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What Happens Before Full-Time Employment? Internships as a Mechanism of Anticipatory Socialization

Stephanie L. Dailey

Although internships help prospective employees develop realistic expectations (Barnett, 2012), research has yet to explore how internships shape full-time employees' organizational and vocational socialization experiences. To understand the impact of internships, semistructured interview and questionnaire data were collected over 15 months (before internships, after internships, and upon full-time employment). Results show that internships may provide more realistic perceptions than traditional means of anticipatory socialization, like recruitment or vocational messages. Whereas previous research has described anticipatory socialization as beneficial for prospective employees, this study reveals how internships can deter prospective employees from certain future full-time positions.

Keywords: Internships; Organizational Anticipatory Socialization; Organizational Identification; Socialization

Socialization “has become increasingly critical to organizational communication over the last few decades” because people now join, participate in, and leave multiple jobs

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and organizations throughout their lifetime of employment (Kramer & Miller, 2013, p. 525). Although studies have explored communication extensively throughout the socialization process (e.g., Buzzanell, Berkelaar, & Kisselburgh, 2011; Myers, Jahn, Gailliard, & Stoltzfus, 2011), scholars have yet to study the communicative role internships play in the course of securing full-time positions.

Research has shown that prior experiences, like recruitment activities and the messages people receive as children, socialize us into organizations and occupations (e.g., Buzzanell et al., 2011; Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Lucas, 2011; Myers et al., 2011). However, it is not clear how internships—a prevailing practice for most college-educated people entering the workforce today (NACE, 2014)—contribute to organizational and vocational socialization. Although empirical research surrounding internships has explored socialization *within* internships (e.g., viewing the internship as a microcosm of the entire socialization process) (Garavan & Murphy, 2001; Staton-Spicer & Darling, 1986), people complete internships to train and prepare for full-time jobs. In light of this growing trend, socialization scholarship must reconceptualize socialization to consider the impact of internships on future employment. This study investigates how and to what extent internships serve as a form of anticipatory socialization rather than just their own microcosm of socialization.

Scholars affirm the central role of communication during anticipatory socialization, suggesting that the “content and accuracy of preentry expectations have important postentry consequences as members’ experience ‘shock’ and ‘surprise’” (Scott & Myers, 2010, p. 94). This study seeks to understand prior experiences by examining anticipatory socialization, the time before people enter organizations as full-time employees. By investigating how interns learn about and identify with organizations, this study challenges our understanding of anticipatory socialization and our assumptions about full-time employees as uncertain newcomers.

THE GROWING TREND OF INTERNSHIPS

Internships have recently soared in popularity. Whereas less than 3% of students interned in 1980 (Perlin, 2011), current estimates of internship participation are now 61% (NACE, 2014), making the experience an ostensible “rite of passage for students” (Coco, 2000, p. 41). Despite a growing number of internships, scholars have yet to theoretically explore how internships foster socialization.

Scholarly research investigating internships falls into two main categories. First, studies have identified several benefits of internships. Internships help students decide on careers (Coco, 2000; D’Abate, 2010; Taylor, 1988), and research shows that companies offer interns more jobs and higher salaries (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Coco, 2000; Taylor, 1988). Second, scholars have examined sources of intern satisfaction (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010), including autonomy, skill variety, and work environment that promote positive experiences (D’Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009; Feldman & Weitz, 1990). Yet, the goal of internships is to acquire knowledge and

skills for future vocations or organizations, so this study explores internships as a mechanism of socialization.

INTERNSHIPS AS A MECHANISM OF SOCIALIZATION

A handful of studies have used socialization as a framework to determine how people adapt to internships (Garavan & Murphy, 2001; Staton-Spicer & Darling, 1986). For example, Garavan and Murphy (2001) explained the anticipatory, encounter, and metamorphosis stages of internships, and Staton-Spicer and Darling (1986) examined communication in preservice teacher socialization. Focused on socialization *within* internships, researchers have viewed the internship as a microcosm of the entire socialization process without addressing the anticipatory socialization that accompanies preparation for future full-time employment.

Internships as Anticipatory Socialization

Socialization is the primary process by which people “learn the ropes” of an organization and adapt to new roles within it (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Developmental models conceptualize the socialization process in four stages: anticipatory socialization, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit (Jablin, 2001). During anticipatory socialization, people “form expectations about careers, jobs, and organizations prior to entering them” (Jablin, 2001, p. 262). According to Jablin (2001), anticipatory socialization involves organizational anticipatory socialization, during which job seekers and employers learn and develop expectations about one another, and vocational anticipatory socialization, during which people learn about particular roles.

Internships serve as anticipatory socialization for full-time employment because they teach potential future full-time employees about a prospective organization, vocation, or role (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). According to Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, and Edwards (2000), “Internships represent anticipatory socialization because individuals are using past experiences to anticipate current organizational practices” (p. 1078). Because they prepare and train prospective employees for entering organizations and various career paths full-time, internships serve as prior organizational and vocational experiences.

Although interns “enter” and work “in” organizations, internships embody anticipatory socialization (rather than encounter or metamorphosis stages) because companies do not regard interns as full-fledged members. Organizations view interns as hopeful hires (Coco, 2000), offering ample opportunities for vocational and organizational socialization through special training, mentoring, and more (Garavan & Murphy, 2001). Furthermore, interns differ from part-time employees or volunteers because interns anticipate working full-time in a “real job” after their internship (Clair, 1996). Because internships serve as anticipatory socialization for full-time employment, it is important to understand how these experiences influence interns’ socialization experiences upon full-time employment.

