

# Business Education and the (Re)production of Gendered Cultures of Work in the City of London

**Sarah Hall\***

This paper examines the role of business education in producing and legitimating gendered cultures of work in the City of London. By combining research on the gendered nature of service work with Bourdieu's identification of multiple forms of capital and the role of education credentials within this, the analysis shows how business education reproduces classed and gendered understandings of appropriate and desirable workplace personas in financial services. The analysis is based on original empirical research undertaken in London's investment banking sector comprising 90 semi-structured interviews and content analysis of business education courses offered to investment bankers. Empirically, the paper focuses attention on the comparatively neglected role of business education undertaken in the workplace in shaping the cultures of work in financial centers such as London. Theoretically, the analysis shows how work on the cultural capital associated with education credentials and their role in shaping workplace identities can be used to better understand the role of education in legitimating, reproducing and sustaining gendered cultures of work more generally.

## Introduction

The role of financial elites in shaping the political economy of the UK is a well-established focus of social scientific research (see, for example, [Michie 1992](#); [Thrift 1994](#); [Leyshon and Thrift 1997](#); [Cain and Hopkins 2002](#)). The significance of this work has been underscored by the 2007–2008 financial crisis and the ensuing finance-led recession with the culpability of financiers in causing the crisis being keenly debated in political, media and academic circles ([Tett 2009](#); [Lewis 2010](#)). Reflecting this continued importance of financial elites and the growing interest in practice within socioeconomic life (see [Jones and Murphy 2011](#)) recent research has moved beyond charting the historic rise of financial elites to examine how their daily working practices sustain their

\*School of Geography, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK, [sarah.hall@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.hall@nottingham.ac.uk)

power within the international financial system. The resulting literature demonstrates how differences between financial centers in terms of their regulatory, cultural and institutional environment produce a geographically variegated international financial system in which particular attitudes, habits and formal and informal rules—what can be termed cultures of work—legitimate certain forms of action by elites while deeming others to be non-legitimate (Beaverstock 2004; Clark and Wójcik 2007; Hall 2008, 2009; Ho 2009).

In this paper, I focus on the gendered nature of these cultures of work. In this respect, research has demonstrated how gendered norms concerning the nature of legitimate (and by extension, potentially lucrative) forms of working practice are co-constitutive of financial cultures of work. For example, in the case of London, McDowell (1997) has demonstrated how certain essentialized masculine dispositions were privileged and became powerful within financial services work in the City of London in the 1990s. In order to advance understandings of how these gendered cultures of financial work continue to be produced and reproduced in the contemporary City of London, this paper focuses on the role of ongoing education and training within financial services workplaces in imbuing gendered norms into financial cultures of work. This focus is important because while the educational *background* at a small number of public fee paying schools and elite universities, notably Oxford and Cambridge, has been identified as an important element in shaping the nature of legitimate working practices in financial services work in the City (Jones 1998; Cain and Hopkins 2002), the role of ongoing education has been neglected. In response, I report on original empirical research undertaken into the use of different forms of business education and training by investment bankers working in London's international financial district. Drawing on this empirical material, it is argued that while these educational experiences are framed by employers as producing a more meritocratic City in which individuals can enjoy rapid career progression through the attainment of desirable technical abilities through appropriate education, they serve to reinforce and rework more longstanding version of "old boys networks" that have, historically at least, served to normalize particular gendered and class norms within financial labor markets in the City (on which see Augar 2001).

Through documenting the important role played by business education in reproducing gendered cultures of work in London's financial district, the analysis presented in the paper makes a number of contributions. Empirically, it focuses attention on the comparatively neglected role of business education undertaken in the workplace in shaping the cultures of work in financial centers such as London. In this respect, I suggest that the significance of such courses to the operation of the international financial system extends beyond the technical expertise taught within them to the more subtle habits, norms and informal rules that course participants are inculcated into and which go on to shape the cultures of work in the City. Theoretically, the analysis shows how work on the cultural capital associated with education credentials

(Bourdieu 1986a,b; 1998) and their role in shaping workplace identities in professional service work (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002; Hanlon 2004) can be used to better understand the role of education in legitimating, reproducing and sustaining gendered cultures of work within the City of London. I develop this argument over three further substantive sections. Next, I conceptualize the role of business education in reproducing gendered cultures of work within the financial services sector. I then examine how these educational experiences are used to inculcate investment bankers into and reproduce and normalize the gendered nature of these labor markets both at early and more senior career stages. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of this analysis for understandings of the gendered nature of work within “knowledge based economies” more generally and the international financial system more specifically in the wake of the financial crisis and ongoing finance-led recession.

