

THE DREAM WILL NEVER PAY OFF

CREATORS

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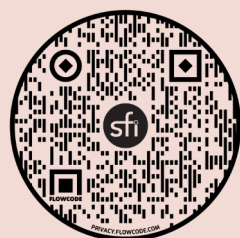
DATES

may - september
two thousand and twenty



HOW UNPAID INTERNSHIPS UPHOLD EXPLOITATION
AND HINDER FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN
THE FASHION INDUSTRY

**The Dream Will Never
Pay Off: How Unpaid
Internships uphold
exploitation and hinder
financial sustainability
within the Fashion Industry**



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SUMMARY

Fashion has long been marketed as the gateway to a fantasy: ‘buy this dress and your dreams will come true.’ Unpaid Internships in the Fashion Industry follow the same path. Pay your dues now and you will be rewarded with a glamorous job in the industry of your dreams. But in both cases this is false advertisement. For centuries the predominant global Fashion Industry has been built on exploitation, marketing beauty at the expense of pain, racism, oppression, and environmental destruction. Our extensive research has found that Unpaid Internships and the broader internship structure are pervasive throughout. Fashion Design Education programs rely on these patterns of exploitation. Brands recruit students to perform free labor, while undermining the very spirit of the Design Students who may otherwise be part of the necessary force to end such exploitative patterns.

Exploitation throughout the Fashion Industry traces back to the enslavement of people working to farm cotton and to the sweatshop conditions of women working in Fashion’s factories throughout the Industrial Revolution. Such exploitation did not end with the American Civil War, overtime pay, or sick leave gained through union mobilization. Instead, production shifted to areas of the world where the people forced to pick cotton and the women working in unsafe factories are largely hidden from view of modern consumers. Yet today’s Fashion Interns work in plain sight on the streets of Manhattan and in corporate headquarters around the world. Here, the promise of career advancement and on-the-job education encounters the reality of ‘bitch work,’ sexual

harassment, and other abuses as described by our numerous interviewees and survey respondents throughout the course of our research and as experienced first hand by the authors of this report.

Often, Fashion Interns pay out of pocket for this abuse. Our research has found that on average a Fashion Design Student at the University of Cincinnati pays \$37,607.50 for the expenses related to their internship experiences. This represents another falsity within the Fashion Industry -- per our survey respondents, there is an overwhelming assumption that interning can lead to financial gain. Specifically, financial gain to lessen the burden of tuition cost. We found that in the majority of cases this is not true at all. Even when Fashion Interns are compensated for their work, more often than not payment is so low that students are forced to take out loans and rely heavily on family and friends for financial support to complete co-ops required for graduation. Our research makes it clear that such exploitation persists because of sexist perceptions and devaluation of labor that is perceived to be feminine. What’s more, such heavy financial burdens to participate in Fashion Internships, be those paid or unpaid, mean that students with fewer financial means, including many Black and non-Black POC students, are excluded from opportunities that are still considered essential for career advancement. This stifles the voices of the young Designers who must be heard in order to build a more equitably representative Fashion Industry working toward justice.

However, there is an opportunity to change.

Based on our research findings we see distinct, actionable items for universities, brands, and industry governing bodies that can quickly transform Fashion Internship practices and through such transformation positively impact the entire Fashion supply chain. This begins in the classroom with new curriculum centering diverse Fashion Histories and supporting inclusive Fashion Futures. Democratic curriculum design and hiring practices are critical to fostering an environment where students of all backgrounds have the support necessary to develop their creative voices. Transparency from educational institutions, brands, and governing bodies, such as the Council of Fashion Designers of America, is vital as well. Students and their families must be aware of the true cost of Fashion Internships. Only by acknowledging the present exploitative practices, will the different actors within the industry be able to install new systems of accountability. Ending abuse, developing scholarships, and other support mechanisms for student internship positions will open opportunities and career pathways for economically and racially diverse Designers. We offer step by step recommendations for change, which, once enacted, will transform Intern experience and represent a leap forward toward equity within one of the world’s largest and most influential industries.

DEAR READERS,

The Fashion Industry as we know it, the industry that we as Fashion Students are being trained for, is collapsing.

When most people think of Fashion, they think of the runways and the magazine covers. However, this image of Fashion is only one side of the curtain -- an aspirational facade of an industry that requires an overwhelming number of human and environmental resources behind the scenes. This facade is crumbling and has been for some time now. In her book, *The End Of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever*, Teri Agins highlights how luxury brands no longer make money from clothing and how runways are not used to sell products, instead, they are used to sell a dream into which consumers will do anything to gain access. Agins points to the ways that this business model has destabilized the industry and has led many of Fashion's darlings down a path towards failure.¹ Giulia Mensitieri's book *The Most Beautiful Job In The World: Lifting The Veil On The Fashion Industry* reveals how the people who keep the Fashion Dream alive -- the Designers, Stylists, Photographers and Interns -- are faced with an increasingly precarious existence.² In Amanda Mull's [recent article](#) for *The Atlantic*, she questions whether the aspirations upon which Fashion is built, the ideals that keep people working with no pay, are fading into history, saying, "Luxury fashion is built on the emotional scaffolding of human aspiration--what happens to the industry when everyone gets sick of worshipping rich white people?"³ A good question, to which we would add: What happens to those of us who work in Fashion when the facade is no longer worth fighting to uphold?

We, the authors of this report, are three students in our fourth year (of five years) within the Fashion Design program at the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (UC DAAP).

As students who pay a hefty tuition bill every semester to be trained for this industry, we have experienced first hand the dissonance between Fashion Dream and Fashion Reality. Our courses explore the glitz and glamour that is still alive within the spectacle of Fashion shows like Chanel's Cruise 2017 collection taking place in Havana -- essentially turning the fleeting runway moment into a full-fledged vacation for Fashion's elite.⁴ We look around at our contemporaries to see a majority female workforce and watch as the industry splashes feminist slogans across products, runways, and editorials; however, most of the Designers we read about are male. We are taught that Fast Fashion is not actually Fashion and yet we watch as companies like H&M and Zara give rise to [billionaire](#) dynasties with accumulated influence and demonstrated control over the structure of our industry.⁵ Sustainability conferences emphasize the size of Fashion (whether that is the often misquoted levels of [pollution](#)⁶ or the fact that Fashion is worth [\\$2.4 trillion](#)⁷), insinuating that Fashion has the power and the wealth to change the world. Yet the reality of working in Fashion seems to be void of wealth, empowered women, vacation time, and world changing opportunities.

For us, and for so many people working in the Fashion Industry, the question becomes: Will the dream ever pay off?

This question is not simply about our bank accounts. We do not believe it is productive to argue that pay reflects worth, but performing unpaid labor does reflect a system of exploitation. We have experienced this most personally through the Unpaid Internship Structure that has been normalized across the Fashion Industry.

The companies we have interned for did not pay minimum wage and instead compensated us with leftover PR box samples and invitations to Fashion shows. Not only were we unpaid, but we were further demeaned and traumatized in the workplace. The Fashion Industry is famously one of the most toxic industries in the world. This makes sense when you consider that without financial validation of labor performed, and the security of a paycheck, people working in Fashion have to prove their worth to one another by leveraging social capital and by selling their identity. In an industry that fails to pay Garment Workers for [completed orders](#)⁸, where well known Stylists are still asked to work for "credit only," and where consumers are taught that they can buy their way out of their insecurities, we would be delusional to think that the Fashion Dream would ever center our survival. Therein lies the problem. If Fashion is but a dream, then the only people who can afford to thrive are those who never have to face reality.

We do not have the privilege of never waking up. We have bills to pay and college debt looming on the horizon. Is Fashion not for us?

This report explores the themes that have arisen from the data collected during our two year study of Fashion's Unpaid Internship Structure. We have interviewed sixteen people across nine professions, we have read numerous books, and we have conducted multiple surveys to which a total of 191 people responded. We have also written papers defending our right to be paid for our labor because we cannot demand to be monetarily valued if we cannot ascribe worth to work. In the time that we have been researching this topic, we have each completed internships at a total of ten different companies in five different cities. Our third and most recent internship was completed with Liz Ricketts, Director of [The OR Foundation](#) and Founder of the [Sustainable Fashion Initiative](#) (SFI), in summer 2020 during which we focused on synthesizing our research. Ironically, this last position spent researching Unpaid Internships was the first time that one of us was paid for an internship.

The report ends with recommendations for the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), for the educational institutions preparing Fashion's future Designers, and for brands. We do not hold any one of these entities responsible, but all of them are guilty of perpetuating an unsustainable system. If a company requires free labor to operate then that is not a sustainable company. If we want independent, human-scale Designers to be successful (which we do) then we need to confront this fact. Too many brands accumulate impressive levels of followers, press mentions, and accolades only to go bankrupt because the Fashion Dream does not pay. By dismissing the topic of Unpaid Internships as petty, or by justifying unpaid labor as part of the hazing-ritual of Fashion, we avoid a greater reckoning. The dream was never within reach. Just as the mythology of the "American Dream" is built on exploitation for the benefit of the few, so too is the Fashion Dream. This Fashion Dream is not the future we aspire to.

If we are going to rebuild a sustainable, and by sustainable we mean inclusive, Fashion Industry then paying Interns seems like a good place to start.

We hope this report, the information and especially the testimonials within it, will leave readers with the same resolve that has inspired and will continue to motivate our work. We also hope that the experiences shared throughout this work will provide a sense of validation for those who have endured similar circumstances without knowing their prevalence within the Fashion Industry.

If you would like to support our efforts please consider donating to: [SFI Cincinnati](#)

If you would like to follow, share, or reach out to us regarding our efforts come say hi to us on Instagram: [@sfi_cincinnati](#) or email us at hi@sificincinnati.org

Thank you,

¹Teri Agins, *The End of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006).

²Giulia Mensitieri, *The Most Beautiful Job in the World: Lifting the Veil on the Fashion Industry* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020).

³Amanda Mull, "Fashion's Racism and Classism Are Finally Out of Style," *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, July 7, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/07/fashions-racism-and-classism-are-going-out-style/613906/>.

⁴Sarah Mower, "Chanel Resort 2017 Fashion Show," *Vogue* (Vogue, May 4, 2016), <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/resort-2017/chanel>.

⁵"Stefan Persson," *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, August 19, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/profile/stefan-persson/>.

⁶Whitney Bauck, "Hey, Quick Question: Why Are We Still Claiming Fashion Is the World's 2nd Most Polluting Industry?" *Fashionista*, February 24, 2020, <https://fashionista.com/2020/02/fashion-second-most-polluting-industry-myth-debunked>.

⁷Imran Amed et al., "The State of Fashion 2017," McKinsey & Company (McKinsey & Company, December 12, 2016), <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-state-of-fashion>.

⁸Brooke Bobb, "This Hashtag Unlocked \$15 Billion of Lost Wages Due to Cancelled Orders From Gap, Levi's, and Other Brands," *Vogue* (Vogue, July 10, 2020), <https://www.vogue.com/article/remake-payup-campaign-social-media-garment-workers-wages-gap>.

THANK YOU,

Thank you to our mentor Liz Ricketts who guided us throughout this research and who assisted with editing this report.

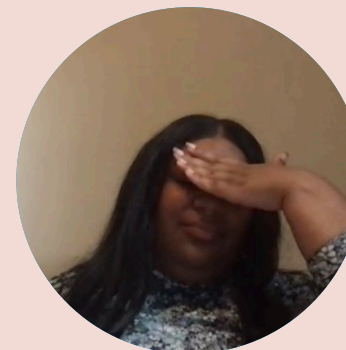
Thank you to Rachel Haines who created the corresponding graphics for our report.

Thank you to everyone who shared their story with us, who participated in our polls and surveys, and who encouraged us to research a topic that many people consider trivial.



Elie Fermann is 21 years old. She has been a Midwesterner all her life, living nowhere besides Cincinnati until she started alternating semesters between UC DAAP and interning in New York. She has been placed twice for co-op; first as an Unpaid Fashion Intern for a small brand in Brooklyn where she worked overtime for a monthly stipend of \$250. After this experience, she chose to pursue a position that would pay her an hourly wage. Her second co-op was with a brand in Manhattan where she was paid New York City's minimum wage of fifteen dollars an hour. She was able to afford these internships through her parents' continued financial support.

Alexa Ream is 22 years old. She was born in Park City, Utah and grew up in the western USA-- moving frequently. She now lives permanently in Cincinnati, OH as a student at UC DAAP. Alexa was an Unpaid Intern in three separate positions, all in the state of Ohio. During this time, her parents were financially supporting her. Upon enrolling in UC DAAP and beginning the co-op program, Alexa has only applied to corporate companies in order to be paid. She has worked in Boston, MA-- receiving eighteen dollars an hour in addition to a thousand dollar, monthly housing stipend. Alexa also interned in Fort Myers, Florida-- receiving sixteen dollars an hour. During both of these internships, Alexa was financially independent and accumulated savings; however, she still relies on financial aid from her parents during the school semesters.



Draven Peña is 23 years old. Born in Portland Oregon, she decided to pursue a fashion degree and move out east to study at UC DAAP in 2018. Since then, she has done internships in the Pacific Northwest as well as in New York City in the fields of design research, forecasting, and podcasting. Draven has never been paid a living wage for any of her internship experiences and has offset the costs through a combination of personal savings and student loans. As a first generation student to a single, working mother, Draven is the sole contributor to her educational and internship expenses.

I really want people to understand that your finances matter. Being paid for your time shouldn't be considered luxury, and our fashion industry has made a paid job as an intern just that, a luxury. And that is a falsity. Fashion tells its lowest ends that I don't value you. Think about garment workers and how we value what it takes to make something. Pennies. Literal pennies.⁹

- Julia Bond

WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

I WAS CALLED 'INTERN' INSTEAD OF MY NAME

Before applying for our first co-op through UC DAAP, we were already aware of the standards upheld by the Fashion Industry, including the normalization of Unpaid Internships. In year one, through our Industry, Theory, and Practice course, taught by the esteemed and highly knowledgeable Liz Ricketts, we learned to examine the industry with a critical eye. Then, in year two, with the formation of the Sustainable Fashion Initiative we were able to cultivate community, explore interdisciplinary topics, and create the space we needed to begin our research into Unpaid Internships. It should be noted that since the inception of SFI, Unpaid Internships have been linked to sustainability for a multitude of reasons, several of which are explored throughout this report. We are now entering our fourth year of schooling and remain committed to improving the realities of Fashion Internships not only for ourselves, but for our younger peers. In the past two years we have interviewed hiring recruiters, students, alumni, Designers, Journalists, lawyers, and fellow researchers. We posed questions to ourselves and to the industry at large: Why do Unpaid Internships persist? Do Unpaid Internships improve one's career prospects? How do Unpaid Internships impact the mental health and social consciousness of Fashion Practitioners? Why do students stay in traumatic work placements even when they are unpaid? Are Unpaid Internships especially common in Fashion because our industry is gendered female? How does the prevalence of Unpaid Internships indicate a lack of financial resilience across the Fashion Industry?

In attempting to answer these questions we first had to establish where the boundaries lie. What conditions define an internship and what is the purpose of an internship? Most would agree that the purpose is to gain pertinent skills, knowledge, and practice to enhance one's ability to transition from classroom to workforce. However, we know that equal access to these instrumental opportunities does not exist, so we must dig deeper. The word intern has a dual definition: "1. A student or trainee who works, sometimes without pay, at a trade or occupation in order to gain work experience or satisfy requirements for a qualification," and, "2. Confine (someone) as a prisoner, especially for political or military reasons... [to] Serve as an intern."¹⁰ In evaluating responses from a survey we conducted, we realized that many Fashion Internships more closely resemble the second definition in that the benefits are not considered reciprocal. Before delving into the lived experiences of our survey respondents we looked to history, policy, and educational institutions for further guidance on what constitutes an internship.

HISTORICAL SHIFTS

“The modern internship is a distant relative of apprenticeships that began under the guild system in the 11th century.”¹¹ Under this system, apprenticeships were considered the first step in a fairly predictable upward trajectory. Apprentices often received accommodation while in training. “It was not until the Industrial Revolution that the apprenticeship system died out, albeit briefly. Vocational training replaced apprenticeships, equipping workers with the skills needed for factory work.”¹² The apprenticeship model resurfaced in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but master-craftspeople were replaced by employers who no longer provided accommodation for apprenticeships. Under this new industrialized system, apprentices were only taught parts of the trade rather than the whole system. In the New York garment industry, where most workers were immigrant women, workers were paid a piece rate, not an hourly rate. Apprenticeships became less common as the goals shifted from becoming a master-artisan, to repeatedly executing a task within a prescriptive industrialized system. Within this model of industrialized clothing production, it made more sense for employers to hire unskilled laborers who could be incentivized through the piece rate system to train themselves, than it did to invest in educating skilled tradespeople who could one day start their own small business as experts. In the 1920s, we see the word “intern” used to describe a doctor who held a medical degree but who lacked a license, implying that “intern” signaled the transition between education and full time work.¹³ Internships as ‘real-world education’ that occurred in tandem with ‘classroom education’ began to grow in popularity during the late 1960s, as students enrolled in co-op programs with the hope of making money to pay for rising college tuition.¹⁴

This history of internships does not take place in a vacuum. Social inequities are of course baked into this timeline. People who were enslaved could be masterfully skilled, but they did not participate in the apprenticeship model because there was no career path for them.¹⁵ White men were more often apprentices than white women because most of the labor performed by women (still to this day) was not considered to be an occupation, or a skill worthy of being mastered. Within Fashion this was enforced by separating Tailors from seamstresses. Guilds actively excluded women from the ranks by legally limiting membership to Tailors only (seamstresses were not allowed) until 1675 when Louis XIV created a new guild: the Corporation of the Maîtresses Couturières, or Mistress Seamstresses. Before it was possible for women to legally operate within the guild system they were at risk of being fined, their workspaces were raided and seamstresses were often beaten instead of being paid.¹⁶ Such legally enforced inequities are not exclusive to centuries past. It was not until 1964 that it became illegal for public universities to discriminate against Black applicants¹⁷ and it was not until 1972 that it became illegal to discriminate against female applicants.¹⁸ While many people may assume that internships are modern tools for economic mobility, these opportunities have never been free of the social hierarchy and systems of oppression that limit access to education and industry.