The Impact of Internships on Full-Time Employment

Although blog posts, films, and memes commonly categorize interns' responsibilities as menially brewing coffee, copying documents, and running errands (Buffum, 2012), studies have suggested that interns learn information that may influence subsequent work experiences (Barnett, 2012). Three streams of literature explain the impact internships may have on full-time employment. Research suggests relationships between communication and identification during anticipatory socialization as well as the relationship between internships and organizational encounters.

Communication during Anticipatory Socialization

Organizational anticipatory socialization research focuses on management's efforts to communicate information during recruitment (for reviews, see Breough, 2008) and describes how people and organizations evaluate their compatibility through person-organization fit (e.g., Gardner, Reithel, Cogliser, Walumbwa, & Foley, 2012). Recently, studies have revealed how communication technologies have changed recruitment practices (e.g., Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014) and job seeker perceptions (e.g., Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Short, 2011).

Whereas the organizational socialization literature focuses heavily on recruitment, vocational anticipatory socialization research concentrates on how career perceptions develop during adolescence (Jablin, 2001; Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Lucas, 2011). For example, Myers and colleagues (2011) confirmed teens' hands-on activities as "one of the most important determinants of future career interests" (p. 107). Recently, Berkelaar (2013) called for research to explore experiences beyond recruitment and childhood experiences to provide a more comprehensive picture of subsequent socialization stages. Although research has shown that internships help prospective employees develop more realistic expectations (Barnett, 2012), this study looks at the nature and source of socializing messages during internships.

RQ1: To what extent and in what manner do internships help potential future full-time employees learn about and adapt to organizations and vocations?

Identification during Internships

A great deal of theoretical (e.g., Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998) and empirical (e.g., Stephens & Dailey, 2012) work has established organizational identification, "the perception of oneness or belongingness to an organization where the individual defines him- or herself in terms of the organization" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104), as a root construct in organizational communication. However, most research highlights members' identification with their employers, not prospective workers', like interns', identification with the organization.

Although most literature concentrates on full-time employees, scholarship demonstrates the need to explore identification before organizational encounter. For example, Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) suggest that prospective employees are

drawn to organizations that align with their self-concept, and research has shown that previous experiences predispose newcomer identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1995). Activities “provide the context for identifications” (Scott et al., 1998, p. 322); thus, interns may experience identification through working and communicating with organizational employees. Little is known, however, about interns’ identification in comparison to the process of identification for full-time members (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Therefore, this study asks:

RQ2: How is the process of organizational identification during internships similar to or different from the process of identification for full-time, paid employees?

Internships and Organizational Encounter

Kramer and Miller (2013) describe encounter, the time at which employees begin working, as “a context overlaid with uncertainty, sensemaking, and identity development” (p. 525). As a result, the bulk of socialization literature investigates new full-time employees. Yet some newcomers may not experience this uncertainty because internships “allow students to develop new, more realistic work expectations, thus narrowing the work expectation-reality gap” (Barnett, 2012, p. 282). Because Barnett interviewed participants at the end of their internship (not upon full-time employment), she called for future research of a “longitudinal study of interns and their experiences as they enter the workforce” (p. 285). The current study explores the influence of internships on full-time employment.

RQ3: To what extent and in what manner do internships, as a mechanism of socialization, influence new employees’ socialization experiences upon organizational encounter?

METHOD

Over 15 months, semistructured interview and questionnaire data were collected before participants’ internships, after their internships, and when they began working full-time. Internships and full-time experiences were chosen to capture the scope of anticipatory socialization and its effect on organizational encounter.

Participants

Participants were recruited from an internship course at a university in the Southwestern United States and a financial services firm called Contoso Financial.¹ Participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as these two groups were chosen to represent a range of internship experiences, including paid/unpaid, full/part-time, and individual/cohort programs. Contoso Financial participants, for example, were paid, worked 40-hour weeks, and interned as a cohort; participants in the internship course were both paid and unpaid, worked various work schedules, and most were not part of a formal internship program. Thus, the two groups were not chosen for

comparison purposes; rather, participants were recruited from these two groups to cast a wide net. To ensure that internships were accurately represented as a mechanism of anticipatory socialization, participants were asked and had to agree that they could foresee themselves working in their organization full time.

Internship Course

Interns were recruited from a summer communication studies internship course to participate in the study. Students in the course interned in various industries, including advertising, law, banking, and event planning. The same participants completed questionnaires and interviews before and after their internships (see [Table 1](#) for response rates).

Contoso Financial

Participants were also recruited from Contoso Financial, a U.S.-based financial services firm that offers credit cards, banking services, and loans to over 50 million customers. Contoso Financial interns were all paid, full-time interns in a cohort, working in analytics, business technology, finance, marketing, and operations. The same participants completed questionnaires and interviews before and after their internships (see [Table 1](#) for response rates).

To measure the effect of internships on full-time employment, data were collected at Contoso Financial when employees began working full-time. Data were collected only from Contoso Financial full-time employees (and not participants in the University course) to better explore socialization experiences upon organizational encounter in a single organization, as opposed to investigating experiences across different organizations with contrasting onboarding practices, organizational cultures, or training exercises.

Approximately half of the full-time workers had interned at Contoso Financial, and the other participants had interned at different organizations (see [Table 1](#) for response rates). This mix of intern experiences allowed for a comparison of how different internships uniquely influenced organizational encounter.

Qualitative Interviews

In total, 87 semistructured interviews were conducted with interns and full-time employees. An interview guide was generated (see Appendix) that asked respondents to express their perceptions of various topics, including socialization and identification (Kvale, 1996). The interview guide allowed flexibility for probes (Charmaz, 2006) and follow-up questions to help respondents extend information and fill in detail (Weiss, 1994). The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes, were audio-recorded, and later transcribed for analysis, resulting in 671 single-spaced pages of text (294 pages of preinternship text, 163 pages of postinternship text, and 214 pages of full-time employment text).

