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McUniversities revisited: a comparison of university and McDonald's casual employee experiences in Australia

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The McDonaldization of higher education refers to the transformation of universities from knowledge generators to rational service organizations or 'McUniversities'. This is reflected in the growing dependence on a casualized academic workforce. The article explores the extent to which the McDonaldization thesis applies to universities by comparing the experiences of casual academics with those of McDonald's employees. Survey and interview findings from an Australian university are compared with Gould's research on McDonald's casual employees in Australia. Aside from their employment status, the two groups have nothing in common. McDonald's employees experience routine work organization with good management and career prospects while casual academics experience stimulating work within a context of poor management and lack of career paths. This article questions the accuracy of applying the McDonaldization thesis to higher education based on the failure of the McJobs descriptor to withstand empirical scrutiny.

Keywords: casualization; flexible labour; higher education; human resource management; McDonaldization

Introduction

'McDonaldization' is a popularized descriptor, functioning as a shorthand metaphor to describe modern 'Taylorist' work organization and management practices in the service sector (Hartley 1995; Hayes and Wynyard 2002; Ritzer 1993, 2004). The term encompasses various business practices, such as using franchising to spread ownership risk and deliver mass produced products and services by combinations of technology and labour. To achieve efficiencies, a fundamental feature of McDonaldization is its reliance on flexible casualized labour and hyper-rationalization of service delivery. In the literature, the McDonaldization and 'McJob' labels usually have negative connotations of worker and consumer exploitation.

Initially, McDonaldization was restricted to lower skilled occupations such as fast food or cleaning services. Since the 1990s the label has also applied to the casualization of higher skilled professions in education and health services (Hayes and Wynyard 2002; Junor 2004; Levin and Shaker 2011; Mok 1999). Workplace casualization is an increasing trend in many OECD countries (Buddelmeyer and Wooden 2011;

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Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell 2004), including Australia where 19.3% of the workforce was casually employed in 2011 (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2012). In this context, McDonaldization thrives.

Internationally, higher education institutions are increasingly reliant on precariously employed casual academics, with rates of casualization especially high in the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA (Higher Education Statistical Agency 2010; May et al. 2011; US Department of Education 2009). In Australia, casual academics are estimated to be responsible for up to 50% of all undergraduate teaching, including up to 80% of first year teaching (Percy et al. 2008). Recent calculations indicate that 61% of Australia's total academic workforce (equating to 67,100 staff) were employed on a casual basis in 2010 (May et al. 2011). Although universities have always employed casual tutors, it was traditionally in the role of academic apprentices. In recent decades, the dominance of neoliberal economic rationalization in universities has resulted in institutions becoming reliant on an adjunct teaching workforce as a flexible labour pool to buffer against uncertain revenues. Implicit in the literature on the McDonaldization of higher education are assumptions that academic jobs, especially those of casuals, are becoming 'McJobs' with respect to their precarious nature, routine and lack of permanent career opportunities. Further, universities themselves are becoming 'McUniversities' by adopting McDonaldized management practices such as reliance on mass casual staff, product standardization and efficiency of delivery, and franchising arrangements (Finkelstein 2002; Hayes and Wynyard 2002; Ritzer 2002).

This article tests one aspect of the applicability of the McDonaldization thesis to higher education by comparing the experiences of casual academics and McDonald's casual employees. The McDonaldization thesis is investigated using survey and interview data from casual academics and comparing it with official information available on the McDonald's website and results from Gould's (2005, 2009, 2010) extensive research with employees and managers of Australian McDonald's outlets. We argue that uncritical acceptance of the McDonaldization thesis and McJobs descriptor to describe universities hinders a more sophisticated understanding of the processes shaping the university in its transformation from knowledge generation to service delivery with multiple and often conflicting objectives.

The article proceeds with four sections. The first section reviews and critiques the concepts of McDonaldization and McJobs in the context of higher education. The subsequent two sections outline the methods that have been used to make comparisons between McDonald's and university casual workers and summarize the findings in terms of comparisons of demographic features, work organization and human resource management for the two groups of employees. In the final section, the findings are discussed and the argument presented that the application of McDonaldization to universities is inappropriate and incorrect in respect to their casual employees. McDonald's and universities have little in common, other than a reliance on casual workers. McDonald's clarity of purpose and approach to labour management create superior human resource practices compared with universities. Populist labels such as McDonaldization, and its corollaries McUniversity and McJobs, distract us from deeper analysis of the tensions between higher education institutions and commercial imperatives.