We can see this history unfold within our institution, the University of Cincinnati

1906

This idea of a co-op, the cooperative education approach to combining academic education and practical work experience, was coined by Dean Herman Schneider at the University of Cincinnati.¹⁹

1943

Nearly seventeen years would pass before the country cried out in desperation for women with engineering knowledge and technical skills during World War II. Before then, America's social, cultural, educational and workplace restrictions were too strong. It wasn't until 1943 that the university opened all of its engineering courses to women, and companies readily hired female co-ops.²⁰

TODAY

As co-ops and internships gained in popularity, apprenticeships lessened. In the United States, they now pertain primarily to highly skilled technical jobs: engineering, carpentry, plumbing, information technology, and welding. Internships replaced more business facing roles.²⁰



1920

OCCASIONALLY THE EMPLOYER WOULD TAKE A CHANCE IF THE WOMAN AGREED TO ACCEPT A FEW DOLLARS A WEEK LESS. A LUCKY CHEMICAL ENGINEER MIGHT GET A JOB DOING ROUTINE ANALYSIS IN THE LABORATORY OF SOME CHEMICAL PLANT. THE DUTIES OF ANSWERING THE TELEPHONE, CARING FOR THE FILING SYSTEM... AND EVEN WASHING THE LUNCHEON DISHES WERE VERY APT TO BE ADDED.²⁰

UC's program increased its range of co-op disciplines, thus opening opportunities to a greater number of students. Moreso, the university became the first in the USA to admit women to preparatory programs in engineering. The push came not from the board or even Dean Schneider. It was a student's aunt who got the ball rolling. Learning that her niece, Ruth McFarlan, Eng '25, was eager to study engineering, Anna McFarlan asked Dean Schneider's secretary -- who was also her friend -- to suggest that engineering be opened to female students.²⁰

1945

After 1945, nearly 20,000 students descended on UC, many of them veterans taking advantage of the G.I. Bill. More than 2,000 were co-ops in the College of Engineering, including 29 women. It was a good time for co-ops. They were in demand -- being offered professional work, rather than introductory jobs. Unless the student was Black.²⁰

¹¹ John A. Taylor, "A Brief History of the Internship," Taylor Research Group (Taylor Research Group, February 4, 2014), <https://www.taylorresearchgroup.com/news/2017/4/5/a-brief-history-of-the-internship>.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Aine Cain, "This Is the Weird History of How Internships Came to Be," Business Insider (Business Insider, June 21, 2016), <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-weird-history-of-how-internships-came-to-be-2016-6>.
¹⁵ General Assembly, "An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves," Encyclopedia Virginia (Encyclopedia Virginia, July 17, 2012), https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/_An_act_concerning_Servants_and_Slaves_1705.
¹⁶ Joan DeJean, "When Women Ruled Fashion: Joan DeJean," Lapham's Quarterly (Lapham's Quarterly), accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/fashion/when-women-ruled-fashion>.
¹⁷ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, The United States Department of Justice, July 1, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/titles/vi>.
¹⁸ Title IX Of The Education Amendments Of 1972, 20 U.S.C. A§ 1681 Et. Seq., The United States Department of Justice, March 2, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/titles/ix>.

¹⁹ "History of Cooperative Education and Internships," Cooperative Education & Internship Association, Inc. (Cooperative Education & Internship Association, Inc., December 5, 2018), <https://www.ceiainc.org/about/history/>.
²⁰ Mary Niehaus, "University of Cincinnati Co-Op: 100 Years of Success," University of Cincinnati (University Relations), accessed August 20, 2020, <https://magazine.uc.edu/issues/1205/success1.html>.

LEGALLY SPEAKING, THE COLOR IS GRAY

Historical analysis illustrates the ways in which internships (or apprenticeships) evolved from being one's primary training, to training that takes place between school and the workforce, to today when internships occur alongside one's education. History does little to define how the role of an Intern is structurally different from that of an employee. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act; which remains one of the only federal acts in place under the United States Department of Labor to protect Interns, the difference between an employee (someone who must be paid if performing labor for a for-profit entity) and an Intern (someone who is not entitled to payment) is defined using a seven part "Primary Beneficiary Test."²¹ The factors are as follows:

THE TEST FOR UNPAID INTERNS AND STUDENTS

1. The extent to which the intern and the employer clearly understand that there is no expectation of compensation. Any promise of compensation, express or implied, suggests that the intern is an employee and vice versa.
2. The extent to which the internship provides training that would be similar to that which would be given in an educational environment, including the clinical and other hands-on training provided by educational institutions.
3. The extent to which the internship is tied to the intern's formal education program by integrated coursework or the receipt of academic credit.
4. The extent to which the internship accommodates the intern's academic commitments by corresponding to the academic calendar.
5. The extent to which the internships duration is limited to the period in which the internship provides the intern with beneficial learning.
6. The extent to which the interns work complements, rather than displaces, the work of paid employees while providing significant educational benefits to the intern.
7. The extent to which the intern and the employer understand that the internship is conducted without entitlement to a paid job at the conclusion of the internship.

HA
HA

While providing a loose framework for the Intern/employer dynamic, the "Primary Beneficiary Test"²² is considered flexible. Furthermore, the phrasing does little to clarify where the boundaries of exploitation lie.²³ According to the Society for Human Resource Management, only 51% of the above listed benefits are required to go to the Intern in order for them to be excluded from compensation under federal law.²⁴ Without clear legal boundaries, institutions of higher learning are left to define criteria for what constitutes an internship and to provide whatever level of oversight they deem appropriate. There are some obvious downsides to this. Policies vary widely across colleges and universities as a result of this legal ambiguity. In our experience, the boundaries set by universities surrounding what constitutes an internship and what constitutes 'compensation' are vague at best and nonexistent at worst.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS OR PUMPING OUT OBEDIENT WORKERS

When it comes to defining the purpose of internships we are most familiar with our learning environment. In our summer 2020 survey, 88.9% of participants identified as Fashion Students, Fashion Alumni, or former Fashion Students (non-graduates) from the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning . We chose to focus our efforts on UC DAAP's Fashion Design program because its students are required to participate in five, twelve to eighteen week-long, co-op rotations in order to graduate, giving them a large breadth of internship or internship-like experience. Co-op is defined by UC DAAP as, "A full-time, full-semester employment experience with a company in your intended professional field. You are paid for your work. A co-op is typically more rigorous than an internship."²⁵ UC DAAP specifically states that students will be paid and suggests that the reason is because a co-op is not an internship. Unfortunately, this does not align with reality where 79.4% of respondents have taken one or more unpaid or unlivable wage co-ops as part of their program at UC DAAP.

We examined the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning vs Cincinnati State to demonstrate how two schools, that both follow the co-op model, can vary in structure. Cincinnati State is a public technical and community college. UC DAAP is a public research university. On their website, Cincinnati State makes the distinction between co-op and internship stating that their students participating in full-time or part-time co-op positions are paid and are expected to be, "...[a] contributing part of the company while getting on-the-job training at the same time," rather than internships which are, "...part-time unpaid assignments related to a student's academic and career goals."²⁶ The assertion that co-op students are contributing members of their companies speaks to the language of the "Primary Beneficiary Test"²⁷; clearly stating that employers benefit from Cincinnati State co-op placements, thus necessitating payment for their co-op students. By contrast, UC DAAP emphasizes that the co-op model is beneficial for students because the program produces "...graduates who are already familiar with the environment and have an understanding of the corporate culture."²⁸ Additionally, they make no mention of student contribution to the employer during the actual co-op placement, thus leaving the requisite of payment ambiguous.²⁹ While UC DAAP states that co-ops should be compensated and that a co-op is typically more rigorous than an internship, the school does not explain how students can explicitly determine the difference between a co-op and an internship, or, more importantly, how compensation may differ between the two.³⁰

AT BOTH PAID AND UNPAID INTERNSHIPS, I HAD TO RUN ALL KINDS OF ERRANDS INCLUDING: BUYING CLOTHING FOR THEM TO KNOCK-OFF, GOING TO THE POST OFFICE, DELIVERING PACKAGES TO CUSTOMERS' HOMES, AND PICKING UP OR DROPPING OFF VERY HEAVY AMOUNTS OF FABRIC AND GARMENTS. AT BOTH OF MY UNPAID INTERNSHIPS, I FELT MUCH MORE LIKE A COURIER THAN A DESIGNER.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Allen Smith, "Will DOL's New Intern Test Revive Unpaid Internships?" SHRM (SHRM, October 29, 2019), <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/intern-employee-dol-new-test.aspx>.

²⁵ "Frequently Asked Questions," DAAP Co-op FAQs (University of Cincinnati, 2018), <https://daap.uc.edu/coop/faq>.

²⁶ "CO-OP STUDENT FAQ," Cincinnati State (Cincinnati State, 2020), <https://www.cincinnati-state.edu/academics/cooperative-education/students/student-faq>.

²⁷ "Fact."

²⁸ "Why Co-Op?" DAAP Co-op Overview (University of Cincinnati, 2018), <https://daap.uc.edu/coop/about>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Frequently."

²¹ Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act," Wage and Hour Division (U.S. Department of Labor, January 2018), <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/71-flsa-internships>.

As a technical college, Cincinnati State students use the work experience they gain on co-op to achieve licensure. As Fashion Students at UC DAAP, co-ops and internships offer no path to licensure as this is not the industry standard. This discrepancy raises a few questions. Does this lack of credentialed skill in Fashion relate back to the idea that domestic labor such as sewing, often performed by women, represents skill not worthy of being mastered? Is Fashion considered creative labor or manual labor? Design internships often advertise 'creativity' as a qualification for applying, the implication being that companies want Interns for their ideas rather than physical labor; however, our survey results suggest that in Fashion the Intern is rarely 'designing' and is most often doing corporeal work including carrying heavy loads.

Many UC DAAP students apply to the university based on assumptions that they made regarding the co-op program. Given that UC has the oldest co-op program in the world,³¹ many students believe that they will receive superior access to on-the-job training and that their co-op experiences would indeed be more rigorous and profitable than what a typical internship could offer them. In contrast, testimonial evidence suggests that UC DAAP Fashion Co-op Students are not exempt from dealing with the same issues that all other Fashion Interns face; even with educational systems in place to aid them in preparing for and securing paid work. This leads us to believe what the difference between a co-op and internship is ambiguous.

FASHIONABLY TRAUMATIC

Our historical, legal, and institutional analysis offered little clarity regarding the rights of Interns or the boundaries between paid and unpaid labor. Instead, responsibility seems to most often fall on the shoulder of employers who define internships based off of industry norms. So what are the industry norms? Based on our survey results it would seem that trauma is deep-seated in Fashion. If we practice what we believe in, then the Fashion Industry believes in hazing, erasing the lines between work and life, triggering events, verbal abuse, and shame.

We began this research hoping to discover clearly defined boundaries that simply needed to be enforced. What we have found is a set of vague, non-policies and educational institutions that are more concerned with protecting their relationships with brands than they are with empowering their students. Our survey results suggest that trauma is a Fashion Internship norm, not an exception. Not being paid for one's work regardless of hours dedicated, type of labor performed, and level of training provided complies with this norm. As does the social isolation that many respondents reported with some characterizing their internship experiences as one of neglect; stating that not only was there no mentorship, but there was no interaction at all. It is hard to imagine that such destructive norms benefit anyone-- Intern or employer.

At a time when everyone is debating the merits of 'cancel culture,' it is worth noting that respondents rarely associated their grievances with one particular company. Quite the opposite. Survey responses were almost completely void of company call-outs suggesting that respondents perceive their individual experiences as indicators of systemic issues and not as unique to a particular work environment. This is all the more reason to be concerned about the future of Fashion. With rising demands for change in a multitude of industries around racism, the gender wage gap, and sexual assault in the workplace, Fashion acts unconcerned. Fashion seems to interpret radical change as trends to capitalize on instead of movements to join or voices to listen to. With this current mindset, how does the industry expect to maintain a connection with young people interested in Fashion-based careers in the future? With such destructive workplace culture, how does the industry expect to retain talent?

I'VE BEEN WORKING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY FOR OVER 10 YEARS, AND I STILL CRINGE WHEN ANYONE ASKS ME WHAT I DO. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION IS THAT I MUST LIKE TO SHOP AND THAT I'M NOT VERY INTELLIGENT. I FEEL THAT I WASTED MY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, MY PARENTS' MONEY, MY SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS, MY TIME, MY YOUTH, AND MY ENERGY BY SEEKING A DEGREE IN FASHION DESIGN. I REGRET IT.

AT BOTH PAID AND UNPAID INTERNSHIPS, I HAD TO RUN ALL KINDS OF ERRANDS INCLUDING: BUYING CLOTHING FOR THEM TO KNOCK-OFF, GOING TO THE POST OFFICE, DELIVERING PACKAGES TO CUSTOMERS' HOMES, AND PICKING UP OR DROPPING OFF VERY HEAVY AMOUNTS OF FABRIC AND GARMENTS. AT BOTH OF MY UNPAID INTERNSHIPS, I FELT MUCH MORE LIKE A COURIER THAN A DESIGNER.

THE SEMESTER OF MY UNPAID INTERNSHIP IN SPRING 2003 WAS THE TIME IN MY LIFE THAT I WAS THE MOST BROKE. I COULDN'T ALWAYS AFFORD THE BUS OR 3 MEALS PER DAY. I HAD ZERO INCOME AND WAS LIVING ON STUDENT AID/DEBT AND SAVINGS FROM JOBS I HAD DONE BEFORE THEN (WHILE BEING A STUDENT). IT WAS BRUTAL, BUT LOOKING BACK I NEVER ONCE REALIZED I SHOULD BE COMPENSATED FOR THE INTERNSHIP; EVEN THOUGH I AND THE OTHER INTERNS WERE LITERALLY HAND SEWING THE GARMENTS THAT WENT DOWN THE RUNWAY AND WERE LATER SOLD.

IN DECEMBER 2019, I DECIDED TO LEAVE THE INDUSTRY. THIS WAS FOR MULTIPLE REASONS BUT THE GLARING RED FLAG WAS THAT MY MIND WAS SUFFERING. I WAS CARRYING SHAME, MANY INSECURITIES, AND A COMPLETE LACK OF SELF-WORTH. I NEEDED TO GET OUT LITERALLY AS A MEANS OF SELF PRESERVATION. I FELT CRUSHED BY THIS INDUSTRY AND THE JUDGEMENTS SURROUNDING FASHION.

I HAD A DESIGNER GIVE ME A TASK AND TELL ME SHE DIDN'T HAVE TIME FOR ME TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW SHE WANTED IT DONE. INTERNSHIPS WERE HORRIBLE EXPERIENCES.

AT ALL OF MY INTERNSHIPS I WAS NEVER PROPERLY TRAINED. SO, WHEN MY BOSSES REALIZED THAT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW THEIR COMPANY WORKED, THEY GOT ANGRY AND GAVE ME BUSY WORK LIKE LAUNDRY OR IRONING. AT MY LAST INTERNSHIP, MY BOSS DIDN'T WANT TO 'BABYSIT ME.' THE JOB THEY MADE ME DO HAD FORMERLY BEEN DUBBED 'SLAVE GIRL' WORK AND WAS COMMONLY SAID TO ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE.

IN MY FIRST INTERNSHIP, MANAGERS WOULD OFTEN CALL US INTERNS OR WE WOULD BE CALLED BY ANOTHER MANAGER TO GET ONE OF US BY SAYING, 'CAN YOU GET ONE OF THE INTERNS TO DO THIS.' WE WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR TAKING OUT THE RUBBISH IN THE OFFICES OF THE MANAGERS EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD PROFESSIONAL CLEANERS. THE MANAGERS WOULD ORDER LUNCH FOR THE WHOLE OFFICE ON FRIDAYS, BUT AS INTERNS WE WERE EXPRESSLY NOT ALLOWED TO TAKE PART. THERE WAS A LUNCH ORGANISED BY THE HEAD OF THE COMPANY FOR THE END OF FASHION WEEK AND HE HAD SAID THAT HE WANTED THE INTERNS TO COME, BUT THE MANAGERS LEFT AND DIDN'T ASK ANY OF US TO JOIN. THE NEXT DAY THE MANAGER ASKED WHY WE DIDN'T GO, AS HE HAD BOOKED A TABLE, BUT WE EXPLAINED THAT NONE OF THE ACCOUNT MANAGERS TOLD US WHERE IT WAS OR WHERE THEY WERE GOING. IT MADE THE DIVIDE BETWEEN INTERNS AND MANAGEMENT EVEN BIGGER, EVEN THOUGH WE WERE ALL AROUND THE SAME AGE.

I WAS INCLUDED IN ALMOST ALL OF THE FITTINGS WITH THE PRODUCTION TEAM, BUT NOT ONCE DID THE HEAD OF THE COMPANY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO ME MY ENTIRE CO-OP. THAT FELT VERY DEVALUING, CONSIDERING THAT I SAW HER ON A REGULAR BASIS IN THE OFFICE.

AFTER WORKING ONE YEAR IN FASHION, POST-GRAD, I DECIDED I COULD NOT SEE CAREER LONGEVITY, GROWTH, OR WORK LIFE BALANCE EVER COMING TO FRUITION WHILE WORKING THROUGH THIS INDUSTRY.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After looking at the history of internships in the USA and conducting a literature review we shifted our focus to gathering testimonial evidence. This included conducting polls via Instagram through our official organization (SFI) account and interviewing students and industry professionals in the USA as well as in the UK Drawing on the knowledge gained through these interviews and informal polls, we created a seventy-five question survey to which sixty-four current and former Fashion Students and Fashion Professionals responded. Most notable is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the sixty-four respondents have completed multiple internships representing 237+ internships as a group. This survey collected information about people's experiences participating in Unpaid Internships and offered space to tease out both the positives and negative outcomes of these experiences.

Throughout this process it became abundantly clear that students felt unprotected when participating in any type of internship (paid or not). Participants who took Unpaid Internships felt especially vulnerable and agreed that the current Unpaid Fashion Internship Structure does not pass most or all of the questions in the "Primary Beneficiary Test"³² under The Fair Labor Standards Act.³³ Examples include unpaid positions where zero training is provided, situations where Unpaid Interns outnumbered employees by three to one, companies where Unpaid Interns performed critical tasks that no paid employee had the skill to perform, and internships where Unpaid Interns were required to be available twenty-four/seven. With internships promoted as an extension of their classroom learning, young people should be leaving these positions with measurable development in place of monetary compensation, but our survey results suggest that learning outcomes are rarely adequate.

The lack of protections for Fashion Interns is unsurprising given how unregulated the Fashion Industry is.³⁴ Exploitation³⁵ runs rampant on various levels.³⁶ Take the (most) recent Marni scandal as indication of Fashion's lack of ordinance. Their S/S 2020 "Jungle Mood" accessories campaign used Black models and props to convey racist, colonial tropes. The photographer, Edgar Azevedo, was paid a total of R\$6,000 Brazilian Reals or \$1100 USD (later raised to \$1900 USD). This was meant to compensate Azevedo for his time as well as to cover the cost of production and the eight models involved.³⁷ Even with Marni being a repeat offender when it comes to using racist imagery for profit, no fee or penalty has been required of them to atone for their mistakes of underpayment and altering of imagery. A simple and all too familiar three paragraph Instagram press release, which now sits in between photos of their latest handbag and a blurry white model, remains the only penance.

As the authors of this report, the first time our education addressed unpaid labor in Fashion was learning about the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse³⁸ in Bangladesh during our first year of study. This disaster illuminates how the entire Fashion Industry is built on an unsustainable business model that places no value on the physical producers and all of the value and celebrity on the visible 'visionaries' (i.e. Designers, Models, Influencers, etc.). Even with certain roles given more value over others, exploitation and under payment are still seen at every level tied to garment production and Fashion. We bring up Garment Factory Workers not to compare suffering and circumstances, but to show solidarity. With exploitation clearly happening in both areas (factories and internships), it allows the issue of unpaid labor to remain unchecked. If Interns in America are allowed to be exploited think about Garment Workers. By fighting for our pay we in turn are setting a precedent for all other areas of the industry throughout the supply chain. The lack of data on underpaid and unpaid work in Fashion led us to survey the Fashion Interns we have access to.

³² "Fact."

³³ Smith.

³⁴ Elizabeth Segran, "It's Time to Regulate Fashion the Way We Regulate the Oil Industry," Fast Company (Fast Company, January 22, 2020), <https://www.fastcompany.com/90453905/its-time-to-regulate-fashion-the-way-we-regulate-the-oil-industry>.

³⁵ Pamela N. Danziger, "The Glamorous Fashion Industry's Ugly Underside Exposed," Forbes (Forbes Magazine, September 30, 2018), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2018/09/30/the-ugly-underside-of-the-glamorous-fashion-industry-exposed/>.

³⁶ Elizabeth Segran, "The Modeling Industry Is Filled With Exploitation- This Labor Activist Is Fighting Back," Fast Company (Fast Company, December 10, 2019), <https://www.fastcompany.com/90430003/the-modeling-industry-is-filled-with-exploitation-this-labor-activist-is-fighting-back>.

³⁷ Diet Prada, "Last week, Italian luxury brand @marni came under fire for a campaign that depicted several racist tropes," Instagram (Instagram, August 5, 2020), <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDhn3BqnYKU/>.