## Gendered Cultures of Work in the City of London

Following Schoenberger’s (1997, 116) seminal work on organizational cultures, cultures of work are the “set of social conventions embracing behavioral norms, standards, customs and the ‘rules of the game’ underlying social interactions”. In terms of financial services, such cultures of work are place and time specific, differing between financial centers and within the same financial center at different points in its history. For example, central to London’s emergence as a leading international financial center in the late nineteenth and twentieth century were the dense networks that were forged between both financiers and their regulators based around shared social, class and educational backgrounds (Kynaston 2001). It is argued that sufficient commonality between individuals within these networks allowed the creation of trust-based relationships with colleagues, clients and regulators at the Bank of England (Pryke 1991; Cook *et al.* 2007). Crucially for my arguments in this paper, research has documented how this culture of work was also gendered through the dominance of a particular version of masculinity. This is reflected in it commonly being termed an era of ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ (Augar 2001), in which “old boys networks’ based around educational background were a key factor in securing entry into and trust within such work places. As Thrift (1994, 342) argues, this “narrative of the gentleman” was “based on values of honor, integrity, courtesy and so on, and manifested in ideas of how to act, ways to talk [and] suitable clothing” (Thrift 1994, 342, see also Tickell 1996; McDowell 1997). In so doing, it entailed both gendered and classed dimensions arising largely from shared elite educational backgrounds.

There are two related literatures on gender that help specify how this culture of work in the City was, historically at least, gendered. First, work on gender as performance (Butler 1993). This literature draws heavily on Foucauldian approaches to sexuality (Foucault 1979) to argue that gender is

not a fixed category that correlates neatly with male and female bodies. Rather we are socialized into gender roles that are played out through a series of performances involving the body through acts such as dress and ways of carrying oneself (Butler 1987). The fact that there is nothing inevitable about the gender performances undertaken by different bodies relates to a second literature which is helpful in understanding the ways in which City cultures of work are gendered. This literature draws attention to the multiple forms of masculinities and femininities and the power relations between them (Connell 1989, 1995). Within work on service work, including financial services, this literature reveals how some gender performances, particularly forms of masculinity, become dominant in different contexts and the ways in which this subverts other gender performances. Using these approaches, McDowell (1997) demonstrates how, in the case of the City of London, the dominant masculinities associated with the rise of the City of London historically based around discourses of the “gentleman” were challenged by other “sexy/greedy” masculinities associated with the rise of trading in the City from the 1980s onwards (Leyshon and Thrift 1997).

These trading masculinities within the City’s culture of work reflect wider changes in the nature of the financial services industry and its recruitment patterns. In part, the growing challenge to dominant gender performances of “the gentleman” in the City reflects changes to the nature of the financial services industry itself as trading functions associated with the rise of the issuance of securities at the expense of advisory services that were based on longstanding client–provider relationships (Augar 2005; Wainwright 2009; see also Wójcik 2011 for an analysis of the central role played by investment banks in the securities industry). The growth of these activities is linked to the wider internationalization, and particularly Americanization of the City, as a growing number of foreign banks increased their London operations from the mid-1980s onwards (Kynaston 2001). Given that these international firms were not as closely tied to UK school and university alumni networks, the growth of non-UK firms in the City gave rise to new recruitment practices including the use of “milk rounds” to recruit graduates from a (slightly) wider range of universities and the growing use of headhunters in order to conduct international searches for finance professionals (Faulconbridge *et al.* 2009; Beaverstock and Hall 2012). These changes in recruitment were also fuelled by an increasing demand for financial services workers following the deregulation of the City in the 1980s that could not easily be met through the traditional recruiting routes of old school networks (Leyshon and Thrift 1997).

At one level, these changes point to the possibility of a more meritocratic City in which educational background and the dominant gender performances of “gentlemanly capitalism” have become less significant. However, in this paper, I suggest that while the role of educational background is still debatable (see Brown and Hesketh 2004 for a wider discussion of the relationship between education and entry into elite labor markets), other forms of

education and training that take place upon entry into City labor markets play an important, but hitherto neglected role, in reproducing certain, dominant masculinities within contemporary City cultures of work.

### **Business Education and Gendered Cultures of Work**

In order to understand the role of ongoing business education in producing gendered cultures of work in the City, I draw on Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural capital and the role of education within this. Bourdieu identifies multiple forms capital – social, economic, symbolic and cultural – possessed by an individual that, in conjunction with one another, serve to shape the relative advantage of individuals within society. Briefly, social capital is based around one's personal networks and membership of social groups. Economic capital can be understood as wealth either through income or inheritance, while symbolic capital refers to the relative prestige of an individual as perceived by others. For Bourdieu (1986a,b) cultural capital comprises: embodied elements (including embodied and cognitive dispositions); objectified elements (the selection and display of cultural goods); and, institutionalized forms (including educational qualifications or credentials and membership of more formal groups and clubs). Given the role of education credentials within it, Bourdieu's work on cultural capital is particularly important for my arguments in this paper.

Following his work on the related forms of capital, for Bourdieu (1984), educational credentials signify more than simply possessing a body of knowledge. Rather they act as a marker for possessing an assemblage of capitals including behaviors, dispositions and embodied skills associated with the prestige of the educational institution and qualification that serve to legitimate (or not) individuals position in a group of space (or, in the case of this paper, the workplaces within the City of London). Conceiving of education credentials in this way is particularly important in the case of service work, including financial services because, as work in organizational theory has shown, an important element of managerial control within organizations in “knowledge” based economies is the (re)production of particular identities among employees (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002). This is particularly important in professional service firms because ensuring appropriate mindsets, habits and behaviors is seen as vital to inculcating individuals into the workplace culture of their organization in order to both control and manage employees with the right mindset and motivation, but also to maximize the profitability of the firm through, for example cementing trust between colleagues and clients (Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson 1998; Hanlon 2004; Karreman and Alvesson 2009).

