KAREN HO

As KAREN HO's writing demonstrates, finance and education now intersect in a way few outsiders know much about: some of America's most powerful and prestigious universities have close ties with Wall Street firms. In 2007, the year before the recession began, more than half of Harvard's graduates chose careers in business or a related field. Two years later, thirty-six percent of Princeton's most recent graduates took a job in finance. Although the percentages have recently declined, the ties between the Ivy League and "the Street" have disturbing implications for the future of higher education in the United States.

For a long time colleges and universities played a special social role because the diversity of the curriculum reflected the rich development of culture over many centuries. History, literature, foreign languages, math and science, anthropology, sociology, psychology—these and other academic disciplines have given many generations of students the opportunity to broaden their minds while preparing them for their future work in a wide variety of fields. But now this ideal of higher education as an exploration of possibilities has come under intense pressure from the influence of "financialization." A number of observers have looked critically at this recent turn, but Karen Ho's writing is unique for several reasons. For one thing, the time she spent working on Wall Street gives her an insider's eye, but she is also an anthropologist who believes the Street has created a distinctive outlook that threatens to remake the whole society in its narrowing image:

> Wall Street shapes not just the stock market but also the very nature of employment and what kinds of workers are valued [everywhere].... The kind of worker they imagine is a worker like themselves. A worker who is constantly retraining, a worker who is constantly networked, a worker whose skill set is very interchangeable, a worker who thinks of downsizing as a challenge—a worker who thrives on this. This becomes the prototype, but in many ways that's quite removed from the daily lives of most American workers.

On Wall Street, rapid change and high risk hold the key to personal success, but for many other Americans, values of this kind have undermined their security and

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Figures on Harvard, Princeton students come from Catherine Rampell, "Out of Harvard and into Finance," *New York Times* December 11, 2011. The quotation comes from Barbara Kiviat, "An Anthropologist on What's Wrong with Wall Street," *Time*, July 22, 2009.

quality of life. If Ho is correct, then Americans need to rediscover or invent values of a different, more democratic kind. But where will this search for new values take place? Traditionally, such alternatives have come from colleges and universities. What will happen to the United States, however, if these institutions too are captured by the "ideology" of finance?

Biographies of Hegemony

When I began to conduct fieldwork in 1998 and 1999, delving into the network of contacts, coworkers, and friends I developed at Stanford, Princeton, and Bankers Trust (BT), it struck me how often my informants ranked and distinguished themselves according to their "smartness." The term seemed fundamental to the Wall Street lexicon. My informants proclaimed that the smartest people in the world came to work there; Wall Street, in their view, had created probably the most elite work-society ever to be assembled on the globe. Almost all the front-office workers that I encountered emphasized how smart their coworkers were, how "deep the talent" was at their particular bank, how if one just hired "the smartest people," then everything else fell into place. Chris Logan and Nicolas Bern, recent Princeton graduates working at BT and Merrill Lynch respectively, explained that from their relatively fresh perspective, what was most culturally unique about Wall Street was the experience of being surrounded by, as Bern put it, the "smartest and most ambitious people." Logan added that the three qualities of success on Wall Street are to be "smart, hardworking, and aggressive. Everything else is considered tangential." According to Kate Miller, a Spelman College graduate and former analyst at Morgan Stanley, interviewees are typically told they will be working with "the brightest people in the world. These are the greatest minds of the century."

Such sentiments were not confined to eager young analysts or investment banking representatives talking up their industry to overawed recruits. Julio Muñoz, who received his MBA from Harvard and was an associate in investment banking at Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette (DLJ), a prestigious boutique investment bank which has since been bought out by Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB), claimed that the most distinguishing features of investment banks are their smartness and exclusivity:

> People are really smart. They really don't hire any—the hiring standards are pretty good. That's one thing they really focused on doing, and that differentiates investment banking from other working environments in that they really do target the experienced individuals with good academic background.... [This] really brings to the investment banks a very

> elite society—somebody in society that had the means to study in X universities. If you really narrowed down the universities where the investment banks recruit, your number probably will not exceed fifteen to twenty universities.

Similarly, John Carlton, a senior managing director at BT who had worked at multiple investment banks such as Kidder Peabody and CSFB, stated that the key characteristics of Wall Street investment bankers are their smartness, aggressiveness, and self-confidence: "There is always a premium on having smart people ... so, it is highly competitive. What happens is that a lot of people say, 'Look, some of the best and brightest people are going to Wall Street. I'm pretty smart myself; I should go [there] as well. And, by the way, I get paid very well.' " Remarking on how hedge funds attract the most brilliant minds from investment banks, Robert Hopkins, a vice president of mergers and acquisitions at Lehman Brothers, exclaimed, "We are talking about the smartest people in the world. We are! They are the smartest people in the world. If you [the average investor or the average corporation] don't know anything, why wouldn't you invest with the smartest people in the world? They must know what they are doing."[1]

The "culture of smartness" is central to understanding Wall Street's financial agency, how investment bankers are personally and institutionally empowered to enact their worldviews, export their practices, and serve as models for far-reaching socioeconomic change. On Wall Street, "smartness" means much more than individual intelligence; it conveys a naturalized and generic sense of "impressiveness," of elite, pinnacle status and expertise, which is used to signify, even prove, investment bankers' worthiness as advisors to corporate America and leaders of the global financial markets. To be considered "smart" on Wall Street is to be implicated in a web of situated practices and ideologies, coproduced through the interactions of multiple institutions, processes, and American culture at large, which confer authority and legitimacy on high finance and contribute to the sector's vast influence. The culture of smartness is not simply a quality of Wall Street, but a currency, a driving force productive of both profit accumulation and global prowess.

The key criterion of smartness is an ability to "wow" the clients—generally speaking, the top executives of Fortune 500 companies. In this sense, although technical skill and business savvy also help to constitute smartness on Wall Street, they are often considered secondary, learnable "on the job." "The best," "the greatest," and "the brightest" minds in the world are sorted and recognized through a credentialing process that is crucially bolstered by image and performance. In other words, smartness must be represented and reinforced by a specific appearance and bodily technique that dominantly signals that impressiveness; not surprisingly, such characteristics as being impeccably and smartly dressed, dashing appearance, mental and physical quickness, aggressiveness, and vigor reference the default upper-classness, maleness, whiteness, and heteronormativity of ideal investment bankers. Here I focus mainly on the specific elitism that is the key valence of smartness....

What allows investment bankers to claim smartness, what defines and legitimates them as smart in the first place, and what particular kind of smartness is being deployed? Where these questions become especially clear is during the process of investment banker identity and social formation: the recruiting, training, and orientation of freshly minted college graduates and MBAs, their initiation into the world of Wall Street. Here it is possible to discern, in starkest relief, Wall Street's cultural values in action, particularly the construction and maintenance of the hegemonic elitism that produces "expert" knowledge of financial markets. Through the continual praxis of recruitment and orientation, the Street enacts and regenerates the very foundations of its legitimacy.

Through the process of recruitment and orientation, investment banks define their notion of both what it takes and what it means to be a successful subject in an age of global capital. To play the role of "master of the universe" requires not only especially strong doses of self-confidence and institutional legitimation, but also a particular set of beliefs regarding Wall Street's role in the world and one's own role on Wall Street. Investment bankers, trained to view financial markets and corporate America through particular, highly ideological lenses, are also imbued with a sense of their own personal exemplariness as agents of *and models for* socioeconomic change—a sense that must be embodied, believed in, and continually "pumped up." In approaching the question of how investment bankers become empowered to advise and influence the direction of corporations in the United States and globally vis à vis their personal trajectories, qualities, connections, associations, and identities, I make the case for the importance of the biographical and the institutional in enacting global capitalist change. The building blocks of dominant capitalist practices are also personal and cultural; people's experiences, their university and career tracking and choices, are constitutive of capitalist hegemony; and the financial is cultural through and through.