³⁸ "The Rana Plaza Accident and Its Aftermath," International Labour Organization (International Labour Organization, December 21, 2017), https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS_614394/lang--en/index.htm.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

DATA & QUESTIONS

As we approached our in depth, seventy-five question survey for Fashion Interns, we began by highlighting seven key sections derived from our original Instagram poll. Each section of the final survey was adjusted based on responses and direct message correspondence generated from the Instagram poll to achieve clarity and accuracy in data reporting. All participants were given ample space to expand upon their answers in order to ensure authenticity. The seven sections are as follows:

1. General Information. Here, participants were asked questions regarding their location, educational background, association to the Fashion Industry past or present, and number of completed Fashion Internships.

These questions allowed us further insight into each individual and enabled us to categorize and compare respondent answers.

2. Identity. Within this section, we prompted questions relating to workplace diversity. We asked participants to rate their work environment for paid and unpaid placements respectively, on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree (with intermediate options in between), as to whether or not they would describe it as economically, racially, gender, sexual orientation, and ability diverse. We then asked the same of their Intern-pools for both paid and unpaid placements respectively.

We found that the vast majority of Unpaid Intern-pools are mostly comprised of white students. Additionally, paid Intern-pools are also majority white with few, BIPOC Interns.

Diversity in gender (though skewed female) and sexual orientation are features of both paid and Unpaid Internships, but according to our surveys both types of internships lack diversity in economic status, race, and ability (perhaps due to non-apparent disabilities). In summary, Fashion is not representative of the general population.

3. Monetary Cost. Here we asked participants to quantify their paid and unpaid experiences, to assert how many of their positions paid a livable wage, to describe the details of their compensation, to report the proceedings of negotiating payment if they had attempted to do so, to explicitly state how much money they have lost per internship, to analyze the cost of their most and least expensive experiences, to itemize their collective expenses while interning, and finally to describe their financial sources supporting each internship and its associated costs. As a critical part of our primary focus and something that is so rarely discussed openly in Fashion, we used a combination of question formatting; allowing long-response, follow-up sections for each question in case participants needed to add further clarification to their answers. We learned that the average cost of a Fashion Internship is \$2,149 per month; however, it is worth noting that 22.2% of our respondents reported spending \$5,000 or more per month on their most expensive internships. Fashion Internships last three and a half months on average, equating to a mean of \$7,521.50 spent per student, per internship. For UC DAAP students, who are required to complete five co-op placements in order to graduate, one person will spend, on average, \$37,607.50 on internships. The 2022 graduating class, fifty-five students, of UC DAAP's Fashion Design program will spend over two million dollars (\$2,068,412.50 to be exact) on internships alone during the course of their (our) program.

BRANDS, HOW WILL YOU ACHIEVE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TARGETS IF THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO CAN AFFORD TO TAKE UNPAID INTERNSHIPS ARE WHITE?

BRANDS, WE SEE MANY OF YOU RAISING MONEY FOR THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT, BLACK-OWNED ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER GROUPS ADVOCATING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE. THIS IS WONDERFUL, BUT WE WONDER IF THIS FORM OF ACTIVISM IS AS EFFECTIVE AS OFFERING PAID INTERNSHIPS TO BLACK STUDENTS? WHAT ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, OR ABOUT OUR SOCIETY, INCENTIVIZES EXTERNAL ACTIVISM VERSUS INTERNAL ACTIVISM?

JOURNALISTS, WHEN YOU DETERMINE THAT A BRAND IS 'DIVERSE' OR 'SUSTAINABLE' ARE YOU LOOKING BEYOND THE RUNWAY AND MARKETING MATERIALS?

When asked to identify their financial sources, participants responded as follows (participants could choose more than one option): 77.8% of respondents reported having financial support from parents or other family members. 71.4% reported using their savings. 34.4% collectively reported utilizing loans and scholarships; one respondent withdrew a \$15,000 loan to cover their expenses. Only 17.5% reported that their compensation as an Intern covered their total expenses. Remaining responses denote having multiple jobs and/or spousal support. Not surprisingly, the majority of students have overlapping sources of funding to support their time as Interns, but concerning many students are going into debt to perform what is supposed to be a paid co-op experience and only 20.6% of respondents were paid a living wage. Only 27.3% of participants felt they had gained skills that led or could lead to achieving financial sustainability.

JOURNALISTS, HOW MIGHT YOU EXPAND YOUR REPORTING ON SUSTAINABILITY TO INCLUDE FINANCIAL HEALTH?

BRANDS, WHY ARE YOU NOT PAYING LIVING WAGES?

4. Elaborating on Internship Experiences. Similar to the above, this section was also comprised of long-response questions and participants were asked to respond in detail. We asked questions such as: have you ever felt devalued as a Fashion Intern, have you ever felt ashamed for being associated with Fashion, have you ever felt shamed by others for being associated with Fashion, how have feelings of shame affected your career and others' along the supply chain, has your internship experience caused you to negatively question your career choice, have you ever felt pressured to stay at an internship despite negative aspects warranting you to end your experience, have you ever experienced sexual harassment as a Fashion Intern, and finally have you ever felt manipulated or traumatized by an internship experience.

82.5% of participants reported feeling devalued as a Fashion Intern. 81% of respondents said they had felt or been made to feel ashamed for pursuing Fashion. When asked to expand upon this factor, almost all respondents cited outside influences being the root of their shame. Numerous UC DAAP students specifically identified students of other majors (predominantly, but not limited to, Industrial Design), professors (predominantly, but not limited to, Industrial Design), and administrators as their sources of shaming. Some respondents shared that they or their family members lie when asked what industry they work in because of the shame associated with their chosen career. More so, many respondents cited shame as their main reason for leaving Fashion.

44.4% of participants said they felt pressured to stay at an internship despite negative aspects warranting them to end their experience. 23.5% of respondents cited experiencing sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or rape. Finally, 41.3% described their internship experiences as traumatizing.

SCHOOLS, WHAT RESOURCES ARE YOU PROVIDING TO STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE TRAUMA ON AN INTERNSHIP?

UC DAAP FACULTY, HOW MIGHT YOU DISMANTLE TOXIC MASCULINITY AND THE HIERARCHY OF DESIGN FIELDS THAT IS ROOTED IN SEXISM?

FASHION STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS, HOW CAN YOU HEAL SO THAT YOUR INTERNALIZED SHAME DOES NOT LEAD YOU TO OPPRESS OTHERS?

5. Accessibility. In this area, we asked a myriad of yes or no questions to understand if Unpaid Internships inhibit career growth through exclusivity and whether an education in Fashion is deemed valuable. We questioned respondents as to if they had access to internships at companies they were truly interested in, if they had ever turned down an internship opportunity because they could not afford to take it, if they were ever encouraged to drop out of college and pursue Fashion without a degree, if they were ever offered a job that would necessitate them to stop their education, if they had ever returned to a company for full-employment after interning there previously, and finally if they would recommend their paid experience over their unpaid experience.

30.2% of participants said they did not have access to internships at companies they were interested in; additionally, 9.5% said that they only had access once or twice, but not consistently-- often finding the positions themselves and not through their educational institution. 39.7% of respondents reported turning down at least one internship experience because they could not afford it. 58.7% identified that they had been told they did not need to complete their Fashion education in order to work in Fashion. 19.0% said that they had been offered a full time job on internship that would require them to stop their education. 55.9% of participants agreed that they would be more likely to recommend their paid internships to a friend or colleague; only 6.8% disagreed and the remaining answers were neutral.

BRANDS, DO YOU TAKE AN APPLICANT'S FINANCIAL SITUATION INTO ACCOUNT WHEN YOU OFFER AN INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITY TO A STUDENT?

BRANDS, HOW MIGHT UNIVERSITIES HELP YOU TO REACH STUDENTS FOR WHOM AN INTERNSHIP WITH YOUR TEAM WOULD BE MOST ADVANTAGEOUS?

UNIVERSITIES, HOW WILL YOU SUPPORT THE MORE THAN ONE IN THREE STUDENTS WHO CANNOT AFFORD THE MOST BENEFICIAL INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AS YOU WOULD STUDENTS APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID TO COVER ACADEMIC TUITION COSTS?

UC DAAP FASHION STUDENTS, YOU WILL LIKELY SPEND \$37,607.50 ON INTERNSHIPS OVER YOUR COLLEGE CAREER. THAT IS MORE THAN THREE YEARS OF IN-STATE TUITION.³⁹ SOME OF YOU WILL SPEND FAR MORE PURSUING 'PRESTIGIOUS' POSITIONS AT 'HIGH FASHION' BRANDS. HOW DO YOU RECONCILE THIS HIDDEN EXPENSE?

UC DAAP FASHION PARENTS, WERE YOU PREPARED TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WHILE ON INTERNSHIP? HOW DOES THE COST OF UNPAID INTERNSHIPS IMPACT YOU?

FASHION INTERNS, NOT EVERYONE HAS PARENTAL SUPPORT. HOW CAN WE SPEAK OPENLY ABOUT PRIVILEGE, NURTURE HEALTHY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND BUILD EQUITY AS A COMMUNITY?

6. Alumni Questions. As the name suggests, this section was for graduates only in order to target their group's unique experiences transitioning from Intern to employee. All questions were long-response. Here, we asked Fashion Alumni to evaluate whether their Unpaid Internships were worth it, to pinpoint a specific placement that led them to the job they have now, to identify their first job after graduating, to assert whether their first job was a placeholder until something more advantageous came along, to reflect on their self confidence post graduation, to determine if they knew what they should be paid in a given position, to list their dream job coming into the industry as an Intern, to name the internship they wish they had landed, to specify whether they thought their personality and connections or hard-skills were more valuable to furthering their career, to state whether they had ever felt fear of being blacklisted, to reflect on whether they are passionate about their work, to list any regrets they may have, and lastly to describe what they would like to see the Fashion Industry and/or UC DAAP improve upon.

31.4% of respondents stated that their Unpaid Internship was not worth it; those who said it was worth it majoritively explained that either they were receiving financial support, they viewed it as a learning experience of what not to do, or that it was beneficial to have a 'name' on their resume. When asked to pinpoint a specific internship that led them to the job they have currently, most cited industry connections (peers, colleagues, former bosses) or a breadth of experience and not one, singular internship. 42.9% of participants said that their first job was not a placeholder (an interim job before finding one more desirable), the remaining 57.1% expressed strongly that their first job was not their 'dream job' or long-term plan.

Only 33.3% of alumni were confident in their skills upon graduation and only 45.5% knew what they should be paid in a given position. The majority of alumni cited couture or name-brands as their initial ideal internship coming into the Fashion Industry. In reflection, they now list a plethora of brands that align particularly with their reality and goals as the internship they wish they had landed. 38.7% said their personality and connections alone furthered their career most, 19.4% said that both personality and connections as well as hard-skills furthered their career most, and only 32.3% said their hard-skills alone furthered their career most. 37.8% of respondents said that they have been afraid of being blacklisted.

When asked to reflect on whether participants were passionate about their work, the general consensus pointed to a continued love for design and clothing, but this was eclipsed by feelings of extreme shame and guilt. Passion was viewed as less important than fixing the critical state of the industry. Survey respondents felt that both UC DAAP and the industry at large truly needed a system overhaul in order to serve both students and Fashion Practitioners. Building from the ground up, respondents cited: diversity, mentorship, sustainability, paid internships, and pushing for true innovation as actions to lay the new foundation of both Fashion and Fashion Education.

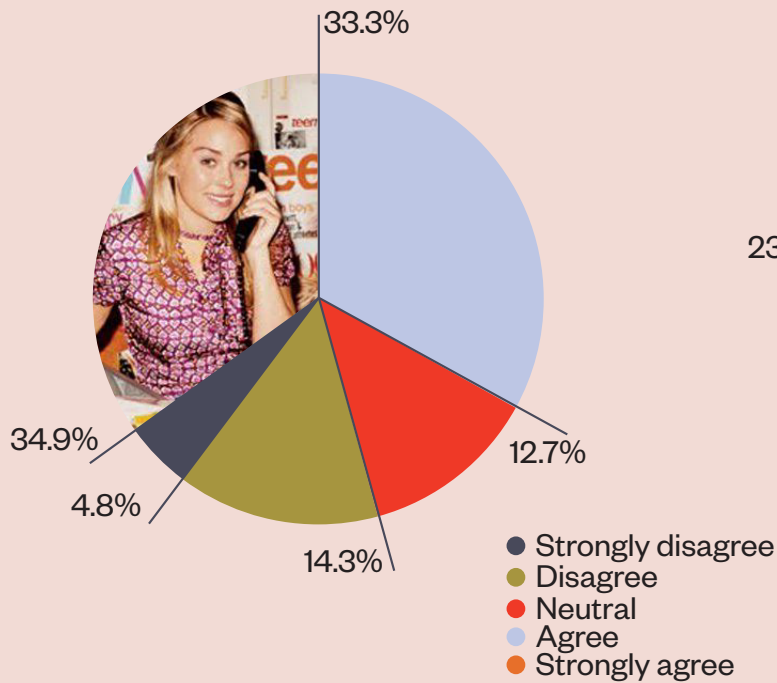
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SCHOOLS, HOW MIGHT YOU PREPARE STUDENTS TO NEGOTIATE PAY AND TO MARKET THEIR SKILLS?

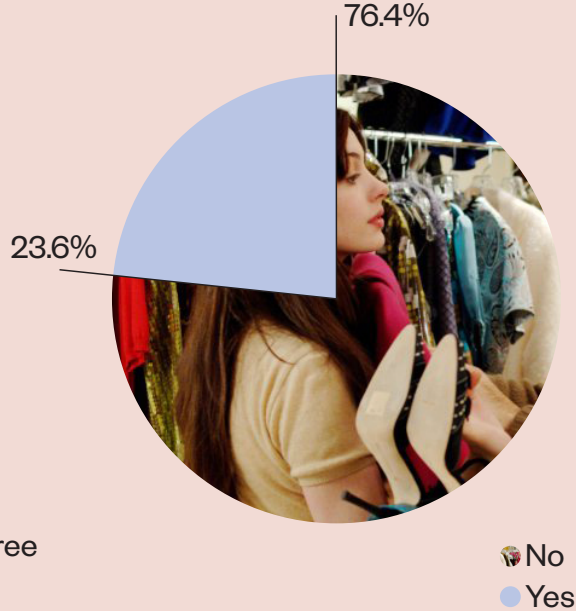
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FASHION PRACTITIONERS, IS A CAREER BASED ON PERSONALITY AND NOT ON A SKILLSET SUSTAINABLE?

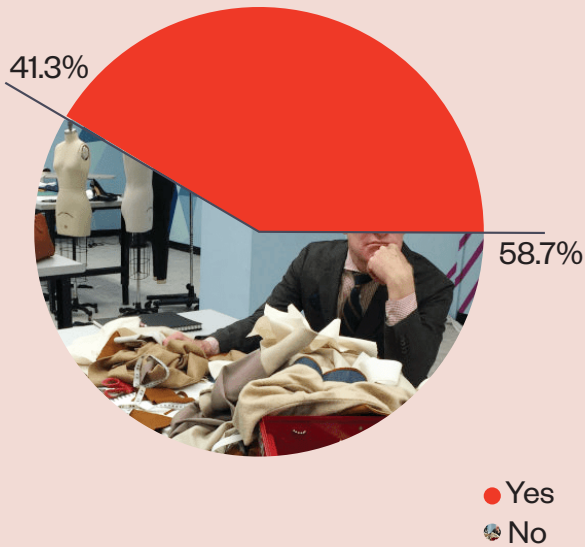
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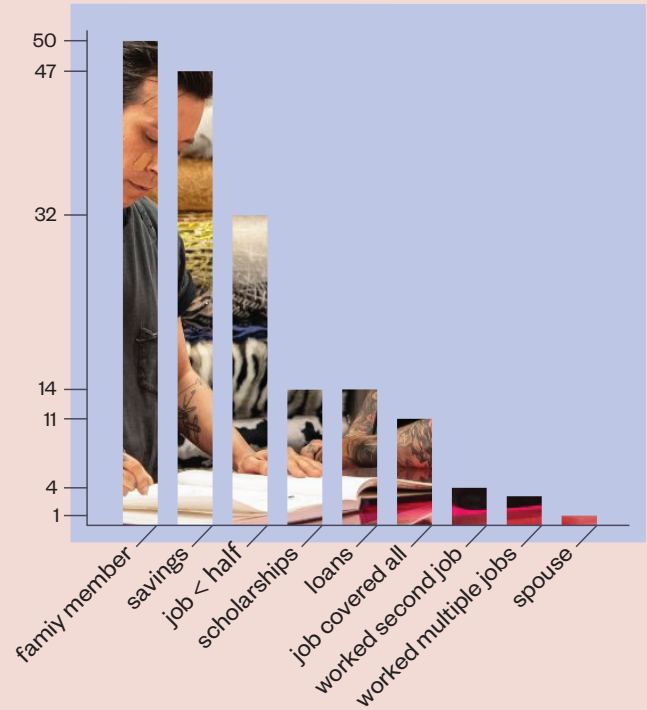
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TOLD YOU DON'T NEED TO FINISH SCHOOL



HOW COSTS WERE COVERED



7. Long-Term Implications. In the final section, participants reflected more broadly on their experiences. We asked participants how they reconcile with brands who tout sustainability, but do not pay their Interns. We asked the same for brands who profess their diversity, but do not reflect the same qualities internally and/or do not pay their Interns. We also asked respondents to assert the purpose of an internship, to identify the obstacles allowing the Unpaid Internship Structure to remain, to state which factors impacted their decision to pursue internships, and lastly to list any resources they wished they had as an Intern.

Most of our respondents who worked for 'sustainable brands' felt that their internship was hypocritical. The brands they worked for touted sustainability in the forms of fighting for women to get equal pay, fairly paying factories, and using deadstock or upcycled materials. However, they failed to see the issue of paying their own Interns. Sustainability is still used as a marketing tactic, not only in the form of products, but in the form of fair labor. Much like sustainability, diversity has become a buzzword to promote an image of progressiveness for the Fashion Industry. Our survey respondents felt similarly, stating that brands wanted diverse bodies for campaigns and imagery, but not a diverse set of minds to actually enact meaningful change from within.

The majority of respondents felt the purpose of an internship is: to gain on-the-job knowledge that is not possible to learn in a classroom setting, to validate that their field of study (Fashion Design) could actually lead to a career in Fashion post-grad, to start to build relationships, and/or to have the opportunity to work in a niche area not taught in traditional Fashion Education (i.e. beading, leatherwork, jewelry design).

When asked what factors (participants could select more than one option) influenced their decision to pursue an internship opportunity, 87.9% of participants cited wanting to make connections within the industry. 69% reported wanting to 'level-up' their education to equate that of 'major' Design Schools. 58.6% said they pursued in order to be paid. The remaining responses predominantly cited wanting to gain experience, to travel, and/or to replace formal education all together. When asked what resources they wished they had as Interns, an overwhelming number of respondents asked for an anonymous reporting system; one that would allow individuals and brands to be held accountable. Other popular answers included: relocation and reliable housing services, a guide to valuing skills, a database of dependable sources to make money if in an unpaid or underpaid position, and finally a mental health support system.

Lastly, when we asked survey respondents what obstacles are upholding the Unpaid Internship Structure the responses were disheartening. The biggest obstacle listed is also the hardest to change. How can we change common practices and behaviors towards unpaid labor? As one respondent stated: "Why buy the cow when the milk is free?"

Per the responses, it is clear that the main players perpetuating this hurtful mindset are what we call 'the Old Guard'. A group of older (mostly white) individuals who say what's 'in vogue'. Additionally, the ones who don't feel the need to dismantle the Unpaid Internship Structure are the ones who can usually afford to pursue an internship, and later career, within it.