McDonaldization and higher education

One of the earliest uses of the McDonaldization concept was by Ritzer (1993) to imply efficiency, calculability, predictability and increased control through replacement of

human initiative with measurable processes in which every task is broken down into its most finite parts so the individual has little or no control. As such, McDonaldization is the new Taylorism: products are standardized and labour relations are transformed. Ritzer's argument, drawing on Weber's theory of rationalization, is that the rational organization has spread into all areas of social and economic relations. The McDonaldization process is, in Ritzer's (1993, 9) articulation: 'an ever more instrumentally rationalised labour process mirrored in an equally instrumentalised sphere of consumer "choices" essentially already made, so that standardisation and efficiency become the unifying functional paradigm for society ...'

Since the 1990s, 'McDonaldization' has been adapted to describe aspects of academic institutions in several OECD countries (see for example, Garland 2008; Hartley 1995; Hayes and Wynyard 2002; Margolis 2004; Mok 1999; M. Parker and Jary 1995). The McDonaldization of higher education implies increasing parallels between universities and the real McDonald's: reliance on cheap and flexible labour; quality rules and regulations; franchising of university brand name with domestic and international partners; standardization of programs; and increased surveillance. Neoliberal ideology drives the corporatization and managerialism practices of university administrators, making universities an easy target for the application of McDonaldization in their quest for the rational service organization (Lorenz 2012; M. Parker and Jary 1995). As universities transform themselves from social to economic institutions, the exchange value of knowledge outweighs its intrinsic value so that university managers focus on money, markets and efficiencies with the aim of producing a standard product at the lowest cost (L. D. Parker 2012). McDonaldization is a popular, and arguably emotive, descriptor of how these transformation processes have undermined the authority of academics' ownership of the tools of scholarship and control of quality. Students increasingly see education as a form of consumption and demand control, choice and 'edutainment' (Lorenz 2012; Margolis 2004). The McDonaldization of higher education is argued to be reflected in growing managerialism, increasing student to staff ratios, mass enrolments and the use of low-wage casually employed academic labour, all of which combine to undermine the integrity of the academy (e.g. Hayes and Wynyard 2002; Ritzer 2002, 2004).

Unlike McDonald's, the processes of standardization in higher education have been selective and focused on outputs. For example, labour is controlled through measured outputs with scant attention to standardizing rules governing the processes of managing labour. The impacts on academic life of McDonaldization and its related practices, New Public Management and managerialism, have been well documented and include work intensification, cynicism, dissatisfaction, de-professionalization and disempowerment (Barry, Chandler and Clark 2001; Lorenz 2012; Ogbonna and Harris 2004; Ryan 2012). However, impacts on the growing 'underclass' of academics – the contingent and casualized workforce (M. Parker and Jary 1995) – are largely ignored. Indeed, Margolis (2004, 370) noted almost a decade ago that commentary on the McDonaldization of higher education lacked empirical rigour. Hence the purpose of this article is to empirically address a key element of McDonaldization, the flexible workforce.

Until Gould (2005, 2009, 2010), rigorous empirical research on work at McDonald's was lacking. Claims that this work was exploitative of casual employees (e.g. Kincheloe 2002; Schlosser 2002) had not been questioned. The unquestioning of pejorative assumptions about work at McDonald's motivated Gould to review criticisms of McJobs and then extensively survey McDonald's employees and store managers within Australia. Utilizing Storey and Bacon's (1993) distinction between

work organization and human resource management, Gould found that although employees experience their work as repetitive and non-challenging, the labour management practices were considerate, inclusive and developmental, focusing on security and career development. The employee experiences were mirrored in Gould's survey of McDonald's store managers. Gould (2010, 799) concludes that 'the putative adverse effects of Taylorist work organization are more dependent on individual reactions than has been assumed ... [suggesting] that the McJobs epithet is overly simplistic and misleading'. Gould's argument is that a more nuanced view of McJobs is required where negative and positive portrayals need to be reconciled in a framework that separates the work organization and human resource management approaches. Following Gould, this article develops a more sophisticated understanding of what McDonaldization of higher education implies for casual academics. Survey and interview responses of casual academics and their managers are compared with the responses of McDonald's employees and managers as reported in Gould (2005, 2009, 2010).