In particular, I focus on the construction of "the smart investment banker": a member of an extended "family" network of elite university alumni and a living symbol of know-how and global agency. Their impressiveness and financial influence are further cemented and proven by surviving brutally intense hard work and an insecure job environment, which in turn allows them to internalize the merit of their analyses and recommendations. Through the institutional culture of Wall Street broadly conceived—where job experiences and workplace incentives map onto elite biographies—investment bankers not only imbibe a particular ideology of shareholder value and spread it across corporate America, but they are also pushed to refashion and reconstruct the working lives of millions in the image of their own.

By investigating investment bankers, as individuals and as collective agents of change, I do not assume a priori that "the market" always already exercises power, but rather that the particular biographies, experiences, and practices of investment bankers, who are both empowered and constrained by their cultural and institutional locations, create social change and financial hegemony on a daily basis. Just as "it is through the 'small stories' that one can begin to unravel and challenge homogenizing discourses embedded within concepts such as globalization, 'the' market, and 'the' state," it is possible to decenter the market as an abstract agent and powerful force by demonstrating that it is only through the small and the everyday that we can understand the creation of hegemony in all its particularity and contextuality. Otherwise, we risk privileging, homogenizing, or taking for granted the metanarratives of the market, the big stories (Crossa 2005, 29; S. 170).

RECRUITMENT

I first entered the cultural world of investment banks through the herculean recruiting efforts that Wall Street undertakes at the most elite universities. Despite my own ambivalence and feelings of mystification about Wall Street as an anthropology graduate student, this direct link—the pipeline between Princeton University and investment banks—enabled my very access to each step of the recruiting process, not to mention the field site itself. Wall Street, in a sense, came to me. Although I hardly recognized it at the time, Wall Street's ubiquity on campus, as well as the intensity of undergraduate interest in investment banking, meant that merely being a student at Princeton allowed, in a sense, automatic participant observation of this world. After fieldwork, I returned to Princeton to write the dissertation, thinking I would be getting away from Wall Street, retreating to an ivory-tower refuge in order to do some serious thinking and writing. Instead, it was more like reentering the belly of the beast. I was a graduate advisor at an undergraduate resident hall. Two weeks into the job, taking a walk after dinner I crossed paths with an undergraduate crowd (two of whom lived in my residence hall) headed toward Nassau Hall. Before I knew it, they had steered me into a Merrill Lynch presentation! The masses of students converging on these recruitment presentations and information sessions are akin to the campus traffic generated by the gatherings and dispersals of concert crowds. Already a veteran of the actual recruitment process back in 1996, now, almost four years later, after campus recruiting had even further intensified as a result of the bull market, I found myself participating in countless dining hall discussions about investment banking, attending still more presentations, and reading endless investment banking advertisements, updates, news, and opinion pieces in the pages of the *Daily Princetonian*. In 2000, I also had access on a regular basis to many of Wall Street's cultural representations and practices at Harvard University because my younger sister was an undergraduate there at the time. She introduced me to friends going through the recruiting process and kept me continually updated on how many of her acquaintances had suddenly, in their senior year, found their true calling as Wall Street investment bankers or management consultants. As many of my previous investment banking informants were also Harvard graduates, I have been able to make detailed observations of Wall Street's interactions with two elite universities.

More so than even the other Ivy League schools, Harvard and Princeton are the "prime recruiting ground for all of the most prestigious Wall Street, management consulting and other types of firms that offer the most sought after jobs.... The Princeton badge is a powerful currency that buys access" (Karseras 2006). As many of my informants have elaborated, "If you go to Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, there are really only two career fields presented: banking and consulting" (Duboff 2005). This shocking narrowness was verified throughout my time at Princeton and on Wall Street: I found not only that most bankers came from a few elite institutions, but also that most undergraduate and even many graduate students assumed that the only "suitable" destinations for life after Princeton—the only sectors offering a truly "Princeton-like job"—were, first, investment banking, and second, management consulting.[2] With its extensive alumni network and juggernaut recruitment machine, Wall Street is the "de facto home away from Princeton for recent graduates, many of whom continue living together even as they take on new responsibilities and lifestyles" (Hall 2005).

As perhaps the most important feeder school to Wall Street, Princeton sends astounding numbers of recruits into financial services in general, and in particular investment banking. According to the Office of Career Services, 30 percent of the class of 2001, 37 percent of the class of 2003, and 40 percent of the class of 2005 and 2006 entered financial services after graduation (Chan 2001; Creed 2003; Easton 2006; Henn 2001). Whereas from 2000 to 2005, 470 Princeton students pursued law or medical degrees, "520 Princeton students—about 40 percent of Princeton students choosing fulltime jobs directly after graduation—decided to work in the financial services sector," amounting to the largest percentage in a single industry (Hall 2005). At Harvard University, which rivals Princeton as the primary producer of Wall Street recruits, investment banking (as well as management consulting) also provides the majority of jobs for its students upon graduation (Lerer 1997). According to Harvard's Office of Career Services, in 2005, close to half of Harvard students go through "the recruiting process to vie for investment banking and consulting jobs" (Huber 2006).

As Devon Peterson, an undergraduate writing for the *Daily Princetonian*, observed in 2002, "It's been common knowledge that many of [Princeton's] undergraduates join the financial realm every year, creating a kind of lighthearted, self-deprecating joke about Philosophy majors becoming I-bankers and once hopeful novelists heading to Wall Street" (Peterson 2002). How do so many undergraduates who enter these institutions without any prior knowledge of investment banking, who once aspired to become, say writers or teachers, "realize" by the time they graduate that they have always wanted to go to Wall Street? How do these talented and well-connected students, with access to a wide range of possible futures, come to believe that investment banking is one of the *only* prestigious job options available post graduation? I argue that such changes in life courses and the attendant discursive transformations must be unpacked in order to understand the particular worldviews, cultural associations, and orientations the recruiting process demands and calls into being.

The forces that push these college students toward investment banking are obviously multiple: the particular college environment, the strength of alumni and peer networks, the cultural linking of success and smartness with Wall Street, the hierarchical narrowing of career options and what constitutes prestige, to name a few. Perhaps the most self-evident reason for Wall Street's recruiting monopoly is simply that its presence dominates campus life: recruiters visit the university virtually every week, even on weekends; they show up in the greatest numbers at career forums, panel discussions, and social events; their advertisements for information sessions "meet and greets," and free drinks and hors d'oeuvres dominate the campus newspapers daily; their company literature and application forms are easily accessible, either at campus locations or online.

The recruiting process saturates almost every aspect of campus life from the very first day of the academic year. Investment banks and consulting firms

dominate the early fall career fairs, setting the terms for what constitutes a successful career (and what it looks like), and monopolize the attention of the student body by showing up with the most polish, fanfare, and numbers. They hand out the best goodie bags, the most titillating magnet sets, mugs, Frisbees, water bottles, caps, and t-shirts, and in a matter of days, thousands of students become walking advertisements as their logos disperse into campus life. At the 2006 Princeton Career Fair, 60 of the 104 firms represented were in financial services or consulting (Rampell 2006). At the 2003 Harvard Career Forum, more than half of the close to one hundred firms in attendance were in investment banking, general finance, and consulting (Urken and Habib 2003). Marketed as general career exploration meant to attract a diversity of students and pathways, these forums actually constitute "recruitment on a grand scale" for the investment banking and consulting industries *(Harvard Crimson* 1995). This early and intense branding of Wall Street careers as the symbol of arrival, the equating of investment banking with "career" in general, serves to narrow students' notions of success and gives the impression that for graduates, there's nothing else out there besides investment banking and consulting (N. Guyer 2003).