As previously stated, Fashion also lacks any government policies that can hold it accountable. There also are not enough formal and consistent funding opportunities to foster young talent so they can, in turn, pay their Interns. All of these factors feed into why the Unpaid Internship Structure has remained in power for so long.

THEMES

After reviewing each of the sixty-four responses to the seventy-five questions, and pairing our data with previous research and interviews, it has become abundantly clear: Fashion Interns are united in their experiences. We have identified four key themes felt universally by participants in our research:



1. Multiple negative factors of Unpaid Internships disproportionately impact BIPOC and female students.

BIPOC Interns are often 'othered' due to the significant lack of representation within the industry. More so, Fashion outright excludes BIPOC students, especially those coming from economically marginalized backgrounds, by requiring Interns to commit to such high financial costs in order to further their education and career. Additionally, sexual harassment is pervasive within the industry. Patriarchal dynamics are commonplace; positioning male superiors above hordes of female subordinates. Body shaming and strict colonial norms run rampant, most often targeting female employees and particularly those who are BIPOC.

I WON'T GO INTO PAINFUL DETAIL HERE, BUT DURING MY INTERNSHIP THEY MADE ME FEEL LIKE ABSOLUTE GARBAGE, GASLIT ME CONSTANTLY, AND WERE OVERTLY SEXIST. MY TIME THERE MADE ME SO STRESSED OUT THAT I EXPERIENCED MY FIRST EVER PANIC ATTACK BECAUSE I WAS SO ANXIOUS ABOUT GOING TO WORK.

HIGHEST PAID INTERNSHIP WAS ALSO THE WORST. NOT ONLY WAS IT BUSY WORK, BUT ME AND ANOTHER INTERN FROM DAAP WERE SEXUALLY HARASSED BY AN ELDER MAILROOM CLERK. SHE TOLD HR AND THEY DID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. WE ARE BOTH BLACK WOMEN AND WERE SCARED TO SAY ANYTHING BECAUSE IT'S A HUGE COMPANY AND THE MAN WAS ALSO A POC, SO WE TRIED TO IGNORE HIM FOR A WHILE. IT WAS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD WORKING AT THIS COMPANY. THE EXECUTIVES AND DIRECTORS WERE MOSTLY WHITE MEN, AND EVEN THE ASSISTANT DESIGNERS SEEMED TO WALK ON EGGSHELLS, SO IT TRICKLED DOWN TO US. I THANKED GOD ON THE DAYS WHEN I WAS ASSIGNED TO MAKE PURCHASE RETURNS. I WOULD SPEND ABOUT TWO HOURS EXPLORING THE CITY AND PRETENDING I GOT LOST WHEN SOMEONE WOULD CALL LOOKING FOR ME.

WHEN I WAS AN INTERN, MY TASK AS THE ONLY FEMALE ON THE TEAM WAS TO CREATE A FEMALE SKATE APPAREL LINE. I WAS NOT GIVEN ANY WORK REGARDING REGULAR DAY TO DAY INLINE PRODUCT, AND I WAS NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS MY ENTIRE PROJECT WAS BUSY WORK. MEN WOULD FREQUENTLY DEVALUE MY WORK AND SAY THAT IT WAS NOT NECESSARY AND THAT FEMALES WERE WEARING MEN'S CLOTHES ALREADY, SO WHY WAS THERE A NEED FOR THIS TYPE OF PRODUCT.

AFTER BEING HIRED BY A COMPANY I INTERNEED FOR, I WAS SEXUALLY HARASSED BY A TEAM MEMBER IN AN ELEVATOR. IT WAS HORRIFYING AND FELT SHAMEFUL, AND ALTHOUGH I DISCLOSED THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY AMONG COLLEAGUES AND TO A SUPERVISOR. SOME DOUBTED THE SEVERITY ("OH, ___ IS LIKE THAT TO EVERYONE") AND SOME EXPRESSED DISGUST, BUT NEITHER ENCOURAGED ME TO GO TO HR. EVEN MY BOYFRIEND AT THE TIME DISSUADED ME FROM TAKING ACTION.

AT MY FIRST UNPAID CO-OP, THE OWNER'S PARTNER ONCE SAID TO A CLIENT, "I LOVE BLACK P*SSY," MULTIPLE TIMES. WHEN SHE TOLD HIM THAT HIS COMMENTS MADE HER FEEL HORRIBLE, ESPECIALLY WITH INTERNS PRESENT, HE ASSUMED THAT I HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT HIM BEHIND HIS BACK AND WENT CRAZY. THERE WERE INSTANCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT DIRECTED AT ME AS WELL, BUT THIS STANDS OUT AS MORE IMPORTANT.

2. There is not an obvious correlation between workload and pay at either paid or Unpaid Internships, exploitation is seen in both situations.

It is common for Unpaid Interns to report being required to perform expert level craft despite their lack of pay. In the Fashion Industry, the term 'compensation' varies drastically in meaning; encompassing everything from a ten dollar lunch stipend, to a sample garment, to a paid metrocard. Fashion Interns can confidently assume that they will not be paid a liveable wage when 'compensation' is used to describe their pay. More so, payment of any kind is often informal, irregular, or 'forgotten' entirely. Additionally, the terms 'busy work' and 'bitch work' are used profusely throughout participant responses for both paid and unpaid experiences. Skill level does not equate pay level and exploitation is seen at all levels.

AS COMPENSATION THEY WOULD LET ME BORROW SOMEONE'S METROCARD AND LET ME HELP MYSELF TO DRINKS IN THE COOLER.

ONLY GIVEN BUSY WORK, EXCLUDED FROM ALL MEETINGS, REFERRED TO AS "THE INTERN", KEPT ESSENTIALLY IN A CORNER.

I WAS OFTEN GIVEN PROMOTIONS AND NO PAY RAISES.

AT MY FIRST CO-OP I WAS MAKING WELL ABOVE MINIMUM WAGE WITH OVERTIME, PLUS A MONTHLY STIPEND OF A THOUSAND DOLLARS A MONTH. I SPENT HOURS A DAY, IF NOT ENTIRE DAYS, PRINTING AND HIGHLIGHTING SALES REPORTS-- NOT HIGH LEVEL THINKING, PURELY LOOKING FOR NUMBERS OVER OR UNDER A CERTAIN AMOUNT. IT GOT TO A POINT WHERE I WOULD BE ASKED TO HIGHLIGHT REPORTS FOR MY ENTIRE TEAM AND THAT WAS ALL I WOULD BE REQUIRED TO DO IN A DAY. THE MOST CHALLENGING THING I WAS FACED WITH WAS RE-LEARNING MICROSOFT EXCEL. OTHER DAILY TASKS INCLUDED ORGANIZING SAMPLE CLOSETS, FILING ORDERS, AND ONLINE SHOPPING AT COMPETING BRANDS. WE WERE GIVEN A WEEK OF TRAINING AND THAT WAS ALL IT TOOK. ANYONE COULD HAVE DONE MY JOB.

ONE PARTICULAR INTERNSHIP PAID NOTHING, HOWEVER DURING THE INTERVIEW IT WAS STATED THAT STUDENTS GET LUNCH AND ARE GIVEN BIKES TO TRAVEL. HOWEVER, UPON ARRIVING THIS CHANGED. WE WERE TOLD BY THE BOSS THAT WE HAD TO, "SUPPLY OUR OWN LUNCH," BECAUSE IT GETS TOO EXPENSIVE. NO BIKE OR MEANS OF TRAVEL WAS GIVEN TO STUDENTS. THE BOSS ONLY STARTED COVERING OUR LUNCH WHEN SHE KNEW SHE WAS ASKING FOR TOO MUCH OR TO MAKE UP FOR THE WORKLOAD. ONLY IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO MY DEPARTURE WAS LUNCH COVERED, BUT ONLY BECAUSE WE HAD TO COME IN ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS AND WORK THREE EXTRA HOURS EVERYDAY.

ON TOP OF MANAGING AND FILLING THE BRAND'S DIRECT TO CONSUMER ORDERS AND RUNNING ERRANDS THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH, I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PATTERN MAKING AND CREATING SAMPLES FROM SCRATCH FOR THEIR NYFW RUNWAY; ALL FOR A MONTHLY TRAVEL STIPEND OF \$250. I HAD NO ONE TO ASK FOR TECHNICAL HELP BESIDES MY FELLOW INTERNS BECAUSE NEITHER OF THE TWO FULL TIME EMPLOYEES STUDIED FASHION OR KNEW HOW TO SEW; ONE LIVED IN ANOTHER STATE. THEY HAD A SAMPLE MAKER IN MIDTOWN AND A FACTORY WHO THEY PAID, WE JUST MINIMIZED THE DAMAGE TO THE BRAND'S TIGHT WALLET.

THEY USUALLY GIVE INTERNS CLOTHING AS COMPENSATION ON THEIR LAST DAY, BUT THEY MADE WOMENSWEAR AND I'M A GUY, SO I DIDN'T GET ANYTHING.

3. Working in fashion can lead to internalized shame and guilt, impacting an individual's commitment to fashion as a long term career.

There is an exorbitant amount of shame within Fashion. There is an exorbitant amount of shame being placed onto Fashion. Fashion Practitioners are abandoning their passions for sustainable, non-toxic career paths. When asked whether their internship experiences caused them to negatively question their career choices, 66.6% of respondents replied in agreement.

I'VE DEBATED GETTING A MASTERS DEGREE IN SOMETHING ELSE BECAUSE FIRST, MY CO-OPS HAVE SHOWN ME THAT NO ONE VALUES THE WORK OF FASHION DESIGNERS AND THAT IS DOUBLY SO IF YOU'RE A MINORITY LIKE ME. SECOND, I HAVE REALLY NEGATIVE FEELINGS TOWARDS MY OWN INTELLIGENCE AND WORTH BECAUSE OF THE WAY THAT FASHION IS SO WIDELY REGARDED.

I HAVE CONSTANTLY CONSIDERED A CAREER CHANGE. I DON'T WANT TO FEEL LIKE I AM HARMING PEOPLE AND CONTRIBUTING TO INEQUALITY.

THE SHAME AND GUILT ARE CURRENTLY WHAT I AM WORKING THROUGH WHILE NOT WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY. I KNOW THAT TO BE A STRONG LEADER, A STRONG CREATIVE, AND GENERALLY AN UPSTANDING PERSON I *NEED* TO GET MY MIND RIGHT. IT IS WHY I LEFT THE INDUSTRY. I FELT I COULD NOT HAVE THE SPACE TO DO SO WHILE WORKING IN FASHION.

RECENTLY, I NOTICED MY TIMIDITY AT WORK. MY TIMIDITY IN TAKING OWNERSHIP AND DISPLAYING LEADERSHIP. MY PROCRASTINATION IS ALSO A MAJOR RED FLAG. ALL THINGS I AM CURRENTLY WORKING ON SO THAT I CAN MAKE A CAREER TRANSITION.

AS I TYPE, MY PALMS BEGIN TO SWEAT, MY HEART RATE RISES, AND I IMMEDIATELY FEEL ANGER IN MY CHEST. THAT IS HOW MUCH "SHAME" I CARRY FROM THIS INDUSTRY AND FROM MY DEGREE. THE SHAME HAS MANIFESTED INTO ANGER AT THIS POINT: WHY WAS I TREATED THIS WAY, WHY WAS I DEVALUED, WHY WAS MY MIND NOT VALUED, WHY WAS ONLY MY APPEARANCE VALUED, ETC. I STARTED THIS PATH IN 2015; I'VE BEEN CARRYING THIS ANGER FOR FIVE YEARS NOW.

I'VE CERTAINLY FELT SHAME FROM MY ENTIRE EXTENDED FAMILY FOR MY CHOICE TO STUDY FASHION. IT HAS BEEN EXPRESSED TO ME THAT IT IS IMPRACTICAL AND INDULGENT AS A CAREER AND THAT THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO STUDY FASHION DESIGN ARE STUPID AND STUCK UP. THIS HAD MADE ME FEEL VERY ALONE AND MISUNDERSTOOD IN MY DAILY LIFE.

4. Low-income or Working-Class students are under-represented in the intern-pool due to their economic status. Immense financial support is required to thrive in Fashion.

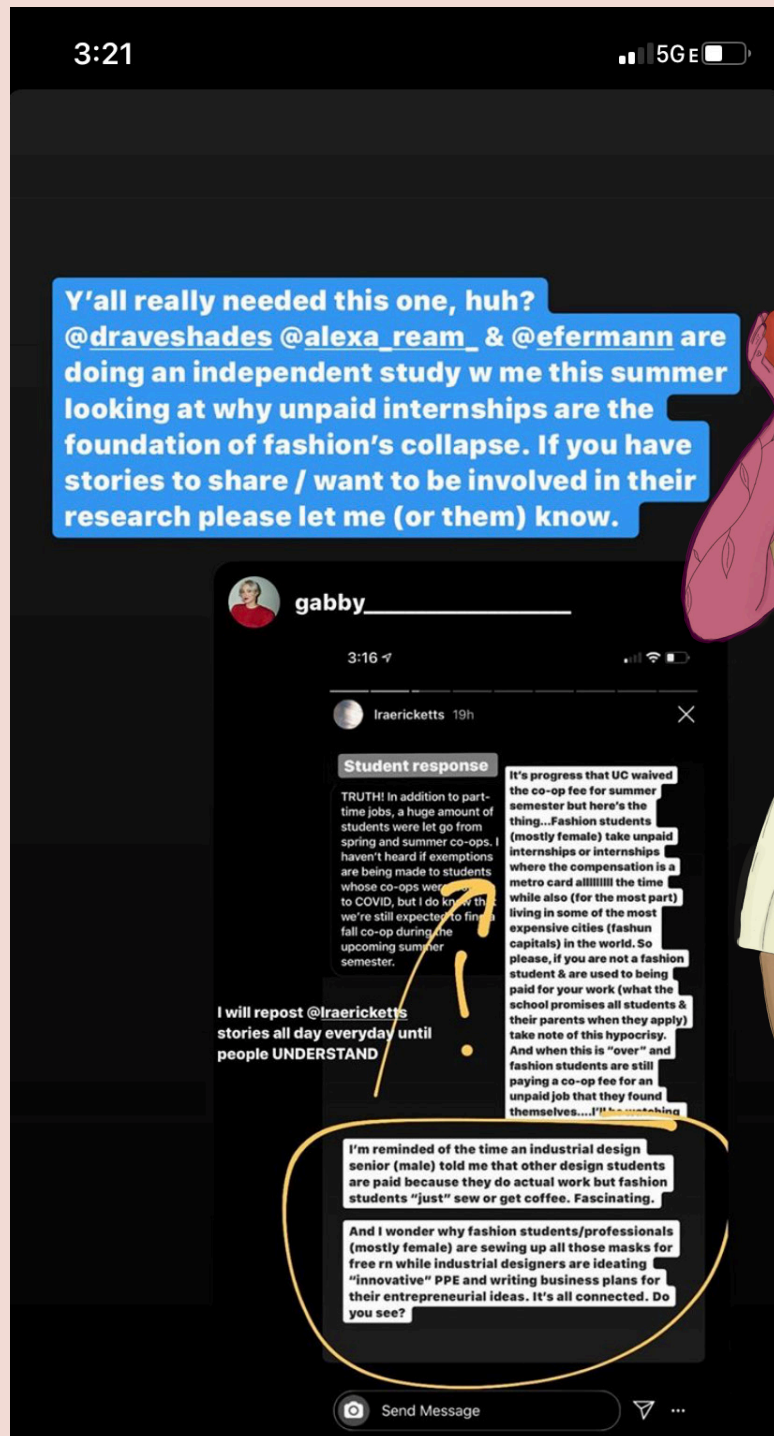
Fashion Interns are spending copious amounts of money only to be traumatized by their roles that fall short of agreed upon expectations. Only 27.1% of participants agreed that their paid work environment was economically diverse and only 21.8% agreed that their unpaid work environment was economically diverse. There is a direct correlation between financial prowess and success in Fashion. With 77.8% of respondents saying they receive financial assistance from their family and 71.4% saying they rely on their savings, what are low-income and working-class Interns to do when these resources are not available to them? The answer is that they are forced to either take out loans, adding to the debt they will likely carry with them throughout adulthood, or they are forced to forgo the opportunity all together.

In addition to these major themes our data indicates that participating in an Unpaid Internship may lead to a pay and salary deficit in future work and that participating in an Unpaid Internship may not lead to a greater chance of full time employment. We cannot state this definitively because our survey instruments lack the direct questioning necessary to yield statistically relevant results, but alumni responses, as well as our industry interviews, suggest that these are two areas worthy of further research.

MY FIRST TIME APPLYING FOR JOBS, I NAIVELY APPLIED TO ANY JOB THAT I THOUGHT I WOULD ENJOY, REGARDLESS OF PAYMENT. HALFWAY THROUGH THE PROCESS WHEN I REALIZED I WOULD BE PAID SOMEWHERE FROM \$150-250 PER MONTH, AND THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD AFFORD TO RELOCATE TO NEW YORK ON THAT WAGE SINCE I PAY FOR HOUSING, FOOD, TRAVEL, ETC ALL ON MY OWN. WHEN I GOT INTERVIEWS FOR THESE COMPANIES, I WAS TORN BETWEEN WANTING THE DREAM NYC JOBS AND NOT BEING ABLE TO TAKE THEM EVEN IF I WAS OFFERED THE POSITION. SINCE THEN, I HAVE LIMITED THE JOBS THAT I HAVE APPLIED TO SIMPLY BECAUSE I KNOW I COULD NOT AFFORD THEM AND OPPORTUNITIES SEEM SO LIMITED.

I WAS PRIVILEGED ENOUGH FOR MY PARENTS TO BE ABLE TO ASSIST ME, BUT I WOULD ESTIMATE THAT I LOST AROUND A COUPLE THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR RENT IN 2018, \$4,000 IN RENT IN 2019 (THESE WERE ALL IN NYC), AND \$4,000 (COULD HAVE BEEN MORE BUT COVID ENDED MY UNPAID INTERNSHIP) LAST SEMESTER IN 2020. I FULLY BELIEVE THAT UNPAID AND UNDERPAID INTERNSHIPS ARE DISCRIMINATORY BECAUSE WITHOUT MY PARENTS' HELP, I COULD'VE NEVER TAKEN THEM.





FASHION IS FEMALE

DRAWING DRESSES ALL DAY MUST BE SO FUN.

OMG I LOVE TO SHOP TOO!

In Fashion, the workforce is majority women, from Fashion Students in the USA to Garment Workers in Bangladesh. The industry is accustomed to underpaying labor. This makes Unpaid Internships and underpaid 'Garment Workers' a feminist issue. Much of our research circled back to the fact that the Fashion Industry is gendered female in both production and consumption. Survey respondents highlighted how the shame they felt often resulted from interactions with male peers and male higher-ups. Many of our readings referenced gender disparity in wage and career prospects. With sexism being a theme throughout our two year study, we delved into the ways we see this surfacing. What are the long-term impacts of continuing to devalue 'women's work'?

WOMEN DO EVERYTHING BUT NONE OF IT IS WORK

Unpaid and underpaid labor is often justified by separating labor from intellect. This division is underscored by separating household labor from the competitive realm of 'work' which is made possible through the gendering of specific tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and sewing.