Outline of research method

The research within a single Australian university commenced in 2010 with a survey of casual academics in a faculty of business and law, followed by in-depth interviews with casual academics and their managers. In 2012, the research team undertook a university-wide survey of casual academics. For the purposes of this article, data from the faculty of business and law was employed, rather than from the university-wide survey. The justification is that the faculty results are enriched with qualitative data and the survey results reflect university-wide results. At the time of the survey, the faculty employed 130 casual academics and 67 tenured and full-time contract academics. The 2:1 proportion of casual to continuing employment employees is typical of the national average for Australian universities in 2010 (May 2011).

The research was designed in two parts: an online survey of casual academics followed by interviews with sessional academics and their managers. Invitations were sent to 130 sessional academics to participate in the anonymous online survey over a three-week period. The response rate was 52% or 67 responses, considered reasonable given difficulties in establishing accurate email addresses for casual staff. For example, about 10% of emails bounced, presumably because employment contracts and hence official university emails had been terminated. The survey instrument was adapted from several earlier surveys (see Ryan et al. 2011). It included 43 items across five sections: employment information (10 items); academic development and support (seven items); academic practice (16 items); motivation and satisfaction (two items); and demographics (eight items). Interviews were held with 17 sessional academics, 13 managers and five administrative staff. The questions were open-ended, based on themes emerging from the online survey such as employment conditions, career aspirations, motivations and satisfactions.

Comparisons with Gould's survey of McDonald's employees were possible through online access to Gould's (2005) PhD thesis and his subsequent publications (2009, 2010). This was a rich source of data and although the questions in the two surveys were not always identical, they were sufficiently similar to make comparisons. For example, where Gould asked about the repetitiveness of the work, the university survey asked about work stimulation. However the faculty size is considerably larger with more full-time employees than found in a McDonald's outlet. Despite this limitation, the comparison is legitimate given the continued references to the 'McUniversity'.

Comparison of McDonald's and university casual employees

Detangling the related concepts of McJobs from the overall process of McDonaldization reveals notable differences between the casualized workforces of McDonald's and universities. This section details the differences, commencing with demographic differences between the two sets of employees. Utilizing Storey and Bacon's (1993) categorization of work into the nature of work organization and the overarching human resource management practices, the differences in each of these categories is then demonstrated. The section concludes with a summary of the comparisons.

Demographic comparisons

Based on Gould's (2005) data, the demographic characteristics of McDonald's casual workers, referred to as 'crew', are compared with the sample of casual academics (see Table 1). There are stark differences with respect to age, educational level and length of service. McDonald's crew are significantly younger and less educated with shorter periods of employment.

Work organization

Using Story and Bacon's (1993) first category, the nature of work organization, two themes are compared: tasks and social environment. These themes can be used to explain how work is organized and perceived, while acknowledging that the physical organization of work at each organization is clearly different. At McDonald's, a small team works interdependently to produce and deliver food, while at the university, teaching is an individual pursuit. However, in regard to the way the organization of

Table 1. Demographic characteristics: McDonald's crew and casual academics.

	McDonald's crew (n = 783)		Casual academics (n = 67)	
	Characteristic	%	Characteristic	%
Age	≤ 16 years	36	< 29 years	5
	17–18 years	32	39–39 years	19
	19–22 years	26	40–49 years	21
	≥ 23 years	6	50–59 years	33
			> 60 years	16
Gender	Male	51	Male casual	53
	Female	49	Female casual	47
Highest educational level	Not yet completed high school	54	Bachelor	25
	Completed high school	30	Honours	3.5
	Completed or enrolled tertiary study	16	Masters	35
			PhD*	36.5
Length of employment	≤ 1 year	46	≤ 3 years	16
	1–2 years	22	2–5 years	30
	2–4 years	26	3–9 years	23
	≥ 4 years	6	> 10 years	25
			(non-response)	6

*respondent has either completed a PhD or is in the process of completing a PhD.

work is perceived, on both counts, the work of McDonald's employees completely differs from the work of casual academics.