Taufiq Rahim, a *Daily Princetonian* columnist, wrote of what he called the "hunting season": "They're here. I can see them. I can smell them. They're in my inbox. They're in my mailbox. They're on my voicemail. They're outside my door. They're on campus, and they smell blood.... They're the investment banks, the consulting firms: McKinsey, Goldman Sachs, Bain and Company, Merrill Lynch" (Rahim 2003). Below I reproduce Goldman Sachs's "Recruitment Calendar" for Harvard undergraduates at the millennium (see Table 1). The recruitment schedule is painstakingly detailed, demonstrating the active pursuit of Harvard students: they will not fall through the cracks. As the director of Princeton's Career Services cautioned students about Wall Street recruiters: "They come after you. If you're hiding under the bed and you don't want to talk anymore, they'll come and get you" (Shapira 1998).

On the day of the recruitment presentation (and most investment banks usually have multiple campus events, as separate divisions will have their own presentations and interview timelines), a given bank's representatives descend in droves to central campus locations, usually the fanciest business hotel near campus. For Princeton, bankers will charter a bus, a few limos, and even some taxis to drive a group of thirty to fifty investment bankers, research analysts, and traders (usually alumni who will also serve as recruiters) from New York City to the Nassau Inn at Princeton. The same goes for Harvard. Elaborate recruitment presentations are held at the Charles Hotel in Cambridge or the Faculty Club; dozens of recent Harvard graduates and seasoned alumni currently working on Wall Street fill the rooms. Including recent hires from Harvard and Princeton allows potential recruits to witness former classmates as smart and successful, as having made the transition from undergraduate life onto the Wall Street fast track.

The very first Wall Street recruitment event I ever attended, in 1995 as a graduate student still contemplating research on Wall Street, was a session presented by Goldman Sachs, widely known among potential employees as the

TABLE 1 Goldman Sachs Recruitment Schedule at Harvard University, 2000–2001.

Division	*Date*	*Event*
Firmwide	September 6, 2000	Thirteenth Annual Women's Leadership Conference Panel Discussion, 10:00–11:30 A.M.
Firmwide	September 14, 2000	HSA Business Leadership Dinner The Charles Hotel, 6:00–8:00 P.M.
Firmwide	September 27, 2000	Resume Writing Workshop Office of Career Services, 12:00–3:00 P.M.
Firmwide	September 27, 2000	Firmwide Information Session The Charles Hotel 6:00–8:00 P.M.
Investment Management	October 2, 2000	Divisional Presentation The Charles Hotel, 6:30–8:00 P.M.
Investment Banking	October 3, 2000	Divisional Presentation The Charles Hotel, 6:30–8:00 P.M.
Equities	October 5, 2000	Divisional Presentation Faculty Club, 8:00–9:30 P.M.
Firmwide	October 11, 2000	HSA Career Week Panel Discussion on "My Career"
Firmwide	October 13, 2000	Career Forum Gordon Track and Tennis Center
Sales and Trading	October 16, 2000	Divisional Presentation The Charles Hotel, 6:30–8:00 P.M.
All Divisions	October 19, 2000	Resume Drop
Corporate Treasury	October 25, 2000	Resume Drop (open)
Corporate Treasury	October 27, 2000	2 Open Full-time Analyst Interview Schedules
Firmwide	October 30, 2000	Minority Event (tentative)
Fixed Income, Currency & Commodities	October 30, 2000	Resume Drop (open)
Fixed Income, Currency & Commodities	November 1, 2000	1.5 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules 1.5 Open Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Investment Banking	November 2, 2000	3 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Equities	November 3, 2000	3 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Investment Research	November 9, 2000	2 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules (1 Schedule for London)
Investment Management	November 9, 2000	2 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Firmwide	December 4, 2000	Women's Event (tentative)

TABLE 1 Continued

Division	*Date*	*Event*
Firmwide	December 14, 2000	Resume Drop for Spring
The Hull Group	January 30, 2001	1 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedule
Equities	February 2, 2001	3 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Fixed Income Research and Strategy	February 7, 2001	1 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedule
Fixed Income, Currency & Commodities	February 7, 2001	1.5 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules 1.5 Open Summer Analyst Interview Schedules
Investment Banking	February 7, 2001	3 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Investment Management	February 8, 2001	1 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedule 2 Closed Summer Analyst Interview Schedules
Equities	February 9, 2001	3 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedules
Investment Research	February 13, 2001	1 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedule
Investment Banking Training and Professional Development	February 21, 2001	1 Closed Full-Time Analyst Interview Schedule 1 Closed Summer Analyst Interview Schedule
Firmwide	TBD	IPO Case Study in conjunction with the Office of Career Services

most prestigious and exclusive investment bank on Wall Street. Arriving a little late at Princeton township's hallowed Nassau Inn, I was greeted by a sea of charcoal gray, navy, and black business suits. There must have been over 150 well-coiffed and starched, professionally driven undergraduates crowding the hotel's ballroom to hear a panel of sixteen Goldman Sachs executives, mostly Princeton grads. Apprehension and eagerness pervaded the room: this was not a time for socializing but rather for competitive vying for "face time" and searing first impressions with the recruiters. Instead of saying hello to friends, juniors and seniors surveyed the room and sought to get on their marks. As the only graduate student in the room, (as far as I could tell), awkwardly attempting to both observe and participate in the recruiting process, not to mention the fact that I was dressed in an old pair of slightly wrinkled gray slacks and a denim vest (of all things), I felt completely out of place.

The lights soon darkened for an introductory slide and video presentation. It was a recorded narration with sweeping views of Manhattan and fast-moving visuals of the globe, suit-clad workers traveling or walking briskly to corporate towers, and sharp-dressed bankers videoconferencing or huddled up in teams with their sleeves rolled up. The narrator explained that a Wall Street career was all about "dealing with change." "The world is going to continue to change faster and faster, so we need people like you." When the lights came on, we turned our attention to the panel. I counted eight white men, five white women, one Latino man, one South Asian woman, and one black man. A relatively older white man, a managing director (Princeton class of '82), began to speak in a tone of pride: "We are a Princeton family. I met my wife here. Princeton students make the best analysts, which is why we recruit heavily here." The other speakers who were recent graduates introduced themselves by naming the schools they had attended: Harvard, Williams, Harvard, Princeton, Wharton, Princeton, Princeton, Princeton. "I'm from the University of Chicago," said the south Asian woman wryly. "I'm not quite as bright as everyone else." The Princetonian managing director then got down to business. "The two-year program will go by in a flash. Your learning and growth curve will be exponential. You will get actual interaction with clients. You are part of the team at our firm; the last thing you should be doing is photocopying. We hire ten people to do that, and that's all they do. We need your intelligence." It quickly became apparent that this was the evening's guiding theme. "So why should you work here?" asked the recent white male alumnus from Harvard. "Because if you hang out with dumb people, you'll learn dumb things. In investment banking, the people are very smart; that's why they got the job. It's very fast, very challenging, and they'll teach as quickly as you can learn." Some speakers emphasized the access to power offered by a Goldman Sachs position. "Our analysts can go anywhere in the world," said one of the white male vice presidents who is an alumnus from Wharton. "We've got Hong Kong, we've got Sydney, we've got London." He returned, inevitably, to the presentation's central motif; with an admiring gaze at the audience, he exclaimed, "You are all so smart!" Finally, the Princetonian managing director got up and announced, "Let's break up, go to the Nassau Inn Tap Room; drinks are on us!" The swarm of undergraduates then beelined toward the panelists, eager for face time with actual Goldman Sachs executives while I was still lingering in my seat. Determined to join the fray, I surveyed the scene and realized that every investment banker was already surrounded by two to three semi-circle layers of undergraduates: as the first layer moved to impress and receive the business card of the banker holding court, the second layer would quickly move into "face-time" position. The only room in the crowd for me was actually behind the speaker's back where there was no waiting line! In that position, I mainly observed throughout the night, and the only person who turned around to talk to me was the young South Asian American analyst from the University of Chicago, and I held on dearly to her business card as a sign of my initiation into this grueling process.