However, while corporate education and training have been identified as an important set of practices through which individuals are inculcated into corporate cultures of work within professional service firms (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002), the ways in which cultural capital relates to gendered cultures of work

has received much less attention. In response, I follow recent engagement by feminist theorists with Bourdieu's work (see Adkins and Skeggs, 2004) and argue that "gender can be a form of cultural capital but only if it is symbolically legitimated (historically, for instance via class, as a particular version of middle-class femininity)" (Skeggs 2004, 24). In this paper, I examine how business education serves to legitimate particular masculine performances creating a gendered culture of work in the City and how such masculinities are also closely tied to the gendered and class-based identities of legitimate City elites that have dominated the City of London historically. In so doing, I reveal how while the greater emphasis placed on business education in the City in the 2000s is often positioned in policy circles as a way of advancing a more meritocratic City of London in which educational and social background is less significant, the cultural capital associated with several business education credentials actually serves to reinforce further the gendered cultures of work in the City in which embodying particular gendered and classed bodily and cognitive dispositions remains an important determinant of upward career progression.

### Methodology

The research reported on below forms part of a multi-method research project that was undertaken to examine the changing nature of financial business education from the perspectives of investment bankers, their employers and financial business education providers in the City of London. The research was undertaken in three stages between 2006 and 2009. First, a database of fifty-two business education providers offering educational services to investment banks in London was compiled using information from the Financial Services Skills Council, international and UK national specialist press (e.g. *The Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*) and relevant trade bodies in London, including the City of London Corporation, City UK and the British Bankers Association.

Second, ninety interviews were conducted with investment bankers at a range of career stages working for investment banks with different countries of ownership (38 interviews); business school faculty and managers (36 interviews); human resource managers in investment banks (6 interviews); and education and managers in for-profit specialist financial business education companies (10 interviews). All interviews apart from one were transcribed in full. Business schools were selected for inclusion in the study using the annual MBA rankings published in *The Financial Times*. Small, boutique financial education firms and multinational education companies with operations in London were included in the study. Interviews collected information on the reasons for offering and studying for business education qualifications, the relationship between business education and career progression within investment banking and the impact of the financial crisis on financial business education. Third, content analysis was undertaken on the business education

course literature including corporate websites, module and course handbooks and marketing material.

## Business Education in the City of London

Recruitment based around educational background typified the relationship between education and investment banking in the City of London prior to the 2000s (see for example Jones 1998; Augar 2001). Educational background continues to play an important role in securing entry into investment banking labor markets as university qualifications from a small number of universities, particularly Oxford, Cambridge and The Russell Group, continue to be used as a marker of institutionalized cultural capital. This is reflected in the relatively small number of universities that investment banks visit in order to target undergraduate students through the annual “milk round” in graduate recruitment (see for example <http://graduate.barclayscapital.com/emea/events>; and Brown and Hesketh 2004 on graduate recruitment into the service sector more generally). However, in the 2000s, business education became an increasingly important element within City cultures of work with figures suggesting that, by 2007, 74% of financial service employers in the City used business education to develop their employees (FSSC 2008; see also Hall and Appleyard 2009).

Historically, the most important form of business education used by investment banks, particularly in the US where there is a much more established use of business education, was the MBA degree from leading business schools. This reflects its role as the “gold standard” of business education (Whitley 2006) and the associated greater institutionalized cultural capital that it confers on graduates. However, the MBA has faced criticism in recent years with some questioning its relevance to contemporary business (Pfeffer and Fong 2004) and others implicating it in economic crises including the accountancy scandals in the US in the early 2000s and the “global” financial crisis (Mintzberg 2004; Caulkin 2008). In response, business schools have diversified their educational provision for financiers to include the launch of MSc degrees in quantitative finance usually taken immediately after graduation from a first degree, reflecting the increasingly technical nature of the international financial system associated the rise of finance-led capitalism in the 2000s and the emergence of new financial products and techniques, notably securitization. Meanwhile, other forms of financial business education providers, especially for-profit business education companies have grown rapidly in response to the perceived limitations of MBA degrees (Hall and Appleyard 2011). These companies provide education both in technical competencies such as the quantitative financial theories that underpin processes of securitization and more explicitly embodied forms of knowledge such as leadership.

Below, I examine how these changing forms of business education help shape gendered cultures of work in the City by legitimating certain workplace attitudes, behaviors and performances that are bound up with a series of



classed and gendered identities at both early and more senior career stages. At both career stages I examine how different types of business education inculcate individuals into the embodied, objectified and institutionalized forms of cultural capital valued within the City of London.

### **Learning to be an Investment Banker: Business Education and Gendered Cultures of Work Among Graduate Recruits**

On entry into investment banking following graduation from their first, undergraduate degree, the most common form of business education for new investment bankers, known as associates or analysts, is the graduate training course run by their employing investment bank. These courses last between one and three months and typically comprise: a residential stay working at the banks' headquarters; a number of rotations working for short periods of time in different departments within the bank; social events to meet other new recruits; and lectures and seminars covering the technical elements of working as an investment banker. There is significant competition to gain entry onto such courses with many ambitious graduates aiming to get onto the courses run by the "magic circle" of large, global investment banks because of the greater symbolic and cultural capital associated with these - capital that can be leveraged much later in a career. As one interviewee summarized

The fact I trained at Goldmans [Goldman Sachs] was a big deal because everyone knows it offers one of the most comprehensive training programmes – and I can still use that now on my CV.

