.

Murray and Gollmitzer (2012) call for a new policy paradigm to address precarious labour, especially for women and racial minorities, clustered in less secure and lower-income employment relationships, including in the creative sector. In Canada, internships are regulated provincially. In the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario, new guidelines clarify what constitutes legal unpaid internships; interns are exempt from consideration as an employee, do not displace

paid workers, and the internship must provide practical training and learning opportunities (Sagan, 2013). Several young activists have challenged the legality of their internships, filing complaints with government entities (Tomlinson, 2013), while NDP Minister Andrew Cash of Toronto recently introduced a private member's bill, the National Urban Worker Strategy, to address the rise in precarious labour. The bill calls for strengthening of labour laws to prevent the misuse of unpaid internships and to extend employment insurance benefits to the self-employed. These are encouraging developments and it is our hope that young women will take a proactive role in advocacy and organization around unpaid internships so that Isabella's sentiment that 'It's not an ideal situation for anyone, but it's just kind of the name of the game' can transform into positive critical activism to challenge 'the name of the game' and to value young women's *paid* labour.

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