During subsequent recruitment presentations, I experienced much of the same: well-suited alumnae declaring, "We only hire superstars," "We are only

hiring from five different schools," "You are the cream of the crop." In these sessions, I was stuck by how proclamations of elitism (through "world-class" universities, the discourses of smartness and globalization) seemed foundational to the very core of how investment bankers see themselves, the world, and their place in it. Representing a world of "collective smartness" and exclusivity seemed fundamentally connected not only to the criteria for becoming an investment banker but also to the very nature of what they do. What precisely were the links between elitism and the enactments of their financial expertise and global dreams, between Wall Street's claims to smartness and their promises of global prowess? Motivated in large part by these compelling presentations, I decided that to understand these grandiose, even mystifying, pronouncements, I had to get a job on Wall Street. I took a leave of absence from graduate school to participate "for real" in this process.

The "vigorous college recruiting season" is usually capped off with elaborate "sell days" to encourage seniors to accept the job. Such perks include "ski trips to Utah and dinners at Lahiere's" (Princeton's four-star restaurant) (Easton 2006; Shapira 1998). Every junior and senior that I interviewed spoke about the allure of recruiting, the constant wining and dining, the fancy spreads at upscale hotels and clubs. According to the *Daily Princetonian* staff writer Alice Easton:

> After months of dressing up in suits and ties, making their way to New York or the Nassau Inn and trying to impress panels of interviewers with their technical and social skills, juniors applying for summer internships in finance and consulting can now reap the benefits of their work: elaborate "sell days" to convince them to accept the job.... "They paid for two nights at a fancy hotel in New York.... They rented out a museum and had a cocktail party, and then rented out the VIP room in a nightclub in Soho."... The company later sent him chocolates in the mail.... [They showed recruits] a whole lifestyle. (Easton 2006)

The obvious implication is that if Harvard and Princeton students join these firms, then in a few years, they too can have it all.

During one of my visits to Harvard University to see my sister in 2000, I sat down with Kendra Lin, a premed student who was not planning to go into investment banking but wanted to understand "what the hype was all about" and possessed a genuine curiosity about why her classmates were so obsessed with Wall Street. In addition to attending the various career forums and participating formally in the recruiting process by signing up with the Office of Career Services (OCS), many Harvard students also participate in immersion programs to educate them about Wall Street and management consulting. Therefore, at the time, at the onset of recruiting season, Harvard Student Agencies, in collaboration with Harvard Business School and leading investment banks and management consulting firms, sponsored the Harvard Business Leadership Program (BLP), a week of recruitment, training, socializing, and general orientation to Wall Street financial institutions, management consulting, and general business practices. Being chosen to participate in BLP was itself a competitive process to search for "business leaders," and as the president of various student associations, Lin made the cut.

Describing her impressions of the BLP events, Lin said that the speakers who made the greatest impression were the representatives of Goldman Sachs. "They're this really elite investment bank that advises many leaders in corporate America on their mergers and acquisitions and securities offerings. They talked about how they managed the privatizations of the largest corporations in China and Spain, to name a few." While some of the non-investment-banking financial firms and smaller start-up corporations (who were in the minority) appeared "homely" to Lin, firms like J. P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs and management consulting groups like Boston Consulting Group "looked very accomplished" and "thought very highly of themselves." As a result, all the Harvard students flocked to talk to them. During the cocktail and dinner hour after the presentations, investment banks proclaimed that Harvard produced the most stellar recruits. Lin talked at length about her favorable impression of Goldman Sachs:

> I really enjoyed Goldman—as a side note, all of these firms are really talented in recruiting students. They make Harvard students feel like they are the cream of the crop. We have the best minds. This image of the Harvard student runs thick through recruiters and through people at the business school. I have heard this many times over the course of the week: that Harvard students are the best business people because you can give them any problem and they will be the ones to come up with the solution most quickly.... I left his speech believing that Goldman is the Harvard of all investment banks, but they all sure know how to sell themselves well.

Goldman Sachs, as Lin described, worked very hard to position itself as an extension of Harvard and, in doing so, confirmed Harvard as the progenitor of the best.

According to Lin, investment bankers emphasized how they "had the perfect life." One executive talked about how "he lives in the burbs, has a minivan, a dog, and two kids. Seriously! His wife graduated from Pritzker [the University of Chicago's business school] and is now a Harvard Medical School professor, and he is a rich VP." After hearing Lin's initial impressions on Wall Street recruiting presentations, I asked her what she thought about her week-long experience with BLP—the dinners, the socials, the business school case studies. What did she like and dislike?

KL: It's all a schmooze fest. You have to schmooze your recruiters. You have to master rounds of interviews followed by more schmoozing, and then once you get there, you have to "live the lifestyle" of a business person. Be social, drink, go to parties, and schmooze some more. Also ... there is no commitment really to social change.

KH: Interesting observations. How did you realize just from this week, so early on, that people have to "live the lifestyle"? How were you clued into this point?

KL: I think it was the set up of the whole BLP that first clued me in to that: I mean, they cater *all* of our meals, our dinners are all at the Charles hotel, and they are quite extravagant for a bunch of college kids. Hey, I love duck and sushi! Before we go into the hotel for dinner, there is a social hour where they serve juice and soda, and that's where it hit me. Basically you see all these students huddled around the bankers and consultants and kissing their ass. Everyone's all dressed up—it's a different culture. Put that together with stereotypes of businessmen from movies, you see that it really is pretty much like that.

This conflation of elite universities with investment banking and "the perfect lifestyle" is crucial to the recruitment process, reproducing as it does the ambience of Wall Street cocktail parties, where investment bankers "schmooze clients" in lavish, impeccably catered settings. These norms are enacted for and demonstrated to students, and like Lin, they immediately pick up on the importance of performing "smartness," not to mention how Wall Street business success is premised on pedigree, competitive consumption, and heteronormativity.

Not surprisingly, Wall Street's intense focus and persistence at Princeton, Harvard, and a few other campuses have repercussions for student culture. Newspapers and dorms overflow with debates about the pros and cons of investment banking work life, excited discussions of what investment bankers "actually do," and romanticized tales of high-roller life in Manhattan. Students begin to see "i-banking" as a "mysterious, glamorous, and relatively undefined world" (Hall 2005). A glance at the campus publications at Princeton and Harvard demonstrates what amounts to a communal obsession, with constant news and opinion articles on "recruiting insanity," "avoiding the i-banking shadow," "schmoozing at Nassau Inn," "defending the indefensible career," "the dangerous allure of recruiting," "aspiring Gordon Gekkos," "new recruits," "future financiers flock to a Darwinian fete," "banking on pain," "i-banking ire," "how investment banking consumed my life," and "is there more to life than investment banking?" Heated campus panel discussions debate the relative merits of banking and consulting, as panelists (firm representatives, usually former students) face off with a cost-benefit analysis of the two career choices and use the platform to further recruit students to their side. It is hardly surprising, then, that the much-mythologized field of investment banking often presents itself as the solution to anxieties about postgraduation life.

