"What's It Supposed to Be?" … "Cooked." The Communication of Information-Seeking Tactics on *Hell's Kitchen*

by

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Abstract

Previous research has argued reality television provides life strategies for viewers and offers them ways to understand, navigate, and respond to certain situations and contexts within their own realities. Because reality television can serve as a socializing agent for viewers in a similar work context, the objective of this study was to launch the discussion of reality television and information-seeking behaviors in organizational entry through a content analysis of the Fox Network reality show *Hell's Kitchen*.

In this thesis, I examined 16 episodes from Season Nine of *Hell's Kitchen*. I conducted a Chi Square test for independence to determine if statistically significant relationships could be found between newcomers' information-seeking tactic selection and the sources of information, newcomers and the hierarchical levels of preferred information sources, and the types of information communicated by newcomers and the sources of information. The Chi Square results suggested relationships exist among all variables investigated.

In conclusion, the results of this study produced both significant and interesting findings for scholars seeking to expand the academic intersection of reality television and organizational socialization. As evidenced in previous research findings and the results of this thesis, parallels exist between actual organizational events and what is displayed on reality television. Therefore, reality television may serve as an outlet for self-

socialization, particularly as a form of organizational anticipatory socialization for

individuals planning to enter a similar work environment.

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CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a disciplinary and theoretical approach that claims one's

reality and identity are formed through interactions with the surrounding world. Those

scholars who adhere to a social constructionist perspective assume that we are creators,

producers, and reproducers of the groups and cultures to which we belong (Burr, 1995;

Carey, 1988). The significance we ascribe to various aspects of our world is not

constructed individually. Central to the social constructionist view is the idea that we

create meaning and comprehend the world around us in collaboration with others

(Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Furthermore, the primary vehicle for building and

maintaining these common perspectives is communication (Pearce, 2009).

The establishment of the social constructionist approach is typically attributed to

Berger and Luckmann (1967), who provided a framework for the theoretical position in

their work *The Social Construction of Reality*. A number of researchers and academics

have expanded constructionism since Berger and Luckmann's seminal publication, and

various (often conflicting) roots have branched from the traditional constructionist

foundation. While most social constructionists do not hold "a singular and unified

position" and "vary considerably in their logics, values, and visions" (Gergen & Gergen,

2003, p. 2), a common thread of principles related to communication practices appears in

most social constructionist literature.

The first tenet holds that communication is the center of human existence. As Carey (1988) described, "Our minds and lives are shaped by our total experience, or…by representations of experience, and a name for this experience is communication" (p. 33). Our social interactions construct the world around us and attribute meaning to our surroundings. In other words, communication is inherent in, and the crux of, "all human relationships, societies, and cultures" (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009, p. 6).

Second, communication is a constitutive, relational, and consequential *process*. Carey (1988) defined communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (p. 23). Because of communication's dynamic and evolving nature, our shared reality is not a fixed way of being or understanding. Reality is a creative, reconstructive, and restorative development based on our communication practices. Specifically, our interactions are constitutive because they act as the foundation of reality. Communication is a practice we inhabit—it creates things and brings reality into existence. In turn, communication is constructed in its own practice (Bartesaghi & Castor, 2009; Craig, 1999; Strati, 1992). In addition, communication is a relational process because the fabric of our world is built and sustained through interactions with others (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009; Pearce, 2009; Spano, Foss, & Kirschbaum, 2009). Furthermore, communication is consequential. It informs the character of our cultural practices by producing and reproducing certain actions while excluding others, perpetuating what we deem acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong, and everything in between (Burr, 2005; Pearce, 2009).

Third, expanding on the previous tenet, our knowledge of the world is upheld through communication. As Burr (2005) described, "The way a person thinks, the very

categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by [communal interchange]" (p. 7). Knowledge is a property of our interactions with others, and these interactions are both historically and culturally influenced. What we commonly understand to be the proper modes of being or "the way things are" is based on the previous and current contextual factors around which our reality is constructed. Because we are not restrained by one culture or history, this specificity of knowledge implies that we are a part of and continue to shape several social worlds that exist simultaneously, and the contexts of these social realities both afford and confine the meanings of each (Burr, 2005; Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009; Gergen, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010; Spano et al., 2009).

This thesis rests in a constructionist view of organizational socialization and is grounded in the premises mentioned previously. This paper adheres to the beliefs that communication is the center of human existence and the foundation of interactions and relationships, communication is a process, and communication upholds our knowledge of the experienced world. Specifically, this thesis will review the literature on organizational socialization with particular attention to seminal approaches, socialization strategies, socialization stages, sensemaking and information seeking in organizational socialization, and socialization's connection to reality television. The thesis will next propose research questions regarding the information-seeking methods employed by the participants in a workplace-based reality television program. The method used to examine these questions will be presented followed by the results of this investigation. Finally, the significance of the findings will be discussed along with limitations of the current study and suggestions

for future research. The next section will define organizational socialization and discuss the prevalent research on the topic.

Organizational Socialization

We can view socialization as a form of constructing reality, specifically the contextualized reality of work in organizational studies. Brim (1966) defined socialization as "the manner in which an individual learns the behavior appropriate to his [or her] position in a group, through interaction with others who hold normative beliefs about what his [or her] role should be and who reward and punish him [or her] for correct or incorrect actions" (p. 9). This description of socialization implies people create a new sense of reality each time they experience an unknown behavioral environment (Van Maanen, 1976). Brim (1966) further noted three requirements fulfill satisfactory socialization: understanding expectations, meeting role requirements, and desiring to engage in the appropriate behavior. In all, the chief feature of any socialization process is the individual's attempt to decipher the accepted roles of the particular setting and to model his or her actions in a way that reflects those standard behaviors (Brim, 1966; Jablin, 1985; Jablin, 2001; Van Maanen, 1976). The function of socialization, then, as Van Maanen (1976) described, is to supply the individual with the knowledge, aptitude, and incentive to ascribe to a defined social role.

Organizational socialization applies the socialization process to a specific context by identifying how individuals come to understand their roles in occupational settings. As Van Maanen (1978) explained, "Organizational socialization or 'people processing' refers to the manner in which the experiences of people learning the ropes of a new organizational position, status, or role are structured for them by others within the

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organization" (p. 19). This form of socialization addresses the ways in which a recruit learns the norms, values, social stock of knowledge, and behavioral standards of a particular organization in order to assume an identity within the collective and contribute as an organizational member (Brown, 1985; Louis, 1980; Schein, 1971; Van Maanen, 1976, 1977).

Each new position or setting within an organization involves some form of socialization, no matter the recruit's previous socialized realities. As several organizational socialization scholars note, an individual takes on a wide array of roles, statuses, and positions from the time he or she first encounters the working world to the time he or she retires, thus exemplifying the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of the organizational socialization process (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1971; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Next, this thesis will explore the foundational research on organizational socialization.

Seminal Approaches to Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization has been examined from multiple perspectives. A vast majority of socialization theory and research focuses on how an individual assumes the normative values and behaviors of a specific work environment. In particular, the work of Van Maanen and his colleagues is influential in shaping organizational socialization research. In describing how people "locate (and relocate) themselves within organizational boundaries" (p. 15), Van Maanen (1977) claimed recruits come to understand themselves within a work environment by creating an interpretive scheme—a mental framework in which individuals decipher their social location from a spatial and temporal perspective. "Social space" is a career map that refers to the way an individual

"normalizes the setting" for their particular organizational situation (p. 22). "Social time,"

on the other hand, is a career clock that focuses on how recruits "discover a theme" to

their career timeline in order to construct socially their current organizational role (p. 32).

Both of these elements work simultaneously to "[resolve] the confusion arising from an

imposed sensory environment" and to shape the recruit's experience in particular

workplace (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 21).

In his discussion of social space, Van Maanen (1977) claimed organizational

recruits view their new working environment as an "invisible landscape" upon which

certain manners of conduct occur. In other words, new employees find their workplace to

be an unfamiliar territory in which they must observe and learn organizational rules and

norms. Recruits use the mental map of social space to regulate, connect, and condense

various organizational components. When an individual enters a new organization, Van

Maanen asserted those ranked higher on the organizational ladder do not press the rules

and guidelines of that particular workplace upon the recruit automatically. Rather, the

newcomer must rely on social cues and evaluate various behaviors in order to grasp the

unfamiliar environment. This process is the essence of normalizing the setting, which

Van Maanen defined as "determining the behavioral terrain in the setting considered

normal" (p. 30) in order to construct a work reality that makes sense of the new

environment and aligns with the realities of existing organizational members. When

normalizing their work surroundings, recruits attempt to develop an orientation that

guides them in accepted organizational behavior. The novices interact with (often

unknown) others in their particular situation and decipher whether the members' actions

fit an accepted pattern of conduct or deviate from the organizational norm. Furthermore,

this normalization process involves identifying the social curve of standard behavior (*range*) and understanding the commonplace notions that explain why certain behaviors are considered acceptable and others are not (*assumptions*). As Van Maanen (1977) described, "The map [for normalization] provides…a situationally-specific definition of just who one is and what one is doing (or supposed to be doing) in the organization" (p. 30).

The second perspective, social time, examines the way in which individuals link discrete communal events in their frame of experience. Van Maanen (1977) claimed recruits come to understand their current role in an organization by considering both previous and potential experiences. As he stated, "The individual is able to function effectively in the present to the degree that he [or she] can provide continuity between the past and the future. Thus, the environment is made intelligible by assuming that future events will occur as past events have occurred" (p. 31). In order to create a career clock, newcomers seek a pattern across their social experiences within organizational life. Van Maanen calls this process "discovering the theme," which involves recruits creating long-standing predictions about their career path as they encounter various organizations throughout their lifetime. In other words, the recruit understands the present organizational reality by evaluating past realities and anticipating future realities in the workplace.

Career themes involve two primary components. The first, *explicitness*, considers the practicality of a theme's potential for success by evaluating how closely the theme aligns with actual experience (McHugh, 1968; Van Maanen, 1977). *Ownership*, the second thematic element, deals with how much perceived control the recruit has over his

or her work circumstances. The greater the individual responsibility held by the newcomer, the more he or she can personalize, build, and maintain the constructed work theme. In all, as Van Maanen stated, "Themes include varying degrees of explicitness and ownership. Themes allow chronological time to become conceptually social, hence, meaningful" (p. 38). The subjective theme created by the individual serves as a guide for the particular organization of the individual's present reality. In all, newcomers normalize the setting and discover a theme to their careers in order to make sense of their new work environment, to create a role consistent with organizational expectations, and to build a reality that is compatible with the perceptions of other organizational members.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described five assumptions underlying organizational socialization. First and foremost, individuals facing an organizational change are in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. Newcomers are prompted to reduce their apprehension by "learning the functional and social requirements" of their acquired role in a timely fashion (p. 8). The recruit will likely be unaccustomed to the organizational activities and events taking place and must adjust to the unfamiliar patterns of the work setting. While anxiety levels vary person-to-person and position-to-position, any transition from the known to the unknown will invoke challenges for the recruit taking on the new role. Second, the process of organizational socialization is interactive and dynamic—it does not take place in a social vacuum. When a recruit enters the organization, he or she relies on the cues of employees, clients, managers, associates, and other socializing agents within his or her work environment in order to create a proper depiction of accepted organizational behavior. In other words, organizational informants

direct the newcomer in the discovery and interpretation of workplace activities and events as well as his or her new role within the setting.