Tasks

McDonald's approach to labour management is influenced by Fordism and Taylorism, determining through measurement the one-best-way for tasks (Gould 2005). Results from Gould (2005, 2010) confirm that most McDonald's crew view the work as repetitive, with 65% agreeing that they do exactly the same task throughout a shift. The assumption that repetitive and uncomplicated work is synonymous with being boring and unchallenging is confirmed by the results indicating crew dislike repetitive tasks and prefer work involving more complex activities. Despite this, 68% of crew respondents were satisfied with their work, suggesting there were aspects other than the nature of the work that contributed to job satisfaction (Gould 2009).

In comparison, teaching is essentially a private relationship between students and teacher, as is the exercise of academic judgment. Such activities cannot be easily captured by a manual or set of procedures, other than by broad activities such as preparation, teaching, marking or consultation. The respondents were asked about degrees of autonomy they could exercise over their work in terms of academic judgment and what they taught. Seventy three per cent considered they had control in relation to academic judgement, suggesting the nature of the work is more complex by requiring the exercise of personal judgment. Although the nature of tutorial work means tutors have less control over what they teach than do lecturers, 42% agreed they had control over what they taught, further indicating greater complexity and autonomy. Thus it is not surprising that 78% of the casual academics expressed satisfaction with the stimulating nature of the work itself. Despite this, a lesser percentage of casual academics (56%) expressed overall job satisfaction compared to the 68% of McDonald's crew who were satisfied with work. This suggests that the specific nature of work cannot account for overall satisfaction with work.

Social environment: teamwork and inclusion

A sense of teamwork and inclusion is a feature of McDonald's work organization. Work at McDonald's is promoted in its recruitment literature as: 'A fun environment with a friendly team. It's a great way to meet new people or to work with existing friends' (McDonald's 2012).

Gould (2005, 2009) found 69% of McDonald's crew enjoy interacting with other team members, 66% agreed they were treated with respect by managers and 58% believed that managers made work fun. In sum, Gould's results indicate that McDonald's employees generally experience a sense of teamwork, inclusion and respect.

In contrast, casual academics report their work experience to be isolating and without respect, as evidenced by Junor (2004); Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure, et al. (2009); and May et al. (2011). Their work is essentially experienced as an individual pursuit rather than a team endeavour whereby they have minimal contact with managers, supervisors or, in many cases, with colleagues. For example, among the respondents, 79% felt excluded from meetings and 62% felt excluded from social activities. Rather than managers making work fun, 64% of the respondents report minimal contact with their supervisors. The majority of the respondents made clear that they feel isolated and lack respect, as expressed in the following comments:

When you were hired ... there was no introducing you really to any of the other staff members. You were ... just this person walking in the hallways that no one really knew who you were or what you were doing there. ... There was no kind of interaction with the other staff. Academics saw your face a lot but didn't really say, who are you, what are you doing ... They'd look at you and ignore you. (S11)

You feel a little bit used as a casual academic, you don't feel respected. (S17)

The nature of work and its effect on employees goes beyond work tasks to the social environment of work. While a McDonald's job might be repetitive, the negative effects are offset by a positive social environment. On the contrary, the tasks of casual academics are stimulating but the work environment promotes feelings of isolation and being undervalued.

Human resource practices

The process of McDonaldization implies prescriptive labour management practices to ensure efficiency and control of employees. This section compares aspects of labour management practices by McDonald's and the university. The practices are divided into five categories: recruitment; training, development and recognition; career paths; remuneration and payment systems; security and termination. Similarly to demographic characteristics and the nature of work, there is little in common. McDonald's employees have superior experiences in all categories.

Recruitment

McDonald's recruits its casual workforce using formalized, transparent and streamlined methods. People interested in working for McDonald's complete a simple on-line application form and suitability test and nominate their preferred working times and locations. Within one month of making a suitable application, an interview is granted, and, if successful, an offer of employment is made within a week of the interview. All new recruits are given a three-month probationary period (former McDonald's store manager, pers. comm.).