Tasks that, if paid, would have earned American women \$1.5 trillion last year.⁴² Nowhere is this separation more apparent than in the division between the Designer and the Garment Worker. Globalization coupled with the theoretical separation of labor, performed within the industrial economy, and labor performed within the knowledge economy (under which art, design, and creativity fall), leads the Fashion Industry to place lower value on the labor and skill needed to manufacture clothing. With these skills being considered industrial, corporeal, and manual, the assumption is that the labor involved in manufacturing clothing requires no mental, intellectual, or imaginative thought. Therefore, manufacturing clothing is often perceived as labor that the educated middle classes of industrial nations no longer want to do. Few, if any, young Americans would dream of becoming a Garment Worker. Rarely are the women who physically stitch our clothing included in conversations about the future of Fashion. Consider further that Tailoring is gendered male and is further separated from the labor of the Garment Worker. This false dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor has led Fashion to idealize the ideological constructs of design work while dismissing the labor necessary to actually make garments.⁴³ It is almost as if the presence of female laborers erases the ability for a task to be considered work at all. This dichotomy feeds the myth of the Fashion Dream, perpetuates performative feminism, and exploits millions of women.

⁴² Gus Wezerek and Kristen R. Ghodsee, "Women's Unpaid Labor Is Worth \$10,900,000,000,000," The New York Times (The New York Times, March 5, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/04/opinion/women-unpaid-labor.html>.
⁴³ Christina H. Moon, Labor and Creativity in New York's Global Fashion Industry (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020)

The separation of labor and intellect shows up in both the Unpaid Internship Structure and the realm of the Garment Worker. When brands and Designers hire an Intern, often to do labor through sample making, errand running, etc., they do not deem this manual labor to be work of monetary value. Tasks such as picking up fabric swatches, sewing samples, and delivering Fashion show invitations are essential for Fashion brands to function, yet they are not considered ‘intellectual.’ While these tasks represent a service that would require payment if an Unpaid Intern were not available to perform them, when assigned to the Unpaid Intern, these tasks are more likely to be thought of as ‘paying dues’ on the part of the Intern rather than as performing a service for which money is owed. As it relates to themselves, the Designers and brand managers would consider it inappropriate to carry out the same tasks that they readily assign to Interns or unpaid workers because these tasks are not the work of a Designer operating within the knowledge economy. The work of an Intern is not considered cerebral. Nor is the work of the people who sew up the garments that are ‘created’ by the Designer. Garment Workers are invisible while Designers are celebrated. This inequity has been on display throughout the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, during which Designers and brands received praise for manufacturing masks,⁴⁴ while Garment Workers in Bangladesh went hungry after brands canceled orders,⁴⁵ and while Garment Workers in Los Angeles (many of whom are undocumented immigrants with no safety net) were forced to sew masks in unsafe working conditions.⁴⁶

I OFTEN TELL PEOPLE I’M IN ‘DESIGN’ AT DAAP. SOME PEOPLE WILL ASK WHAT I MEAN AND THEN I SAY FASHION. THIS SHAME HAPPENED ABOUT A YEAR INTO DAAP. I BECAME INSECURE THAT I MIGHT NOT BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS I THOUGHT COMING INTO COLLEGE. I OFTEN SAY, “I HAVE A MINOR IN MARKETING,” FOR PEOPLE TO RESPECT MY INTELLIGENCE MORE.

MEN GROW UP TO BE DESIGNERS

Our survey suggests that the superficial superior/inferior dynamic between the Fashion Designer and the Garment Worker is socially accepted because of the sexism that exists at every level of the Fashion Industry. In the USA, Fashion Design is a female profession. The overwhelming majority of our survey respondents are female, our 2022 cohort at UC DAAP is 100% female and most Fashion Design graduates across the USA are female.⁴⁷ Given these facts, it seems strange that most iconic figures in Fashion are often erased.⁴⁸ Consider the common misconception (perpetuated by Fashion History courses) that Couture Fashion was founded by Charles Worth when it was actually the founding of the Corporation of the Maîtresses Couturières in 1675 that ushered in the concept of Couture.⁴⁹

The contributions of female Fashion Practitioners continue to be dismissed today. “Fashion, an industry dominated by women’s wear and buoyed by female dollars, with an image sold to women by women, is still largely run by men.”⁵⁰ It is widely accepted that women make up the majority of the workforce in Fashion (Garment Workers, Fashion Students, Designers, etc.) but, “Even though women are entering the industry at the bottom, they are not rising proportionally to the top.”⁵¹

GOING TO SCHOOL AT THE SAME TIME PROJECT RUNWAY BLEW UP WAS DIFFICULT. PEOPLE ASSUMED I JUST DREW ALL DAY AND STAPLED SHIT TOGETHER... A VERY CLOSE FRIEND WHO IS AN INTERIOR DESIGNER ASKED ME IF I WOULD GO TO MY (VERY CORPORATE) JOB AND SKETCH ALL DAY. THE PERCEPTION OF THIS JOB IS SO SKEWED. BUT MY FRIENDS ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT I CAN DO WHEN THEY NEED A CHEAP HEM FOR THEIR BRIDESMAIDS GOWN BECAUSE THEY DON’T WANT TO PAY THE DRY CLEANER/TAILOR A FAIR WAGE AND INSTEAD WANT TO PAY ME WITH A, “DRINK LATER.”

In the industry, men are at the top of the pecking order and, “Many female designers perceive that their male counterparts have won more industry honors and are featured more prominently in magazines.”⁵² The evidence, even if circumstantial, illustrates that, “of the young American designers most embraced by retailers and celebrated in the Fashion Media in recent years, the roll call is almost exclusively male.”⁵³

“The Glass Runway”, a survey that was conducted by Glamour and the CFDA in 2018, reported on the language used to talk about female and male Designers and their work: “Men’s designs tend to be praised as innovative and groundbreaking, while women’s are described as practical and wearable.”⁵⁴

Men are believed to design for the image of Fashion, how women want to be seen, whereas female Designers design for the way women actually live. The industry celebrates men and what they seemingly bring to design: genius and fantasy.

This gendering of ‘genius’ reaches beyond Fashion. A 2016 study by Kristen Elmor suggests that men are expected to be ‘struck by genius’ whereas women are expected to work for, and nurture, their intellectual achievements. Within Fashion, the celebration of ‘male genius’ is made evident by the way that television portrays male Designers as the visionary while the models, who are women, are seen as the product. Take the beloved Project Runway as an example where the role of ‘design mentor’ (Tim Gunn and Christian Siriano) and the role of ‘designer judge’ (Michael Kors and Zac Posen) has been filled by a man across some-20 seasons, by a handful of producers, on multiple networks.

It is clear that male Designers are the aspirational figures in Fashion. With the workforce in Fashion being predominantly female, we can assume that there is an inherent devaluation of the skills, labor, and time spent by female laborers whether occupying the role of Designer or Garment Worker because of sexism. Unpaid Internships are an extension of larger gender-pay and career inequity. Valuable discrimination says, “evidence abounds that jobs filled mostly by women have pay levels lower than they would be if the jobs were filled mostly by men.”⁵⁵

Male Designers are considered rare: they are cherished and protected. Conversely, we suggest that female Designers are undervalued and viewed as disposable because the Fashion Industry is accustomed to seeing women in the sector of the industry it most exploits: ‘garment work.’ The dominance of male Designers upholds the Fashion Dream and as Marc Bain puts it, “fashion, and women, are poorer for it.”⁵⁶ Considering that gender equality is a key component of the United Nations’ “Sustainable Development Goals”⁵⁷ and that organizations like Project Drawdown believe that empowering women and girls could be more impactful than many ‘green technologies’ in fighting climate change,⁵⁸ Fashion must recognize the systemic impacts of promoting men above women at every level of the Industry.

FASHION IS PORTRAYED AS SUCH A GLAMOROUS LIFE. PEOPLE ARE SUPER EXCITED WHEN I TELL THEM WHAT I DO BECAUSE THEY EITHER THINK IT’S JUST SO MUCH FUN OR THEY THINK I’M SHALLOW AND REFER TO MY JOB AS SHOPPING ... IT’S NEITHER OF THOSE THINGS AND I DON’T WANT TO BE PERCEIVED AS EITHER OF THOSE IDEAS. I’M SMART AND I WORK HARD. SOMETIMES I WANT PEOPLE TO JUDGE ME BASED ON A CONVERSATION BEFORE MY JOB TITLE.

⁴⁴ Vanessa Friedman and Jessica Testa, “Christian Siriano and Dov Charney Are Making Masks and Medical Supplies Now,” The New York Times (The New York Times, March 22, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/style/coronavirus-masks-dov-charney-christian-siriano.html>.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth L. Cline, “The Power Of #PayUp,” Atmos, July 14, 2020, <https://atmos.earth/payup-bangladesh-factory-worker-social-campaign/>.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Segrán, “I Don’t Really Have a Choice”: L.A. Garment Workers Are Risking Their Lives to Sew Masks,” Fast Company (Fast Company, July 30, 2020), <https://www.fastcompany.com/90531703/i-dont-really-have-a-choice-la-garment-workers-are-risking-their-lives-to-sew-masks>.

⁴⁷ Vanessa Friedman, “Fashion’s Woman Problem,” The New York Times (The New York Times, May 20, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/fashion/glass-runway-no-female-ceos.html>.

⁴⁸ Chloe Gray, “The Matilda Effect: The Brilliant Women Whose Achievements Were Erased by Men,” Stylist (Stylist, May 20, 2019), <https://www.stylist.co.uk/people/matilda-effect-what-is-it-erasure-achievements-by-women-susan-sontag-hidden-women/267412>.

⁴⁹ DeJean, Friedman.

⁵⁰ Eric Wilson, “In Fashion, Who Really Gets Ahead?,” The New York Times (The New York Times, December 8, 2005), https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/08/fashion/thursdaysstyles/in-fashion-who-really-gets-ahead.html?_r=0.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hilary George-Parkin, “The Glass Runway: Our Exclusive Survey on the State of the Fashion Industry,” Glamour (Glamour, May 21, 2018), <https://www.glamour.com/story/the-glass-runway-fashion-industry-survey>.

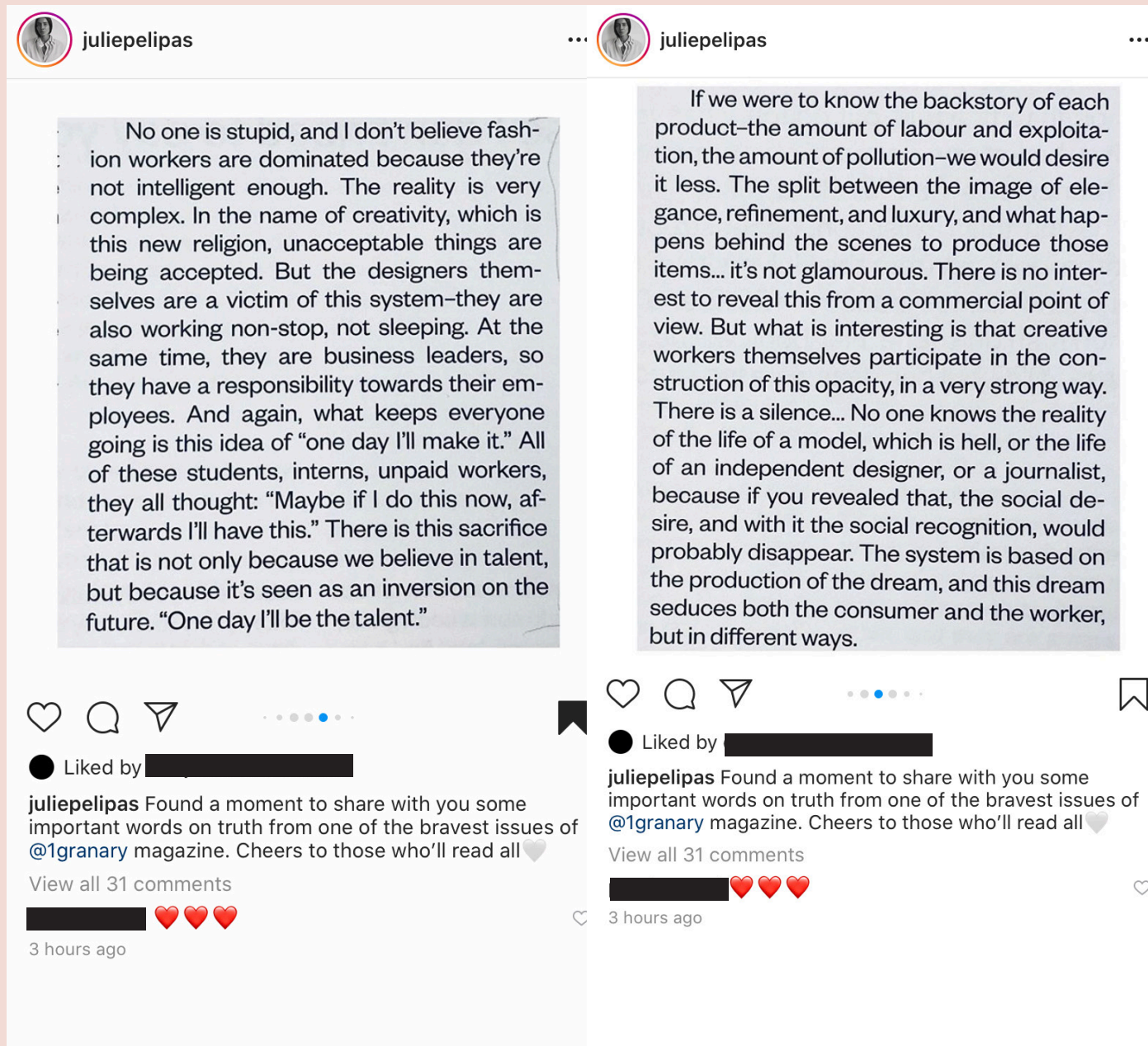
⁵⁴ Myra Luna-Lucero and Kristen C. Elmore, “Light Bulbs or Seeds? How Metaphors for Ideas Influence Judgments About Genius,” SAGE Journals (SAGE Journals, October 7, 2016), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1948550616667611>.

⁵⁵ David B. Grusky and Szonja Széleányi, The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ Marc Bain, “Even in 2015, the Designers of Women’s Clothes Are Mostly Men,” Quartz (Quartz, October 8, 2015), <https://qz.com/518497/even-in-2015-the-designers-of-womens-clothes-are-mostly-men/>.

⁵⁷ “Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls,” Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020), <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

⁵⁸ “Health and Education,” Project Drawdown (Project Drawdown, August 7, 2020), <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/health-and-education>.



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BITCH WORK NOT SISTERHOOD

Consider the phrase 'bitch work.' This phrase, which is often used to insinuate menial work, was referenced by multiple male survey respondents. What these respondents considered 'bitch work' represents the tasks and responsibilities that are often listed in Fashion Internship job descriptions. By describing these tasks as 'bitch work,' respondents were suggesting that they are 'above' these tasks, a notion underpinned by the separation of cerebral and manual labor. The use of 'bitch work' also appears to cannote labor that can be done by an abstract group of people (women) further underscoring this idea that Fashion Design is the work of a solitary genius and not a team. This stands in sharp contrast to the sentiments of most female survey respondents for whom the issue is not that they are being asked to perform tasks that they feel are below them, but that these tasks are not acknowledged as 'real work;' worthy of respect, gratitude, mentorship, or compensation. Female respondents wished for collective work and guidance, not isolation and individual success. The question is whether or not, over time, in an industry where men still reign supreme, female Fashion Practitioners will begin to describe the labor performed by Interns as 'bitch work;' thereby marking their proximity to male power and establishing their position 'above' the Intern.

While bell hooks teaches us that male dominance is part of the White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy that pervades every aspect of our reality,⁶⁰ male leadership can be particularly disorienting in Fashion given the overwhelming evidence that Fashion is majority female from school to studio to magazine to factory. One might presume that these demographics would engender a sense of security and sisterhood; our research suggests that the opposite is true. Sexism within Fashion appears to have long-term negative consequences and may prove to be a key obstacle in improving the Fashion Internship Structure.

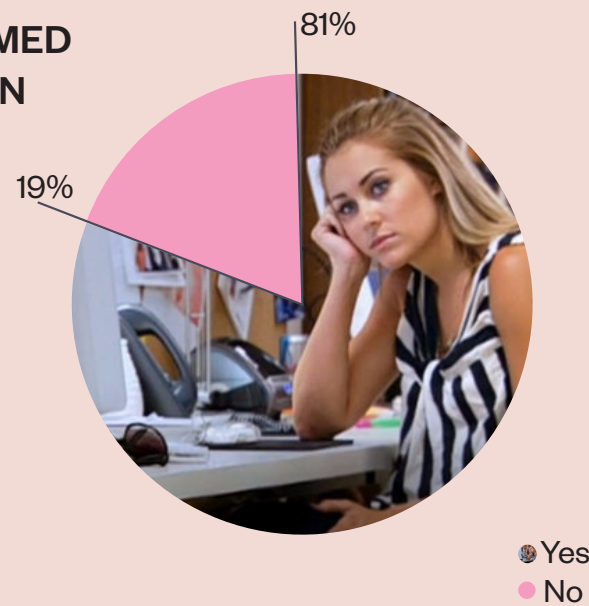
Unpaid Internships are often justified as a 'right of passage' suggesting that emerging Fashion Practitioners must go through the same system as established practitioners to validate their participation in the industry, even if the system is corrupt. This is akin to the 'we have always done it this way' or the 'I suffered, so you should too' narratives that youth are so often labeled naive for challenging.⁶¹ Our research highlights several ways that internalized shame and sexism lead Fashion Students and Practitioners to unconsciously perpetuate a toxic culture of elitism and misogyny. Throughout our interviews and survey analysis, we find that shame leads women to defend their intelligence, even if that means putting down other women. Several respondents admitted to differentiating between themselves and their peers by telling friends that they work in 'cerebral fashion' or that they are an 'apparel designer' or a 'technical fashion designer.' Through this differentiation, respondents are stating that they are not one of the 'normal fashion' Designers. Along with verbally distancing themselves from their female peers, respondents highlighted ways that they had been undermined in the workplace or participated in demeaning their peers' abilities.

⁵⁹ @juliepelipas. Instagram Post. August 16, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CD9ADbYn2j/>.

⁶⁰ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

⁶¹ Adam Thierer, "Why Do We Always Sell the Next Generation Short?" *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, March 13, 2012), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adamthierer/2012/01/08/why-do-we-always-sell-the-next-generation-short/>.

FELT ASHAMED FOR BEING IN FASHION



In addition to perpetuating a toxic anti-female culture within the design community, internalized shame and sexism sends ripples across the supply chain. Sustainability has become a more intersectional movement and campaigns such as Fashion Revolution's #whomademyclothes⁶² and ReMake's #PayUp⁶³ have succeeded in centering Garment Worker voices, at least to an extent, but the sustainability movement lacks any widespread public action from female Designers. It strikes us as odd that the many predominantly female design teams, at companies across the USA, have failed to protest in solidarity with Garment Workers who make the very clothing that they design. Our interviews and survey analysis offer three possible reasons for this. One, Fashion Students operate under the assumption that they exist in proximity to the Fashion Dream even when performing unpaid labor. This leads Fashion Students to move forward, even if this means leaving Garment Workers behind in their pursuit to be validated.

Two, internalized shame seems to force Fashion Students and Fashion Practitioners inward, focused on self-preservation and not on collective justice.

When asked if they had considered how their shame impacts people throughout the supply chains, many survey respondents felt immense shame for working in Fashion, but they had not focused on how this impacts other people. This leads us to wonder about the relationship between shame and narcissism. Three, the survey respondents who do think about how their shame impacts others, felt that they were powerless to change the Fashion Industry for the better. The shame and internalized sexism felt by respondents convinced them that they are useless in the sustainability (inclusive of labor rights) movement. This does not bode well for our future.