Table 1 Participant Response Rates

Internship Course Participants' Response Rates					
Preinternship			Postinternship		
	<i>n</i>	Response Rate	<i>n</i>	Response Rate	
Questionnaire	20	91%	20	91%	91%
Interview	21	95%	21	95%	95%

Contoso Financial Participants' Response Rates					
Preinternship			Full-Time Employment		
	<i>n</i>	Response Rate	<i>n</i>	Response Rate	
Questionnaire	18	72%	22	88%	21*
Interview	12	48%	12	48%	21

Note. * Because only 21 Contoso Financial employees completed questionnaires upon full-time employment, this quantitative data was not used in the analysis.

Throughout interviewing, the researcher took steps to establish validity, defined as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124–125). Scholars have noted that participants often feel compelled to present information in favorable ways (Kvale, 1996; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), which was a notable concern of interviewing interns vying for full-time positions. Thus, the researcher made sure to build rapport with participants, a “prerequisite to gaining solid data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19), so they would feel free to express negative thoughts. Furthermore, the researcher assured participants that their responses would not be directly shared with employers, allowed respondents to create their own pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and conducted interviews in private conference rooms, since context and situation affect interviews (Weiss, 1994).

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory with three major steps (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, through open coding, text was assigned to emergent categories using the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this initial step of “moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43), the researcher read through transcripts, coding participants’ references to learning about and adapting to the organization, their identification, and their successes (or blunders) upon full-time employment. Codes were attached to data “chunks” of varying size (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 71) by comparing events, actions, and interactions for similarities and differences, grouping them together to form categories, and giving conceptual labels to each code (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher categorized some comments under multiple codes, such as coding the phrase “They go by OPCE for short. That’s ... how everything was presented on signatures for their emails,” as “learning jargon” and “learning by email.” From this process, 55 open codes were generated relevant to the study’s conceptual framework.

Second, axial coding was conducted, which involved “integrating categories and their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 106). Here, connections between categories were made and codes were collapsed into broader themes that spanned categories. For example, the initial categories of “internet,” “social media,” and “email” were combined into the axial code “technology.” As categories were consolidated, they became more theoretical and more abstract (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This phase of coding resulted in 15 axial codes.

Third, the research questions guiding the study were reviewed and the 15 axial codes were further collapsed through selective coding, “the process by which *all* categories are unified around a ‘core category’... [which] represents the central phenomenon of the study” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14). In this step, the constant comparative method was used to compress 15 axial codes into three, more abstract core categories. For example, the axial codes “technology,” “people,” “recruitment/

orientation,” and “observation” explained how interns learned and adapted to organizations and vocations, so they were collapsed into the selective code “sources.”

The first core category addressed the first research question, “To what extent and in what manner do internships help potential future full-time employees learn about and adapt to organizations and vocations?” and encompassed the dimensions (four axial codes) and sources (four axial codes) of learning about and adapting to organizations and vocations. The second core category addressed the second research question regarding the “process of identification” and included five axial codes, and the third core category sought to answer the third research question regarding internships’ influence on full-time employment, which encompassed two axial codes.

Once these three core categories were identified, the data’s fit/misfit was reexamined to ensure the best explanation of the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition to collecting and coding qualitative data, survey data were gathered from interns and full-time employees.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were collected from the same participants to measure changes in specific variables (organizational socialization and identification) over time. Participants were e-mailed a link to take three identical online questionnaires, which measured organizational socialization with Gailliard, Myers, and Seibold’s (2010) Organizational Assimilation Index. This measure included items such as “I understand the standards of the organization.” In addition, the questionnaire measured identification with a four-item version of Cheney’s (1982) Organizational Identification Questionnaire, which included items like “I find it easy to identify with this organization.” Participants answered items on 5-point, Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 2 summarizes reliabilities and descriptive statistics from both measures. Demographic information was collected as control variables (summarized in Table 3).

RESULTS

Internships: A Breeding Ground for Socialization

To answer the first research question, quantitative data were analyzed to see if organizational socialization increased after an internship. To prepare for these analyses, the researcher screened the data for univariate and multivariate outliers, and looked at the values of skewness and kurtosis to check that the distribution of scores was approximately normal (see Table 2). Prior to analysis, all potential control variables were assessed and determined to have an insignificant effect on the models, so they were excluded from the models.

Within subjects, repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to test each socialization dimension. Internships had a significant effect on people’s familiarity with coworkers, $F(1, 36) = 17.97, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .33, \text{power} = .99$; familiarity

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Scales for Pre- and Postinternship Questionnaires

	N	α	M	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis		
					Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE	
Preinternship									
Familiarity w/Coworkers	37	.68	3.49	.69	-.34	.39	-.28	.76	.76
Familiarity w/Supervisors	37	.92	2.94	1.12	-.09	.39	-1.03	.76	.76
Acculturation	38	.75	4.34	.48	-.58	.38	.09	.75	.75
Recognition	38	.94	3.70	.99	-1.60	.38	2.76	.75	.75
Involvement	38	.81	3.68	.88	-.55	.38	.78	.75	.75
Job Competency	38	.77	2.80	.87	.25	.38	-.35	.75	.75
Role Negotiation	38	.85	3.23	.85	.22	.38	.26	.75	.75
Identification	38	.82	4.00	0.61	-0.36	.38	-0.26	0.75	0.75
Postinternship									
Familiarity w/Coworkers	38	.78	4.07	.60	-.48	.38	.29	.75	.75
Familiarity w/Supervisors	38	.87	3.71	.91	-1.07	.38	1.03	.75	.75
Acculturation	38	.85	4.45	.51	-.22	.38	-1.14	.75	.75
Recognition	38	.87	4.17	.67	-.62	.38	.27	.75	.75
Involvement	38	.86	3.92	.88	-1.00	.38	1.08	.75	.75
Job Competency	38	.72	3.41	.81	-.28	.38	.95	.75	.75
Role Negotiation	38	.77	3.66	.68	.35	.38	-.40	.75	.75
Identification	38	.84	3.91	.69	-.74	.38	1.31	.75	.75