Although most of my recruitment participation was with undergraduates (as I myself went through the college analyst recruitment program), the process for elite business schools for the recruitment of MBAs for associate positions (one level higher than analyst) has similar components. For the most part, many graduate students at prestigious business schools, such as Harvard Business School (HBS), Wharton, Sloan (MIT Business School), Columbia Business School, and so forth, have had financial experience. Most have worked as analysts at investment banks or in management consulting firms; those who do not have a financial background have plenty of opportunity to study finance as a "concentration" in business schools. All MBAs are literally bombarded by recruitment presentations

and information sessions sponsored by their school's own student finance clubs and associations as well as Wall Street investment banks themselves.

Starting the first year, MBA students realize that to work on Wall Street after graduating from the two-year masters program, they must intern on Wall Street their first summer and receive a job offer thirteen weeks into the internship. As Bill Hayes, a recent MIT Sloan alumnus and an associate at Goldman Sachs, described the process in 2001:

> Within a month of school starting, everyone starts coming. Hotel presentations; meet and greets. They invite you out for drinks in the effort to get the best and brightest to apply. The bulge bracket firms don't have to sell themselves (the smaller banks do) since all the students gravitate toward them. I guess only they can afford it. They'll have a reception, and you have to meet people and hope you make some sort of connection. For Merrill, I went to a presentation, sent in my resume, and they called. Goldman came in with a whole crew of Wharton alumni, and then went to HBS afterwards. At the same time this is all happening, we have smaller events where the school Finance Club has receptions with bankers from top firms, where half of the MBA class shows up, or these clubs have information "learning" sessions like "Investment Banking 101" and "Day on the Job," which is a smaller setting, and you hope to make a contact with a recent grad to give you an "in." You have to send follow-up e-mails and thank-you's to every contact. Our Finance Club also organized mock interviews, resume workshops, and "trips to Wall Street" where anyone can go and visit all the banks. I met with Morgan and Goldman and Lehman. You go to their offices and try to distinguish yourself.... They only hire from these elite schools because they are already prefiltered. It makes you feel good; you've already been nominated. Bankers will say, "You might ask why we ask about GPA and test scores. Because we've done the correlation between top GPA and test scores from top schools and performance in the organization, and we know you will succeed."

Wall Street saturation of business school life is certainly equal to that of the general university population. The difference is that elite MBA programs explicitly represent themselves as channels to and of Wall Street; they are not emphasizing a general liberal arts education. Students often enter these institutions precisely to get a job in finance, and just a few months into the scramble for a job at top Wall Street investment banks, the first-round interview slots are full.

For MBAs, the selling of "the perfect lifestyle" is, on the one hand, expected and taken for granted, and on the other, understood as ironic, as most MBAs, having worked on Wall Street as college graduates, have experienced their "lifestyle" as simultaneously grueling and exploitative. What is more seductive is the forecasting of elite social networking and Wall Street influence over corporate America. Such an anointing was unmistakable at the Harvard Business School Women's Panel, an event catered for young professional women to

network and apply to business schools, sponsored by Harvard Business School and held at Citigroup's Headquarters in New York City in 1999. Although designed as an open career forum, the HBS alumnae panelists talked almost exclusively about finance and management consulting: "For HBS women, 30 percent go into consulting and about 40 percent go into finance and investment banking." "Banking internships come pretty quickly into the process. You receive one-on-one counseling before your internship decision. Recruiters are there pretty early." What struck me the most was panelist Jordan Thompson's parallel between Harvard and Wall Street: "I've never been to so many black tie parties. I was invited to so many parties and you see that people bring their intensity, enthusiasm, and ambitions as much in their work as in their social lives. I organized pub nights and cross-section mixes. When you are social chair at HBS, you have a certain carte blanche to talk to and call up the CEOs of companies." What Thompson experienced as social chair of her class mirrored the Wall Street's relationship with corporate America. Wall Street, armed with HBS graduates, has "carte blanche" to advise CEOs on the latest deals and expectations.

THE CROSS-POLLINATION OF ELITISM

They are declared to be "the best and the brightest." They quickly become used to the respect, status, and impressive nods from peers, parental figures, job prospectors, and society at large. Those most enamored of, or dependent on, their putative membership in "the cream of the crop" seek ways to maintain and continue the high status to which they have become accustomed, especially as graduation looms near. As Devon Peterson, an undergraduate writer for the *Daily Princetonian*, observed about the "the allures and drawbacks of elite jobs": "For four years we have enjoyed being the most elite college-aged kids in one of the most elite, unilaterally powerful nations ever to exist.... These banking firms provide us with a way to maintain our elite status in society by providing avenues to wealth and power that other professions do not" (Peterson 2002). Peterson's reference to himself as being at the pinnacle of power is a crucial window into the identity formation of bankers-to-be. Dafna Hochman, an undergraduate writer for the *Harvard Crimson*, similarly recognizes, not only the central importance of being the best, as defined by prestige, status, and smartness, to Harvard students, but also that what gives Wall Street crucial competitive advantage in recruiting is its acute understanding of this phenomena. Wall Streeters are able to sell themselves so effectively because they know what attracts these students: it is also precisely what investment banks themselves seek. Hochman (1999) observes, "The business world is obviously desperate to milk our minds, youth, creativity and work ethic. And they have correctly assessed what it takes to attract us: appear competitive, prestigious, and upwardly mobile.... They know that four years ago, we wanted the absolute best. We did not settle for number three or four on the college rankings. They prey on our desire to find the 'Harvard' of everything: activities, summer jobs, relationships and now careers."

Elite Students and Life after Graduation

Implicit in this transformation from undergraduate to investment banker is Wall Street's notion that if students do not choose Wall Street postgraduation, they are somehow "less smart," as smartness is defined by continued aggressive striving to perpetuate elite status. The cultivation of a particular kind of banker and the privileging of an elite norm, insidiously racialized, are nowhere better illustrated than with this event in Kate Miller's work life. In 1997, Miller, former analyst at Morgan Stanley, was one of its first recruits from a historically black college. In the following narrative describing her experience with a senior manager, Miller further demonstrates that what constitutes "smartness" is explicitly dependent on school pedigree as well as race.

> Well, there were a couple of officers that were known for being really good guys and being fair to people of color. And it was very interesting because I was in Word Processing [an actual floor of the bank where all the documents investment banks use to pitch deals are professionally printed]. I was trying to work on a document with some of the assistants there, and a principal [equivalent to senior vice president] came into Word Processing and was talking about his experiences recruiting that year. And he turned to me, well, he was saying to another analyst, "Well, you know, I just really have problems with the idea of us recruiting at historically black colleges. I mean, I know people say that the students that attend those schools are smart enough to attend Harvard and Stanford and get into these great institutions, but actually choose to attend the black college. Well, I have a problem with that. If they're that smart, and they're turning down one of the top institutions in the country, then I think that shows poor judgment, and we should really rethink whether or not these are the type of people that we want working at our company." He said this so that I overheard, and I guess he had assumed that I had gone to an Ivy League school because he then sort of turned to me and said, "Well, what do you think, Kate?" And I said, "Well, I went to a black college; I went to Spelman." And he just sort of looked at me and realized he made an incredible mistake and just said, "Well, I guess I lost my case. I guess you proved your point against me." So I just sort of shrugged my shoulders. Well, what do you say? You've been there for five months. You never really worked with the guy. It's not like you two have a rapport. But it was awkward, especially to think that this was one of the cool guys who really thought that it was important to increase diversity within the company.