IF I FEEL 'STUPID' AND POWERLESS IN MY ROLE AS A DESIGNER, HOW COULD I POSSIBLY ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN? THIS UNDERVALUING OF MYSELF LEADS TO UNDERVALUING THE REST OF THE INDUSTRY — ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THE CURRENT SETUP OF CORPORATE DESIGN DETACHES THE DESIGNER SO MUCH FROM THE SUPPLY CHAIN AND PROCESS; ALLOWING THE PROCESS TO FEEL LIKE A SEPARATE, INHUMAN THING. EVEN IN MY CURRENT ROLE AT A SMALL 'ETHICALLY' MINDED COMPANY, I FEEL MY OPINION IS LOOKED DOWN UPON OR UNDERVALUED — THE TEAM IS CONSTANTLY SEEKING OTHER INPUT ON SUPPLY CHAIN, SUSTAINABILITY, AND EVEN PRODUCT DESIGN EVEN THOUGH I'M RIGHT HERE! I THINK MY INTERNALIZED SHAME HAS CONTRIBUTED TO ME NOT BELIEVING IN MY OWN OPINIONS AS WELL; THEREFORE NOT HAVING THE IMPACT I COULD.

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I WILL GIVE INTO THE NARRATIVE THAT I CONSTANTLY FEEL IS TOLD ABOUT FASHION STUDENTS-- THAT I WILL JUST TAKE A JOB WHERE I MINDLESSLY DESIGN CLOTHING THAT THERE ISN'T A REAL NEED FOR, DESPITE CHOOSING TO GO INTO FASHION TO MAKE A POSITIVE CHANGE.

I THINK ABOUT MY SHAME A LOT. I'M SURE IT IMPACTS THE WHOLE SUPPLY CHAIN, CONTRIBUTING TO SEXISM AND STIGMAS IN THE INDUSTRY IE: 'WE DON'T DESERVE TO BE PAID.'

THE MORE I SEE HOW THE INDUSTRY THAT I'M A PART OF DEVALUES AND DESTROYS THE ENVIRONMENT AND OPPRESSES WOMEN AND GIRLS, THE MORE DISAPPOINTED AND DISILLUSIONED I BECOME. I'VE DIVORCED MYSELF FROM CAREER AMBITIONS BECAUSE I'VE SEEN FIRSTHAND HOW PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE ABUSED BY THE INDUSTRY, HOW ECONOMIC DISPARITY IS USED AS LEVERAGE IN THAT ABUSE, AND HOW FASHION IS A POWERFUL TOOL OF THE PATRIARCHY. I'M ALWAYS LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT OF THE INDUSTRY, BUT FIND THAT I'M USUALLY FLATLY TURNED DOWN FOR OTHER OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE MY DEGREE IS IN FASHION DESIGN. I'M NOT ABLE AT THIS TIME TO SEEK ANOTHER DEGREE, SO I FEEL A BIT HELD HOSTAGE.

MY PAID INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES WERE LARGELY POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE. MY UNPAID INTERNSHIPS WERE LARGELY DEMORALIZING AND DIMINISHING. INTERNS WERE TREATED AS DISPOSABLE. THERE WAS A LOT OF 'PUNCHING DOWN.'

OTHER MAJORS WOULD NOT TAKE MY IDEAS OR CRITIQUES SERIOUSLY OR WOULD MOCK MY JOURNEY THROUGHOUT FASHION. IT WAS SEEN AS 'CUTE' AND SUPERFLUOUS. I, LITERALLY, BEGAN TO BELIEVE I WAS STUPID. I MEAN THAT IN ALL SERIOUSNESS. EVEN AMONGST MY PEERS IN FASHION, WE DID NOT BUILD EACH OTHER UP. WE TORE EACH OTHER DOWN. THE CONSTANT COMPETITION OF GETTING 'THE' INTERNSHIP, FITTING IN WITH PEERS, GOSSIP, AND TRASH TALKING OTHER PEOPLES' WORK WAS COMMONPLACE.

JUST YESTERDAY, I TOLD SOMEONE THAT I HAVE A DEGREE IN FASHION AND THEY IMMEDIATELY RESPONDED, "WELL, I AM SORRY YOU DIDN'T STUDY SOMETHING THAT IS RELEVANT!" I SHUT DOWN. I DIDN'T STAND UP FOR MYSELF OR THE FACT THAT THIS INDUSTRY IS INCREDIBLY RELEVANT. IT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS. IT IS A FEMINIST CRISIS. YET, I CARRY SO MUCH SHAME THAT I COULD NOT DEFEND MYSELF OR DARE EXPLAIN JUST HOW IMPORTANT, RELEVANT, AND IMPACTFUL THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS. I REMAINED SILENT.

⁶² "Who Made My Clothes?," Fashion Revolution (YouTube, April 22, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTnFtaOqHIM>.

⁶³ "#PayUp Updates from Petitioned Brands," Remake (Remake, April 20, 2020), <https://remake.world/stories/news/payup-brand-updates/>.

DROPPING OUT IS FOR RICH WHITE MEN

From talking to industry professionals, alumni, and students, we identified common misconceptions about Unpaid Internships as well as common misconceptions about Interns' circumstances that are often used to justify the Unpaid Internship Structure. Aside from the concept of 'paying dues' or the assertion that Unpaid Internships are not a priority within the larger scope of female exploitation, the most common misconception we heard was that schooling is 'useless' (58.7% of survey respondents had been told that they did not need to complete their Fashion Education in order to work in Fashion). Many of the people we spoke with (both within and outside of the Fashion Industry), suggested that students should drop out and use their tuition dollars to pay to 'study' as Unpaid Interns. While we do not dismiss this as an option and we believe that the apprenticeship model is worth revisiting, there are several issues with suggesting that Fashion Students dropout of college.

Many students pay for their education through forms of assistance, such as scholarships and financial aid, that are not replicated outside of higher education. Furthermore, disadvantaged students may be reliant on financial aid not only to study, but to live as these funds serve as their only way of paying for basic necessities. However, some young people are afforded access to family and generational wealth, so they are able to pursue Unpaid Internships with or without scholarships; therefore, perpetuating the gatekeeping of these opportunities. Without transformative economic policies such as universal basic income, inequality

would likely be exaggerated, not improved, if young people relied on Unpaid Internships as their sole form of education.

Many of the world's wealthiest people dropped out of college and can be heard encouraging youth to do the same, but upon closer examination there is one characteristic that all of these success stories have in common; the dropouts are white men.⁶⁴ Setting the advice of these privileged men aside, reality proves that dropping out of school is not for everyone. According to Hasan Minhaj's Patriot Act: "For low income students, a college degree may be the single best engine for social mobility... You have a 90% chance of getting out of poverty."⁶⁵ Suggesting that students dropout, demands that disadvantaged students take on more risk than privileged students with no guarantee that this risk will pay off. While work experience is important, many employers hire based on formal education as an indication of one's capacity and as a signal of one's devotion to working in Fashion. We were unable to find research supporting the idea that Fashion Brands value work experience over formal schooling. Perhaps those who suggest students use tuition dollars to pay for Unpaid Internships would hire an otherwise inexperienced person if they demonstrated a 'bootstrap mentality' and appeared to be a 'self-starter.' This is problematic because the 'bootstrap mentality' enables privileged, predominately white people who benefit from generational wealth to pursue their education in Fashion without the stress of paying their own bills. "The wealth gap between America's richest and poorer families more than doubled from 1989 to 2016," causing working class Americans to take on two jobs to provide for themselves and their

families.⁶⁶ In this environment, it is irresponsible to suggest that young people forgo schooling and make it their full time 'job' to hone their craft through self-guided learning only to be hired for an Unpaid Internship. There are few instances where this scenario could prove effective (apprenticing with a Seamstress or Tailor may be an exception), which means that dropping out of school is not a sustainable solution. This mentality excuses problematic norms in Fashion and distracts the industry from tackling the systemic roots of the Unpaid Internship Structure.

Listen.....

I told y'all about my DMs

I wonder how indicative this list is of the development "star power" or design acumen versus creating designers that are actually able to function in the fashion industry in 2019...so many things have shifted in the industry since Louise Wilson was at the helm of the design department of CSM, one of the most significant being the expectation for designers to be equally (if not more) technically proficient and computer savvy as they are creative. With the advent of influencer-curated collections, the dumbing down (and quickening pace) of fast fashion and high street collections, and the Star becoming the designer (V Beckham, Fenty, The Row), it seems like schools are being judged on their ability to churn out talent that is able to sustain these new infrastructures rather than being true novel thinkers. We loooove a girl that can come up with ideas but the kids have to eat too...idk. It's a shame that less and less often real points of view aren't being celebrated — and financed.

⁶⁴ Abigail Hess, "10 Ultra-Successful Millionaire and Billionaire College Dropouts," CNBC (CNBC, May 10, 2017), <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/10/10-ultra-successful-millionaire-and-billionaire-college-dropouts.html>.

⁶⁵ Hasan Minhaj, "Is College Still Worth It?" Patriot Act | Netflix (YouTube, June 15, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtF2v7Vw0>.

⁶⁶ Katherine Schaeffer, "6 Facts About Economic Inequality in the U.S.," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, February 7, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/07/6-facts-about-economic-inequality-in-the-u-s/>.

⁶⁷ @londongirlinnyc. Instagram Story, May 31, 2019.

RECOMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

It is clear that Unpaid Internships are not effective, fair, or healthy. Where do we go from here? As inconvenient as it may be, we must admit that there is not one person, or entity to blame for the Unpaid Internship Structure. While protesting the Patriarchy is important, we cannot stop there. Change will take everyone from Fashion Students and Faculty to Fashion Brands, NGOs, and governing bodies. Our findings inspire us to offer recommendations for three entities that we believe must work together to transform the Fashion Internship Experience: Schools, Brands and the Council of Fashion Designers of America.

“The Reality of Fashion Is Not What Students Expect,” says Anna dello Russo

BY BOF TEAM



ARE STUDENTS STILL EXPECTING
A JOLLY LIFE/EASY CAREER IN
THE FASHION INDUSTRY?

IT’S HARDER TO NAVIGATE THAN
THE GAME OF THRONES.

TO ALL STUDENTS:

- 1. LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS.
- 2. FIND GREAT MENTORS.
- 3. DO YOUR THING.
- 4. DON’T LIE TO YOUR PUBLIC.

⁶⁸@pam_boy, Instagram Story, May 16, 2019.

FASHION EDUCATION

TEACH REALITY

Fashion Education romanticizes the industry and gives students false hope. Fashion at large is on a mission to sell consumers a fantasy. Overproduction and overconsumption are driven by consumers' insecurities; Fashion's waste crisis is fueled by a mental health crisis. As Gen Z digital natives we know this well. We have grown up during "the Great Acceleration"⁶⁹ of Fashion and have been marketed to twenty-four/seven. We have seen the impact that this has on our health and on our environment. We see through the fantasy and yet the Industry continues to try to sell us the Dream. By moving forward in denial, the industry appears blind to the reality that the business model is crumbling beneath their feet. Fashion Media, Fashion Conferences, and Fashion Brands alike affirm this image. Fashion Education follows suit, teaching students to sell a Dream that feels more and more like a delusion and in doing so schools render themselves irrelevant. With over half of survey respondents being told that they do not need to go to college to work in Fashion, we hope that this rings loud and clear; Fashion Programs must evolve or they will disappear.

Fashion Education, as identified from our case study of the Fashion Design program at the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning, ill-prepares students for the reality of the Fashion Industry, despite career preparedness being one of the espoused deliverables of UC DAAP's co-op program.⁷⁰ Rather than equipping students with

the tools to be skilled Fashion Workers as a means to financial stability, most courses teach students to design in the abstract and to work for the very brands that are rapidly disappearing. Our research has shown that only the most privileged of students, most often male students, can succeed by marketing their creative 'genius.' Teaching students conceptual design without also teaching them how to rigorously research, cite sources, and write confidently about their concepts is irresponsible.

We recommend that schools, such as the University of Cincinnati, reassess the way that their Fashion Program is marketed. The era of the lone, 'celebrity runway designer' is over. Marketing materials should focus less on senior Fashion shows and more on the realities of an industry in crisis. Schools must stop preparing students to exist within a business model that does not work. Regardless of their aspirations, students should graduate with an understanding of how to negotiate pay, what to charge for specific skills such as mending and tailoring, how to author a contract as a consultant, and how to access healthcare as a freelancer. These life skills are not only relevant, but necessary in our economic climate.

We recommend that Fashion Education offer students the opportunity to master a specific craft in lieu of completing an internship. Crafts may include embroidery, natural dyeing, and sewing machine maintenance. In aligning ourselves with reality we must confront the fact that there is a dearth of people who know how to repair

an industrial serger and a copious amount of people who know how to create a mood board. By rethinking skill development from the perspective of financial independence, and not from the perspective of fantasy, we can cultivate a sustainable ecosystem of diverse, skilled Fashion Practitioners.

Lastly, we recommend that Fashion Education conduct in-depth multi-year research on the career trajectory of their alumni and make these reports available to the public. The University of Cincinnati promotes itself as the number one public university for co-op and internships in the USA,⁷¹ but there is seemingly no data to back this up. On a larger scale, there is little research on career longevity in Fashion in general.



RESPECT & ELEVATE WOMEN

The sexism that exists in the industry also plays a part in higher education institutions. The disparaging of female students appears to be normalized. 82.5% of survey respondents reported feeling devalued attributing this to not only the conditions while on internship, but also to the way they are treated by staff and administration at their place of study. The hierarchy of male dominated design fields (in UC DAAP's School of Design this is Industrial Design) over female dominated fields (in UC DAAP's School of Design this is Fashion Design) is preserved by guarding who has access to which software, courses, and equipment. This hierarchy is not a secret. Not only is this hierarchy socially understood by students in every program at UC DAAP within their first year of school, it is made explicitly apparent in all-design discipline and interdisciplinary courses. All-design lectures are taught in this hierarchy: Industrial Design accomplishments are taught first and most often, then Graphic Design, and on occasion professors will mention a Fashion Designer, but even so, Fashion tends to be used as evidence of a theory or technique that originated in another discipline. When Fashion is referenced by non-Fashion faculty the same examples tend to be used such as Coco Chanel (for Couture), Everlane (for sustainability) and TOMS Shoes (for innovative business models). This is problematic because Fashion Students learn nothing new when the same examples are repeated, these examples also perpetuate a non-critical view of Fashion (Chanel was a Nazi informant,⁷³ Everlane is guilty of greenwashing⁷⁴ and TOMS Shoes was built on cultural appropriation and colonialism).⁷⁵

When non-Fashion faculty make little to no effort to think critically about Fashion, Style, or Dress, they perpetuate the notion that Fashion is not worthy of intellectual inquiry; thus cementing the view that Fashion Students are not intelligent. Conversely, Fashion Faculty who teach interdisciplinary courses have reported feeling dismissed by students from other disciplines and have had their intelligence explicitly questioned by male students from other disciplines with one professor reporting that a male Industrial Design student said, "Fashion designers aren't paid because they don't do anything important, so what do I have to learn from fashion?"

Within UC DAAP this hierarchy also plays out in the distribution and management of school resources. Fashion Students are blamed for damages caused by students from other disciplines and are retaliated against when sewing machines need repair. Fashion Students share resources including: dress forms (three persons to a form), tables, and even stools-- with a constant game of musical chairs to find one. These are not shortages felt by the other programs. Technology labs have restrictions and limit access to specific students. Fashion Students are not allowed access to other programs labs, software, or courses meaning that they are unable to gain useful skills in other disciplines. When Fashion Students enquire about obtaining special access to such resources, they are most often blocked by administrators who argue that Fashion Students do not have the appropriate knowledge to partake. On the flipside, Industrial Design Students have unlimited access to advanced sewing machines and all University of Cincinnati students have the option to take a sewing class (this is not taken out of the Fashion

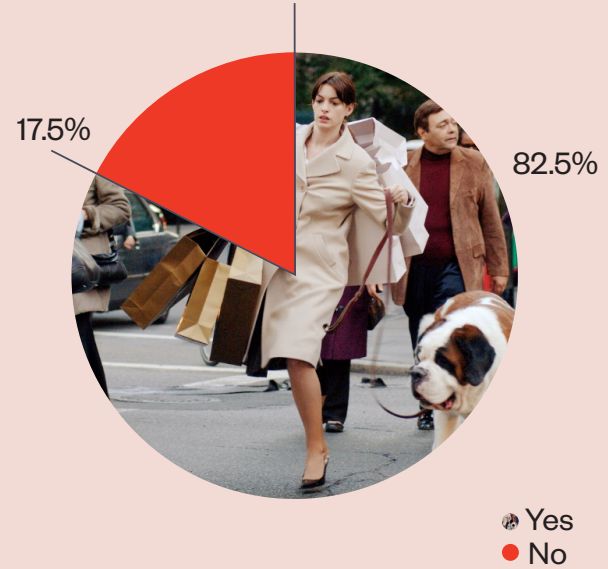
Program's budget, but it is taught by a Fashion Professor in a Fashion facility). In fact, out of the three design majors, Fashion is the only design discipline in which students from other disciplines can minor. While students from Graphic Design and Industrial Design use the Fashion Design minor, accessing Fashion courses, to pursue a career in the Fashion Industry, Fashion Students are made to feel as if their field of study is merely a hobby that others can dabble in.

The above grievances may be specific to UC DAAP and the way that design disciplines interact within our environment; however, our research revealed that Fashion Students and Fashion Practitioners feel that it is easier for men from other disciplines to work in Fashion than it is for Fashion Practitioners to make a career in another field. Whereas it is common to see an Architect such as Virgil Abloh, a Graphic Designer such as Tim Brown, or countless 'economists' such as Michael Preysman venture into Fashion as a 'disruptor,' the opposite is not true. Not only does this continue to perpetuate the male 'genius' myth, but celebrating people with no formal training in Fashion perpetuates the idea that Fashion is a hobby, a product, or a sector and not a craft or an aspect of culture. While Fashion is indeed a business, many of the sustainability challenges we face today result from the Fast Fashion model that treats clothing as a disposable commodity and not as an art form.

Many of the male 'disruptors' who enter Fashion do so because they see an opportunity to capture market share, not because they themselves love clothing. Despite highly publicized sustainability

agendas, we are left to wonder if billionaire Fast Fashion CEOs such as Karl-Johan Persson of H&M actually care about clothing. How can people who do not love Fashion possibly 'save' it? The inability for trained Fashion Practitioners to lead Fashion Brands and to contribute to other fields is a problem born of both social inequity and a failure of education.

FELT DEVALUED ON INTERNSHIP



⁷³ Geoffrey Jones and Emily Grandjean, "Coco Chanel: From Fashion Icon to Nazi Agent," Harvard Business School (President & Fellows of Harvard College, April 2020AD), <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=54412>.
⁷⁴ Jennifer Nini, "The Petition Making Everlane Accountable to Its 'Radical Transparency' Brand Philosophy," Eco Warrior Princess (Eco Warrior Princess, March 9, 2020), <https://ecowarriorprincess.net/2020/03/petition-making-everlane-accountable-to-radical-transparency-brand-philosophy/>.
⁷⁵ Shui-yin Sharon Yam, "Materiality and Global Economic Citizenship: TOMS Shoes' Usage of Place and Emotion as Rhetorical Strategy," Academia (Academia, March 2013), https://www.academia.edu/4450952/Materiality_and_Global_Economic_Citizenship_TOMS_Shoes_Usage_of_Place_and_Emotion_as_Rhetorical_Strategy.

While the following recommendations have been articulated with UC DAAP in mind, we believe that much of what we advise could be applied to other Design Schools and Fashion Programs.

We recommend that design be taught from an intersectional feminist point of view. Lectures across all design disciplines must reassess precedents and assignments to include female practitioners and feminist theory. Topics such as the ‘sharing economy’ and ‘circularity’ must acknowledge the fact that currently trending business models (such as car sharing and repair), have long existed as unpaid, and unacknowledged female labor. The fact that men have now ‘discovered’ the market potential of collectivist, informal economy activities like swapping does not make these activities ‘new.’ Courses must address cultural appropriation from an intersectional feminist and a decolonizing perspective. Students must be taught how to properly attribute sources of knowledge, and in doing so, student work will be seen more appropriately as a collective effort and not as an act of individual ‘genius.’