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	
Age	$M = 23$ ($SD = 4.5$)
Sex	
<i>Male</i>	44%
<i>Female</i>	56%
Education Completed	
<i>Sophomore Year</i>	< 2%
<i>Junior Year</i>	65%
<i>Undergraduate</i>	26%
<i>Some Graduate</i>	3%
<i>Graduate</i>	5%
Division	
<i>Finance</i>	< 2%
<i>Marketing</i>	66%
<i>Operations</i>	31%
<i>Other</i>	< 2%
Office Size	$M = 1534$ ($SD = 1281$)
Work Status	
<i>Full-Time</i>	69%
<i>Part-Time</i>	31%
Salary	
<i>Paid</i>	83%
<i>Unpaid</i>	17%

Note. $N = 66$.

with supervisors, $F(1, 36) = 8.45$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .19$, power = .81; recognition, $F(1, 37) = 6.01$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$, power = .67; job competency, $F(1, 37) = 20.12$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .35$, power = .99; and role negotiation, $F(1, 37) = 11.48$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$, power = .91. Table 4 summarizes each socialization dimension before and after internships.

Qualitative data also suggested that internships increased participants' organizational and vocational socialization. Participants' knowledge and adjustment to the organization before and during their internship centered around four dimensions—culture, organization, members, and vocation (see Table 5).

First, interns learned about and settled into the organizational or occupational culture by observing and enacting behavior, adopting jargon, accepting policies, and assuming values. For example, Tiffany observed that “everyone gets to the office and prepares their coffee and their breakfast” and adapted to this norm by bringing her meal to work. Second, participants became socialized into the organization, which occurred by following facts, embracing the industry position, absorbing the structure, and understanding clients. Holly, for example, felt her law firm stood out by being

Table 4 Comparisons of Socialization Dimensions for Pre- and Postinternship Questionnaires

Dimension of Organizational Socialization	Preinternship		Postinternship		F	Partial η^2	Power
	M	SD	M	SD			
Familiarity w/ Coworkers	3.49	.69	4.05	.58	17.97***	.33	.99
Familiarity w/ Supervisors	2.94	1.12	3.68	.91	8.45**	.19	.81
Acculturation	4.34	.48	4.45	.51	1.55	.04	.23
Recognition	3.70	.99	4.17	.67	6.01*	.14	.67
Involvement	3.68	.88	3.92	.88	1.68	.04	.24
Job Competency	2.82	.87	3.41	.81	20.18***	.35	.99
Role Negotiation	3.23	.85	3.66	.68	11.48**	.24	.91

Note. For significant relationships, effect sizes were small to moderate, and all partial η^2 squared (η^2) values met the .14 cutoff criteria (Cohen, 1988).
 *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Table 5 Dimensions of Anticipatory Socialization

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Explanation	Example
Dimensions	Culture	Observed/ Enacted Behavior	How people acted, dressed, or communicated	Maria learned about "Contoso Financial time," which made it admissible to arrive 5 minutes late to meetings.
		Adopted Jargon	Organization- or industry-specific language	"[My manager] took me to all of his meetings and most of it went right over my head.... But now I can hear myself speaking the lingo." (Jennifer)
		Accepted Policies	Stated or unstated rules in the organization	"They were saying 'You know, she's always around, she's always watching, and so we have to try to keep our voices down low.'" (Cameron)
		Assumed Values	Organization's mission/values	"I did Google 'Contoso Financial' to look for recent news articles.... There was something about... new acquisitions they're trying to get.... It showed me they were sticking to their values, and not just putting out 'these are our values' kind of thing." (Franklin)
	Organization	Followed Facts	Organization's main functions, history, or basic processes	"I [searched online] to know if they are making money and whether or not they would be able to pay in the future." (Michael)
		Embraced Industry Position	Organization's reputation; ranking among competitors	Dane knew his TV station was "considered a top 25 or 30 market in the country, out of 210."
		Absorbed Structure	Organization's hierarchy; details about departments	"I got annoyed because I couldn't go down to legal and knock on their door. I had to fill out a form for a 5-minute question. I just wanted to go downstairs and knock the door." (Bianca)
		Understood Clients	Organization's customers/vendors	Margaret was excited to join her advertising agency that had "some pretty prestigious clients."

(Continued)

Table 5 (Continued)

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Explanation	Example
Dimensions	Members	Befriended Coworkers	General (e.g., employees are nice) or specific (e.g., Mary is nice) peer characteristics	Bianca thought employees were “on Zoloft or Prozac. Not literally, but they are the happiest people ever.”
		Related to Supervisors	Supervisors’ work preferences; communication styles; personal details	“My manager’s name is Katherine and she meets with me every other week for 30 minutes. We don’t have a very close relationship. This is a very busy time in her life. She is working on the TI project a lot.” (Maria)
Vocation		Gained ob	Daily activities; skills/knowledge required; best practices	Stafan realized that marketing “is definitely not like <i>Mad Men</i> every day” and described work as “repetitive.”
		Became Involved	Contributed/took on extra work	“If you have to stay late a couple hours, to be willing to do it, because it’s hard work, and it’s a long day and working takes a lot out of you.... I don’t mind working really, really hard when it comes down to it.” (Eliza)
		Negotiated Roles	Balanced personal and organizational goals	“[When determining job duties] I was like, ‘I’m a communication major so I want to be able to have something to do with that in an internship’.... But then also I have other responsibilities that aren’t exactly what I want to do. So, it’s a balance for sure.” (Carla)
	Felt Recognized	Felt valued or that work was important	“I really feel like I am making a difference. I’m helping my manager.” (Jennifer)	