(Female investment bank associate, London, October 2006)

Interviews with human resources managers and senior investment bankers involved in the training of associates revealed that an important aim of such courses was not simply to provide individuals with the technical knowledge and expertise needed to complete their jobs, but also to socialize them into the expected workplace personas of contemporary investment bankers – or what Bourdieu (1998) would term embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital - as the following examples demonstrates

Our training scheme for associates is comprehensive – yes we cover technical know how but a vital element is learning what it means to work here, our unique culture, how we engage with colleagues and clients and even things we take for granted like what a working day looks like, the hours, the commitment etc

(Male investment bank vice president, September 2006)

Yes so like the first week is generally an overview just to give them an idea of our history and our background and our cultural networks and what's available to them and that sort of thing. So as far as soft skills they do philanthropy and that sort of thing just to give them a sort of



overview and then it goes into more specific training. So on the securities side, they start like the equities and fixed income classes [...] at the beginning and they are given general core skills that they need such as accountancy skills and excel skills and things like that but then they also have a product specific week where they go into a lot more detail of their own particular area.

*(Human Resources manager, November 2008)*

In addition to the course content of graduate training schemes, a survey of course promotional literature highlights how the importance of learning how to be a successful banker involves learning a set of cultural dispositions and knowledge of specific corporate cultures in addition to technical competencies:

The curriculum includes intensive technology training, orientation to Morgan Stanley, an overview of the securities industry, exposure to senior managers, professional skills workshops and a project addressing real business needs. Trainees develop a strong network of colleagues during the programme and build lasting relationships

<http://www.morganstanley.com/about/careers/gtp.html>, last accessed, 20 October 2011

Each programme begins with approximately eight weeks of classroom-based training. This consists of an introduction to the firm and its resources, and intensive technical training in accounting, finance, modeling and valuation, plus briefings on specific financial products. You'll also build on your communication, quantitative and analytical skills and participate in a number of team building and networking events.

<http://graduate.barclayscapital.com/emea/full-time-programmes>, last accessed 20 October 2011.

The importance attached to inculcating individuals into the acceptable social and cultural dispositions and attitudes of being a successful investment banker within graduate training courses echoes the literature on advanced business service firms more generally (Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson 1998; Alvesson and Wilmott 2002; Jones 2003) in which it is argued that such characteristics are vital to the fostering of trust-based relationships between colleagues and clients. The main features of this idealized investment banking persona that these courses are seeking to legitimate and reproduce are summarized in Table 1.

The rhetoric surrounding these courses is strongly framed by the discourses of human capital (Becker 1993) in which it is understood that through suitable investment in their skills through education, workers will be able to maximize their productivity and hence earning power (see also Olds and Thrift 2005). This framing of graduate training courses follows wider discourses of

**Table 1.** Dimensions of the “Professional” Investment Banker Subject in the City of London

Quality	Componentes
Client relationship management	Commercial awareness of client needs Acceptable behavior in dealings with clients
Cultural fit	Shared non work interests and opinions
Commitment and Willingness	Flexibility to work long hours Eagerness to undertake additional tasks at short notice for more senior colleagues
Embodiment	Appropriate dress and presentation

Source: Author interviews and analysis of graduate training course promotional material.

meritocracy that are argued to have increased in the City since the 1980s, according to which educational background has become less important following the growth of international, and particularly American firms within the city. However, it is my contention in this paper that the forms of cultural capital being legitimated through such courses are also gendered and classed in particular and related ways.

First, client relationship management is an important element in graduate training schemes since selling financial products to a range of corporate and financial clients is central to the investment banking business model (Augar 2005). As such, during their graduate training scheme, new associates are provided with an introduction into how corporate hospitality at elite sporting events such as the Wimbledon tennis tournament and the Rugby Six nations international competition is a vital way of entertaining clients in order to secure new business as well as to celebrate the successful completion of contracts with clients. However, the focus of such hospitality at leading sporting competitions combines two competing masculinities that have been important within the historic development of the City. First, it reflects the continued importance of a particular upper middle class based masculinity associated with a “gentleman” civility that characterized cultures of work in the City historically in which sporting events were key social spaces in which to network with individuals of similar backgrounds (see for example Thrift 1994). However, it also involves elements of the more outwardly competitive, trading masculinity in which the aggression typical of many competitive team sports was seen as a desirable attribute to bring onto the trading floor (see Ho 2009 for a discussion of this in the case of Wall Street). Indeed, reflecting the long-standing nature of such tropes, associates typically learn the appropriate ways of acting at such events by attending with, and shadowing, more senior colleagues as the following example demonstrates

During my graduate training scheme in New York (the headquarter location of their investment banks) I was invited to attend a couple of corporate hospitality events – both were at baseball matches

*(Male investment bank associate, March 2007)*

Interviews with female associates pointed to the competing ways in which such events contributed to gendered cultures of work in the City with some respondents reflecting on the challenges of not having a strong sporting background in terms of engaging with clients in the “club-based” world of a “gentlemanly capitalist”:

The first corporate hospitality event I attended was a rugby match at Twickenham – part of the Six nations [annual tournament]. It was a nightmare – freezing cold, I don’t understand rugby and as a result I had very little to say to anyone

*(Investment bank associate, June 2008)*

However, other female associates described how they used their lack of interest in sport as a way of initiating client contact by, as one associate put it in July 2008 “being super girly and asking them to explain the game to me”.