The third assumption addresses organizational stability and efficiency based on continuous socialization over time. The organization's operations are upheld and consistency is preserved when roles, statuses, and positions are cycled continuously with minimal disturbance to the system. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) asserted an organization's socialization processes bring together the "various interlocking parts of an on-going social concern" (p. 9). Fourth, striking similarities appear in the ways in which individuals adjust to their new organizational roles, yet certainly substantial differences may occur in the degree to which a person must change his or her behaviors to fit the new position. In any case, however, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) claimed some degree of uncertainty always exists when taking on an unfamiliar working role.

Fifth, and finally, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) maintained no inherent or essential form of organizational socialization exists. Rather, they claimed individuality and context play a predominant role in socialization processes. Taking a constructionist approach, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) asserted that "individuals, not organizations, create and sustain beliefs about what is and is not functional…and, as in all matters individual, what is functional for one actor may be dysfunctional for another" (pp. 10-11). Thus, the scholars maintain that socialization within the workplace varies from member to member. The recruit going through a particular organizational socialization determines the unique reality of that process. This thesis will next explore how socialization is patterned in a work context through the strategies of organizational socialization.

Strategies of Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization strategies are formats used by workplaces that move employees through the socialization process. In other words, the strategies provide a certain pattern in which recruits come to learn about the workplace and their organizational role. As Van Maanen (1978) highlighted, organizational acclimation occurs via training, education, apprenticeships, and other generic processes. More specifically, certain patterns arise within these types of socialization that influence how individuals come to recognize their positions within the new working environment. As such, Van Maanen (1978) summarized seven contrasting pairs of organizational socialization strategies that describe the techniques used to "break in" newcomers and transition recruits from organizational outsiders to organizational members.

First, Van Maanen (1978) discussed *formal* and *informal socialization strategies*. Formality refers to the degree to which the workplace and recruits' roles are defined clearly and separated from other social contexts. In formal socialization, work expectations are explained explicitly and the recruits' job is distinguished from other organizational positions. Informal socialization, on the other hand, does not entail such clear distinctions and often involves a trial-and-error approach to learning one's organizational role.

The second strategy pairing Van Maanen identified is *individual* and *collective socialization.* Considered to be perhaps the most crucial of all strategies, these process variables depend on whether the recruit is socialized independently or within a group. Collective socialization typically is more cost effective, yet recruits can develop a herd

mentality and are often more likely to resist or deviate from the organizational norms and standards based on group socialization experiences.

Third, *sequential* and *nonsequential socialization strategies* address the stages involved in socialization practices. Sequential processes are unit-based and include distinct, identifiable phases that newcomers must complete chronologically in order to learn their organizational roles. Nonsequential approaches are not tied to a set order or schedule. Instead, they involve one fluid stage through which individuals come to understand their position within the organization. Van Maanen's (1978) fourth pairing, *fixed* and *variable socialization strategies*, advances our understanding of sequential and nonsequential processes by identifying the amount of time a newcomer has to complete socialization activities. Fixed processes involve a determined and standardized period of transition for all individuals entering the organization, and recruits are aware of the time allotted to complete each phase. In contrast, the variable socialization strategies encompass a "what may be true for one is not true for another" (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 28) mentality. Here, recruits are not provided with a socialization timeline and instead must determine their own progression path within the organization, which can vary easily from other newcomers' transitional experiences. Variable process more so addresses the newcomer's overall mastery of particular activities rather than assigning a finite amount of time to complete a task.

The fifth set identified by Van Maanen (1978), *tournament* and *contest* processes, focus on the competition element within the encounter phase. In a tournament course, recruits are clustered into certain socialization tracks based on an initial assessment of their skills, previous experience, education, determination, and the like. In a contest

approach, newcomers are not separated by presumed differences from the beginning. Instead, recruits enter the organization on an equal field and progress through the socialization channels based on individual performance. Sixth, *serial* and *disjunctive socialization strategies* consider the history of socialization methods within an organization. According to Van Maanen, the serial process involves seasoned members teaching recruits the ropes of the workplace. These forms of socialization tend to stabilize and stagnate over time. On the other hand, disjunctive approaches occur when no predecessors are available to socialize new employees. Recruits are left to their own devices or are oriented in nontraditional ways for each socialization occurrence. While the disjunctive strategy allows for more creativity and innovation than the serial process, Van Maanen (1978) notes that this strategy often entails inaccurate organizational understandings and overall confusion for newcomers.

The final complementary strategies, *investiture* and *divestiture* processes, address how workplaces condition newcomers into organizational members. As Van Maanen (1978) explained, investiture and divestiture strategies center on "the degree to which a socialization process is set up either to confirm or dismantle the incoming identity of a newcomer" (p. 33). In an investiture scenario, recruits' desired qualities are confirmed and praised, and the organization capitalizes on the positive characteristics identified. In contrast, divestiture methods repudiate and remove certain qualities of entering members in order for recruits to acquire accepted organizational traits. While the investiture strategy accepts newcomers as they are, the divestiture process strips new employees of their former ways and molds recruits into the appropriate behavioral roles.

The "people-processing" dimensions discussed are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive (Van Maanen, 1978). An organization's socialization approach may encompass one, none, or a blend of these strategies. Next, this thesis will break socialization into specific stages by covering the phase model of organizational socialization.

Phases of Organizational Socialization

To better understand the ongoing process of organizational socialization, many communication researchers support a phase model that breaks socialization into specific stages of an individual's development within an organization (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1987; Schein, 1971; Van Maanen, 1977). As previously discussed, an individual entering a new working environment does not become integrated into an organizational culture immediately (Jablin, 1982; Van Maanen, 1977). Rather, the recruit must adjust to organizational life by learning the accepted roles, values, norms, and attitudes of a particular work setting (Brim, 1966; Jablin, 1982; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen, 1977). By actively studying established forms of organizational behavior, the individual can make sense of his or her workplace, take on the expected organizational role, and, in turn, transition from organizational outsider to organizational member (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Jablin, 1982, 1987). The "turning points" (Bullis & Bach, 1989) and "boundary passages" (Van Maanen, 1976) of this process mark the periods through which the individual becomes "integrated into the 'reality' or culture of an organization" (Jablin, 1987, p. 693). The phases of socialization highlighted most by organizational communication scholars are anticipatory socialization, encounter/entry, metamorphosis, and disengagement/exit.

Anticipatory Socialization

According to Merton (1957), organizational socialization begins with anticipatory socialization. From as early as childhood, individuals are conditioned into a certain set of expectations regarding how the working world operates and how people define themselves within an organizational reality. Jablin (1985, 1987, 2001) claimed this process occurs in two primary phrases: *vocational choice*, in which job seekers solicit information from sources such as family, educational institutions, peers, and the media and eventually select an occupation, and *organizational choice*, which occurs when individuals choose specific workplaces within their career field. As Jablin (1987) described:

> Intrinsic to [anticipatory socialization is] the notion that job seekers develop expectations about jobs/organizations and their communication characteristics as a result of the interaction of their vocational socialization and the sources of information with which they come into contact in the job search process. (p. 693)

Furthermore, this phase addresses the degree to which recruits are adequately prepared for their particular working role before entering the organization (Van Maanen, 1976). During anticipatory socialization, newcomers predict their organizational experiences and attempt to take on their perception of the organization's beliefs and values (Louis, 1980).

Encounter/Entry

The encounter/entry phase, or "breaking-in period" (Van Maanen, 1976), takes place when the recruit enters the organization and, in turn, shifts from organizational outsider to insider (Wanous, 1976; Wanous, 1977). During this socialization stage, the recruit faces a "reality shock" (Hughes, 1958; Van Maanen, 1977) as he or she confronts

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the actual working environment and begins to "learn the ropes" of the organization (Jablin, 1987; Schein, 1965; Van Maanen, 1976). The actual activities of the organization may not match the recruit's original expectations. The newcomer must learn to manage and make sense of the new environment by relying on current sensory experiences and knowledge from previous organizational settings (Chatman, 1989; Jones, 1983; Schneider, 1983). The degree of uncertainty and shock the recruit feels depends on the difference between the individual's expectations and the reality of his or her organizational position. The greater the discrepancy between the newcomer's previous judgments about the organization and the organization's reality, the more likely the recruit will experience a difficult transition into the workplace (Jablin, 1987; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen, 1977; Wanous, 1977).

Futhermore, newcomer adjustment is central to the encounter phase of organizational socialization (Ashford & Taylor, 1993; Hulin, 1991; Krammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Nicholson, 1984). Entering a new organizational setting alters an individual's daily order. As Van Maanen (1977) described, "Matters concerning self, friendship, privacy, time, competence, demeanor, and the future are suddenly problematic. The individual…searches for commonsense theories to explain and make meaningful the myriad of activities going on in the workplace" (p. 16). Despite the newcomer's own customs, values, attitudes, and beliefs—and regardless of the person's previous realities—the recruit will begin to evaluate the expectations of those surrounding him or her and start to construct definitions of what is acceptable or unacceptable in that particular work environment. These constructed understandings provide the individual with contextually-situated workplace descriptions that help to

reduce anxiety and uncertainty about his or her role within the organization (Louis, 1980; Jablin, 2001; Van Maanen, 1977).

Metamorphosis/Role Management

In the third socialization phase, the newcomer moves from organizational insider to organizational member. As Feldman (1976) described, organizational newcomers tentatively have worked out any uncertainty and confusion and must now make sense of their work in terms of other realities, such as their home life. The successful recruit has found solutions to the problems identified in the encounter/entry phase (Van Maanen, 1976). Furthermore, he or she has accepted and internalized the appropriate communicative practices of the organization and is no longer viewed as a "new" employee (Jablin, 1987; Jablin, 2001). Through didactic interaction with management, the immediate supervisor, coworkers, and others, the individual aligns his or her perspective with the organization's reality. As Jablin (1987) stated, "It is through the proactive and reactive communication of expectations to and from an individual by members…that organizational roles are negotiated and individuals share in the socially created 'reality' of organizations" (pp. 693-694).

Disengagement/Exit

The final stage of organizational socialization addresses the individual's psychological and physical departure from the work setting. As Jablin (2001) noted, "Organizational disengagement is a process, not an event. What we might normally associate with exit—the public, physical activity of leaving a particular job and organization—is something that happens midway through the process" (p. 785). As Jablin made clear, organizational exit involves a progression through which the

individual becomes detached from the work environment, leaves the organization, and experiences a potential sense of uncertainty and anxiety after his or her exit. In addition, organizational disengagement is a mutual experience that presents a challenge for both the individual leaving and the remaining organizational members (Ebaugh, 1984; Jablin, 2001). Ebaugh (1984) described organizational disengagement/exit as a "mutual withdrawal" (p. 10) in which an individual feels less connected to a particular workgroup, and the group communicates fewer responsibilities to the individual. Thus, the person conceptualizes his or her leave from the workgroup as a feasible choice. While all phases of organizational socialization offer unique points of study, this paper focuses mostly on organizational entry, as discussed in the following sections.

