Stories from the Competitive Labor Market: Internships, Attachment, and Anxiety in Sport Management

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Socio-Cultural - Work-Life (Volunteers)  
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Sport management scholars have established that the labor market in sport management is saturated, competitive, and highly uncertain for students and graduates (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2015; Hawzen, McLeod, Holden, & Newman, 2018; Mahoney, Mondello, Hums, & Judd, 2004; Weese, 2002). Within this context it is imperative that students accumulate internship work experience to enhance their employability (NACE, 2015). Such emphasis on student internships in sport management has led to numerous studies dating back to the 1980s that focus on the adoption of internships in the curriculum (Parkhouse, 1989), best internship administrative practices (Deluca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2015; Schneider & Stier, 2006), internship stakeholder (university, student, and business) expectations (Desensei, Kelley, Blanton, & Beitel, 1990), and student intern experience and identity (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014; Wiest & King-White, 2013). By focusing on the subjectivities of sport management majors in the labor market, this study contributes to literature on student internship experiences in the sport industry as well the ongoing debates about best practices surrounding internship administration.

In this study, I reflect on my qualitative dissertation research and examine the personal narratives of sport management majors trying to attain careers and promotion in the sport industry. According to Rinehart (2005), “sport management scholars and practitioners could use the personal narrative method in creative ways to ascertain the meanings and lived experiences that individuals assign to their lives” (p. 499). Personal narratives were collected from 33 semistructured in-depth interviews with sport management majors (current students and alumni) conducted between September 2016 and November 2017. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 years old, and their work experience varied from college student with no internship experience to graduates with five years of full-time employment in the sport industry. The interviews focused on two broad themes: 1) their backgrounds in sport participation as athletes and fans growing up and 2) their experiences of the sport labor market. Using critical sociological labor studies, the analysis focuses on the interplay between the pleasure sport management majors derive from their “affective attachment” (Berlant, 2011) to sport and the anxiety they feel from the pressure to become employable (Frayne, 2015; Cremin, 2009) in the labor market. I conclude with a discussion about how sport management experiences are framed by sport marketing strategies and the political economic organization of the labor market, and how the field of sport management can best approach this structural dilemma that effects so many sport management majors.