The second way in which graduate training schemes were used to reproduce a reworked “old boys network” associated with the acceptable version of who a successful investment banker is was through the use of such courses to train individuals in the importance of demonstrating commitment to their employing investment bank and the “acceptable” ways of demonstrating this. Most notably, individuals were expected to work long hours during training, “often up to 60 hours per week” as one vice president summarized in July 2007. Indeed, a number of associates were proud of how many hours they had worked without a break as the following examples demonstrate

You have to be committed, I did a 36 houer [sic] where I just slept under my desk but at least I was there when the business was taking place. I’ve heard of some places where they even have a room with pop up beds in because they expect that people are going to need to stay overnight at some point.

*(Investment bank associate, December 2006)*

There is a presentism [sic] whereby people don’t think you are working unless you are seen in the office. You start to learn about this on the training course where they tell you that you need to be seen to get promoted and noticed

*(Investment bank associate, March 2007)*

The majority of investment bank associates interviewed accepted and even celebrated this long hours culture as a necessary part of building a successful

career. This reflects the ways in which work and pleasure overlapped in the cultures of work associated with “gentlemanly capitalism” in which social, often personal ties were vital for corporate success (Augar 2001). However, the more senior bankers interviewed reflected on the challenges this posed in terms of combining work with their home lives, a point I return to below.

Third, and finally, training courses were used as important processes through which individuals learnt the importance of looking like and embodying a professional investment banker and the importance of this for forwarding their own careers. In part, this was achieved through briefing sessions on organizational dress codes but it was also learnt through observations of more senior colleagues. Echoing McDowell’s (1997) work on what she describes as the “sober” staid world of the City in the 1990s, individuals (both men and women) were encouraged to wear a neutral, masculine business wear of suits with “very little space for me to dress in a girly or colorful way” (Investment bank associate, London July 2007). Indeed, this business attire extended to personal grooming with female associates speaking at length about their hair and makeup as the following example demonstrates

Because you basically have to wear a dark color suit getting your make up right and hair straightened is essential to getting that mix right between blending in with the guys but also looking like a woman

*(Investment bank associate, September 2007).*

As such, graduate training schemes represent an important set of activities in reproducing “acceptable” and professional investment banking subjects that are highly gendered, reflecting historically dominant masculinities of the “gentlemanly capitalist” being reproduced and legitimated alongside some elements of the newer “sexy/greedy” City trader. This understanding of such courses runs counter to the rhetoric that surrounds them within the industry that emphasizes their meritocratic nature in individual difference is celebrated:

‘As a global business, our people come from all over the world and represent different nationalities, educational backgrounds and life experiences. We welcome their unique perspectives, their energy and ideas and their willingness to learn as well as to teach’. (<http://www.goldmansachs.com/careers/why-goldman-sachs/diversity/index.html>, accessed 7/11/11)

This role of business education in reproducing cultures of work that valorize idealized and gendered “professional” investment bankers extends beyond these initial graduate training schemes to more senior career levels.

### **Developing as an Investment Banker: Business Education and Gendered Cultures of Work Among Senior Investment Bankers**

Unlike the compulsory graduate training courses that new recruits follow, more senior investment bankers are able to choose what forms of business education they undertake. One of the most significant decisions is whether to undertake an MBA degree at a leading international business school. In New York and in US owned investment banks, MBA degrees have historically been much more important than in the City of London and European owned investment banks. However, as US banks increased their London operations from the mid-1980s, MBA degrees became increasingly popular in the UK as a way of accelerating one's career progression as the following human resources manager summarized

When I started out in the early 1990s MBA degrees weren't that common. However, we respond to our competition as US banks have grown here [in the City] so I've seen more and more people take an MBA in order to climb the career ladder as fast as possible.

*(Human Resources Manager, September 2006)*

Echoing comments such as this, the promotional material of MBA courses frequently uses the language of human capital to frame an MBA as an investment in unlocking an individual's maximum earnings as the case of London Business School advertising material highlights

It's a big decision. An MBA is a significant investment that demands substantial return. Choose London Business School and make sure your investment pays off

#### **London Business School 2011**

However, it is well documented that the residential nature of MBA degrees coupled with the fact that individuals frequently travel internationally to study for them contributes to the under-representation of women on such courses (Simpson 1995). This was widely commented on by the women I interviewed with comments such as the following being typical

I don't have an MBA and one of the main reasons was purely practical—with a young child I just couldn't travel to a good [business] School internationally and I just didn't have the time to work on one. Whether that's affected my career progression or not—it's hard to tell

*(Female Investment banking associate, December 2008)*

I had a place on an MBA and was all set to use that as the next investment in my career and then we started a family and I just couldn't justify the time and financial cost when there were other priorities on us as a family

*(Investment bank vice-president, October 2006)*

However, in addition to the ways in which the practicalities of studying for an MBA degree restrict the participation of some individuals, the course content of MBA degrees and education offered by specialist business education companies to more senior investment bankers also serves to legitimate particular gendered cultures of work in the City associated with particular dominant masculinities. At more advanced career stages within investment banks, this was most notable in leadership education. This type of education grew in importance in the 2000s as “American values increasingly took over the City” (Investment bank vice president, September 2008; see also Hall and Appleyard 2009).