“known for their pro bono work.” Third, throughout anticipatory socialization, participants socialized with *members* by befriending coworkers and relating to supervisors. Some member interactions were negative, which inhibited socialization. For example, Zack did not mesh with an employee during his interview because “she was really math and stats based, and she was really on my case about my math career and college.” Fourth, interns learned about and adapted to *vocations*, which occurred by interns gaining job competence, becoming involved, negotiating roles, and feeling recognized. Dane explained, “I thought that when [sports broadcasters] got there, everything was prepared for them, and all they had to do was read off the Teleprompter. But as I learned from working, there is a lot more work that goes into it.”

Participants learned about these four dimensions through four sources—technology, people, recruitment and orientation, and observation (see Table 6). First, interns used *technologies* to learn about and adapt to organizations and vocations, including the Internet, social media, and e-mail. Company review websites, like Glassdoor, let one intern know that he wouldn’t “get paid as much as some of the industry leaders, but it’s a good company to work for.” Second, participants learned about and adapted to the organization and their roles from directly interacting with other *people*, specifically employees, friends, and family. For example, Eliza’s friend had interned at the company and shared “what it is like daily in the office, how things flow, how people interact with one another, to let me know that it’s not super intense.” Third, *recruitment and orientation* efforts led by the organization, in particular interviews and orientation, socialized interns. Some interns thought these sources provided inaccurate information, as Jennifer noted: “The first day I was really unimpressed with the person that gave us the orientation.... [But then] a lot of people [have] exceeded my expectations in terms of experience level and intelligence and ability to communicate.” Fourth, many participants experienced organizational and vocational socialization through *observation* of the organization’s physical space, job binders and prior work, and experiences. For example, Lawton’s firm provided a handbook with “basic information about what they expect from an intern, like professional behavior.” In sum, internships socialized participants to organizations and vocations. Interns’ identification, however, showed a more complicated process of adjustment.

Contradictory Factors in the Process of Intern Identification

A within-subjects, repeated measures ANOVA revealed that internships did not have a significant effect on organizational identification, $F(1, 37) = .49, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, power = .11. Although low power might have prevented detecting a true effect, identification’s mean score actually decreased over time, showing a pattern opposite to socialization. Whereas internships socialized participants because they adapted to organizations and vocations, interns did not incorporate organizations into their identity. Qualitative data explain why participants may have reported lower levels of identification after their internships.

Table 6 Sources of Anticipatory Socialization

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code	Explanation	Example
Sources	Technology	Internet	Company websites; review websites	"I looked on their website just to see what they were all about and learn what their firm mainly deals with." (Tiffany)
		Social Media	Facebook, Twitter, etc.	"The research person on my team has a research Twitter feed, so I have joined that.... For the most part, it's articles that are related to our department." (Ananya)
		E-mail	Personal/work e-mail	"Whoever was CC'd on emails, I first tried to find their title to figure out how important they were. And then if you can find out any personal interests about them, that's always [good]." (Michael)
People		Employees	Current/former employees	"Actually, one of the current [full-time employees] went to [my college]... she was like, 'What are you doing this summer? We have a cool internship.... I think you should apply.'" (Zack)
		Family/Friends	Outsiders familiar with the organization/industry	"Ananya commented to coworkers that her mother said Ananya's fingernail polish was 'not professional' enough for a bank, so Ananya got a manicure before her first day." (Field Notes)
Recruitment/		Campus	Orientation recruiting; interviews	Interview "When I interviewed, they pretty much told me what I was going to do, what they expected of me, so I knew it I was getting myself into." (Dane)
Orientation		Welcome/training sessions	"During orientation, one of the first things he covered were their values." (Mason)	
Observation		Space	Physical layout; décor; location	"There are these little alien figurines that I have seen lying around. I didn't know what they were.... But I figured out ... they give them to every new employee when they start." (Margaret)
Job		Binders/Prior Work	Employee handbooks; templates; completed projects	Cameron followed a "binder that has the list of email responses, which help guide you along just so you know what to say."

The sections that follow discuss how participants shared *conflicting identity narratives*, which were caused by tensions that encouraged and inhibited identification. Organizational *sensegiving* and individual *sensemaking* practices encouraged identity narratives, but organizational *sensebreaking* and individual *identity forecasting* (projecting identities into the future and foreseeing themselves as part/not part of organizations) inhibited identification. Ashforth and colleagues (2008) present four of these factors—identity narratives, sensegiving, sensemaking, and sensebreaking—in their model of how identifications formed, but these factors operated differently in the process of internships than full-time employment. Also, identity forecasting emerged as a factor unique to the process of identification during internships.

Conflicting Identity Narratives

Some interns felt connected to organizations through their internship. For example, Tiffany felt “part of the legal community” after her internship, and Arjun felt like a member when he received his internship offer. Other narratives, however, communicated an *absence* of identification. Zack believed that “as an intern, you do not really actually feel like you’re part of the place,” and Jeremy did not feel like he belonged because he had “an outsider’s point of view.” Conflicting identity narratives resulted from tensions between factors that encouraged identification—sensegiving and sensemaking, and factors that inhibited intern identification—sensebreaking and identity forecasting.