Sensemaking in the Encounter/Entry Phase of Socialization

While all stages of socialization are key to an individual's integration into the organizational culture, this thesis specifically focuses on the communicative patterns of the encounter/entry phase as an essential component of organizational socialization and as an often precedent-setting period for the recruit's future experiences in a particular working environment. As previously discussed, during the trial-and-error process of organizational encounter, individuals use social cues and contexts to make meaningful the "pivotal" values, beliefs, and social norms of the particular organization.

Specifically, the entry phase is "a time for learning what insiders consider to be 'normal' patterns of thinking and behaving…and in particular what things *mean* to members of the organization" (Jablin, 2001, p. 755). In an attempt to develop role clarity, the recruit must let go of previous communicative practices that do not align with the organization's culture, take in information from other organizational members, and adapt

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his or her behavior to the accepted manners of conduct for the new workplace (Jablin, 1987; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Van Maanen, 1976).

Through a newcomer experience model, Louis (1980) described three significant characteristics of a recruit's experiences in the encounter phase. The first, *change*, involves an individual experiencing clear discrepancies between the "new" and "old" work settings. Change can involve differences in one's organizational role, rank, social networks, and working conditions. The more organizational change the individual experiences, the harder it is for the recruit to adjust to the new working environment.

The second element, *contrast*, occurs when the individual internally compares features in the new role against his or her background. Louis claimed this feature to be a private rather than public characteristic. Contrast is unique to each organizational member. Because it is not a shared, identifiable trait of the organization, contrast will be "person-specific" rather than "indigenous to the organizational transition" (Louis, 1980, p. 236). As Louis stated, "For two people understanding the same change…different contrasts will emerge" (1980, p. 236).

Surprise, the final and perhaps most important feature of the encounter phase, signifies the difference between the recruit's expectations formed during anticipatory socialization and the reality of the new workplace (Louis, 1980). This characteristic involves the newcomer's reactions to the contrasts, changes, and unexpected differences in the new setting and can emerge from unexpected aspects of the workplace, workers, or self. Louis identified multiple forms of surprise that take place in the entry phase. Surprise can emerge when career expectations do not match the newcomer's actual job experiences, when expectations in one's own abilities are not fulfilled, when unexpected

features of the workplace and work conditions arise, when the newcomer encounters confusion in predicting proper reactions to organizational happenings, when the newcomer uses cultural assumptions from previous places of employment that do not work in the new organization, etc. Louis (1980) noted all types of surprise require some form of newcomer adaptation. Van Maanen (1977) also highlighted the importance of surprise in his work.

While change, contrast, and surprise involve identifying differences between the individual's expectations and the reality of the organization, the newcomer must next diagnose and interpret the discrepancies through *sensemaking*. In order to deal with unexpected organizational experiences and surprises in particular, Louis (1980) claimed newcomers follow certain cognitive scripts that help them understand their organizational environment. Sensemaking, or "the role of conscious thought in coping" (p. 239), allows the individual to predict event patterns and outcomes. Little conscious thought is needed when event sequences and consequences match the newcomer's script. However, the recruit's "cognitive consistency" (p. 240) is jeopardized when organizational happenings do not align with the newcomer's predictions. In this case, the recruit must rationalize these discrepancies and make sense of the situation. In all, these cognitive scripts are guides for understanding organizational outcomes and coping with event incongruities.

Louis (1980) argued newcomers use a variety of inputs when making sense of organizational events. First, newcomers use past experiences in previous organizations to help them understand the new work setting. Second, the recruits' personalities, predispositions, and "orienting purposes in the situation and in general" (p. 241) can also serve as a guide in the sensemaking phase. Recruits may also choose to enact *local*

interpretation schemes in which they use their limited knowledge of the organization and its history to make organizational decisions. Finally, individuals can rely on other organizational members' interpretations to help them make sense of differences between the new organization and previous work experiences (Louis, 1980). This final method of sensemaking in which recruits interact with others to construct their new organizational realities is of specific concern to this thesis.

Information Seeking and Socialization

Miller and Jablin (1991) extended the sensemaking research by identifying the means in which recruits seek out information to better understand their new organizational environment. The scholars claimed organizational newcomers are sensitive to differences in their backgrounds and the new organization's values and expectations. In response to this sensitivity and heightened awareness, recruits actively think about their lack of knowledge and search for ways to obtain information about the new organization. As Miller and Jablin (1991) explained, "When individuals are new to an organization they may seek information in a far more deliberate manner than when they have grown accustomed to their roles and their organizational environments" (p. 94). This unique feature is one of the key traits of the encounter/entry phase of organizational socialization.

Miller and Jablin (1991) categorized several variables that influence information-seeking behaviors during the encounter phase. The first factor the researchers identified is *uncertainty*. When newcomers transition from one organizational role to another, as is the case in moving from anticipatory socialization to organizational entry, a "boundary passage" occurs that involves some degree of uncertainty faced by the newcomers. For

example, by leaving one organizational position and taking on a new job, the recruit must learn new behaviors, values, expectations, and so on. In citing Brett (1984) and Berger and Calabrese (1975), Miller and Jablin claimed the degree of uncertainty experienced by the individual directly affects their information-seeking behaviors. The more uncertainty a recruit encounters, the more likely he or she will be to seek information. As uncertainty declines, then the less likely the newcomer will be to actively engage in information-seeking behaviors.

A second factor, *social cost*, addresses the consequences involved when a recruit takes part in information-seeking activities. As Miller and Jablin (1991) described, "All communication involves costs or social exchange" (p. 95). In turn, newcomers often consider the costs and rewards of their actions when evaluating the best method to gain organizational information. The third variable, *information sources*, lays out the suppliers of organizational information. A newcomer can solicit information from management, supervisors, co-workers, clients, and other organization contacts, or through the job task itself.

A fourth influence of information-seeking behavior is *information content*, in which case the actual subject material sought by the newcomer affects the information-seeking behavior selected. The three main types of content agreed upon by researchers are referent (information about how to do certain job functions), appraisal (information about how successful the recruit is in completing job functions), and relational (information about the recruits' affiliations with other organizational members). The final factor, *individual differences and contextual factors*, addresses how newcomers' personalities and orientations as well as unique organizational situations influence the

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manner in which recruits seek information. In all, as a result of their heightened awareness and mindfulness to differences between old organizational roles and new job experiences and expectations, newcomers employ information-seeking tactics to reduce role conflict and uncertainty and gain organizational clarity. Furthermore, as Miller and Jablin (1991) described:

The manner in which newcomers seek information is likely to be shaped by their level of uncertainty about organizational events, the social costs inherent in information seeking, differences among newcomers with respect to personality and past work experiences, and contextual factors associated with the organizational setting. (p. 101)

Most organizational researchers agree that a variety of information seeking tactics often warrant greater organizational understanding and lower role ambiguity for newcomers. In this regard, the utilization of information-seeking behaviors clearly plays a large role in the encounter/entry phase. From this perspective, Miller and Jablin (1991) labeled and explained seven deliberate efforts recruits make to elicit information in their work: *overt questions*, *indirect questions*, *third party*, *testing limits*, *disguising conversation*, *observance*, and *surveillance*. The first, *overt questions*, is the most open and forthcoming tactic and occurs with newcomers seek information through direct methods. New hires using this approach often are comfortable with both the source and the information requested. *Indirect questions*, a second tactic, occurs when the newcomer gathers information through roundabout means such as non-interrogative questions or hinting, thus allowing the recruits to save face for the person they're questioning and for themselves (see Brown & Levinson, 1978).

The third strategy, *third party*, is employed when individuals seek information through secondary means rather than a primary source. According to Miller and Jablin (1991), this tactic is likely selected when information seeking from a primary source is not an option and/or when the newcomer does not consider the source or the subject matter to be approachable. Third party employment is also used as a verification tactic to confirm information previously gathered in more straightforward approaches. Fourth, *testing limits* occurs when recruits construct "situations to which information targets must respond" (Miller & Jablin, 1991, p. 106). Recruits monitor source responses toward certain actions in an attempt to gauge organizational attitudes. Specific strategies employed when testing limits include *Garfinkeling*, or intentionally breaking organizational rules to define "how salient the rules are to incumbents" (p. 107) to clarify a particular role, and *testing*, which involves deviating from the guidelines in order to define work relationships and organizational precedence.

Disguising conversation, another information-seeking tactic, occurs when newcomers mask their curiosity as casual interaction. Recruits using this tactic usually guide their information targets to discuss specific subjects. The newcomer cannot control the informant's response; however, the informer typically remains unaware that the recruit is attempting to gain organizational insight. A sixth method, *observance*, occurs when newcomers do not intervene in or inquire about the organizational actions around them. Instead, new hires solicit information discreetly by watching and scrutinizing specific actions of others associated with the organization. In turn, the individual may modify his or her attitudes and/or behaviors to replicate the perceived organizational norms found by his or her observations. *Surveillance*, the final tactic Miller and Jablin

(1991) identified, is a monitoring approach that involves recruits employing "their

retrospective sensemaking skills by integrating novel stimuli with past experiences" (p.

112). Here, newcomers mold their cognitive scripts and ascribe meaning to their

organizational situation by mentally weighing the behaviors and attitudes of their current

working environment with previous organizational realities. In summary, new hires use

information-seeking tactics to alleviate role conflict and role ambiguity. Miller and Jablin

(1991) claimed newcomers' selection of certain tactics influences greatly their growth

and development in the organization. As the researchers described, "The most

appropriate information-seeking tactic for [newcomers] in a particular situation will

likely depend upon [their] uncertainty about the information, assessment of the target as

an information source, and beliefs about potential social costs associated with use of each

tactic" (p. 114). Recruits who evaluate properly the current situation, weigh successfully

the costs and rewards of tactics, and employ information-seeking tactics effectively

develop greater role clarity over time.

Numerous researchers have examined sensemaking and information-seeking

behaviors in a variety of organizational contexts. Scholars have explored how

accountants (Morrison, 1993a), clergy (Forward, 1999; Michels, 2012), salespeople

(Dubinsky, Howell, Ingram, & Bellenger, 1986; Menguc, Sang-Lin, & Seigyoung, 2007;

Sager & Johnston, 1989), medical professionals (Clarke, Belden, Koopman, Steege,

Moore, Canfield, & Kim, 2013; Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009), engineers (Aurisicchio,

Bracewell, & Wallace, 2010), helicopter pilots (Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 2006),

university faculty (Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2010), graduate teaching assistants

(Bernardi, 2006; Myers, 1998), choir members (Kramer, 2011) and other newcomers deal

with uncertainty and make sense of their environment by seeking organizational

information. However, the food service community—and restaurant chefs in particular—

is an occupational area that has yet to be explored in terms of organizational

socialization. Furthermore, media representations of socialization processes are also

uncharted territory. This thesis aims to open both of these lines of research.

Reality Television

Just as socialization has permeated organizational communication literature,

reality-based programming has taken over the media landscape and caused a stir in

academia (e.g., Beck, Hellmueller, & Aeschbacher, 2012; Hall, 2009; Murray &

Ouellette, 2009; Nabi, 2007; Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Rose & Wood, 2005). While the

boom in scholarly interest of this television genre has taken place within a relatively

recent time span, the reality-based format is not new to television (Friedman, 2002;

Murray & Ouellette, 2009). Some scholars have argued *Candid Camera* to be the original

reality television show, with its first episode airing in the late 1940s (Clissold, 2004;

McCarthy, 2009). Other academics have discussed the evolution of reality-based

programming over the years as the major influence for the genre's formation. As Murray

and Ouellette (2009) described, the quiz shows of late 1950s, charity and makeover

programs featured in the 1950s and 1960s, prank shows of the 1960s and 1970s, and

daytime talk shows beginning in the early 1990s all feature key elements of reality

programming that paved the way for the current reality genre.