Business education providers framed this education as a way of maximizing the human capital of investment bankers

Investment banking labour markets are competitive and so it makes sense that individuals invest in themselves through our leadership education both to make themselves more effective in the workplace but also to position themselves favourably vis-à-vis their colleagues when it comes to bonus rounds, promotions, that kind of thing

*(Business School Manager, October 2006)*

However, the types of leadership reproduced and legitimated through this education are gendered in particular ways, reflecting work on the gendered performance and the content of leadership education within business schools (Sinclair 1995; Burke and Vinnicombe 2005). This gendering was manifest in a number of ways. First, the location of many of these courses and the discourses surrounding them that arose from these locations frequently legitimates and values stereotypically masculine qualities of hyper competition and aggression—linked in many ways to the “sexy/greedy” trading masculinity that rose in the City in the 1980s as identified by McDowell (1997). Again the use of sport as both location and discourse was important in this respect as the following example shows

I was sent on a future leaders away day. It was held at a football stadium and references to sport were all over the place – how do you beat the rules of the game, how do you get your team to perform at their best on match days, that kind of thing. I’ve got used to it now and I’ve developed a working knowledge of some sports just to get by.

*(Male investment bank vice president, September 2007)*

Second, the activities used as part of educational courses embodied a form of heroic masculinity in which adventure and risk taking are celebrated and displayed to colleagues in ways that echo the symbolic component of cultural capital:

The options for team building are all quite out doorsy (sic)—long distance endurance cycling events, walking on hot coals, that kind of thing

*(Investment banker, September 2006)*

This reflects wider work on the training program undertaken by bankers such as Rohlen's (1973) research into the use of military training approaches within Japanese banks and the relationship between extreme sports such as bungee jumping and the more competitive nature of work within "knowledge based economies" more generally (Thrift 2005).

The ways in which cultures of work at the senior levels of investment banks were legitimated through business education extends beyond leadership education to include education aimed at maintaining and enhancing their technical know-how. These courses are typically run by business education companies ranging in size from multinationals such as Kaplan to boutiques specializing in quantitative finance such as 7 City Learning. This education is aimed at fostering entrepreneurial risk takers who, rather than understanding financial markets as fundamentally uncertain, embraced the discourses of risk "management" that surround securitization (O'Neil 2009). The culture of work being legitimated through these courses was based around a technically competent masculinity which runs counter to discourses of women being unable to make rational financial management decisions that have a longstanding history within financial services (see for example De Goede 2005 on credit money in the sixteenth century and Maltby and Rutterford 2006 on female investors in the nineteenth century). The workplace person being legitimated is that associated with rationality and decisiveness—as Augar (2009, 124) writes of investment banking before the financial crisis, "there was a different culture of boldness, a determination to become a major player, a willingness to invest". For example, course brochures emphasized the ways in which their educational services enabled investment bankers to make rational decisions based on evidence:

We teach model builders how to design and construct financial models that can be practically used to evaluate business and make decisions, a financial model's ultimate purpose

Financial Mechanics, FAST Modelling course brochure.

The importance attached to the ability to be decisive and make rational decisions was also frequently commented on by my interviewees with comments such as the following being typical

I think an ability to look at mathematical functions and understand them, as well as apply logic, I think fundamentally just having a logical mind for problem solving is generally required both in managing projects, running teams or solving issues more generally



*(Male investment banker July 2009)*

Taken together, education in both leadership and more technical skills was framed by employers and education providers as facilitating a more meritocratic elite financial services labor market in which education and social background was less important and people could literally invest in their upward career mobility by investing in business education:

Our training programme produces a more meritocratic and diverse employee body. We are less interested in where you've come from and give you educational options that allow everyone to maximise their potential

*(Human resources manager, September 2006)*

However, the research and analysis presented above suggest that the types of educational experiences being celebrated as heralding the end of “gentlemanly capitalism” within the City in which educational background was a key determinant of success may be (re)producing gendered cultures of work in which a number of historically powerful masculinities in the City, notably those of the “gentlemanly capitalist” and “sexy/greedy” traders remain important.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The research presented in this paper reveals how a range of business education experiences are used by investment banks in London's financial district in an effort to (re)produce the highly skilled financiers deemed to be an essential factor in the continued competitiveness of the City as an international financial center (Z/Yen 2009). These educational experiences are positioned by policy makers and financial employers as being indicative of a more meritocratic City in which educational background and personal connections have become less important in terms of facilitating entry into, and upward career progression within, financial labor markets. However, by combining work on gender in the workplace with understandings of the cultural capital associated with particular education credentials, in this paper I have argued that financial business education serves to reproduce and legitimate gendered and classed cultures of work in the City of London. Through these forms of education, acceptable and desirable ways of interacting with colleagues and clients are legitimated as well as attitudes to risk management that involve embodied and cognitive dispositions associated with more longstanding dominant masculinities and class-based forms of cultural capital in the City.