By virtue of "choosing" Spelman College, Miller demonstrated a lack of judgment; she was not only quantitatively "less smart" because she chose not to attend Harvard or Stanford, but she was also more provincial, less global. The complete equating of smartness with these institutions, the identification of historically white colleges as global, universal institutions, as well as the wholesale

erasure of the white upper-class male privilege embedded in these universities are part and parcel of how excellence is understood. Central to Wall Street's construction of its own superiority is the corollary assumption that other corporations and industries are "less than"—less smart, less efficient, less competitive, less global, less hardworking—and thus less likely to survive the demands of global capitalism unless they restructure their cultural values and practices according to the standards of Wall Street. In a meritocratic feedback loop, their growing influence itself becomes further evidence that they are, in fact, "the smartest."

It is important to pause here to acknowledge that many of these students are of course quite aware of how the culture of smartness, as coproduced by elite universities, students, and Wall Street, capitalizes on, monopolizes, and narrows students' interests. Katherine Reilly, an undergraduate *Daily Princetonian* columnist, asked her fellow students to find "the courage to buck a system that has served us so well": "We should not let our type-A drive for success, money, or power or our fear of ending up outside the realm of 'acceptable' Princeton accomplishment dictate what we do with our lives" (Reilly 2003). Similarly, Dafna Hochman indicted Harvard for portraying the Wall Street recruiting process as every student's career process: this conflation "reflects Harvard's subtle and not so subtle attempts to challenge our values, delude our personal goals and to generally morph our diverse interests and talents into its ideal type of a respectable alum" (Hochman 1999). Fellow undergraduate *Harvard Crimson* writer Matthew Siegel wondered, "Could it be at all possible that the culture of success at Harvard drives people to skip right over the most important part of cognition—getting to know themselves and what they want and need—and instead, sends them straight into the outstretched arms of J. P. Morgan's H.R. department?" (Siegel 2003). Interestingly enough, his answer to why investment banking has so seduced Harvard undergraduates does not centrally implicate investment banking as the culprit: "It's not about investment banking. It is about the possibility that with all our running around trying to impress everyone all the time, it becomes hard to know what we really want" (Siegel 2003). Many students recognize the monopolistic hold that banking and consulting have on their future aspirations and that the very act of participating in recruiting precludes the questioning of "our place and privilege in the world" because the desire to hold on to privilege is naturalized vis à vis recruiting (Suleiman 1998). It is one thing if one's goal in life is to make "multi-million-dollar corporations even richer" or if one "cannot be happy unless you work for Goldman," but the crux of the problem is that students hardly question or ponder what they might truly be passionate about, much less the contradictions of their own privilege (Graham-Felsen 2003). Instead, these students more than likely continue with "the absurd impression that there is only one thing to do next year," that is, resort to the already-laid-out "typical Princeton job," the next step toward continued upward mobility, the surefire sign that one truly is the best and the brightest (Suleiman 1998).

Certainly, the pinnacle of meritocracy is necessarily precarious: it is shot through with class, race, and gender hierarchies; with the constant and anxious

performance of smartness; and with a prestigious branding so dependent on the singularity of the apex that it cannot help but degrade. The fact that American culture, as Katherine Newman presciently pointed out long ago, has virtually no cultural repertoire that helps make sense of downward mobility for the middle class is perhaps doubly true for the elite, for whom expanding or diverging from the narrow path of status maintenance is understood and experienced as slippage or corrosion (Newman 1999). Where to find Harvard after Harvard? The push to replicate is excruciatingly intense. As Devon Peterson (2002) observed: "Perhaps most difficult to overcome is the naturally difficult task of giving up social status and an elite way of life."

"Wall Street University": Kinship Networks and Elite Extension

Wall Street and elite universities work together to foster and exploit this need to "find the next Harvard," in the process creating a symbiotic relationship that furthers each institution's dreams, goals, and practices. Wall Street has enjoyed long-standing historical ties with status-heavy Ivy League universities, ties that have produced generations of financiers and advisors to American industry. Since the 1980s, at precisely the time that Wall Street worked to solidify its expert influence over most U.S. corporations, these historical ties have been transformed into massive feeder relationships. Investment banks have naturalized themselves as the primary destinations for elite graduates as part of a program to consolidate and justify Wall Street's domination of corporate America, regardless of the "quality" of advice. In addition, over the past twenty-five years, student anxieties over preserving their elite status have increased, making Wall Street, at least until mid-2008, a much more attractive possibility than before. These developments, I argue, have converged to create a culture of "survival of the smartest."

Wall Street did not begin to recruit in droves at elite East Coast schools until the early 1980s. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, elite university graduates interested in business careers looked to management training programs with industrial, aerospace, or chemical corporations, rather than Wall Street firms (*Harvard Crimson* 1963; Wilentz 1975). For decades, general, "open" recruiting was not a standard practice for most businesses: Ivy League graduates relied on family wealth and networks, entered graduate school, or were approached via the "old boys' network" for financial or industrial fast-track grooming; and most Ivy League faculty, determined to perpetuate the ivory tower model, were "outraged by recruiting" (Beniger 1967). At Harvard in the 1950s, Wall Street financiers recruited a relatively small number of men directly from the well-established residential houses at Harvard College by holding small panels and conferences in intimate settings such as the Lowell House common room and the Eliot House dining hall (*Harvard Crimson* 1953, 1957). These efforts were small-scale as interest in the securities markets had plummeted after the Great Depression, and Wall Street was not necessarily the first choice for dynamic, ambitious college graduates. Furthermore, Wall Street and many other businesses

searched for managers from business schools, not undergraduate programs (Masters 1986). In general, because of economic stability in the postwar era for the upper-middle and upper classes, the postgraduation job search lacked the anxiety so often associated with it later. Most elite graduates had "job futures so well established that they never have to go seek" recruiting (Wilentz 1975). Remarking on a "trend" toward "working right after college," *Harvard Crimson* writer Jeffrey Senger (1984) reported that it was not until 1984 that a majority of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton graduates sought jobs after graduation; in 1974, only one-third, and in 1959, only one-tenth. For example, with surprisingly little angst, the *Harvard Crimson*, in an article headlined "The Jobless Class of '72," said that "by choice or by chance, over half of the Class of 1972 found themselves with nowhere to go and nothing to do after graduation." The culprit was not so much economic hard times as the fact that "students who were planning on business careers were unwilling to make long-term commitments" and that those going to graduate schools "also wanted to take a breather from the academic regimen" (Bennett 1972). It is also important to remember that campus culture in the Vietnam Era was much more hostile to big business in general than in subsequent years, as evidenced (for example) by student protests against napalm manufacturer Dow Chemical Corporation's attempt to recruit at Harvard in 1967 (Beniger 1967).