In contrast, the recruitment of casual academics is frequently highly informal such as making a personal approach or via a contact or friend (May 2011). The need to continue personal networking to secure ongoing employment is apparent, as the following quotes testify:

[Every teaching term] you have to go to each academic and let them know you are available. I was finding that I was overwhelmed because I had so much work maybe in first semester and then nothing in second semester. Maybe I wasn't talking to the right people ... You have to be *in* with certain lecturers to get the work. (S5)

I don't know next semester how many tutorials I'm going to get or whether I am going to get any tutorials, it's all depending on my personal contacts or my networking. ... You have to be your own sales person, being a casual, that's how it works here. (S7)

Training, development and recognition

McDonald's training is standardized, much like its products. Individual differences are subsumed to the point of homogeneity. The efficiency, control, predictability and

calculability of McDonaldization are reflected in the intense training and supervision of new recruits. Rigid, clear training and career pathways enable successful global reproduction of the McDonald's model. In several OECD countries (e.g. Australia, USA), McDonald's is a nationally registered training organization where credentials are transferrable to other institutions (McDonald's 2012).

The availability of training and development from the commencement of employment, along with payment for training, form an important part of McDonald's recruitment strategy:

Starting work can be a scary thought, but don't worry, at McDonald's we understand what it's like to be the new kid on the block. You'll get all the support and training you need to make a go of it ...

If you've got the drive to develop, then we want to help. Our training and development programs make it easy to see exactly what your options are and how to get there, all while getting paid. (McDonald's 2012)

Development through feedback and recognition is encouraged at McDonald's, with 54% of crew agreeing that managers provide positive feedback (Gould 2005, 2010). Additionally, McDonald's recognizes that people are motivated by recognition and respect as much as by remuneration. McDonald's has recognition awards for its employees along with scholarships and sports grants to 'support your studies and sporting dreams' (McDonald's 2012). Furthermore, all staff at McDonald's are provided with a six-monthly training review (former McDonald's store manager, pers. comm.).

Training and development for casual academics is neither structured nor often even available. Research on casual academics consistently reports that they are poorly resourced and excluded from mainstream development activities and opportunities (Bloss 2012; Coates, Dobson, Edwards, et al. 2009). This is further confirmed in the present research where only 25% of respondents considered access to training and development opportunities were adequate. This dissatisfaction is articulated in the following comment:

It's really hard to get training and development. As far as teaching goes I've learnt from trial and error but it would've been nice to have some guidelines about how to approach certain instances with students. (S5)

Casual academics frequently start work without training or support. The phrase, 'thrown in the deep end' was used repeatedly by casual academics in interviews:

I got thrown in the deep end actually. I did do the one day sessional training course but about 2 years after I started. (S5)

Well, it was just like being thrown in the deep end – here are some slides, go do it. So I got shown where my classroom was but that was all. It was a pretty scary experience to begin with There was no induction process ... (S10)

Unlike McDonald's, casual academics are expected to maintain their stock of skills and nurture human capital at their own time and cost. Casual teachers are 'not paid to develop and maintain their knowledge-base, yet are expected to deploy it in the teaching process' (Brown, Goodman and Yasukawa 2010, 172). This is evident in that only 16% of respondents reported having been paid to attend training and development sessions. Furthermore, more than 60% of respondents had not received any formal

evaluation or relevant feedback on their work. Overall satisfaction with feedback and recognition was limited to 35% of survey respondents. Formal and informal recognition of work by casual academics is ad hoc. Recognition appears to be the exception rather than management practice as evidenced by the following quotation:

It's like you're a rat on a treadmill ... you don't have to lavish them (i.e. casual academics) with money or anything, just kind words and affirmation. Those sorts of things make a big difference. (S4)

Career pathways

Linked to its structured training and development programs, McDonald's promotes its ability to provide a career path through management traineeships. For example, the McDonald's (2012) website states: 'Unlike many companies, McDonald's offers a career path to help employees who want to advance. It's easier to stay on track ... McDonald's is a registered training organization and able to issue nationally recognized qualifications.'

Gould's (2010) research confirms that within McDonald's, both crew and management acknowledge there is a career path for those that want it. A decision to continue employment at McDonald's, providing performance is adequate, virtually guarantees promotion. Other commentators also note that McDonald's offers career paths to those that seek one (e.g. Cantalupo 2003). Not only does McDonald's provide a clear career path, but 66% of McDonald's managers agreed that they have an obligation to provide employees with a career path and 75% of managers favoured current crew for promotion and appointment. This is supported by 80% of McDonald's managers having commenced their careers as crew. Given the youth and school status of most McDonald's crew, it is not surprising that almost two thirds were not interested in long-term employment with McDonald's.