Theoretically, this finding is significant because it positions business education as an important, but hitherto neglected factor in the reproduction and reworking of more longstanding gendered cultures of work within elite financial services labor markets. In so doing, it underscores the need for conceptualizing education more widely in studies of the reproduction of work and

workers within neo-liberal “knowledge based economies” more generally in which individuals are increasingly expected to literally invest in their own economic potential through education in order to enhance economic competitiveness (Thrift 2005). It also extends recent research examining the intersection between feminist thought and Bourdieu’s social theory by detailing the ways in which education can serve to legitimate gendered elements of cultural capital (see also Reay 2004). Empirically, my findings are important for two main reasons. First, they contribute to a growing literature that reveals how the financial services boom of the so-called NICE (no inflation, constant expansion) decade of the 2000s was accompanied by a distinctive gendered division of labor and gendered culture of work in the City (see for example Czarniawska 2006; McDowell 2010). Second, they reveal the problematic nature of policy responses to the ongoing financial crisis that have identified the hypermasculine nature of financial services work as one of the causes of the crisis and suggested that greater female participation in these labor markets would lead to a more sustainable and less risk averse international financial system (Altman 2009; Treasury Committee 2010). Rather, this research highlights the ways in which simply increasing the number of women working in finance would not necessarily alter the gendered nature of elite financial services work and its associated attitudes to risk taking and management that were central to the crisis. As such, understanding the relationship between business education and the cultures of work within the international financial system has an important contribution to make in identifying the causes of the crisis as well as raising questions concerning the gendered nature of work and learning within “knowledge based economies” more generally.

## Acknowledgements

I am also grateful to Lindsey Appleyard for her work on business education and the comments of the reviewers and editors who informed the arguments made in the paper.

## Funding

The research reported on in this paper was funded by The Nuffield Foundation (SGS/3204) and an ESRC First Grant (RES-061-25-0071).

## References

- Adkins, L., and B. Skeggs, eds. 2004. *Feminism After Bourdieu*. London: Blackwell Publishing.
- Altman, R. 2009. “We Cannot Return to the Old Macho Ways.” *The Observer*, 15 February 2009.

- Alvesson, M., and H. Wilmott. 2002. "Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual." *Journal of Management Studies*, 39 (5): 619–44.
- Anderson-Gough, F., C. Grey, and K. Robson. 1998. *Making Up Accountants: The Professional and Organizational Socialization of Trainee Chartered Accountants*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Augar, P. 2001. *The Death of Gentlemanly Capitalism*. London: Penguin.
- . 2005. *The Greed Merchants: How Investment Banks Played the Free Market Game*. London: Penguin.
- . 2009. *Chasing Alpha: How Reckless Growth and Unchecked Ambition Ruined the City's Golden Decade*. London: Bodley Head.
- Beaverstock, J. V. 2004. "Managing Across Borders: Transnational Knowledge Management and Expatriation in Legal Firms." *Journal of Economic Geography*, 4, 157–79.
- Beaverstock, J. V., and S. Hall. 2012. "Competing for Talent: Global Mobility, Immigration and the City of London's Labour Market." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 5 (2): 271–87.
- Becker, G. 1993. *Human Capital: Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- . 1986a. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson New York: Greenwood.
- . 1986b. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brown, P., and A. Hesketh. 2004. *The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, R., and S. Vinnicombe. 2005. "Advancing Women's Careers." *Career Development International*, 10 (3): 165–7.
- Butler, J. 1987. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault." In *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late Capitalist Societies*, eds. S. Benhabib, and D. Cornell Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . 1993. *Bodies That Matter*. London: Routledge.
- Cain, P. J., and A. G. Hopkins. 2002. *British Imperialism 1688–2000*. London: Longman.
- Caulkin, S. 2008. 'When it came to the crunch, MBAs didn't help' *The Observer* 26 October, page 8.
- Clark, G. L., and D. Wójcik. 2007. *The Geography of Finance: Corporate Governance in the Global Marketplace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Connell, R. 1989. "Cool Guys, Swats and Wimps: the Interplay of Masculinity and Education." *Oxford Review of Education*, 15, 291–303.
- . 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cook, G. A. S., N. Pandit, J. V. Beaverstock, P. J. Taylor, and K. Pain. 2007. "The Role of Location in Knowledge Creation and Diffusion: Evidence of Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in the City of London Financial Services Agglomeration." *Environment and Planning A*, 39, 1325–45.
- Czarniawska, B. 2006. "Women in Financial Services: Fiction and More Fiction." In *The sociology of Financial Markets*, eds. K. Knorr Cetina, and A. Preda Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- De Goede, M. 2005. *A Genealogy of Finance: Virtue, Fortune and Faith*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Faulconbridge, J. R., J. V. Beaverstock, S. Hall, and A. Hewitson. 2009. "The 'War for Talent': The Gatekeeper Role of Executive Search Firms in Elite Labour Markets." *Geoforum*, 40 (5): 800–8.
- Foucault, M. 1979. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. London: Allen Lane.
- FSSC. 2008. *Skills Bill: Sector Skills Agreement for Financial Services*. England, London: Financial Services Skills Council.
- Hall, S. 2008. "Geographies of Business Education: MBA Programmes, Reflexive Business Schools and the Cultural Circuit of Capital." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 33, 27–41.
- . 2009. "Financialised Elites and the Changing Nature of Finance Capitalism: Investment Bankers in London's Financial District." *Growth and Change*, 31 (2): 173–89.
- Hall, S., and L. Appleyard. 2009. "City of London, City of Learning? Placing Business Education within the Geographies of Finance." *Journal of Economic Geography*, 9, 591–617.
- . 2011. "Commoditising Learning: Cultural Economy and the Growth of For-profit Business Education Service Firms in London." *Environment and Planning A*, 43 (1): 10–27.
- Hanlon, G. 2004. "Institutional Forms and Organization Structures: Homology, Trust and Reputational Capital in Professional Service Firms." *Organization*, 11 (2): 187–210.
- Ho, K. 2009. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Jones, A. M. 1998. "(Re)producing Gender Cultures: Theorizing Gender in Investment Banking Recruitment." *Geoforum*, 29, 451–74.
- . 2003. *Management Consultancy and Banking in an Era of Globalization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Jones, A., and J. T. Murphy 2011. "Theorizing Practice in Economic Geography: Foundations, Challenges and Possibilities." *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (3), 366–92.
- Karreman, D., and M. Alvesson. 2009. "Resisting Resistance: Counter-resistance, Consent and Compliance in a Consultancy Firm." *Human Relations*, 62, 1115–44.
- Kynaston, D. 2001. *The City of London Volume 4: A Club No More 1945–2000*. London: Pimlico.
- Lewis, M. 2010. *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine*. London: Allen.
- Leyshon, A., and N. Thrift. 1997. *Money/Space: Geographies of Monetary Transformation*. London: Routledge.
- London Business Schools. 2011. *The MBA 1521 months Full Time*. London: London Business School.
- Maltby, J., and J. Rutterford. 2006. "'She Possess Her Own Fortune': Women Investors from the Later Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century." *Business History*, 48, 220–53.
- McDowell, L. 1997. *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 2010. "Capital Culture Revisited: Sex, Testosterone and the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34 (3): 652–8.