As Wall Street investment banks profited exorbitantly from their increasing influence over corporate America in the 1980s, they began to recruit at elite universities on a grand scale, creating the two-year analyst programs for the express purpose of targeting undergraduates directly out of college. This new cadre of workers, no longer handpicked through small-scale networks of family, friends, and close business associates, was legitimated by placing even greater cachet on the universities where they were recruited. In place of the elite, individualized family of men came the elite "Princeton" or "Harvard" family, which relied on a new variant of kinship based on alumni rather than "old boys'" networks. Recall my own initiation into "the Princeton family" in my very first recruitment presentation in 1995 when a Goldman Sachs managing director and Princeton alumnus addressed the audience as "the Princeton family" to establish both connection with "us" and to delineate an elite selectivity—just as not everyone can be a student at Princeton, investment banking is not a profession in which all can participate. "Princeton alumnae make the best analysts." That women and minorities were not explicitly excluded in this process was a crucial part of this new ideology of meritocracy.

What made this central glue of elite-institution-alumni stick to Wall Street despite the possible dilution of elitism caused by this extension of exclusivity to all alumni, ostensibly, was the formation of a generic culture of "the best" which pervaded and extended from, say, Wharton to Wall Street. By attracting masses of elite university alumni to Wall Street, investment banks and universities coproduce an extension and transferal of elitism via what I call a human kinship bridge. For example, in 2004, when Goldman Sachs CEO Hank Paulson gave a keynote speech to Wharton MBA students, the first point he made "after stating

Goldman Sachs's $23 billion in revenue in 2004" was "the importance his firm places on 'hiring and retaining the best people' in order to maintain a 'culture of excellence'." Paulson then emphasized the strong, intimate relationship his firm has with Wharton, "saying that more people were hired from the University to work at Goldman Sachs in 2004 than from any other school in the country" (Siegal 2005).

When a Harvard or Princeton education is seen as the normative "baseline" pedigree, it becomes ordinary as well as collective, encompassing, even universal. Wall Street smartness is, in a sense, "generic," and it is precisely this notion of elitism so pervasive as to be commonplace, smartness so sweeping as to become generic, that reinforces Wall Street's claims of extraordinariness. Specifically, the assumption is that everyone on Wall Street is smart and comes from Princeton or Harvard; as such, this smartness generically applies to *all members of this class* or kind in a way that is naturalized and comprehensively descriptive of this entire group of workers. The notion of Wall Street smartness is so ingrained that it does not have to be emphasized as "special" or qualified; as such, smartness is not a "brand name" or external label, but a blanket, sweeping generalization about all investment bankers. Wall Street's generic smartness is so comprehensive as to connote a global application to all members. Of course, while Princeton and Harvard are pinnacle "brand names," their generic status on Wall Street further attests to how special the accumulation of merit is at investment banks.

The kinship of generically smart investment bankers guarantees the extension and reinforcement of all the social particularities of those universities' positions in American culture, while simultaneously rendering invisible its normative, unmarked privilege. Marked investment bankers, who usually strive to be generically kin (and generically smart), feel the brunt of these contradictions daily. Kate Miller observed that she "never felt like more of a black woman with all of the negative stereotypes attached than I did when I was working at Morgan Stanley." She chose not to pursue a career in investment banking (or was discouraged from doing so), so her narratives illustrate a certain level of what might be called alienation from Wall Street culture and values. She described her initial experiences this way:

> I felt like the first thing people saw when they looked at me was not a bright person who had been admitted to the analyst class but a black woman. And most of the people that I worked with really had very little exposure to other races. I'm sure some of the men had very little exposure to women on a professional basis. Even though the industry has made a lot of strides to be more inclusive of women, I still think that white male officers prefer to work with white male analysts.

This pattern of exclusion, where white male vice presidents pick white male analysts to be on their team, where Yale graduates seek to work with other Yale graduates, greatly influenced Miller's opportunity to work on "higher profile" deals and to make connections with potential mentors. Many first-year analysts get to know senior-level bankers through various formal and informal alma

mater networking events. Miller poignantly observed, "If you're an analyst from Dartmouth and there are fifteen managing directors who also went to Dartmouth, then you get to know those fifteen managing directors. Well, Spelman College grad, guess what? There are no MDs, VPs, even associates that graduated from Spelman." Given that smartness and membership in a financial kin network that drives business and social opportunities are intimately dependent on both elite institutions and one's closeness to the unmarked, generic norm, Miller's various identities as a black woman from Spelman renders her less smart, less kin, and by extension, less of an investment banker.

Creating Pinnacle Status and Generic Smartness

Solidifying Wall Street as "the" extension of hyperelite universities requires the convergence of student aspirations, cultural pressures of elite upward mobility, Wall Street reframing of alumni kinship, and its marketing and monopoly of the recruitment process. In this section, I demonstrate one concrete way in which these entanglements of elitism are "operationalized" by even further narrowing the space at the top such that the most coveted investment banks and the "most" prestigious universities are not only associated singularly with each other but also distinguished from (and desired more than) the "regularly" prestigious ones. I argue that by painstakingly differentiating and creating hierarchies between and within elite universities through the recruitment process, investment bankers further intertwine their identities with the most elite universities, create demand for their jobs and institutions, and solidify their association with smartness.

As I have described, the two universities from which the prestigious Wall Street investment banks most actively recruit all students without restriction to major or department are Harvard and Princeton. It turns out that recruitment at other elite universities is not approached in a similar manner. For example, although investment banks also widely recruit at Yale, often included with Harvard and Princeton as one of the "top three" schools for banking or consulting, Yale, however, lags behind the other two in its reputation on Wall Street. According to one Yale alumnus who works on Wall Street, "because investment bankers perceive hostility" from many students at Yale, "they concentrate their recruitment energies at Princeton and Harvard.... They're looking to hire a larger portion of students from Harvard and Princeton, despite the fact that the number of applicants from each school is relatively similar" (Tanenbaum 2005). Yale is perceived by many of my investment banker informants to be more "liberal and 'artsy'," less free-market oriented in a sense, and perhaps even tainted by New Haven, a largely working-class, majority African American city. Instead of recruiting universally at Yale, as happens at Harvard and Princeton, banks might require Yale students to demonstrate their quantitative ability, by, say, majoring in economics or undergoing a financial internship (Engler 2006).[3]

A similar phenomenon occurs at the University of Pennsylvania. There, again, investment banks do not recruit as actively from the general undergraduate

population as a whole, although undergraduates and graduates from Penn's renowned Wharton School of Business are among the most highly sought-after recruits. "Some college seniors said it was difficult to find investment banking and consulting opportunities without a Wharton pedigree. It's harder to [secure financial jobs] if you are in the College" (Miley 2000). "Wharton may be the reason big-name investment banks are attracted to ... Penn." In 2005, over half of Wharton graduates went into investment banking (Steinbery 2006). Similar to Yale, non-Wharton undergraduates at Penn report that they need to demonstrate technical or financial expertise in order to attract Wall Street investment banks.

By contrast, investment banking recruiters at Princeton and Harvard explicitly express how they *do not care* if undergraduates are trained in finance because a skilled background or already-acquired technical expertise is *not* really what they are looking for. As Gia Moron, a media and recruiting spokesperson at Goldman Sachs, told *The Harvard Crimson*, "We have found that financial know-how is easy to teach—in fact, training is an important part of a new hire's orientation—but the skills that the most successful candidates possess are beyond teaching: Energy, a history of excellence and achievement, leadership and interpersonal skills are some of the stand-outs" (Ho 2003). According to a Princeton undergraduate, Kate Daviau ('06), "They understand that interns come in knowing basically nothing—but if you're smart and personable, it's worth it to them to hire you." The *Daily Princetonian* writer Catherine Rampell observed that from all her interactions with potential Wall Street employees during her years at Princeton, most do not even know what "financial services" is. "Most are going into finance because they haven't figured out what else they could do," yet "finance employers are seeking them out, telling them they're qualified for finance" no matter what their training, major, or department—as long as they are from Princeton. "They bombard us with food, mail, Princeton alumni connection, and they keep telling us we're qualified, we're perfectly qualified even though we've never 'held a real job' " (Rampell 2006).