We recommend that Fashion Design courses reassess course content to better represent women’s achievements and women’s interests. Within Fashion Design, most courses are constructed from a male point of view. Just as Western history is taught for, about, and by white men, the same can be said of Fashion History. As students, we learn of the ‘genius’ male Designers, their manipulation of women’s bodies and their exploitation of the female image.

We are subsequently taught that men know what women desire better than women do. As Tom Ford says: “Of course there are many more gay male designers, I think we are more objective. We don’t come with the baggage of hating certain parts of our bodies.”⁷⁶ We are still taught to design for a singular body type, for the body type men have defined as beautiful. The fantasy ensues when men’s ideas are celebrated regardless of practicality and without considering the eventual wearer’s body. This is socially problematic. By failing to teach Fashion Students how to design for all body types, schools fail to properly train students. It is technically easier to design for a shapeless form because fit becomes a non-issue. Teaching students to design for all body types would make them better Designers and would likely prepare them for more sustainable careers, whether those be in design or tailoring. By elevating thinness, Fashion Faculty do harm to Fashion Students’ mental health and to their skillset.

We do not advocate for each design discipline to be siloed. We encourage collaboration! But, collaboration must be two sided and done with respect. We also believe collaboration is necessary in tackling social justice, sustainability, and climate change. We have seen first hand how these challenges bring people together across disciplines through the formation of the Sustainable Fashion Initiative. Unique to SFI is the opportunity for Fashion Students to position themselves as experts on complex topics such as Waste Colonization, Racism,⁷⁷ and Unpaid Internships. When Fashion Students are given the opportunity to teach others about the impact that our industry has on the environment, trade policy, and mental health, everyone benefits because everyone wears clothing. We recommend that UC DAAP provide

more opportunities for Fashion Students to not only participate in interdisciplinary projects, but to demonstrate expertise and leadership within these projects.

EMPOWER BLACK STUDENTS AND DISMANTLE WHITE SUPREMACY

Within the past few years, ideas around the decolonization of Fashion Education have gained serious traction. Industry experts and educators such as Kimberly M. Jenkins (professor and founder of The Fashion and Race Database),⁷⁸ Frederica Brooksworth (researcher/lecturer and founder of Fashion Scholar),⁷⁹ and Aisha Richards (UAL professor and founder of UAL’s Shades of Noir)⁸⁰ are some of the few voices who are actively challenging the Western narrative taught in traditional Fashion Curriculum. For most students, college or university is where their Fashion Education begins; it is also where themes of cultural appropriation, bias, discrimination, and other industry issues can first be seen taking place in the context of Fashion.

Globally, Fashion Programs are lacking diversity in both their students and their faculty, yet they operate under the illusion of inclusivity to market to BIPOC students. This has led to an environment where Black and non-Black POC students face a myriad of microaggressions, targeted racist rhetoric and behaviors, and an overall lack of structure to let them learn and grow equally alongside their white peers. One of the authors of this report juggles her school work with actively fighting against racist curriculum and a lack of representation within her institution (UC DAAP); all of which makes her education inadequate and

demands greater effort in comparison to her white peers. In terms of faculty, there is a clear lack of representation. As stated by Vogue Business in a June 2020 article, “Only six per cent of full-time faculty in US universities were Black in autumn 2018, compared to 73 per cent of white staff. In the UK, the proportion was two per cent.”⁸¹ The lack of diversity in faculty further isolates BIPOC students. Many of our interviewees feel discouraged from exploring projects tied to their racial identity due to the general lack of understanding and enthusiasm from their professors. Additionally, BIPOC students expressed that they receive less nuanced critiques when presenting projects that center racial identity, due to the lack of diversity in their professors and guest critiquers.

Students are actively voicing their demands on changing the white-centric viewpoint of traditional Fashion Education. Many Fashion Programs we researched, including UC DAAP, have created anonymous, student-run satire Instagram accounts exposing the many ‘isms’ and deep rooted issues that plague their universities.

We recommend that schools take steps to be more transparent about how decisions are made and to include students in critical decisions. Specifically, we recommend that schools support the formation of a student/faculty board to ensure that changes to curriculum are informed by students’ experiences in the classroom as well as students’ internship experiences. This will lead to greater accountability as well as increase cross-pollination of ideas and best practices between school and industry. In addition to curriculum, the student/faculty board must allow for students to be involved in the hiring process for all faculty and in the approval process for tenure-track faculty.

⁷⁶ Kimberly M. Jenkins, 2017.

⁷⁹ Frederica Brooksworth, “Home,” Fashion Scholar (Fashion Scholar, 2020), <https://www.fashionscholar.com/>.

⁸⁰ Aisha Richards, “Shades of Noir,” Shades of Noir (Aisha Richards, 2020), <https://shadesofnoir.org.uk/>.

⁸¹ Annachiara Biondi, “White Staff and a White Curriculum: Inside Fashion Education,” Vogue Business (Condé Nast, June 29, 2020), <https://www.voguebusiness.com/fashion/white-staff-and-a-white-curriculum-inside-fashion-education>.

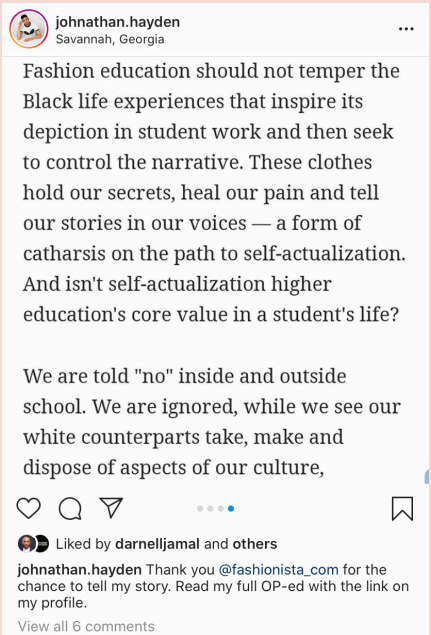
A key component of empowering Black students is hiring Black and non-Black POC faculty. We know that same-race teachers are key to closing the K-12 achievement gap.⁸² Based on testimonials from Black UC DAAP students, we are confident that the same applies to the college experience in that more Black educators would set up Black students for greater success in their careers.⁸³

It may take time for schools to hire more Black and non-Black POC faculty due to structural challenges that limit the number of applicants and that negatively impact faculty retention. Recognizing that anti-racism work requires long-term dedication and that racism within schools will not be fixed overnight, necessitates a multi-pronged strategy. With this in mind, we recommend that schools create a mentorship program for Black and non-Black POC students especially if it is difficult for Black students and non-Black POC to intern with Black-owned, racially diverse Fashion Companies. This mentorship program should be officially supported by the school with data and contacts being collected by the school for students.

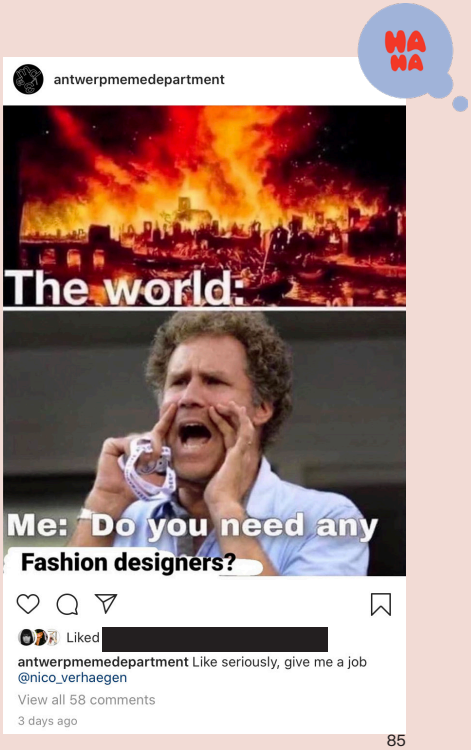
We recommend that schools create a system for reporting and supporting students who experience racism while on internship. Our research found that when Interns reported instances of workplace sexual harassment or racism to their HR departments, they were dismissed. Even more common was the lack of HR leaving students without a channel through which to report abusive behavior. We recommend that schools create a formal structure for reporting racism while on internship and while on campus. Students experience the same discrimination and devaluing

in the classroom as they will in the industry. The lack of support in reporting their negative experiences will likely continue post-graduation.

Lastly, we recommend that Fashion Programs create an interdisciplinary course on performative activism, marketing, and disaster capitalism. We have seen countless brands respond inappropriately and inadequately to COVID-19 and to the Black Lives Matter movement. We have also seen an unprecedented level of outcry from the public as well as internal accountability within brands. Fashion Brands that use Black and non-Black POC to sell products, but that lack diversity in the workplace are being called out for the first time. While many Fashion Brands have tackled ‘diversity and inclusion’ from the perspective of their runways and marketing campaigns, Fashion is far from a utopia. Fashion Programs should prepare students to think differently about diversity, transparency, corporate activism, authenticity, and marketing.



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⁸² Jill Rosen, "Black Students Who Have One Black Teacher More Likely to Go to College," Johns Hopkins University (Johns Hopkins University, November 12, 2018), <https://releases.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-who-have-one-black-teacher-more-likely-to-go-to-college/>.
⁸³ Coleman.
⁸⁴ @johnathan.hayden. Instagram Post. August 12, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDy7LzIFx2V/>.

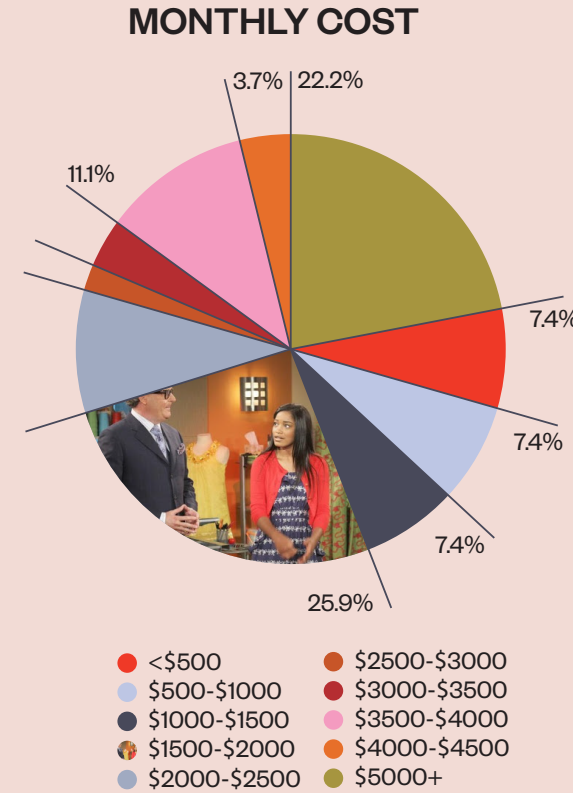
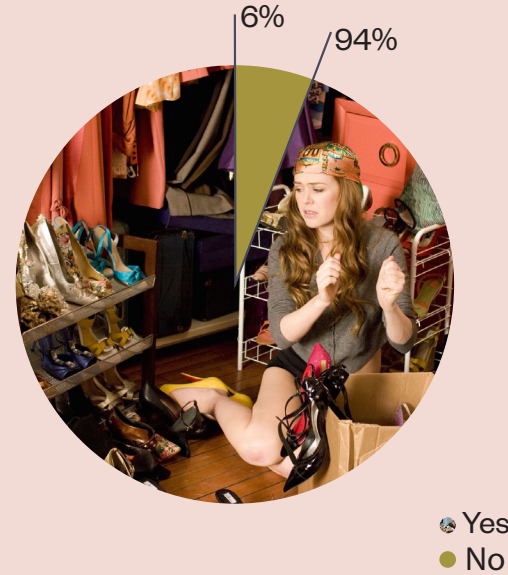
⁸⁵ @antwerpmemedepartment. Instagram Post. September 2, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEppDKwgq1o/>.
⁸⁶ @parsonskonfessions. Instagram Post. April 22, 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwkEGVgBDK/>.
⁸⁷ @daapmemes. Instagram Post. August 14, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDy7LzIFx2V/>.
⁸⁸ @daapmemes. Instagram Post. August 1, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDXdobVDDca/>.

TALK MONEY & FIGHT FOR YOUR STUDENTS' CAREERS

Unpaid Internships are often touted as a small investment for a brighter future. However, when looking at just how much an average student pays to participate in an Unpaid Internship, the numbers reveal just how big this investment has become. According to our survey results, the average cost of a Fashion Internship is \$2,149 per month-- for UC DAAP students, who are required to complete five co-op placements in order to graduate, one person will spend, on average, \$37,607.50 on internships alone.

When it came to paying for these expenses, 77.8% of respondents attributed funding to the generosity of a parent or family member, 71.4% of respondents used savings, and 47.6% of respondents said their paid internship covered less than half of their monthly expenses. Less well off students do not have the luxury of having their internship opportunities 'pre-paid.' Our data shows that it is most often white, affluent students who hold the coveted, compensated positions. A [2019 survey](#) of 3,952 graduating seniors by the National Association of Colleges and Employers revealed that, "71 percent of respondents were White, but they made up 74 percent of paid interns... Meanwhile, Black students were 6.6 percent of the sample, but represented only 6 percent of paid interns, which is statistically significant underrepresentation."⁸⁹ This survey was not specific to Fashion Interns, but we can confidently assume that these numbers would not improve when looking at Fashion independently.

EXPERIENCED A NET LOSS ON CO-OP



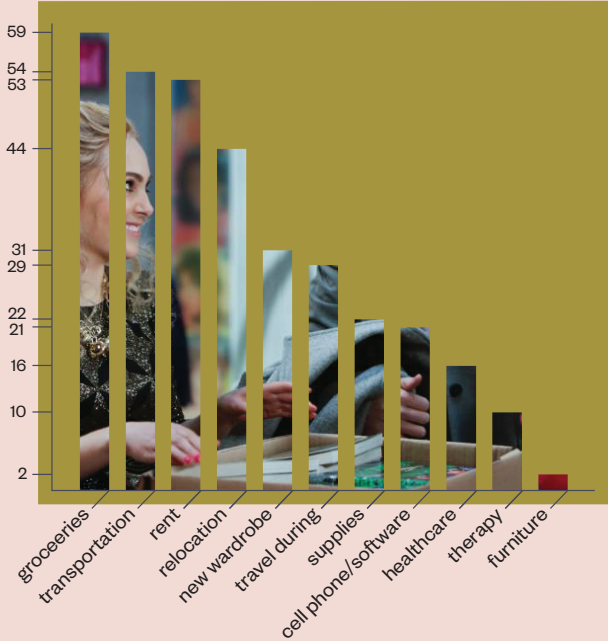
We recommend that schools be transparent about the cost of internships. Universities should include the financial breakdown for different internship scenarios on their website so prospective students and their families are aware of these (otherwise hidden) costs. Case studies should be developed in collaboration with current students to reflect a range of experiences and costs.

We recommend that schools create scholarships to cover moving and living expenses for underprivileged students. Fashion Internships whether paid or unpaid, often require students to live in some of the world's most expensive cities. These opportunities should be available to a diverse range of students especially when students are required by their university to complete more than one internship.

We also recommend that Fashion Schools advocate for policies that regulate overproduction and Fast Fashion more broadly. According to [Not Just A Label](#), there are roughly four thousand Fashion Graduates every year and only five hundred jobs.⁹⁰ [Business of Fashion](#) has run several articles questioning the number of Fashion Design Programs.⁹¹ The issue is not the number of Fashion Design Students, but rather the business model they must work in. Fast Fashion has managed to produce excess and manufacture scarcity at the same time. With the rise of mass market brands producing Disposable Fashion, there is less room for independent Designers, Tailors, Menders, Dyers, and small

businesses more broadly. Fashion Schools have a responsibility to fight against a business model that limits the potential of their graduates. Fashion Schools must fight for a Fashion Ecosystem in which independent Designers and human-scale businesses can sustain themselves.

INTERN EXPENSES



INTERN COMPENSATION



⁸⁹ NACE Staff, "Racial Disproportionalities Exist in Terms of Intern Representation," National Association of Colleges and Employers (National Association of Colleges and Employers, July 24, 2020), <https://www.nacweb.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/trends-and-predictions/racial-disproportionalities-exist-in-terms-of-intern-representation/>.

⁹⁰ Kam Dhillon, "Is Fashion Education Failing Young Designers?" Not Just a Label (Not Just a Label, June 1, 2016), <https://www.notjustalabel.com/editorial/fashion-education-failing-young-designers>.

⁹¹ Frances Corner, "Op-Ed: Are We Producing Too Many Fashion Designers?" The Business of Fashion (The Business of Fashion, February 12, 2014), <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-producing-many-fashion-designers>.

DISINCENTIVIZE TOXIC COMPETITION

When does healthy competition cross the line? Higher education institutions perpetuate outdated Capitalistic ideals of competition. When students begin their academic careers, many are searching for peers with whom to learn from and teach. However, students report that professors quickly interject with their well-meaning, but ultimately pernicious ideas that students should work in a highly competitive environment to create their best work.

This can devolve into an environment where students engage in backstabbing behavior, ideas and belongings are stolen, patterns are destroyed, rumors are spread, and anxiety is induced. While this competitive climate may be mirrored in other industries, this does not justify perpetuating non-cooperative behavior; especially given the fact that collective action is required to address our climate crisis. Extreme cases of competition in Design School perpetuates the notion that Fashion is a fantasy and teaches students to aspire to be the quintessential celebrity Designer struck by genius.

Alternatively, collaboration threatens this mindset of competition. It also dispels the idea of, “glorif[ying] the individual (usually male) artist as the ideal type,” and the stereotype of the tortured lone-wolf genius.⁹² In his interview in Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration, Matt Lucero says, “Collaborative art strategies and the notion of the heroic lone genius are dichotomies similar to centre and periphery, or global north and global south. It is good to look at all sorts of practices and even the in-between as a gauge for what is relevant these days.... The heroic lone art genius is something that is mainly driven by the

systems within which they operate, whether that is the art markets, political framework, or contexts of oppression.”⁹³ Collaboration encourages students to share their resources and their accomplishments. Artist Anouk De Clercg says collaborating means, “It’s not only you with your network, but it’s like plugging into the networks of other people, so together you have much broader knowledge.”⁹⁴ This is especially pertinent to Design Education as funding and access differs from discipline to discipline, and collaboration can act as an equalizer. To frame this for Fashion Design Schools, collaboration creates better, more impressive, well rounded results.

We recommend that schools incentivize collaborative senior projects (commonly referred to as thesis, capstone, or collection). We also recommend that schools encourage interdisciplinary communication and collaboration in and outside of the classroom. The solo senior project reinforces the trope of the Designer as ‘genius’ and inspires students to pursue projects for reasons that are not beneficial for themselves, their peers, or society simply because they desire to ‘win’. Many of the problems we face as a species require intense collaboration whether we are addressing climate change, education, or mass migration. Senior projects are an excellent moment to not only tackle some of these problems, but to do so in a way that nurtures the team dynamic and the group learning that we so desperately need. Working in groups is not easy. Collaborating is not easy. Students must be guided through these experiences. This will encourage greater respect between disciplines and build solidarity among students.

We also recommend that student critiques make space for failure. This includes incentivizing taking risks, even if this produces a lower quality result. Learning requires self reflection, but when students are in a hyper-competitive environment self reflection and recognition of one’s faults can be seen as weakness. By speaking openly about failure, students will feel more comfortable speaking openly about their internship experience. The overwhelming majority of our research respondents admitted to lying to peers and to their professors about their internship experience because they were afraid to admit that they had a bad experience; as it is presumed that any negative experience is a reflection of their abilities. In addition, nearly every survey respondent desired to be anonymous in this report. People should not be afraid to tell the truth. Schools can help improve the integrity and value of student reporting by encouraging students to talk about failure in the classroom.