Sensegiving

Organizations engaged in sensegiving to promote interns’ identification. Sensegiving made participants feel part of organizations and allowed interns to adopt the organization’s identity. For example, organizations *offered symbolic artifacts*, such as t-shirts, that urged interns to “try on” identities. After Jeremy accepted his internship, the company sent him company-branded trinkets and a good luck note for his final exams, which established an organizational bond. Also, by *granting participants access* (to areas of the campus, e-mail, shared folders, etc.), companies encouraged a feeling of belongingness. Tiffany’s law firm gave her an access badge to enter the building, which made her feel “official, like I was supposed to be there.” This sensegiving stimulated interns to adopt and make sense of their identities.

Sensemaking

Participants projected certain identities into various environments and engaged in sensemaking—interpreting, reflecting, and observing the reactions or consequences of performing different selves. Participants enacted and made sense of three aspects of organizational *culture* by communicating values, norms, and identity markers. For example, Eliza embodied the company’s values, which “include to work really hard and admit that you’re wrong, which is something that I live by.” In addition to performing culture, participants enacted and made sense of organizational

membership. By finding similarities with full-time employees and building relationships, interns felt like organizational members. Ananya observed, “I feel like I have made a lot of friends.... So I feel like I fit in.” Last, participants made sense of their *roles.* Working in human resources had terrified Margaret because she did not want to fire people; however, a recruiter convinced Margaret that she fit the role: “She loved her job because it was at that specific company, and she wouldn’t do it anywhere else. That was a clear sign to me that I would like it, too.” Although sensegiving and sensemaking encouraged identification, the next two factors, sensebreaking and identity forecasting, limited interns’ identification.

Sensebreaking

Organizations engaged in sensebreaking practices, which changed interns’ understanding of their environment. Sensebreaking implied that interns were not full organizational members, and this practice created identity gaps—tensions that made participants question who they were relative to the organization. Employers encouraged sensebreaking through *testing,* warning participants that internships were essentially an “extended interview” for full-time employment. When asked about the least favorite part of her internship, Jennifer audibly sighed, answering: “The pressure of the full-time position. I just want to do my best. And I hope that’s enough.” By reminding potential future full-time employees that internships were a “tryout,” organizations inhibited identification.

Organizations also engaged in sensebreaking by reminding participants that interns were in *training.* Organizations implicitly and explicitly communicated interns’ inadequacy or how interns did not “measure up” to full-time employees. Organizational staff publicly labeled participants as “interns” (e.g., during introductions or on required e-mail signatures), which degraded and objectified participants’ organizational status. Interns felt pressure to learn and fill this knowledge gap, as participants frequently said, “You have to put a lot into the experience in order to get something out of it.” Many participants believed the only way to fill identity gaps was to work harder.

Identity Forecasting

In addition to this organizational pressure, participants realized whether or not they would continue as full-time employees after their internship. Interns inhibited their identification by projecting identities into the future and not seeing themselves as organizational members. Many participants also mentioned learning particular things they wanted in a workplace that were missing from their current internship. Lisa commented:

I did learn that I am not a huge fan of the office environment.... I don’t want to be stuck in a cubicle in my job when I have a career.... That’s why I am so excited about my internship next semester because the office ... is a lot more open with windows, and it is super modern. It will be very different.

As this quote shows, when interns knew they would not be staying in the organization, they distanced themselves through identity forecasting.

In conclusion, the process of identification during internships was complex. Some interns engaged in organizational sensegiving and individual sensemaking practices that encouraged identification, whereas others did not identify with organizations on account of organizational sensebreaking and individual identity forecasting.

Anticipatory Socialization through Internships: Too Much of a “Good” Thing?

When participants began their internships, they foresaw themselves working in that company or occupation in the future. For some, the extended anticipatory socialization of an internship tainted participants’ perceived organizational and vocational images. Of the 49 interns who participated in the study before and after their internships, only 11 of those interns (22%) continued to work full-time in the same company. In many cases, once interns became acquainted with the organization or job, they discovered a lack of fit. As Michael said, “I enjoyed the internship, but felt the company was moving at a snail’s pace, with too much red tape. Its goals did not align with my goals. I asked to not be considered for employment.” Other interns foresaw themselves as part of the organization at the end of their internship, only to find that the company had no permanent positions available.

By engaging in traditional anticipatory socialization (e.g., recruitment, vocational messages) before their internship, interns thought they understood an organization or vocation, and saw themselves as a good fit. Cameron was “really excited” about her internship at a magazine, but after her internship, Cameron explained, “It’s not just fun and games or a glamorous job. There is a lot of work that goes into it.... Your work becomes your social life, which I didn’t initially think of.” Cameron now works full-time in another vocation.

Whereas previous research has described realistic job previews as beneficial for interns (Barnett, 2012), this study shows that internships may hurt organizations’ efforts to recruit interns or taint interns’ interest in jobs or employers. Although traditional anticipatory socialization methods, like interviews, supply just enough of an introduction to both parties, in-depth experiences, such as internships, make applicants and organizations less desirable. But what happens when interns encounter organizations and vocations following their internships?

Varying Effects of Organizational and Vocational Anticipatory Socialization Upon Encounter

Interviews with full-time employees at Contoso Financial—those who interned at Contoso Financial and those who interned at other organizations—showed that internships, as a mechanism of organizational and vocational socialization, uniquely influenced experiences upon organizational encounter.

Outcomes of Organizational Anticipatory Socialization upon Encounter

New employees who interned at Contoso Financial reaped four benefits of organizational anticipatory socialization. First, previous interns held an *established network*, including past coworkers, cross-functional teammates, and other former interns. Arjun, for example, already knew colleagues in his “new” full-time team. Griffin, a previous intern at Contoso Financial, used his network for work-related problems: “It’s nice because I know people in different functions, so if I have a question, I can ask them.” In contrast, newcomers like Hannah, who interned elsewhere, admitted “struggling to meet people.”