Reality television is an ambiguous, multifaceted, and ever-evolving genre, but

communication and media scholars have taken great strides to give reality television clear

parameters (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Godlewski & Perse, 2010; Nabi, 2007). Reiss and

Wiltz (2004) claimed reality television is separated from other genres of television through its selection of non-professional actors as main characters. Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003) expanded Reiss and Wiltz's (2004) work by defining reality television as "programs that film real people as they live out events in their lives, contrived or otherwise, as they occur" (p. 304). Nabi et al. (2003) also claimed the genre can be characterized by key elements such as (1) the performance of non-professional actors, (2) at least partial filming in the non-actors' work or living environments, (3) non-scripted (or perceived non-scripted) material, (4) a narrative sequence of events, and (5) the principal goal of audience entertainment. Beck, Hellmueller, and Aeschbacher (2012) asserted reality television differs from other genres through its use of documentary elements and focus on "authentic" individuals, settings, predicaments, and accounts. The researchers also aligned with Nabi et al.'s (2003) explanation by describing reality programming as distinct from fictional television through its depiction of ordinary people and its focus on entertainment (Beck et al., 2012).

The exponential growth and increasing complexity of reality television has led communication and media scholars to call for a simplification of the genre by finding commonalities among narrative structures (Krakowiak, Kleck, & Tsay, 2006). In response to this concern, several researchers have identified an array of specialized categories or subgenres for reality television (Nabi, 2007; Murray & Ouellette, 2009; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Upon conducting a factor analysis of twelve reality television shows, Nabi, Stitt, Halford, and Finnerty (2006) found common threads among the programming and identified six reality subgenres: game show/competition (e.g., *The Next Food Network Star*, *Survivor*), romance (e.g., *Rock of Love with Bret Michaels*, *Flavor of*

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Love), reality-drama (e.g., *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Laguna Beach*), informational (e.g., *House Hunters*, *Trading Spaces*), crime/police (e.g., *America's Most Wanted*, *The First 48*), and talent (e.g., *America's Best Dance Crew*, *Last Comic Standing*). Murray and Ouellette (2009) aimed to develop a more substantial conceptualization of reality television and redefine existing subgenres in their work. The research pair expanded Nabi et al.'s (2006) categorizations and classified twelve reality subgenres: the gamedoc (e.g., *Project Runway*, *The Amazing Race*), the dating program (e.g., *The Bachelor*, *Love in the Wild*), the makeover program (e.g., *What Not to Wear*, *How Do I Look?*), the docusoap (e.g., *Jersey Shore*, *Big Rich Texas*), the talent contest (e.g., *So You Think You Can Dance*, *The Voice*), court programs (e.g., *Judge Judy*, *The People's Court*), reality sitcoms (e.g., *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, *The Girls Next Door*), the charity program (e.g., *Secret Millionaire*, *Restaurant Impossible*), lifestyle games (e.g., *The Biggest Loser*, *Supernanny*), investigation shows (e.g., *Cheaters*, *Room Raiders*), miscellaneous celebrity programs (e.g., *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*, *Celebrity Fit Club*), and spoof shows (e.g., *The Joe Schmo Show*, *Disaster Date*). While these subgenres vary greatly, they are all united in the features previously mentioned. Murray and Ouellette (2009) encapsulated the subgenres' overarching cohesion by claiming each specialized category shares the purpose of providing viewers with an "unmediated, voyeuristic, and yet often playful look into what might be called 'entertaining real'" (p. 5).

In addition to defining and compartmentalizing reality television, researchers have also taken several directions in their examination of this vast genre. Communication and media scholars have studied how factors such as perception of realistic content

(Papachrissi & Mendelson, 2007), surveillance (Andrejevic, 2002), self-importance (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004), desire for vindication (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004), voyeurism (Baruh, 2010; Nabi et al., 2003), passivity and desensitization (Javors, 2004) and audience interactivity (Griffen-Foley, 2004) affect viewer enjoyment of reality shows. Other researchers have investigated how gender (Brophy-Baermann, 2005; Cox, 2012; Dubrofsky, 2009; García-Gómez, 2012; Kraidy, 2009), race (Bell-Jordan, 2008; Drew, 2011; Dubrofsky, 2006; Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008; Hopson, 2008; Orbe, 2008; Smith, 2008; Squires, 2010; Wang, 2010), and other demographic variables are communicated on reality television. In addition, several scholars have examined how psychological traits such as perception of body image (Egbert & Belcher, 2012; Frith, Raisborough, & Klein, 2010; Marwick, 2010; Wegenstein & Ruck, 2011), online user behavior (Stefanone & Lackaff, 2009; Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010), and sexual development (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2011) are affected by viewing reality television shows. Finally, researchers have studied the manifestation of behaviors such as antisocial conduct (Wilson, Robinson, & Callister, 2012), conflict (García-Gómez, 2012; Lauzen & Dozier, 2008; Lorenzo-Dus, 2008), and aggression (Coyne, Robinson, & Nelson, 2010) in reality television.

Reality Television as a Guide for Living

Specific to the purpose of this thesis, the reality television genre presents a model of relevant behaviors to its viewers. As Ouellette and Hay (2008) described:

Reality TV circulates informal 'guides for living' that we are all (at times) called upon to learn from and follow. These are not abstract ideologies imposed from above, but highly dispersed and practical techniques for reflecting on, managing,

and improving the multiple dimensions of our personal lives with the resources

available to us. Reality TV has become one of these resources. (p. 2)

In other words, reality television provides life strategies for viewers and offers them ways

to understand, navigate, and respond to certain situations and contexts within their own

realities. In a summary of the research, Lair (2011) noted reality television shows often

address certain life changes experienced by individuals. These transformations can stem

from a continuum of personal issues—such as romantic relationships (e.g., *A Shot at Love
with Tila Tequila*) and lifestyle changes (e.g., *A Makeover Story*)—to larger social

problems, such as socioeconomic class and sexual orientation (i.e., *The Real World*). The

work setting is one particular area in which change can occur. According to Lair (2011),

reality shows can focus on work directly (e.g., *Restaurant: Impossible*) or indirectly (e.g.,

Big Brother).

In line with the rationale of this thesis, some scholars have studied the overt

participation of individuals within an occupational domain on television programs. For

example, researchers have studied televised representations of working roles in fiction

genres vis-à-vis "real-world" occupational happenings (i.e., Gibelman, 2004; Jones,

2003). Other scholars, such as Jubas (2013), Jubas and Knutson (2012, 2013), and

Waldeck (2009), have examined how popular fiction programs socialize individuals into

workplace practices and affect the process of "professional identity construction" (Jubas,

2013, p. 127). Moving specifically into the reality television genre, several researchers

have used the series *The Apprentice* as a focus of organizational analysis. For example,

Kinnick and Parton (2005) investigated how communication competencies play a role in

show participants' success or failure. Hearn (2006) used *The Apprentice* and other

programs to illustrate how the reality television genre narrates and produces social working conditions and identity, and Raducanu, Vitria, and Gatica-Perez (2009) drew on the format of *The Apprentice* to investigate how nonverbal cues are managed in competitive business meetings. Furthermore, Lair (2011) explored *The Apprentice* as "equipment for living" (p. 76) through an outline of the reality show's implied audiences. While *The Apprentice* has undoubtedly been the primary target of workplace study, one other reality show, *Hell's Kitchen*, has also received attention in regard to organizational practices. In addition to the work presented in this thesis, Nilsson (2013) recently examined how instances of violence and hierarchy communicate hegemonic prescriptions of masculinity on *Hell's Kitchen*.

In all, while academics have broken much ground in their studies on reality television and have identified the importance of reality television programming in influencing workplace expectations (Lair, 2011; Waldeck, 2009), research that addresses the manifestation of information-seeking behaviors on reality television shows— particularly in an organizational setting—is deficient, perhaps missing entirely. As noted previously, an organization's socialization process is a major influence in forming a workplace identity. If reality television can influence how individuals behave in and identify with their places of employment, researchers should investigate how reality television participants come to understand their organizational positions and working roles on the show.

This thesis examines socialization practices exhibited by recruits in the reality television series *Hell's Kitchen*. The show's premise rests in eliminating recruits until a successful candidate position remains. The program also eliminates contestants on a set

schedule, and show participants must complete certain tasks to advance in the competition. Therefore, in regard to socialization strategies, the elimination period can be thought of as a type of contest socialization with fixed and sequential elements, as described by Van Maanen (1978). The recruit who succeeds to become a member of the organization can be thought to have transitioned from an organizational insider in the entry phase into an organizational member in the role management or metamorphosis phase.

Because organizational socialization can construct a work reality for employees and reality television shows can serve as anticipatory socialization agents for viewers in a similar work environment, this study aims to launch the discussion of reality television and information-seeking behaviors in organizational entry by addressing the following research questions:

RQ_1: Does a relationship exist between contestants' information-seeking tactics and the source of the information?

RQ_{1A}: How are the information tactics and sources of information related?

RQ_2: Does a relationship exist between the hierarchical level of the information seeker and the hierarchical level of their preferred information source?

RQ_{2A}: How are the hierarchical levels between information seeker and preferred information source related?

RQ_3: Does a relationship exist between the types of information communicated by contestants and the source of the information?

RQ_{3A}: How are the information type and the source of information related?

In summary, Chapter 1 explored the literature relevant to the purpose of thesis.

The foundational tenets of social constructionism and organizational socialization were discussed. In addition, particular focus was directed toward literature on the seminal approaches, socialization strategies, socialization stages, and sensemaking and information seeking in organizational socialization, as well as organizational socialization's connection to reality television. Research questions were proposed regarding the information-seeking methods employed by participants in a workplace-based reality television program. The method for investigating the research questions is presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Selected Text

Hell's Kitchen is a Fox Network reality series that began airing in the United States in 2005. The show features aspiring restaurateurs competing to win the ultimate prize as a head chef in one the top eateries owned by Gordon Ramsay, a world-renowned chef, restaurateur, and public figure in the fine-dining world. The competitors serve as the kitchen staff in Ramsay's Los Angeles restaurant, and a contestant is eliminated each episode based on his or her performance in the Hell's Kitchen dinner service and cooking challenge. This show reflects an ideal format for organizational communication studies because the competitors enter a new organizational environment and must work together as Hell's Kitchen restaurant chefs (peers) under the direction of Executive Chef Ramsay (supervisor) in order to run a functioning eating establishment. As discussed in the literature review, socialization practices saturate both organizations and reality TV, and *Hell's Kitchen* is situated at the crossroads precisely where reality television and organizational socialization meet.

Data Collection

A complete season of *Hell's Kitchen* was examined to answer the research questions. Season selection occurred through the probability sampling technique of simple random sampling. A random sampling method was chosen to ensure research objectivity. The simple random sampling technique was the most appropriate due to the small sample size. At the time this study was conducted, the series had completed eleven

seasons. Each season contained 12 to 22 episodes, with each episode running approximately 45 minutes in length. *Hell's Kitchen* seasons were numbered one through eleven based on their

airdate—one as the earliest season and eleven as the latest season to air—and an online random number generator was used to determine the data set. Season Nine, with a total of 16 episodes, was selected as the study's sample.