In contrast, the university has no formal career path for its casual workforce nor even career advice, and definitely no obligation, formal or informal, to privilege casual academics over external candidates when full-time positions do arise. Indeed, the 'invisibility' and exclusion of casual academics often precludes them knowing about job opportunities. For sessional academics, the limitations of career development are of particular concern as 66% of respondents aspired to an academic career even though 44% had been casually employed for over five years, and 21% more than 10 years. Casual academic work is no longer a springboard to an academic career. Not surprisingly, only 6% of respondents were satisfied with their opportunities for promotion and less than 14% were satisfied with career progression. The following comment exemplifies this dissatisfaction: 'Opportunities for promotion are non-existent really; [in terms of] career progression, you tend to be much the same thing for 20 years' (S16).

Figure 1 depicts how the career pathway at McDonald's is more standardized and linear compared with that for a casual academic, where realization of full-time, tenured work is uncertain for many years. Importantly, people wishing to work for McDonald's are aware of this linear career path which is clearly shown on the company's website and know if they perform and embrace opportunities then their expectations are likely to be met. In contrast, the career path for casual academics is neither clear nor easily discovered. Aside from investing years of study to obtain a higher degree, experience and competency as a teacher is rarely sufficient to make it to the first rung of the career ladder. For those lucky enough to make it to the first rung there is no guarantee of further progression. Tenure and hence security may never be achieved.

Figure 1. Comparison of career pathways: McDonald's and Australian universities.

Remuneration and payment systems

McDonald's pay rates are clearly defined and nationally consistent, allowing for automatic increases based on age and experience. In 2010, the minimum award rates for a crew-member were A\$10 per hour for a 16-year-old, progressing to A\$18 per hour for those 21 years and over. Completion of training programs and progression from a crew-member to crew-trainer and chief increases the hourly rate (former McDonald's store manager, pers. comm.). Earnings are paid automatically on a weekly basis. The payment system at McDonald's is fully computerized, staff electronically log on and

off for their shifts so that their pay is automatically calculated. Rosters are produced well in advance and designed to accommodate where possible employees' other commitments.

Among casual academics, experiences with pay and payment systems were a major concern for 90% of the respondents. Although hourly pay rates for casual academics are four to 10 times higher than at McDonald's depending on the type of duties, the minimum entry level qualification for academic work is the completion of an undergraduate degree, although most have a postgraduate degree as well. The attainment of these qualifications represents a significant opportunity cost in terms of time and tuition fees.

I've actually worked in administration where I was being paid over \$20 an hour and as [an academic] marker I get paid \$35 and that doesn't accurately reflect the difference between somebody who's basically unskilled and somebody who has educational qualifications at a tertiary level. (S17)

Despite the above comment, levels of pay were a source of moderate dissatisfaction among the respondents, 42% of whom were satisfied with their pay, while the remaining 58% were either non-committal or dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction was attributed largely to three factors: inconsistent interpretations, lack of progression and the amount of unpaid work associated with teaching. First, payment for academic duties is interpreted inconsistently such that pay rates for equivalent tasks can differ between discipline groups in the same faculty, between faculties within the same university, and between different universities. Second, there is neither allowance for, nor recognition of, experience in casual academic remuneration. Those with 20 years of experience receive the same level of pay as someone teaching for the first time. Third, the rates frequently underestimate the time required for preparation, student consultation and marking, especially for lectures. For example, 77.5% of the survey respondents reported not being adequately paid for time they spent preparing for teaching and in responding to emails; 63% felt underpaid for the time spent in face-to-face student consultations and 61.5% felt the payment for marking did not adequately reflect the time spent on marking.

I'd spend two days to prepare for a three hour lecture and get paid some piddly amount of money. (S4)

I do put a lot more time into [marking] than I get paid for. (S7)

As well as remuneration concerns, university payment systems were a source of discontent for casual academics. In contrast to McDonald's efficiency of processing payments, casual academics are required to complete on-line time sheets, usually fortnightly. For some casual academics the payment period can encompass several small contract jobs so completion of the timesheets can take half an hour or more of unpaid time. Among respondents, almost one half (47%) considered the processing of timesheets to be less than adequate, while 59% considered the timeliness of receiving employment contracts to be less than adequate.