We recommend that schools speak openly about the cycle of shame, guilt, and envy that feeds into a culture of toxic competition. One of the most salient insights that emerged from our research is how ingrained the feelings of shame, guilt, and envy are in the Fashion Industry. Each feeling feeds into the other creating an incestuous triangle of power struggle that stops individual and group development. Many of our interviewees and survey respondents felt shame and embarrassment early on when they would tell friends and family about wanting to pursue a career in Fashion. Fashion is seen as frivolous or a hobby; rhetoric which is common when describing female facing industries. When we examine history, it becomes clear how Fashion found itself at this intersection of the Intern Industrial Complex. When speaking with Fashion

Psychologist Shakayla Forbes-Bell on how fashion feeds negative emotions, she spoke from personal experience, “In fashion you are expected to work extremely hard and the reward is simply the fact that you get to work in the fashion industry. I think there is a lot of shame behind saying that you are tired, stressed, or overworked.”⁹⁵ With burn out being a main topic in the general conversation of life/work balance, the Fashion Industry stands out as a culprit of driving people too far. Fashion’s love of martyrs and wanting to see tangible success overnight, has proven to be its own downfall. All of this, in combination with living in the time of “bursting of the Fashion bubble,” makes Fashion appear as the antithesis of a lucrative industry for one’s mental and physical well being.⁹⁶

⁹² Ellen Mara De Watcher, *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration* (London, UK: Phaidon Press, 2017).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Draven Peria, Shakayla Forbes-Bell Interview, Personal, August 7, 2020.

⁹⁶ Irina Aleksander, “Sweatpants Forever: How the Fashion Industry Collapsed,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, August 6, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/06/magazine/fashion-sweatpants.html>.

FASHION BRANDS

Unpaid Internships are an indicator of a larger system of obstacles that keep small brands downtrodden. Irina Aleksander, in her article “Sweatpants Forever: How the Fashion Industry Collapsed,” writes, “[Scott] Sternberg [of Entireworld] had been saying that the fashion industry was a giant bubble heading toward collapse. Now the pandemic was just speeding up the inevitable. In fact, it had already begun.”⁹⁷ Contributing to this erupting volcano are the many ways that Fashion has tried to cheat its workers in pursuit of a fantasy that is disintegrating as Fashion itself collapses. Aleksander also recounts an Instagram live conversation between Marc Jacobs and Vogue where Jacobs states: “‘We’ve done everything to such excess that there is no consumer for all of it.... Everyone is exhausted by it. The designers are exhausted by it. The journalists are exhausted from following it.... When you’re just told to produce, to produce, to produce, it’s like having a gun to your head and saying, ‘you know, dance, monkey!’”⁹⁸

Aleksander suggests that Fashion’s culture of burnout and overproduction is attributed to the wholesale system. When retailers could no longer promise customers brand exclusivity because, “designers could not afford to remain exclusive to a certain store, the compromise was exclusive styles. In addition to a presented collection, buyers requested slightly altered looks ... that could then still be exclusive to their customers.... ‘The amount of work you do for exclusives is out of control,’”⁹⁹ says Batsheva Hay. This coupled with the fact that accounts can return unsold merchandise to brands is one piece of Fashion’s financially unstable

puzzle. Another piece is, of course, the Fashion calendar and the pressure to produce a runway show each season.¹⁰⁰

Behind these crumbling pillars of Fashion are the standards of working for free, for exposure, and for products. Forbes’ The Big Issues Facing Fashion in 2019 says, “The most famous issue [of skilled labor exploitation] is that of unpaid interns, but the reality is that it happens at all levels of experience and jobs --from stylists to photographers to makeup artists to journalists-- where people are expected to work for free or for exchange of goods, or even simply for exposure.”¹⁰¹ This side of the industry is detailed in Giulia Mensitieri’s *Le Plus Beau Métier du Monde*, which translates to *The Most Beautiful Job in the World: Lifting the Veil on the Fashion Industry in English*. Mensitieri says that, “Fashion workers accept these conditions because of the ‘economy of hope’. They hope that they will achieve their dream job someday. This is how structural precarity works: you stay, you keep, you work for free, because maybe someday you will arrive where you wish.”¹⁰² This is the inevitable outcome of upholding the Fashion Dream: “The image the fashion world creates to drive consumer demand for its goods is also used to drive demand for people to become part of that world. The image produces and maintains only the dimension of dream and prestige, keeping the conditions of production invisible or opaque,”¹⁰³ Mensitieri states. In our research, many interviewees and survey respondents expressed that they were made to feel ungrateful and were expected to feel

fortunate to be in the ‘room’ while on Unpaid Internships. Mensitieri analyzes this phenomenon: “The message is, you don’t have to be paid because you are lucky to be there at all. Working in fashion is hyper-socially validating, even if you’re unpaid. Fashion presents itself as something exceptional, a world outside the ordinary.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, with the pandemic exposing the fragility of the system, we are liberating ourselves from the imposed Fashion Dream.

All of these factors reveal an absurdly broken Fashion Industry. We empathize with those currently navigating this system that simply does not prioritize their mental, financial, or creative wellbeing. The solution is to create an alternative, not to uphold the dominant system. Perpetuating the Unpaid Internship Structure is part of upholding the current system.

We recognize that circumstances vary drastically between small, medium, and large brands. We want to uplift Designers, Stylists, and other industry professionals who may be struggling with the financial precarity of the Fashion Industry. We do not advocate for a one-size-fits-all solution that unfairly penalizes small businesses or mischaracterizes their good intentions in offering internships. We also recognize that many startups do not have security in funding nor consistency in workflow to be able to offer paid internships year round. That being said, there are certain circumstances under which we believe Unpaid Internships are completely unacceptable regardless of company size. Those circumstances are as follows:

-Unpaid Interns outnumber paid employees.

-Unpaid Interns are required to work more than two full days a week or more than three days a week with limited hours.¹⁰⁵

-Unpaid Interns are required to exceed six months in their position without pay.¹⁰⁶

-Unpaid Interns are required to perform tasks that are essential to the financial stability of the company without any mentorship and/or tasks that are essential, but that no paid employee has the skill to complete.

-Unpaid Interns are asked to work an irregular schedule that makes it impossible for them to find additional paid work.

With these factors in mind we offer the following recommendations focused on small, independent brands:

First, we recommend that all in Fashion, from luxury to small startups reflect on their relationship with Unpaid Internships. Throughout our research it became apparent that many brands offer Unpaid Internships with little concern for the experience of the student or the long-term implications of unpaid labor. Many in Fashion view internships as a learning opportunity, regardless of the quality of the experience. Others seem resentful of Fashion Schools for their reliance on Fashion Brands to provide students with ‘real-world’ training. Regardless of the rationale for offering Unpaid Internships, it has become apparent to us that the experience of individual Interns gets lost within the larger narrative of whose job it is to educate the next generation of Fashion Practitioners.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Rebecca Suhrawardi, “The Big Issues Facing Fashion in 2019,” *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, January 16, 2019), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccasuhrawardi/2019/01/16/the-big-issues-facing-fashion-in-2019/>.

¹⁰² Mensitieri.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Frederica Brookworth, (July 13, 2020).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

We believe that the responsibility must be shared between Fashion Workers and Fashion Educators. We ask that anyone working in Fashion think critically about their motivations for offering Unpaid Internships. We recommend that Fashion Practitioners ask themselves the following questions to determine whether their motivations are exploitative or not:

- Do you offer Unpaid Internships because Interns provide you with labor and skills that you do not wish to invest in?
- Do you offer Unpaid Internships because students approach you and you feel pressured to offer them an opportunity?
- Do you offer Unpaid Internships because students approach you and you want to serve them?
- Do you offer Unpaid Internships because that is the industry norm?
- The average internship costs \$7,521.50. If you were a student, would you pay for the Unpaid Internship experience that you offer as a brand?
- Do you view your Interns as future competition or as future colleagues and contemporaries?
- Do you believe that Unpaid Internships are a right of passage?
- If Unpaid Interns shoulder the responsibilities of paid employees, how does this practice of undervaluing labor affect other people along the supply chain or chain of command?

Second, we recommend that individuals publicly disclose (via social media, website, press, etc.) their brand's approach to internships. There should be written rationale and comprehensive policies that inquiring students can review before applying for an internship position. Additionally,

we ask for greater financial transparency. Fashion Practitioners must be transparent about why they can, or cannot, afford to pay Interns. This will be beneficial for the financial health of the entire industry. Too many cash-strapped brands and struggling Designers hide behind their Instagram follower count and the performative glamour of the Fashion Dream. Pretending to be financially stable helps no one. Fashion Students and Interns would benefit from understanding the financial risks associated with building a brand or styling a cover shoot. We believe that environmental and social sustainability will not be achieved without the solidarity that comes from financial disclosure. We are not asking that Fashion Practitioners sacrifice what they do not have. We are asking for honesty.

Third, we recommend that those who work in Fashion reassess their brand's sustainability and diversity strategies to focus less on external (performative) activism and more on internal inclusivity. Many individuals market their brands as diverse based on the composition of their runway shows or ad campaigns and not based on the composition of their team or Intern-pool. We asked survey respondents how they reconcile Unpaid Internships with claims of diversity and sustainability. Respondents agreed that it is simply not possible to reconcile the two. Our research shows that by not paying Interns, brands make these opportunities inaccessible to lower class students as well as to many BIPOC students. How can brands tout their diversity when Unpaid Internships statistically serve white, affluent people who can afford to pay for the unpaid experience?

Access to internships impacts hiring practices. Only 24.5% of survey respondents agreed that their unpaid workplace was racially diverse; more so, this percentage in actuality could be lower. As

our survey pool was majority white and from the Midwest, it is plausible that their criteria for what constitutes diversity is not in alignment with our own. The same disparities can be said of class: 77.8% of our survey respondents relied on financial support from a parent or family member for their internship. This disadvantages students who do not have access to generational wealth. Furthermore, this disadvantages students from communities where it is not only abnormal to ask for financial support from one's family, but where children are expected to alleviate their family's financial burden. Brands should not be applauded for diversity in marketing if they fail to use their privileged position to diversify the industry from the inside out. This does not mean that it is necessary to advertise the race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation of a brand's Intern-pool. Mensitieri's book, *Le Plus Beau Métier du Monde* critiques this, "...'conscientious capitalism' where every major (and not so major) fashion brand has numerous social causes they loudly support, but also where they silently exploit the workers that keep the dream factories operating."¹⁰⁷ Instead of focusing on optics, we recommend that brands shift their diversity and sustainability strategies to prioritize slow, long-term change.

Fourth, we recommend that Fashion Practitioners carefully consider how they might best serve students given the resources at their disposal. An employer may not be able to offer ten paid internship positions per year, but this brand may be able to offer two paid positions. Consider that it may be more beneficial for brands and for Interns to prioritize fewer, higher quality internship opportunities than many uncompensated and unstructured opportunities. Many employers feel overwhelmed by the thought of paying their Interns because there appears

to be a revolving door of eager applicants. No small brand can budget for an endless supply of Interns, but again, we recommend that brands step back from the relentless pace of Fashion to consider that paying an Intern amounts to roughly \$7,200 per Intern per semester (calculated at \$15/hr for 40hr/week x 12 weeks). We recommend that Fashion Practitioners consider redirecting marketing budget to cover the cost of an Intern. We recommend that Fashion Practitioners consider redirecting marketing budget to cover the cost of an Intern. As Aleksander made clear in her "Sweatpants Forever" article: the pillars of Fashion (the calendar and the wholesale accounts) are dissolving.¹⁰⁸ If these procedures are not serving you as they should, could you redirect the funds you would spend on a Fashion show or end-of-season campaign in part to pay an Intern? In addition, we recommend that Fashion Practitioners embrace boundaries as beneficial for Interns and for themselves. This is especially important in regards to working hours, as many Unpaid Interns are further hindered by the fact that their employers are unable to establish consistent hours; making it impossible for Unpaid Interns to seek additional paid work. We recommend that brands establish clear, consistent boundaries upfront.

For individuals in hiring-positions, who are unable to pay Interns, but feel passionate about serving students, we recommend considering other avenues to utilize the limited resources a brand does have. Employers could invite students to shadow an employee for a week or two, thereby granting access to a student and allowing them to observe without exploiting the student for free labor. Corporate and independent Designers can offer to mentor students, review portfolios, and be guest critics for school projects. Many brands or individuals do this, but with focused attention, these practices could be as valuable as an internship.



COUNCIL OF FASHION DESIGNERS OF AMERICA (CFDA)

One of the best ways the industry can assist in the dismantling of the Intern Industrial Complex is for our institutions to start prioritizing the funding of Intern labor. The Council of Fashion Designers of America, one of the oldest trade associations for Designers in the USA, has the unique opportunity to lead initiatives outside of governmental policy to better the Fashion Industry and create sustainable changes.

Our research has shown that scholarships are an immediate and effective way to close both the growing economic gap between Fashion Students and create more diverse work environments. Numerous students in our survey described how scholarships acted as their primary financial resource and were absolutely necessary in order to take Unpaid Internships. The CFDA website states, “the program [CFDA] has awarded more than 275 scholarships and \$1.78M to students of 19 leading Undergraduate American fashion design programs.”¹⁰⁹ Currently, the CFDA offers five different scholarship opportunities to students pursuing a degree in Fashion. Each of these scholarships ranges from one to five recipients with cash awards from \$25,000 to \$80,000 (\$20,000 awarded over a four year period).¹¹⁰ It is clear that the CFDA wants to support emerging talent, but how can we set our young people up for success when the CFDA and industry at large continue to ignore practices that hurt and

traumatize the very group they claim to support? Moreover, internship structures, even those with some degree of compensation, commonly skirt the law with pay exploitation. Certainly students are not forced to take internships. In that regard one could argue that students voluntarily sign-up for such exploitative situations, but we call on the CFDA to recognize that such common-practice, exploitative internship structures are not healthy for students; especially those who may feel they have to participate within the internship system in order to find a job. These exploitive structures are not representative of an inclusive and equitable future for Fashion. Our research indicates that Fashion no longer aligns with the future aspirations of young people and that Fashion Graduates are leaving to pursue careers that better serve their values.¹¹¹ The implications of this will be disastrous for the Fashion Industry.

To counteract this effect, we are proposing that the CFDA set up a new channel of funding that benefits Interns as well as brands. This funding will focus on giving grants to small brands to specifically fund a living wage and/or travel expenses for both full-time and part-time Interns. Criteria for brands to be considered for this fund, will include meeting a set of standards set forth by the CFDA. This set of standards should differ based on a brand’s size, which is determined by: revenue, the number of full-time employees, and years in operation. Chosen brands should be required to agree to the following:

¹⁰⁹ “Students,” CFDA (CFDA, 2020), <https://cfda.com/programs/students>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Robin Mellery-Pratt and Sophie Soar, “The Truth About Gen-Z and Millennial Employees,” The Business of Fashion (The Business of Fashion, November 14, 2019), <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/careers/millennial-gen-z-employees-fashion-survey-bof-careers-white-paper>.

Brands over 10 employees and/or with over \$1Million in yearly revenue should agree to these standards:

1. Mentorship and training workshops attended by brand owners and or upper management before receiving Interns
2. Designating an employee to be in charge of one on one mentorship sessions with the Intern(s)
3. An engaging learning plan that centers Intern skill development in multiple areas
4. 'Check-in' meetings with Interns to gain feedback and submit said feedback to the CFDA
5. A no retaliation clause signed by all employees of the brand
6. All pay stubs will be signed by both the Intern and the supervisor and will be turned into the CFDA
7. A signed agreement stating that if there is any evidence of abuse, exploitation, or illegal activity, the brand will face penalties and be immediately removed from the approved brands list by the CFDA.

Brands under 10 employees and/or with less than \$1Million in yearly revenue should agree to these standards:

1. Co-attend workshops around financial literacy with their selected Intern. These workshops will focus on how smaller brands can redistribute their limited time and money to increase profitability and financial longevity.
2. A no retaliation clause signed by all employees of the brand
3. All pay stubs will be signed by both the Intern and the supervisor and will be turned into the CFDA
4. A signed agreement stating that if there is any evidence of abuse, exploitation, or illegal activity, the brand will face penalties and be immediately removed from the approved brands list by the CFDA.

This funding should prioritize brands owned and operated by women and BIPOC, and for brands that have a clear track record when it comes to sustainability and sustainable practices.

The CFDA should also commit publically to not honoring any brand through its award platform that is not in compliance with the above guidelines.

It is also highly recommended that the CFDA partner with nationally ranked Design Programs. By doing so, the CFDA and such programs can formalize the collection of student data. More so, Design Programs can provide additional scholarship opportunities and other funding to assist students even further. Data collected by the CFDA and Design Programs should be published not only on their respective platforms, but also within notable Fashion News Organizations such as the Business of Fashion and Vogue Business. This will ensure full transparency and provide needed information for both students and brands.

The purpose of these suggestions is to set a new industry standard through payment of labor by creating a reciprocal relationship for the Intern and their employer. Additionally, for Fashion to truly progress we need to be in collective agreement that the current rules and regulations put in place do not serve everyone equally and that these rules must change. Fashion's current circus of showrooms, influencer marketing, the uncertainty of lending samples, and the Fashion Week craze, have put us smack in the middle of a mess of our own creation. Stepping away from the fantasy to prioritize paying Fashion's labor-force will provide the foundation necessary to jump start the positive changes that are needed for this industry to survive.

IN CONCLUSION...

As an industry of great intersection, it is imperative to turn the mirror upon ourselves and reflect on the ways in which, as individuals, as collectives, and as the Fashion Industry at large, we uphold exploitive systems. These systems are detrimental to financial stability and are halting the social mobility of all who enter the industry without the luxury of a deluded reality. We implore readers to contemplate their roles and experiences, looking beyond the elusive, elaborate guise of Fashion to internalize in understanding all that is fraught within this industry. Recognize privilege where it is present; namely introspectively.

If one were to look at recent reporting surrounding the Fashion Industry, it should come as no surprise to find extensive articles delineating the racism, corruption, and exploitation that occurs on a daily and international basis. The gig is up. The curtain has been pulled back. Fashion has been left vulnerable and poised for revolution. As we press forward with urgency, several questions emerge. What should be prioritized in the new Fashion? What skills should be taught in the future? Where do we begin?

To replace the antiquated, oppressive systems within Fashion: We must act with candor and with monetary transparency. We must value our craft beyond its superficial associations. We must negate the social and financial reduction of feminized labor. We must underscore the importance of artisanal skill and look to alternate forms of internships: alternates that harken to the development and preparedness of an apprenticeship. Finally, if we are going to disrupt the precedent of exploitation and the utter lack of livelihood in Fashion, we must financially empower Fashion Interns.

The Fashion Dream will never pay off because it was not designed to. It is an illusion to fuel commodity production and to further line the pockets of already privileged capitalists. However, the Future of Fashion could be one of craft, creativity, self-expression, confidence, and connection in solidarity with the struggle toward Justice.

CONTACT

We hope this report, the information and especially the testimonials within it, will leave readers with the same resolve that has inspired and will continue to motivate our work. We also hope that the experiences shared throughout this work will provide a sense of validation for those who have endured similar circumstances without knowing their prevalence within the Fashion Industry.

If you would like to support our efforts please consider donating to: [SFI Cincinnati](#)

If you would like to follow, share, or reach out to us regarding our efforts come say hi to us on Instagram: [@sfi_cincinnati](#) or email us at hi@sfiincincinnati.org

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