Design and Coding Scheme

A content analysis was conducted to examine the information-seeking behaviors communicated in a randomly selected season of the reality television series *Hell's Kitchen*. Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking categories, ranging in their degree of explicitness and preciseness of information sought, were applied in this study to discern the information seeking utterances performed by individuals featured on the show and answer the proposed research questions. As mentioned, information-seeking tactics often warrant greater organizational understanding and lower role ambiguity for newcomers. In this regard, the utilization of information-seeking behaviors plays a large role in the encounter/entry phase. Five of Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking tactics involving spoken utterances, as outlined in the literature review, were applied to the coding scheme: *overt questions* (e.g., "How do I make a correct beef wellington, Chef?"), *indirect questions* (e.g., "It'd be great to figure out the best way to make it to the next round. What do you think?"), *third party* (e.g., "John, do you know why Susan was so upset with me at the last dinner service?"), *testing limits* (e.g., a contestant intentionally undercooking the risotto to see how another peer or Chef Ramsay will react to the mistake), and *disguising conversation* (e.g., "I was so upset by Chef Ramsey's

remarks that it was hard to decipher what even went wrong in the first place"). Two of

Miller and Jablin's (1991) categories—*observation* and *surveillance*—were not

examined. These two tactics are mental processes that are nonverbal in nature and

address information-seeker intent. Judging intent requires an investigation to perform

follow-up interviews with participants. As such, observance and surveillance, which do

not involve utterances that can be identified in a televised situation, were not included in

the current analysis.

Along with labeling information-seeking tactics according to Miller and Jablin's

(1991) categorizations to answer Research Question 1, this thesis also examined certain

variables thought to affect information-seeking tactic selection. First, the type of

information-seeking episode is studied by classifying the information sought as *task

information* or *social information*. In congruence with the work of Miller and Jablin

(1991), Shah (1998), Cross, Rice, and Parker (2001), Xu, Kim, and Kankanhalli (2010),

and others, information type was determined to be task-centered if the newcomer

addressed job-related or organizational needs and socially-centered if the recruit sought

information in regard to cultural, personal, and other nonwork-related concerns.

This thesis also focused on the relational element of organizational information

seeking (see Borgatti, 2001; Miller & Jablin, 1991) by identifying the relationship

between the information seeker and the information holder (e.g., contestant seeking

information from a peer, contestant seeking information from a superior, contestant

seeking information from the televised audience, contestant challenge leader seeking

information from a peer follower, or a contestant follower seeking information from a

peer leader). The *peer* relationship is one in which both individuals share an equal

organizational status. *Subordinate/superior* dyads involve one individual holding a higher organizational status than the other. The *contestant/audience* relationship is displayed when a newcomer seemingly talks with show viewers. The *peer/subordinate* dyad involves one contestant holding a temporary superior status over his or her peer through his or her provisional leadership position, such as challenge leader. The final relationship examined, *subordinate/peer*, occurs when one contestant holding a temporary inferior status to his or her peer through the peer's provisional leadership position. Information seekers are defined as those performing the information-seeking utterances outlined by Miller and Jablin (1991). Informants are the individuals to whom the utterance is directed.

Procedures and Statistical Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the units of analysis were information-seeking utterances (see Austin, 1975; Jefferson, 1972; McLaughlin, 1984; Moerman, 1972; Speier, 1972). As McLaughlin (1984) defined, an utterance is "a spoken proposition: a unit of speech corresponding to a single sentence or independent clause" (p. 278). Expanding McLaughlin's definition, this study classifies information-seeking utterances as verbal cues employed when organizational newcomers search for information in order to make sense of their organization and work identity, create a meaningful organizational reality, and/or dispel uncertainty in their particular work context (see Jablin, 1987; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Van Maanen, 1978). As noted, 16 episodes of *Hell's Kitchen* from Season Nine constituted the sampling unit.

The researcher and a fellow coder selected from the School of Communication and Journalism's research assistants coded a portion of the sample to establish interrater

reliability. The coder was taught to identify the units of analysis in a training session. The researcher defined and explained each coding category and showed brief clips from *Hell's Kitchen* seasons to demonstrate how units might be displayed in the sample. Any disagreements in coding units were settled through negotiation (see Brown, 1988; Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981; Ragan, 1983). Once the coders understood and agreed upon the units of analysis, they were then asked to code an identical 25 percent portion (four episodes) of the sample independently.

A questionnaire was designed for sample coding (see Appendix A). Coders were instructed to complete the questionnaire for each information utterance displayed in order to analyze the variables described previously and establish unitizing reliability. The questionnaire asked coders to identify the individuals involved in the interaction, the information-seeking tactic used by the contestant, the type of information sought by the contestant, and the contestant's hierarchical organizational relationship to the potential informant. The questionnaire was constructed to help determine the most common occurrences of information-seeking tactics, the type of information requested, and the sources of information sought by show members in the season. Information-seeking tactics (Question B) received the following numeric labels, ranging from most direct to least direct: *1*—overt questions, *2*—indirect questions, *3*—third party, *4*—testing limits, and *5*—disguising conversation. Information types (Question C) were coded as *1*—task and *2*—social. The hierarchical organizational relationship (Question D) received the labels of *1*—peer, *2*—superior/subordinate, *3*—contestant/audience, *4*—peer/subordinate, and *5*—subordinate/peer. An "other" option was also included in each

category to ensure that the coding groups were exhaustive. After coding, data was transferred into an Excel sheet for SPSS reliability calculations.

The researcher first conducted a coding trial run to ensure coders reached variable agreement. The coders examined four randomly selected episodes independently, and results were compared. Cohen's kappa for the trial run was below the accepted minimum of 0.80. The researcher conducted additional training with the coder by identifying instances for analysis, employing examples of each variable, and clarifying variable definitions. The researcher and coder had an extensive discussion of their coding differences and again reached a consensus through negotiation. Once agreement was reached, the pair selected another 25 percent coding sample (4 episodes) at random. Cohen's kappa intercoder reliabilities for information tactics displayed, information type, and source relationship in the second run were .840, .931, and .970, respectively. All intercoder reliabilities were above the accepted minimum. The researcher coded all additional episodes in the sample. A Chi Square test for independence was conducted to determine statistical significance and verify if any relationships among variables existed in this study. The results of this analysis follow in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

This thesis analyzed information-seeking utterances spoken by organizational newcomers in a randomly selected season of *Hell's Kitchen*. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to determine if relationships existed between information-seeking tactics and preferred information sources, information seekers and preferred information sources (hierarchical organizational relationship), and information types and preferred information sources. Season Nine was chosen as the study's coding sample, and a total of 442 information-seeking utterances (N = 442) were observed and recorded from the 16 episodes featured in the season.

Information-Seeking Tactic

Information-seeking tactics involve behaviors employed by newcomers to elicit information in their work environment. All five of Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking tactics selected for this study were observed during coding. More than 85 percent of the information-seeking tactics were overt in nature (n = 378). Almost nine percent (n = 38) of the tactics fell into the indirect category. Disguising conversation occurred in 3.4 percent (n = 15) of the information-seeking utterances, and both third party (n = 5) and testing limits (n = 6) were each coded as roughly one percent of the total information-seeking utterances observed.

Hierarchical Organizational Relationship

The hierarchical organizational relationship refers to the association between the organizational newcomer and the person to whom the information seeking-tactic is directed. Almost three-fourths of the information-seeking utterances coded involved organizational newcomers seeking information from their peers (n = 321, 72.6 percent). About eight percent of the utterances took place for both peer leaders to their teammates (n = 36) and teammates to their peer leaders (n = 35). Newcomers looked to the cameras and televised audience for information in 4.5 percent of the total utterances (n = 20), their superiors in 4.1 percent of the total utterances (n = 18), and to other informants such as customers or guest judges in 2.7 percent of the total utterances (n = 12).

Information Type

Information type addresses the information content sought by organizational newcomers. The vast majority of information-seeking utterances were task-oriented (n = 381, 86.2 percent). Almost 14 percent (n = 61) of the utterances were coded as social-oriented.

<center>**Chi Square Analyses**</center>

Chi Square analyses were conducted to determine if relationships existed between the variables described in RQ_1, RQ_2, and RQ_3.

Information-Seeking Tactics and Preferred Information Sources

RQ_1 asked if a relationship existed between information-seeking tactics selected by newcomers and their intended information giver. The Chi Square results for RQ_1 revealed statistically significant results (X^2 (20, N = 442), 77.354, p<.05), thereby permitting the researcher to answer RQ_{1A}, the extended research question (see Table 1

and Appendix B). RQ_{1A} sought to answer how information tactics and sources of information are related. The results of the Chi Square test for independence indicated contestants were most likely to use information-seeking tactics on their peers (n = 321, 72.62 percent) followed by peer leaders seeking information from their peers (n = 36, 8.14 percent), peers seeking information from their peer leaders (n = 35, 7.92 percent), contestants seeking information from the viewer audience (n = 20, 4.52 percent), contestants seeking information from organizational superiors (n = 18, 4.07 percent), and contestants seeking information from customers, guest judges, and other individuals (n = 12, 2.71 percent). In addition, the results of the analysis showed the most common information-seeking tactic performed by contestants on their information sources was overt questioning (n = 378, 85.52 percent), followed by indirect questioning (n = 38, 8.60 percent), disguising conversation (n = 15, 3.39 percent), testing limits (n = 6, 1.36 percent), and third party inquiries (n = 5, 1.13 percent).

Table 1

*Information-Seeking Tactic * Information Source Crosstabulation*

Information-Seeking Tactic	Information Source						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	273	10	17	32	34	12	378
2	31	3	0	3	1	0	38
3	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
4	2	4	0	0	0	0	6
5	11	1	2	1	0	0	15
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

Contestants and Preferred Information Sources

RQ_2 asked if a relationship existed between show contestants' information seeking and their potential information sources. The Chi Square analysis revealed statistically significant support for RQ_2 (X^2 (85, N = 442), 182.280, p<.05), thus allowing

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the researcher to move on to the sub-question (see Table 2 and Appendix B). RQ_{2A}

assessed to whom the newcomers seek for information if a relationship does exist. The

Chi Square crosstabulation showed contestants were more likely to go to their peers for

information rather than any other information sources (n = 321, 72.62 percent), followed

by their peer followers (n = 36, 72.62 percent), their peer leaders (x = 35, 7.92 percent),

and the show audience (n = 20, 4.52 percent). Contestants were least likely to seek

information from their organizational superiors (n = 18, 4.07 percent), and other

information sources not mentioned, such as customers, guest judges, and organizational

outsiders (n = 12, 2.71 percent).