Second, internships helped socialize Contoso Financial employees to *normative behavior*, so they knew the “way things were done.” TJ discussed norms that were second nature because of his internship:

You walk through the revolving doors, and I have to swipe my badge to get through. If you didn’t have an internship, you probably didn’t even realize you had to do that (laughs). Just small things, like the [cafeteria] only accepts Contoso Financial cards. You don’t want to look dumb and give them a CashBank card.

New employees who interned outside of Contoso Financial found the culture harder to grasp. When newcomers discussed behavioral norms, they spoke in *comparison* to the organizations where they interned. This juxtaposition helped participants notice unique norms at the firm. For example, Charlie previously worked at a bank undergoing a government bailout and recalled feeling embarrassed wearing that company’s badge. Charlie realized the culture was different at Contoso Financial because he never took off his badge.

Third, newcomers who interned at Contoso Financial also had *company knowledge* that other new full-timers lacked. Natalie, a former intern, learned “Lotus Notes, systems, finding my way around, understanding rooms and things,” as an intern, which made her comfortable as a full-time employee. Several other Contoso Financial interns said they could “make the connection between departments faster” (Ananya). Opposed to previous interns, newcomers who interned elsewhere understood little about Contoso Financial. Manny commented, “Having had an internship at Worldwide Airlines, I learned a lot about the company in just 6 months.... But now I have to start over at Contoso Financial.”

Fourth, internships laid a foundation for *organizational identification* that was fully activated upon a full-time offer. Factors that inhibited identification during internships (sensebreaking and identity forecasting) disappeared when organizations offered interns permanent positions. Elaine, a former intern, felt identified for almost a year before she began working full-time. Newcomers who interned at other organizations, however, did not feel an instant bond to the firm. Charlie said, “I don’t know if I feel like Contoso Financial is part of who I am.” Participants with outside internship experiences did not immediately feel like they belonged.

Outcomes of Vocational Anticipatory Socialization upon Encounter

Newcomers who performed similar jobs as interns experienced *role clarity* upon full-time employment. Participants who utilized vocational knowledge from prior

experiences excelled in their new roles. Hannah did not intern at Contoso Financial, but both her internship and full-time job were in data analytics, which she found helpful. Participants working in new positions experienced confusion; as Andy noted, “There is just so much knowledge that you have to have to do this role that I don’t have yet.”

Regardless of where they interned, all participants claimed their internships provided them *professional competence* for their full-time roles, including knowledge of how to communicate professionally and what work was like in certain occupational circles. For instance, TJ, a former intern at Contoso Financial, believed his internship taught him “business skills” for full-time employment. Robert, who previously interned at an advertising agency, applied his previous “knowledge of the service industry and also the creative side of stuff... It helps me understand how to work with other companies.”

In conclusion, newcomers who interned at Contoso Financial benefitted from their organizational anticipatory socialization because they entered full-time positions with an established network, normative behavior, company knowledge, and identification. Newcomers who interned at other organizations, on the other hand, drew on vocational anticipatory socialization for role clarity. Finally, regardless of where participants interned, their professional competence helped them succeed in their full-time roles.

DISCUSSION

Over 60% of college graduates have completed an internship before entering the full-time workforce (NACE, 2014). This study makes a contribution by demonstrating how and to what extent internships serve as a primary form of anticipatory socialization that shapes full-time employees’ organizational encounter. This study investigated how internships serve as a form of anticipatory socialization, rather than just interns’ own microcosm of socialization. Through this lens, internships change our idea of the socialization process and contribute to three distinct areas of existing theory and research.

Rethinking Organizational Encounter

Results of this study challenge conceptualizations of organizational encounter by showing how newcomers with internship experiences confidently enter organizations and vocations, rather than feeling lost or anxious. When interns encounter organizations and vocations full-time, they are able to elude the information seeking and identity forging that other newcomers endure (Kramer & Miller, 2013). Thus, this research supports recent calls to consider newcomers’ “*relative tenure* rather than calendar days” (Berkelaar, 2013, p. 43), since interns may feel like organizational or vocational insiders. These findings should change the way scholars look at socialization theory by rethinking what it means to be “new,” because newcomers with internship experience might think and act like seasoned employees.

In fact, this study shows that internships may even allow for *more* opportunities to learn about and adapt to organizations and vocations than being a new permanent employee. Because interns and organizations are persuading one another about a compatible future, both sides engage in extra practices that encouraged socialization (e.g., special events, training). Whereas traditional means of anticipatory socialization, like organizational recruitment or orientation, seek to strengthen individual–organizational bonds, internships offer an extended preview of an organization or vocation, which can either improve or obstruct future relationships among interns and organizations.

Indeed, internships provide many of the same dimensions of learning and adapting that employees experience after organizational encounter. For example, Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994), Morrison (1995), Myers and Oetzel (2003), and Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) discussed various dimensions referenced in this study, such as culture, organization, members, and vocation. Research that explains the sources from which full-time employees learn and adapt also align with many of the sources cited in this study, such as people and observation (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Nelson & Quick, 1991; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Teboul, 1994).

However, interns also experience different dimensions and sources from full-time employees during encounter and metamorphosis. For instance, these findings empirically demonstrate technology as a source of anticipatory socialization, whereas previous research has only theoretically explored the role of technology during this stage (Berkelaar, 2013; Flanagan & Waldeck, 2004; Kramer, 2010). This study elucidates how the Internet, social media, and e-mail foster interns’ knowledge and adjustment to the organization during internships.