I find the (timesheet) process so baffling when I go through [the online payroll system] that sometimes I've just feel like, when it's been a small contract, that I just won't even bother putting in a timesheet. (S8)

Some casuals had to wait for six weeks to get paid. It is a common story that casuals just do not get paid for weeks waiting for contracts to be authorised. (S13)

Security and termination

In general, McDonald's crew are aware of their casual status and feel secure in that if they are reliable and perform well they likely will keep their jobs and be offered more work if they want it. McDonald's managers confirm this view with 81% of managers agreeing that 'subject to adequate performance, crew should keep their job as long as they like' (Gould 2005, 162). If the employee plays by the rules, for example, with respect to punctuality, hygiene, customer service, competency, taking training opportunities and addressing management feedback, then a degree of security is granted. Gould's research finds that over 70% of crew and 85% of management believe that good performance will see a continuation of services. Managers would only terminate employment as a last resort; indeed the common view is that effective long-term service culminates in job security for McDonald's crew.

Insecurity of employment was a common fear among the university interviewees and survey respondents. For more than 75% of the respondents, discontinuity of work was an important concern. For example: 'Security's been a very major thing over the years. So you're always worried about, am I going to have work in the holidays? Am I going to have an income?' (S11).

The fear of termination is particularly poignant in this quote: 'Not knowing what work you're going to get. It puts you in a situation where you're feeling desperate and you've got to say yes to what's offered' (S4).

For casual academics, performing well is no indicator of continued employment, presumably because of the lack of evaluation and changes in course coordinators who have a preference for some people over others, regardless of experience or performance. The feeling of 'disposability' is common:

You'll get an email from the Head of School or whoever going, 'Congratulations. You've scored 4.8 out of five' ... then you're thinking, oh, well, they must think I'm good. And then you get dumped. (S9)

I've been here five years, it seems to work in 18-month cycles where they give you lots of work and then they dump you ... without a word. And then a trimester or two later they rehire you again and you get lots of work. And then 18 months later they dump you again. (S5)

Summary of findings

It is clear that McDonald's crew and casual academic have little in common outside their precarious employment status. They not only differ demographically but the nature of their work and work environments are diametrically opposed. Despite being educated and skilled, casual academics endure human resource management practices that are in deficit on all counts compared to the management of McDonald's crew.

Discussion

The comparison between McDonald's crew and casual academics reveals major flaws in the unquestioned acceptance and usefulness of McDonaldization terms applied to higher education. Just as Gould (2010) questioned whether the McJobs epithet is appropriate for

describing McDonald's employees, the question arises whether the McDonaldization thesis is appropriate to higher education given this article's comparison of the work and management of casual employees of McDonald's and of universities. Gould finds the McJobs label deficient in several aspects. While the work organization of McDonald's employees has salient Taylorist characteristics, the management of these employees offers human resource advantages such as training and the possibility of careers. Hence the work is neither exploitative nor precarious as suggested in previous literature (e.g. Kincheloe 2002; Schlosser 2002). Undoubtedly, the work organization in McDonald's is repetitive, with only a minority of employees seeking an ongoing career, but those who join McDonald's do so knowing what to expect. Ironically, casual academic work is anything but Taylorist, yet its management could be construed to be both exploitative and precarious. A lack of clarity about academic career paths creates expectations among casual academics that ultimately result in frustration and disillusionment (Buddelmeier and Wooden 2011). Based on the failure to find any similarities between the work and management of these two groups of employees, the relevance of the McDonaldization thesis to other aspects of higher education is questionable.

McDonaldization in relation to higher education is misplaced because the inputs, processes and outputs of the two organizations are entirely different – they cannot be meaningfully compared. McDonald's standardizes its inputs, processes and outputs, transforming processed, homogenized food inputs into convenience fast food based on efficient Taylorist labour management. Conversely, using relational and creative processes that are frequently invisible and unmeasurable, the university is charged with educating human individuals (i.e. inputs) of different abilities and aspirations to produce heterogeneous graduates with various skills and knowledge bases. As clearly as a hamburger cannot be compared to a university graduate, McDonaldization cannot be applied to higher education.