Table 2

*Information Seeker*Information Source Crosstabulation*

			Information Source				
Information Seeker	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
2	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
3	29	1	2	3	0	0	38
4	3	1	1	0	0	1	6
5	75	2	4	4	10	0	95
6	19	1	1	1	3	1	26
7	7	0	0	0	0	1	8
8	20	0	1	0	0	0	21
9	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
10	34	0	3	2	2	0	41
11	10	2	1	0	1	0	14
12	11	1	0	0	2	1	15
13	13	0	1	0	0	0	14
14	18	3	0	0	0	1	22
15	19	1	4	7	8	1	40
16	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
17	19	5	0	7	1	1	33
18	36	0	2	12	8	1	59
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

Information Types and Preferred Information Sources

RQ$_3$ asked if a relationship existed between the types of information sought by

show contestants and their potential information sources. A Chi Square test was

conducted and significant support was found for a relationship between the variables (X^2

(5, N = 442) 16.89, p<.05). RQ$_{3A}$ was assessed based on obtaining statistically significant

results (see Table 3 and Appendix B). The sub-question asked what relationship existed

between the type of information contestants requested and whom the contestants sought

out for information. The Chi Square crosstabulation results suggested contestants were

far more likely to seek task-oriented information (n = 381, 86.20 percent) rather than

social-oriented information (n = 61, 13.80 percent) across all information source

categories, no matter the hierarchical organizational relationship.

Table 3

Information Type*Information Source Crosstabulation

	Information Source						
Information Type	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	271	18	15	35	34	8	381
2	50	0	5	1	1	4	61
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

In brief, the researcher found statistical support for RQ$_1$ (X^2 (20, N = 442), 77.354,

p<.05), RQ$_2$ (X^2 (85, N = 442), 182.280, p<.05), and RQ$_3$ (X^2 (5, N = 442) 16.89, p<.05).

Because relationships were determined to exist among all variables tested, RQ$_{1A}$, RQ$_{2A}$,

and RQ$_{3A}$ were opened for discussion. The sub-research questions asked how the

variables were related if a relationship existed. RQ$_{1A}$ revealed contestants were far more

likely to use overt methods to obtain information (n = 378, 85.52 percent) than to perform

any other information-seeking tactic. The results for RQ_{2A} showed contestants were

significantly more likely to approach their fellow competitors than any other source in the

restaurant (n = 321, 72.76 percent). Finally, the results of RQ_{3A} confirmed contestants

were much more likely to seek information regarding task-oriented concerns (n = 381,

86.20 percent) than social-oriented issues (n = 61, 13.80 percent). The significance of

these results along with the limitations of the current study and suggestions for future

research will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to examine information-seeking behaviors in the entry phase of organizational socialization as depicted on reality television. The researcher sought to determine if relationships existed between newcomer information-seeking tactic selection and the source of information, newcomers and the hierarchical levels of their preferred information source, and the types of information communicated by the newcomers and the source of information on the Fox Network reality show *Hell's Kitchen*. This approach was selected because research has yet to explore how information-seeking behaviors and other information-seeking variables are presented on reality TV. In all, the results of this study produced both significant and interesting findings for scholars seeking to expand the academic intersection of reality television and organizational socialization.

Summary of Study

This study is based in the theoretical approach of social constructionism, which claims one's reality and identity are formed through interactions with the surrounding world. Social constructionists assume that we are creators, producers, and reproducers of the groups and cultures to which we belong. This constructionist view of organizational studies led the researcher to focus the intent of this thesis on organizational socialization. Socialization is the process by which people create a new sense of reality each time they experience an unknown behavioral environment. We can view socialization as a form of

constructing reality, specifically the contextualized reality of work in organizational studies.

In the literature review, the researcher discussed how organizational socialization applies to the socialization process to a specific context by identifying how individuals come to understand their roles in occupational settings. Seminal approaches to organizational socialization were assessed, such as Van Maanen's (1977) theory of social time and space, and Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) assumptions of organizational socialization. These approaches led to the discussion of the strategies of organizational socialization, which are socialization formats that provide a certain pattern in which recruits come to learn about the workplace and their organizational role, as well as the socialization phases, which breaks socialization into specific stages of an individual's development within an organization. In the phases of socialization section, literature addressing the stages of anticipatory socialization, encounter/entry, metamorphosis, and disengagement/exit were discussed. Specific to the purpose of this study were the contest socialization strategy and the encounter/entry period of organizational socialization. The contest strategy is a form of socialization used during the entry phase that occurs when newcomers begin their time in the organization on an equal playing field and progress through the socialization channels based on their performance. The encounter phase, or "breaking-in" period, occurs when a recruit enters the organization and learns the operations of their work environment. Both contest socialization and encounter/entry are key to the socialization experience of *Hell's Kitchen* contestants.

The focus was narrowed further to information seeking and sensemaking in the encounter/entry phase of organizational socialization, the primary concentration of this

thesis. Here, recruits are faced with a variety of inputs and must come to understand and cope with their organizational environment through conscious thought. Miller and Jablin (1991) categorized several variables that influence sensemaking behaviors, such as *uncertainty*, *social cost*, *information content*, and *contextual factors*. These variables affect how new recruits choose to gather information from other individuals. Miller and Jablin (1991) labeled seven deliberate tactics newcomers use to elicit information in their work—*overt questions*, *indirect questions*, *third party*, *testing limits*, *disguising conversation*, *observance*, and *surveillance*.

The literature on reality television was also reviewed. Previous research has argued reality television provides life strategies for viewers and offers them ways to understand, navigate, and respond to certain situations and contexts within their own realities (see Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Lair, 2011). Because reality television can serve as anticipatory socialization agents for viewers in a similar work environment, this study aimed to launch the discussion of reality television and information-seeking behaviors in organizational entry through an analysis of the reality show *Hell's Kitchen*. Using Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking variables and tactics, the following research questions were asked to guide the study:

RQ$_1$: Does a relationship exist between contestants' information-seeking tactics and the source of the information?

RQ$_{1A}$: How are the information tactics and sources of information related?

RQ$_2$: Does a relationship exist between the hierarchical level of the information seeker and the hierarchical level of their preferred information source?

RQ_{2A}: How are the hierarchical levels between information seeker and preferred

information source related?

RQ₃: Does a relationship exist between the types of information communicated by

contestants and the source of the information?

RQ_{3A}: How are the information type and the preferred source of information

related?

All procedures were described in the methods section. A content analysis was

conducted to examine the information-seeking behaviors communicated in a randomly

selected season of *Hell's Kitchen*. The units of analysis for this study were information-

seeking utterances, defined as "spoken proposition[s]…unit[s] of speech corresponding to

a single sentence or independent clause" (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 278) in which

organizational newcomers search for information to dispel uncertainty and make sense of

their organization and work identity. Coders examined 25 percent of the sample (four

episodes) and were asked to complete a questionnaire that identified the individuals

involved in the interaction, the information seeking tactic used by the contestant, the type

of information sought by the contestant, and the contestant's hierarchical organizational

relationship to the potential informant for each information-seeking utterance displayed.

The questionnaire was constructed to help determine the most common occurrences of

information-seeking tactics, the type of information requested, and the sources of

information sought by show members in the season.

After a trial run, Cohen's kappa intercoder reliabilities for information tactics

displayed, information type, and seeker/source relationship were determined to be .840,

.931, and .970, respectively. All intercoder reliabilities were above the accepted

minimum. The researcher coded all additional episodes in the sample. A chi-square test for independence was conducted to determine statistical significance and verify if any relationships among variables existed in this study.

The Chi Square findings were discussed in the results chapter. The researcher found statistical support for RQ_1 (X^2 (20, N = 442), 77.354, p<.05), RQ_2 (X^2 (85, N = 442), 182.280, p<.05), and RQ_3 (X^2 (5, N = 442) 16.89, p<.05). Because relationships were determined to exist among all variables tested, RQ_{1A}, RQ_{2A}, and RQ_{3A} were opened for discussion. The sub-research questions asked how the variables were related if a relationship existed. The statistical findings in RQ_{1A}, RQ_{2A}, and RQ_{3A} along with the significance of these findings are presented in the next section, the summary of findings.

Summary of Findings

RQ_1 and RQ_{1A}

The Chi-Square analyses showed statistically significant results in support of RQ_1, which asked if a relationship existed between the information-seeking tactic selected by newcomers and their intended information giver. Therefore, the results revealed contestants selected certain information-seeking tactics above others based on the person from whom they hoped to garner information.

In analyzing RQ_{1A}, the findings showed contestants performed all types of Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking tactics. However, contestants were far more likely to use overt methods to obtain information (n = 378, 85.52 percent) than to execute any other information-seeking tactic. This finding is supported by previous socialization research, which claims new hires are more likely to use direct information-seeking methods upon entering a new organization or organizational position (see Comer, 1991;

Holder, 1996; Kramer, Callister, & Turban, 1995; Miller, 1989, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1995; Myers, 1998; Teboul, 1994, 1995). Furthermore, this study determined overt questions were the most frequently used tactic in all newcomer-informant relationships. These findings are to be expected based on the time-sensitive nature of the show. *Hell's Kitchen* involves contestants competing in a high-stress, demanding environment, and most of the tasks assigned to contestants are to be done within an allotted time frame. In turn, show contenders are more likely to gather information in the most direct, efficient way possible in order to avoid wasting time.

In addition, *Hell's Kitchen* features contestants running a restaurant kitchen where communication is key. Multiple chefs are handling numerous stations and preparing various dishes that require different cooking times, but the orders for a table must all be complete at the same time. Therefore, the contestants must communicate efficiently and effectively. The competitors should be frank and direct in their information seeking in order to run a successful dinner service. Information sought through indirect means often leads to miscommunication, which may be why the other four tactics—all indirect in nature—constitute less than 15 percent of the entire sample.

RQ$_2$ and RQ$_{2A}$

The Chi-Square analyses also showed statistically significant results in support of RQ$_2$, which sought to examine if a relationship existed between the hierarchical level of the newcomer information seeker and the hierarchical level of the preferred information source. Thus, the results showed contestants' selection of their preferred information givers was influenced by the hierarchical organizational relationship between the individuals.

RQ$_{2A}$ assessed to whom the newcomers go to for information if a relationship does exist. Results showed newcomers seek specific individuals to garner information based on the potential informant's hierarchical placement within the organization. Contestants were significantly more likely to approach their fellow competitors than any other organizational source (n = 321, 72.76 percent). This result supports previous research, which has found peer coworkers to be the primary informants sought by organizational newcomers upon entering an organization (see Comer, 1991; Morrison, 1993b; Sias, 2009; Teboul, 1994).

Furthermore, the competitive element of the reality show may deter contestants from seeking information from their organizational superiors. As Miller and Jablin (1991) described, newcomers' information-seeking behaviors are influenced by contextual factors and social cost. Because *Hell's Kitchen* contestants face elimination weekly and must prove their culinary expertise in each challenge and dinner service, the reality TV newcomers may not wish to poke Chef Ramsay, the proverbial bear. As previous research has noted, persistently questioning organizational superiors may cause those higher on the organizational ladder to perceive the newcomer as incompetent and insecure (e.g., Miller & Jablin, 1991; Sias, 2009). *Hell's Kitchen* calls for competing chefs to be confident and knowledgeable in their work, and any perceived traits that do not meet these standards lead to competitors being eliminated. Therefore, contestants may perceive less risk in directing their questions to their fellow contestants or other organizational members compared to their Hell's Kitchen superiors. This contextual factor helps explain why contestants were more likely to approach their fellow peers, peer challenge leaders, peer challenge followers, and even the televised audience before they

sought a Hell's Kitchen restaurant superior for information, which only constituted 4.07 percent (n = 18) of all information sources.

RQ$_3$ and RQ$_{3A}$

RQ$_3$ asked if a relationship existed between the information type and information source. A Chi Square test for independence was conducted and significance was found in support of a relationship between the variables. Therefore, the statistical evidence shows that the person from whom they hoped to garner information influenced the type of information sought by show contestants.