Uniqueness of Identification and Internships

In addition to expanding the socialization literature to account for internships as a mechanism of socialization, this study contributes to identification theory and research by showing the uniqueness of interns’ attachments. Ashforth et al. (2008) have noted the dearth of research focusing explicitly on the process of identification, and therefore synthesized constructs from the identification literature on full-time, paid employees to create a model of the identification process (also see Pratt, 2000). The current study demonstrates how Ashforth and colleagues’ four general dynamics driving the identification process—identity narratives, sensegiving, sensemaking, and sensebreaking—unfolded during internships.

These findings add to identification scholarship by demonstrating how Ashforth et al.’s (2008) factors of identification work differently during internships compared to full-time, paid employment. For example, previous theory describes sensebreaking as a blatant, pronounced activity. Namely, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) noted that organizations use divestiture tactics such as boot camp or hazing, which strip away incoming identities. Sensebreaking prior to encounter, however, encompasses more obscure tactics. Organizations tested interns and prompted prospective full-time employees to search for meaning by reminding participants that they are in training.

Furthermore, this study deepens our understanding of the identification process by identifying an additional factor, *identity forecasting*, which explains how individuals limit their identification by projecting identities into the future and seeing themselves in a different organization or vocation. This work contributes to the concept of “anticipatory deidentification,” the process of role separation as people anticipate leaving, which scholars have only recently explored empirically (Davis & Myers, 2012). Identity forecasting adds an additional layer of understanding to voluntary exit and might help extend deidentification research beyond time-limited memberships. In addition to contributing to exit literature, identity forecasting distinguishes interns from temporary employees.

With the concept of identity forecasting, this study extends the work on temporary employees which has found that organizations distance temporary employees by denying workers symbolic artifacts and prohibiting employees’ feedback and decision-making (Gossett, 2002). Although interns work temporarily, employers treated interns differently from temporary employees. For interns, identification depended largely on interns’ expectations for permanent employment with the organization. Participants began internships with fairly high levels of identification, but as time went on, some interns did not forecast their identity towards full-time membership and protected themselves from investing emotionally. Other interns expected full-time positions in the future, which helped them to stay connected. Therefore, identity forecasting distinguishes interns and temporary employees because interns expect full-time work.

Internships Alter Full-Time Employment

This study shows that specific outcomes of organizational and vocational anticipatory socialization depended on an intern’s particular role and organization. Carolina’s comment encapsulates internships’ influence on full-time employment:

Unless you were an intern and you are going to be working on something you already did last summer, I don’t think you are at an advantage in any way. I definitely think there are advantages ... like where’s the cafeteria, what are these buildings, how do you get from A to B, the bus schedule. And [you] probably know the organizational inter-workings; I mean, that would make sense if you worked here for 3 months. But in terms of job clarity, work role clarity, I don’t think so.

In short, newcomers with prior experience at Contoso Financial benefitted more from organizational than vocational socialization, whereas internship experiences outside of Contoso Financial led to vocational outcomes. This finding adds to research demonstrating the power of organizational and vocational experiences prior to entry. For example, Gibson and Papa (2000) showed how “organizational osmosis” (p. 79) led employees to be “particularly susceptible to concertive control practices” (p. 82). Furthermore, Stephens and Dailey (2012) found that prior experiences with an organization put people in a “state of readiness” (p. 415) which influenced how newcomers reacted to organizational activities. In sum, this study contributes to the work that explores the various effects that people’s prior organizational and vocational experiences have when they enter a new full-time job.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study focused on internship experiences of undergraduate and graduate students, and although these findings should be conceptually applicable to others' experiences, future research should explore the degree to which these findings hold for nontraditional internships (e.g., "returnships" for experienced employees reentering the workforce, see Cohen, 2012), and additional studies should use other measures besides self-reports. Moreover, subsequent research should investigate outcomes of interns who continue working in the same company *and role* when they continue as full-time employees.

In addition to extending this research by looking at other forms of internships, scholars should continue to explore technology's role in organizational and vocational socialization. Research has explored technology use in the recruitment and selection processes (e.g., Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014; Walker et al., 2011), but the current study demonstrates that technologies cultivate anticipatory workers' knowledge and adjustment to cultures, organizations, members, and vocations. Future research should examine the content, accuracy, and effects of information that potential employees can garner online.

In conclusion, this study investigated a prevalent activity in the workforce, completing an internship, which organizational communication scholars have overlooked as a form of anticipatory socialization. This research places internships as a formative activity in the socialization process, one that may provide perceptions that are more realistic than traditional means of anticipatory socialization and persuade potential future full-time employees to enter or avoid certain positions in organizations and vocations.

Note

1. "Contoso Financial" is a pseudonym, as are all proper nouns utilized in this study.

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Appendix: Interview Guide (Abridged)

Preinternship Interview

Background: Tell me about your background. What brought you to [company]?

Socialization: Tell me about how you got your internship. What all do you know about [company]? How did you learn this?

Identity: What does it mean for you personally to work here? Are the values/goals here different/similar from your own?

Postinternship Interview

Vocational Socialization: Tell me about what you currently do here. How did you learn this? What have you learned about your job/responsibilities here?

Organizational Socialization: What have you learned about the culture here? What have you learned about employees/norms/feedback?

Identity: Do you feel that you fit here? Why/why not?

Full-Time Employment Interview

Background: Tell me about your background. What brought you here?

Orientation: What was beneficial? Tell me about meeting your manager/team.

Vocational Socialization: Tell me about your first day. How did you learn your tasks/expectations?

Organizational Socialization: What is your understanding of the culture? How did you learn this? Have you integrated with others?

Identity: Do you feel part of [company]? Do you share the values/goals of this company?