This open-ended, "generic" recruitment at Princeton and Harvard not only naturalizes the students there as "the best," the elite among the elite, but also sheds light on what actually constitutes smartness for Wall Street. Being the best and the brightest, especially for college graduates, does not mean possessing actual technical skills, a background in finance, or even a specific aptitude for banking. Instead, Princeton and Harvard recruits bring to the table just the right mix of general qualities and associations: they are not too technical or geeky (MIT), not too liberal (Yale), not too far away (Stanford), and their universities carry more historical prestige than the remaining Ivies (Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania). Possessed of a combination of traditional cachet, class standing, and pedigree, they can show prima facie evidence of their "excellence" by virtue of their schools' (presumably) exclusive selection processes; and they demonstrate a constant striving for further "excellence" by virtue of their participation in the intense process of recruiting and their evident desire for a high-status, upper-crust lifestyle.

NOTES

1. Certainly, this idea has currency beyond Wall Street, though I would argue that, as evidenced by Bethany McLean's and Peter Elkind's *The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2003) on the Enron executives and Wall Street advisors, these financiers are so convinced of their own brilliance that they created illusory businesses for short-term stock price appreciation while scamming small investors and their own employees. The culture of smartness is particularly heralded, utilized, and valued in finance capital as productive of spectacular profit accumulation and global dominance.
2. Management consulting is considered a professional service where consulting firms advise corporate America on such "strategic" matters as entering a new business, streamlining existing departments, restructuring and downsizing, outsourcing, and so forth. Projects might include figuring out how to increase a company's market share, how to exit a certain business, where to move and relocate a particular division. At elite universities, becoming a management consulting analyst for some of the top consulting firms such as McKinsey and Bain is almost as highly sought after as investment banking, though not quite as prestigious or lucrative. The fact that one of the most popular debates on Harvard's and Princeton's campuses are panel sessions entitled "Investment Banking vs. Consulting" is evidence, not only of the production of narrow career "choices," but also of the limiting of what constitutes an acceptable job after graduation. That there are heated debates and panel discussions on campus about whether or not to choose "investment banking or consulting" (not to mention the fact that literally hundreds of students pack auditoriums to hear this topic) is a culturally specific phenomenon. Usually, panelists composed of firm representatives (usually former students) face off about the pros and cons of the two career choices, and use the platform to further recruit students to their "side." Discussion usually ranges from talk of compensation and the "caliber of people" to work hours and the amount of "strategic" responsibility an entry-level employee can have over corporate America. In a *Harvard Crimson* opinion piece, "Avoiding a Path to Nowhere," J. Mehta, a Harvard undergraduate, called attention to this oddness, in a sense, as well as the narrowness of such a debate. He writes, "I-banking and consulting. Consulting and I-banking. I-banking vs. consulting. What more could be on a Harvard senior's mind?" He continues, "We are caught in a vicious cycle, in which the brightest and most ambitious enter fields that most solidify the social status quo—blazing a path to nowhere in which the next generation of equally smart and energetic Harvard graduates are bound to follow" (Mehta 1998).
3. Yale numbers are significantly lower that that of Princeton and Harvard. According to their recruitment office, "30 percent of Yale students chose jobs in non-profits, 30 percent go to graduate or professional school, and 40 percent choose corporate careers in finance, consulting, publishing, communications, manufacturing, even brewing" (Tanenbaum 2005). A survey by the Office of Institutional Research showed that ordinarily around 20 percent of Yale students enter finance, but only 13 percent did in 2002 with the financial downturn (Pryor 2006).

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QUESTIONS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE READING

1. Ho points out that a future in finance has not always been the preferred goal of students at Harvard and other elite universities. Before the 1980s, she writes, "Ivy League graduates relied on family wealth and networks ... for financial or industrial fast-track grooming." How do the values of Ivy League students seem to have changed over time? What factors might explain how Wall Street became so pervasive a presence in the lives of Ivy League undergraduates? How might the growing influence of finance on university campuses reflect changes in the larger culture?
2. Why does Ho see "smartness" as an "ideology" and not an empirical fact? Clearly, many students come to the Ivies with excellent grades, well-developed skills, and broad-based general knowledge, but does "smartness" actually refer to qualities like these? Or does "smartness" signify something more complex? How does "smartness" help to create a sense of group solidarity and exclusiveness, and in what ways might it accentuate the students' fears about not fitting in? If students like Princeton's Katherine Reilly understand that "smartness" exerts pressure on people to embrace a narrow set of expectations, why does hers remain the minority view?
3. One of Ho's most important terms is *hegemony*, which refers to the use of culture rather than force as an instrument of domination (political, social, or economic). How does the elite educational system create hegemony, and who, exactly, dominates whom? Does the hegemony that Ho describes

reach beyond the university? Is the university itself dominated by *the Street*? Within the system of hegemony, should we see all Ivy League students as equal? Are all being groomed for membership in the elite? Or do we find within the Ivy League itself a division between the future elite and those destined to become subordinate?

QUESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. When Ho describes investment bankers, she often uses the word *power*. For example, she writes, "I do not assume a priori [automatically] that 'the market' always already exercises power, but rather that the particular biographies, experiences, and practices of investment bankers, who are both empowered and constrained by their cultural and institutional locations, create social change and financial hegemony on a daily basis." Should we think of power as something possessed by individuals or groups, or does it have to be created and sustained by the actions of the powerful? How does Wall Street use the Ivy Leagues to create its power? Why is it necessary for financiers to recruit so relentlessly? Is the presence of Wall Street on campus a sign of its strength or its weakness?
2. Using the evidence that Ho provides, can we say that Wall Street qualifies as a true meritocracy—that is, an elite system whose success has been achieved by virtue of ability, strength of character, and hard work? Or, conversely, do investment bankers represent an example of unearned privilege? One measure of a meritocracy is the degree to which its members are required to compete in order to gain entry into the ranks of the elite. Are the Ivy Leaguers recruited by Wall Street subjected to rigorous competition, or would you say they have been protected from competing by the process of recruitment? What other evidence can you provide to support the case for meritocracy, or the case for special privilege?

QUESTIONS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN READINGS

1. In "Immune to Reality," Daniel Gilbert makes the claim that people are surprisingly inept at predicting what will make them happy in the future. Gilbert argues that we stumble into happiness because it turns up inadvertently, and he suggests that our conscious intentions to realize long-held dreams are just as likely to end in frustration as in felicity. What might Gilbert say to the students recruited by the investment banking firms? Even if those students had read Gilbert (who teaches at Harvard, by the way), would they be likely to step off the fast track to "success"? If they

understood Gilbert's argument but still persisted in careers on the Street, what motives might explain their choice?

2. In what ways might the ideology of "smartness" contribute to the growing inequality that Joseph Stiglitz examines in "Rent Seeking and the Making of an Unequal Society"? As you develop your response, you might pay particular attention to his distinction between the supposed "geniuses of business" like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, and the "giant" Stiglitz celebrates, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, who could have become a billionaire but instead chose to make his idea freely available. Would it be fair to say that the recruitment programs in the Ivy League are designed to create a culture of rent-seeking? And does the existence of this culture complicate Stiglitz's call for systemic reform? How might the ideology of "smartness" work against the prospects for greater equality?