Contestants were much more likely to seek information regarding task-oriented issues (n = 381, 86.20 percent) than social-oriented issues (n = 61, 13.80 percent). This finding is consistent with previous research, which claims new hires are more likely to seek task or technical-oriented information during organizational entry (e.g., Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993b, 1995; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Sias, 2009; Teboul, 1994). Furthermore, the contextual element of the show should also be considered. *Hell's Kitchen* contestants enter the competition in hope of winning a head chef position at BLT Steak in New York City. Most contestants admit readily they are not on the show to make friends—they are on *Hell's Kitchen* with an end goal in mind. Thus, most of the contenders' communication and information-seeking behaviors center around the show challenges, dinner services, and other tasks at hand rather than on social matters.

Overall Conclusions

In all, the findings in each of these research questions provide interesting insights into the mass media as a socializing agent. The media is a pervasive and inescapable part of everyday life. With the average Americans predicted to consume more than 15.5 hours

of traditional and nontraditional media per day by 2015 (Scott, 2013), verbal and nonverbal mass-mediated messages saturate American culture and, in turn, affect our shared perceptions. As Arnett (1995) noted, media can self-socialize individuals into certain modes of being. The media has the power to influence our values, beliefs, and choices in day-to-day operations. Thus, understanding various outlets through which the media socialize the American public, including reality television, may reveal much about the ways in which individuals construct their organizational realities.

As mentioned in the literature review, reality TV can serve as a "guide for living" for its audience (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 2). The reality television format provides life strategies for its viewers and offers them ways to understand, navigate, and respond to certain situations and contexts within their own realities. As evidenced in previous research findings and the results of this thesis, parallels do exist between actual organizational events and what is displayed on reality television. Therefore, reality television may serve as an outlet for self-socialization, particularly as a form of organizational anticipatory socialization for individuals planning to enter a similar work environment.

As discussed, an organization's socialization process is a major influence in forming workplace identity. If reality television can influence how individuals behave in and identify with their places of employment, researchers should investigate how reality television participants come to understand their organizational positions and working roles on organizational reality shows such as *Hell's Kitchen*. A critical component of organizational socialization is information-seeking behaviors performed by organizational newcomers. Information seeking is key to organizational learning and

imperative to the process of shaping new employees into accepted organizational members. As Miller and Jablin (1991) explained, information seeking is a means through which recruits actively attempt to garner organizational insight to better understand their new work environment. However, while previous research has acknowledged reality television as a narrative structure and productive force for work conditions (Hearn, 2006) as well as an influencing agent for organizational expectations (Lair, 2011; Waldeck, 2009), researchers have yet to identify how organizational socialization practices like information seeking occur in reality television.

This thesis contributes important findings to organizational communication and media literature by breaking ground in identifying how information-seeking components are communicated on organization-based reality television. In short, this study shows newcomers act cooperatively to construct their new realities even in the most competitive of circumstances. *Hell's Kitchen* contestants not only sought information, but they also used certain tactics, approached specific organizational members, and looked for particular types of information in their quest for organizational knowledge and role management. Each of these information-seeking elements influenced how show contestants came to understand their position in the Hell's Kitchen restaurant. In turn, organizational communication and media scholars can use this thesis as a guide for connecting organizational socialization to reality television, particularly in terms of how reality television viewers in similar working conditions may come to understand their organizational roles through vicarious learning.

Specifically, this study can provide insights into elements of anticipatory socialization that have been heretofore relatively unexplored from newcomers'

perspectives. For example, the information-seeking strategies presented on *Hell's Kitchen* might influence the image audience members will have on their actual working roles, particularly if they are newcomers in the food service industry. As discussed in the literature review, Louis (1980) claimed recruits experience surprise and sensemaking upon entering a new organization. Surprise signifies the difference between the recruit's expectations formed during anticipatory socialization and the reality of the new workplace, while sensemaking allows the individual to predict organizational patterns and outcomes through coping behaviors. Show viewers entering, or on the verge of entering, a restaurant or similar work environment might view the reality show and experience dissonance between their work expectations and what occurs on *Hell's Kitchen*. In turn, viewers might make sense of what they are viewing by altering their own organizational expectations to match information-seeking behaviors communicated on *Hell's Kitchen*. In other words, the information-seeking tactics displayed on the show could affect viewers' expectations in a way that contributes to surprise and/or to sensemaking processes in their actual work environment.

Furthermore, show viewers might attempt to normalize their work environment based on the televised information-seeking displays on *Hell's Kitchen.* As Van Maanen (1977) described, recruits normalize the setting in their new organization by developing an orientation and behavioral terrain to guide them in understanding acceptable organizational behavior. In order to make sense of their positions and reduce organizational uncertainty, *Hell's Kitchen* contestants began to ask questions and gather information most often through overt methods, which show contestants found to be an acceptable way to acquire information. Therefore, *Hell's Kitchen* competitors primarily

normalized the restaurant environment through straightforward information-seeking

measures. On the other hand, contestants also learned other information-seeking tactics

did not meet organizational standards. For example, show contestants who performed the

testing limits tactic received negative feedback from their informants. Thus, some

information-seeking tactics (e.g., overt questions) became common routine while other

practices (e.g., testing limits) were not employed because they fell outside the norm and

consequences were involved. In a similar fashion, show viewers may attempt to regulate

their actual places of employment by enacting information-seeking behaviors that seemed

to normalize the work environment for *Hell's Kitchen* contestants.

In addition to helping newcomers' expectations, organizations can also benefit

from the results of this study. For instance, this thesis reveals to whom newcomers go for

information. Organizations might find value in making sure these information sources are

trained in a way that provides unity of purpose and unity of direction. Mixed messages do

little to assist with socialization, so the emphasis on clear, consistent messages from

valued sources could be another implication derived from this study.

Moreover, this thesis illuminates the type of information recruits seek during the

encounter/entry phase of organizational socialization. In the case of *Hell's Kitchen*,

contestants were far more likely to garner information on task-related topics than

relationship-oriented concerns. Show contestants seemed more focused on completing the

job at hand rather than developing and fostering organizational relationships with

coworkers, management, and such. In actuality, organizational members should also

build relationships and express social concerns in order to assimilate fully into their

respective places of employment. Culinary organizations and restaurant management

should explore the types of communication within their organizations and perhaps open the lines of communication so their employees feel comfortable discussing more personal, relational concerns. In all, if indeed these information-seeking behaviors are being used as a part of anticipatory socialization, then culinary schools and restaurants may need to address expectations that have been created by this show. All restaurants will not have the same culture as *Hell's Kitchen*, so some assessment and retraining may be warranted.

In addition, while this thesis focuses largely on the encounter phase of organizational socialization, the findings of this study are not limited entirely to current employees in the anticipatory or encounter phases of their employment. Individuals watching *Hell's Kitchen* will likely be in various phases of socialization within their current organizational realities. Audience members in other organizational socialization stages, such as metamorphosis and even organizational exit, are also susceptible to the influence of the show in their actual work environments. Viewers may watch the show and in turn resocialize themselves into their current organizational context based on the communicative patterns they observe on *Hell's Kitchen.*

Furthermore, this study can also help researchers understand *Hell's Kitchen* as a socializing agent beyond the scope of newcomers and organizations in a similar culinary context. This thesis may also have implications for how customers are socialized into their restaurant expectations. People expect the businesses they encounter to operate in a certain fashion. In turn, restaurant patrons who view *Hell's Kitchen* might expect the kitchens of the dining establishments they frequent to function in a similar manner. Thus, no matter the individual's background or professional orientation, *Hell's Kitchen* viewers

cannot escape the socialization of this show. In other words, audience members have the potential to be influenced by *Hell's Kitchen* despite their organizational identity or place of employment.

Finally, scholarship should recognize the parameters of *Hell's Kitchen* are not considered to be typical for most organizations. Individuals or institutions potentially influenced by the show should be aware the televised events on *Hell's Kitchen* might not mirror the communicative behaviors of other food-service organizations. The type of person who would self-select to appear on *Hell's Kitchen* is likely not typical of the average person entering the restaurant field. This observation is compounded by the further intervention of the show's producers in selecting persons who are likely to be the most compelling to watch. Thus, viewers may be using the experiences of these non-representative contestants to shape their expectations of what they as newcomers might encounter upon entering the organization.

In addition, the information-seeking behaviors communicated on *Hell's Kitchen* might not be characteristic of the information-seeking patterns found in other restaurants based on the organizational socialization strategy enacted on the show. As Van Maanen (1978) highlighted, organizational socialization strategies are formats used by workplaces that move employees through the socialization process and provide a certain pattern in which recruits come to learn about the workplace and their organizational role. *Hell's Kitchen* follows a contest format, which highlights the competition element within the encounter phase. During contest socialization, as seen on the show, recruits enter the organization on equal footing and progress through the socialization channels based on individual performance. Because *Hell's Kitchen* contestants face elimination weekly and

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must prove and improve their culinary talents throughout the competition, the information-seeking behaviors employed by show contestants will likely vary from individuals in the culinary field experiencing a different socialization strategy. For example, testing limits seems to be particularly perilous in an elimination format such as that used in *Hell's Kitchen*. However, a chef opting to test the limits in an investiture scenario might be regarded as confident and fearless and, in turn, be praised for his or her bold move. In any case, organizational socialization strategies likely influence the information-seeking behaviors enacted by organizational newcomers both on the show and in other organizational contexts. Therefore, individuals socialized into organizations through other strategic means may not seek information using the same methods as *Hell's Kitchen* contestants and should be aware that differences between their realities and the reality of the show competitors may not align. Next, study limitations and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Limitations

Some limitations are present in the study. First, the methodology of this thesis could be strengthened. Only one season of *Hell's Kitchen* was coded. While Season Nine was selected at random, the sample may not be an accurate reflection of the series as a whole. Depictions of newcomer information seeking may vary from season to season. Increasing the sample size to include more *Hell's Kitchen* seasons may have increased the reliability and validity of this study.

Furthermore, the researcher did not examine two of Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking categories, *observance* and *surveillance*. Both categories were beyond the scope of this study. Observance and surveillance might have been significant

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forms of contestant information seeking on the show. However, these two tactics are nonverbal mental processes that address information-seeker intent. As mentioned, judging intent without being able to perform follow-up interviews with participants is ill advised. The categories were eliminated because follow-up interviews were not a feasible option.

Even so, as Miller and Jablin (1991) discussed, employees may turn to indirect forms of information seeking (including nonverbal behaviors) when social costs increase in their work environment. For example, *Hell's Kitchen* contestants may seek information through covert methods in order to avoid perceptions of ineptitude or insecurity in their work. Therefore, removing nonverbal components from the study may leave an incomplete understanding of newcomer information seeking on the reality show.

In addition to the methodological issues mentioned, limitations were also found in the choice of media examined. *Hell's Kitchen* fits communication scholars' understanding of an organization. The show presents an operating restaurant in which show contestants must work together, under the supervision of Chef Ramsay, to complete challenges and perform successful dinner services. However, *Hell's Kitchen* and other similar reality shows may not be accurate reflections of organizational life and real-world experiences. Television can serve as a socializing agent for its viewers, but televised events are edited and dramatized to increase viewership and show ratings. In turn, the information-seeking behaviors displayed on *Hell's Kitchen* may not be true to activities in a similar organizational context.