- Michie, R. 1992. *The City of London: Continuity and Change 1850–1990*. London: MacMillan.
- Mintzberg, H. 2004. *Developing Managers not MBA's* London: Financial Times.
- Olds, K., and N. Thrift. 2005. "Cultures on the Brink: Re-engineering the Soul of Capitalism—On a Global Scale." In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Governmentalities and Ethics*, eds. A. Ong, and S. Collins Oxford: Blackwell.
- O'Neill, P. 2009. "Infrastructure Investment and the Management of Risk." In *Managing Financial Risks*, eds. G. L. Clark, A. D. Dixon, and A. H. B. Monk Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pfeffer, J., and C. Fong. 2004. "The Business School 'Business': Some Lessons from the US Experience." *Journal of Management Studies*, 41, 1501–20.
- Pryke, M. 1991. "An International City Going 'Global': Spatial Change in the City of London." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 9, 197–222.
- Reay, D. 2004. "Gendering Bourdieu's Concept of Capitals? Emotional Capital, Women and Social Class." In *Feminism after Bourdieu*, eds. L. Adkins, and B. Skeggs London: Blackwell.
- Rohlen, T. P. 1973. "The Education of a Japanese Banker." In *Inside the Japanese System*, eds. D. Okimoto, and T. Rohlen Stanford: T, University Press Stanford.
- Schoenberger, E. 1997. *The Cultural Crisis of the Firm*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Simpson, R. 1995. "Is Management Education on the Right Track for Women?" *Women in management review*, 10 (6): 3–8.
- Sinclair, A. 1995. "Sex and the MBA." *Organization*, 2 (2): 295–317.
- Skeggs, B. 2004. "Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality." In *Feminism After Bourdieu*, eds. L. Adkins, and B. Skeggs London: Blackwell Publishing.
- Tett, G. 2009. *Fool's Gold: How Unrestrained Greed Corrupted a Dream, Shattered Global Markets and Unleashed a Catastrophe*. London: Little Brown.
- Thrift, N. 1994. "On the Social and Cultural Determinants of International Financial Centres: The Case of the City of London." In *Money, Power and Space*, eds. N. Thrift, S. Corbridge, and R. Martin Oxford: Blackwells.
- . 2005. *Knowing Capitalism*. London: Sage.
- Tickell, A. 1996. "Making a Melodrama Out of a Crisis: Reinterpreting the Collapse of Barings Bank." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14, 5–33.
- Treasury Committee. 2010. *Women in the City, Tenth report of Session 2009–10*. London, HC: House of Commons, 482.
- Wainwright, T. 2009. "Laying the Foundations for a Crisis: Mapping the Historico-Geographical Construction of Residential Mortgage Backed Securitization in the UK." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33 (2), 372–88.
- Whitley, R. 2006. "Understanding Differences: Searching for the Social Processes that Construct and Reproduce Variety in Science and Economic Organization." *Organization Studies*, 27, 1153–77.
- Wójcik, D. 2011. "Securitization and Its Footprint: The Rise of the US Securities Industry Centres 1998–2007." *Journal of Economic Geography*, 11(6), 925–47.
- Z/Yen. 2009. *The Global Financial Centres Index* 6. September (<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation>).