The central question of why McDonald's is superior to universities in managing its casual staff has two possible explanations. First, casual employees are a central feature of McDonald's product and business model, hence accorded the appropriate recognition and training. This strategy is an important part of brand protection, as well as a response to an expected low employee retention rate, given the non-vocational nature of the work. In contrast, casual academics, despite their ubiquity and contribution to cost savings, are considered peripheral to the 'business of the university' (Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure, et al. 2009; May et al. 2011; Ryan et al. 2011) regardless of 'brand' and possibly because of their increasingly high retention rate. Unlike McDonald's employees, whose work motivations are largely instrumental, casual academics are passionate about their work, as if addicted to teaching and learning. Indeed, McDonald's human resource management cleverly casts casualized, repetitive work as a 'vocation', whereas university management's clumsy, insensitive handling of its adjunct workforce downgrades genuine vocational aspirations to 'non-vocational' status, thus sowing seeds of discontent for dedicated, qualified casual academics who desire a career.

The second explanation concerns organizational purpose. McDonald's has an unambiguous purpose to generate profit through the production of homogenous fast food in a fun environment. The motives of the university, contrariwise, are increasingly muddled. Traditional goals of knowledge acquisition and dissemination clash with neo-liberalist pressures to operate as a free market corporation, with the university privileging financialization over education and research (L. D. Parker 2012), but without having a 'product' in the economic sense that financialization would imply (Lorenz 2012). Hence, there is confusion of purpose and identity that manifests in operational

contradictions. The mismanagement verging on non-management of casual academics is but a symptom of a wider confusion over the philosophy and purpose of the university's role (Barry, Chandler, and Clark 2001). In its rush to mimic the corporation, the university has attempted to market itself, managerialize its structures, and standardize and measure what cannot be standardized and measured (Lorenz 2012). In doing so, it has inadvertently and inappropriately built cumbersome and expensive bureaucracies (Lorenz 2012) in a way that would have to be considered the antithesis of efficiency under McDonaldization.

At best, and in line with its confusion of purpose, the university could be viewed as employing selective aspects of McDonaldization as a means of control over its 'product'. However, these aspects are essentially superficial; for example, standardization of courses and questionable attempts to calculate productivity and quality. Unfortunately, the more desirable aspects of McDonaldization, such as a focus on maintaining core business and the producers of the business, have been overlooked. The use of such selective aspects of McDonaldization by universities is insufficient grounds to justify its use as a descriptor of higher education. By focusing on McDonaldization of education, the destructive consequences of neoliberalism and its corollary, managerialism, escape examination because they lie outside the McDonaldization model.

Following Gould's (2005, 2009, 2010) critique of the veracity of the 'McJobs' epithet to the reality of work at McDonald's, this article has built on his work – albeit in a different labour market sample – to question the applicability of McDonaldization to higher education. The clarity of purpose and consistency of operations at McDonald's is an organizational feature from which universities would benefit. Indeed, a practical contribution of this paper would be to encourage universities to adopt the more positive human resource management practices of McDonald's such as transparent selection and recruitment processes and training and development programs for casual staff. At a more general level, this small comparative study of labour management strategies contributes to understanding the nuances of casualization in different sectors and how work and other dimensions of society interact. The McDonaldization descriptor applied to higher education captures only superficial aspects – standardization, efficiency and reliance on flexible labour. If the analogy cannot stretch to the work and management of academic labour, then other aspects of higher education to which McDonaldization has been applied may not withstand empirical scrutiny. It is easy to apply pejorative labels like McUniversity to unpalatable aspects of organizations, but the appeal of such labels may deflect us from deeper analysis of important issues. Our paper goes some way to responding to Margolis' (2004) call for further empirical work and critical questioning of relevance of the McDonaldization thesis to universities. Additionally, it opens up other areas for further research on the contradictions between university practice and the tenets of McDonaldization, including excessive bureaucratization and the different meanings and consequences of 'efficiency' for each organization. Investigation into these areas might lead more naturally back to the central role of neoliberalist ideology in undermining higher education.

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