Finally, the production and editing of *Hell's Kitchen* also serve as limitations for this study. All information-seeking tactics used by contestants may not be aired.

Utterances may also be skewed based on piecing together various scenes to resemble a continuous flow of events. As a result, the information seeking utterances displayed might not be a complete and accurate reflection of what took place when competitors were working as the Hell's Kitchen restaurant staff.

Future Research

The results of this thesis lend themselves to additional study. For example, future research could examine the nonverbal components of information seeking, particularly Miller and Jablin's (1991) *observance* and *surveillance* information-seeking tactics, in organization-based reality television shows. This study could provide a more complete understanding of show contestants' information-seeking behaviors on *Hell's Kitchen* or other similar programs.

Another area for future research would be to examine if and how these information-seeking tactics change over time using a longitudinal approach. Research in organization communication has shown employees are more likely to garner information through overt methods upon initially entering the organization but opt to perform more covert information seeking as their time in the organization progresses (Miller & Jablin, 1991). However, indirect questions may not be particularly effective given the time-pressure immediacy and nature of the work in a high-volume restaurant. Despite contextual factors surrounding the premise of the show that might make indirect information seeking somewhat disadvantageous, future researchers could investigate if the observed transformation from overt to indirect information seeking holds true for *Hell's Kitchen*.

Scholars may also be interested in comparing the information-seeking behaviors performed by *Hell's Kitchen* finalists to contestants eliminated in earlier rounds. Research could determine if differences exist in the information-seeking tactics selected, types of information sought, and the preferred information sources. The research could also ascertain if some information-seeking methods were more successful than others. These topics may help organizational communication scholars understand the potential benefits and consequences of certain information-seeking behaviors. Future researchers may also wish to compare information seeking on *Hell's Kitchen* to other organization-based reality shows or organization-based shows across various genres to see if any differences in newcomer information seeking arise.

Furthermore, while this study only describes the portrayal of newcomer information-seeking behaviors on reality TV, scholars may wish to investigate if organizations portrayed on reality television provide a reasonable reflection of newcomer information-seeking behaviors in actual organizations. Lauzen and Dozier (2008) and other media scholars claim television depictions do not reflect reality, so it would be interesting to conduct a comparison analysis that examines the similarities and differences in the information-seeking tactics performed by organizational newcomers in an actual restaurant versus the information-seeking behaviors depicted on *Hell's Kitchen*.

Finally, several communication scholars have used Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory to explain how the media affects audience behavior (Jin, 2006; Nelson & Fife, 2008). While most reality television consumers do not view the reality genre as entirely authentic, they do perceive shows falling into the reality realm to be more accurate than shows in other genres (Papachrissi & Mendelson, 2007). Viewers may also

identify more with reality television personalities because the lives of those featured on reality shows are often patterned in a relatable fashion (Nabi et al., 2003; Papachrissi & Mendelson, 2007). In turn, viewers' character identification may transform into character emulation (Nelson & Fife, 2008; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Scholars interested in communication and media studies can expand on this research by using experimental or survey methods to determine the effect organizational reality shows such as *Hell's Kitchen* have on viewers' information-seeking performance in their actual work environments. Another possible study would be to determine how much viewing the program has on the anticipatory socialization of possible employees in terms of the realism and congruence of their expectations regarding the workplace. In all, future researchers can draw from this investigation as they continue to broaden and deepen our understanding of reality construction using organizational information-seeking behavior on reality television.

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APPENDIX A: CODEBOOK

Unit of Analysis

This content analysis will examine all information-seeking utterances communicated in a randomly selected season of the reality television series *Hell's Kitchen*. Information-seeking utterances are defined as verbal cues employed when organizational newcomers search for information in order to make sense of their organization and work identity, create a meaningful organizational reality, and/or dispel uncertainty in their particular work context (see Jablin, 1987; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Van Maanen, 1978).

Coding Elements

Coders will complete a questionnaire—the coding instrument for this thesis—for each instance a *Hell's Kitchen* contestant communicates an information-seeking utterance. Because this study focuses on the socialization of organizational newcomers in the encounter/entry phase, coders will identify only the information-seeking utterances communicated by reality show *contestants*. For example, an information-seeking behavior performed by Chef Ramsey (veteran organizational member) to a show contestant (organizational newcomer) would not be coded in this study. Coders completing the questionnaire provided will examine the following elements.

Information-Seeking Tactics

Five of Miller and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking categories will be applied

in this coding scheme to discern the information-seeking utterances used by

organizational newcomers (the contestants) featured on *Hell's Kitchen*. Two tactics

defined by Miller and Jablin—*observation* and *surveillance*—will not be examined.

These categories are nonverbal in nature and thus do not involve utterances. As such,

these types of information seeking behaviors fall beyond the scope of this thesis. Miller

and Jablin's (1991) information-seeking tactics defined below range in their degree of

explicitness and preciseness of information sought:

1. *Overt questions*: information-seeking utterance that involves a

   straightforward request for information (e.g., "How do I make a correct

   beef wellington, Chef?")

2. *Indirect questions*: information-seeking utterance that occurs when a

   newcomer gathers information through roundabout means, such as non-

   interrogative questions or hinting (e.g., "It'd be great to figure out the best

   way to make it to the next round. What do you think?")

3. *Third party*: information-seeking utterance employed when individuals

   seek information through secondary means rather than a primary source

   (e.g., "John, do you know why Susan was so upset with me at the last

   dinner service?")

4. *Testing limits*: information-seeking utterance in which recruits place the

   respondent in a situation that demands an answer (e.g., a contestant

intentionally undercooking the risotto to see how another peer will react to the mistake)

5. *Disguising conversation*: information-seeking utterance occurring when newcomers mask their curiosity as casual interaction and typically guide their information targets to discuss specific subjects (e.g., "I was so upset by Chef Ramsey's remarks that it was hard to decipher what even went wrong in the first place")

Information Type

This thesis also examines types of information-seeking utterances. Information types are classified as *task information* or *social information*. In congruence with the work of Miller and Jablin (1991), Shah (1998), Cross, Rice, and Parker (2001), Xu, Kim, and Kankanhalli (2010), and others, information type is determined to be task-centered if the newcomer addresses job-related or organizational needs (e.g., "How do you make parmesan risotto?") and socially-centered if the recruit seeks information in regard to cultural, personal, and other nonwork-related concerns (e.g., "Is Bonnie mad at me?").

Hierarchical Organizational Relationship

This study also focuses on the hierarchical relational element of organizational information seeking (see Borgatti, 2001; Miller & Jablin, 1991) by identifying the relationship between the information seeker and the information holder. Coders will identify the following relationships when newcomer information-seeking behaviors are displayed:

1. *Peer*: a relationship in which both individuals share an equal organizational status (e.g., two contestants)

2. *Subordinate/superior*: a relationship in which one individual holds a higher organizational status than the other (e.g., a contestant and a sous chef)

3. *Contestant/audience*: a relationship in which the newcomer seemingly talks with show viewers (e.g., a contestant expressing information-seeking behaviors in an interview-like setting to the televised audience)

4. *Peer/subordinate*: a relationship in which one contestant temporarily holds a superior status over his or her peer through his or her provisional leadership position (e.g., a dinner service team leader seeking information from a contestant following his or her instructions)

5. *Subordinate/peer*: a relationship in which one contestant temporarily holds an inferior status to his or her peer through the peer's provisional leadership position (e.g., a contestant seeking information from another contestant selected as the team leader for a challenge)

Coding Instrument

Please complete one questionnaire for **each information-seeking utterance communicated by show contestants. If an "other" option is selected, describe the coded element to the best of your ability.*

Season:
Episode Number:
Approximate Time: _____ min _____ sec
Character(s) in the information-seeking interaction: _____

   A. Which contestant is seeking information?
       1. Amanda
       2. Brendan
       3. Carrie
       4. Chino
       5. Elise
       6. Elizabeth
       7. Gina
       8. Jamie
       9. Jason
      10. Jennifer
      11. Jonathon
      12. Krupa
      13. Monterray
      14. Natalie
      15. Paul
      16. Steven
      17. Tommy
      18. Will
      19. Other _____

   B. Which information-seeking tactic is the contestant employing?
       1. Overt questions
       2. Indirect questions
       3. Third party
       4. Testing limits
       5. Disguising conversation
       6. Other _____

   C. What type of information is the contestant seeking?
       1. Task
       2. Social
       3. Other _____

D. What is the hierarchical relationship between the information seeker and information giver?
    1. Peer
    2. Subordinate/superior
    3. Contestant/audience
    4. Peer/subordinate
    5. Subordinate/peer
    6. Other _____

APPENDIX B: TABLES

Table 1

*Information-Seeking Tactic * Information Source Crosstabulation*

Information-Seeking Tactic	Information Source						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	273	10	17	32	34	12	378
2	31	3	0	3	1	0	38
3	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
4	2	4	0	0	0	0	6
5	11	1	2	1	0	0	15
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

RQ$_1$ Crosstabulation Key

Information-Seeking Tactic	Information Source
1 = Overt questions	1 = Peer
2 = Indirect questions	2 = Superior
3 = Third party	3 = Televised audience
4 = Testing limits	4 = Peer subordinate
5 = Disguising conversation	5 = Peer leader
	6 = Other

RQ$_1$ Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	77.354	20	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.931	20	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.319	1	.128
N of Valid Cases	442		

Table 2

Information Seeker*Information Source Crosstabulation

	Information Source						
Information Seeker	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
2	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
3	29	1	2	3	0	0	38
4	3	1	1	0	0	1	6
5	75	2	4	4	10	0	95
6	19	1	1	1	3	1	26
7	7	0	0	0	0	1	8
8	20	0	1	0	0	0	21
9	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
10	34	0	3	2	2	0	41
11	10	2	1	0	1	0	14
12	11	1	0	0	2	1	15
13	13	0	1	0	0	0	14
14	18	3	0	0	0	1	22
15	19	1	4	7	8	1	40
16	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
17	19	5	0	7	1	1	33
18	36	0	2	12	8	1	59
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

RQ₂ Crosstabulation Key

Information Seeker	Information Source
1 = Amanda	1 = Peer
2 = Brendan	2 = Superior
3 = Carrie	3 = Televised audience
4 = Chino	4 = Peer subordinate
5 = Elise	5 = Peer leader
6 = Elizabeth	6 = Other
7 = Gina	
8 = Jamie	
9 = Jason	
10 = Jennifer	
11 = Jonathon	
12 = Krupa	
13 = Monterray	
14 = Natalie	
15 = Paul	
16 = Steven	
17 = Tommy	
18 = Will	

RQ₂ Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	182.280	85	.000
Likelihood Ratio	146.770	85	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.546	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	442		

Table 3

Information Type*Information Source Crosstabulation

	Information Source						
Information Type	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	271	18	15	35	34	8	381
2	50	0	5	1	1	4	61
Total	321	18	20	36	35	12	442

RQ₃ Crosstabulation Key

Information Type	Information Source
1 = Task	1 = Peer
2 = Social	2 = Superior
	3 = Televised audience
	4 = Peer subordinate
	5 = Peer leader
	6 = Other

RQ₃ Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.890	5	.005
Likelihood Ratio	21.073	5	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.564	1	.211
N of Valid Cases	442		