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"Discrimination within the hiring process. A study on the impact of people's social classes on the typical recruitment practices within the Italian legal environment"

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Abstract

Research focused on understanding the factors that sustain socioeconomic advantages in Italy primarily concentrates on formal education, with less attention given to recognizing social class biases in the job market. To explore this issue, an investigation was carried out using a résumé audit study to examine how indicators of social class, along with gender information, affect the hiring process at major Italian law firms and law departments within large multinational companies operating in Italy. We submitted job applications from fictional students attending reputable but non-elite law schools to 454 law firm offices across Milan and Rome. In these applications, we deliberately added signals indicating the applicants' social class background and gender while keeping all other qualifications identical.

Surprisingly, male applicants from higher social classes received significantly more interview callbacks compared to their counterparts, including higher-class women, lower-class women, and lower-class men. These findings suggest that, when compared to candidates from lower social classes, individuals from higher social classes are seen as better fits for the exclusive culture and high-profile clients commonly associated with major law firms. Furthermore, despite an overall improvement in evaluations for higher-class men, this advantage is also observed for higher-class women. On the other hand, gender played a crucial role, indicating that males have a significantly higher likelihood of being hired compared to females. As a result, both indications of a privileged background and gender provide a significant advantage to individuals applying for jobs in the field of law.

Key words: hiring, employment, social class, gender, discrimination, employment opportunities, audit study.

Introduction

Social class has long been recognized as a fundamental element of social hierarchy (Higgins & Judge, 2004), influencing individuals' access to various resources and opportunities (Cox & Blake, 1991). In recent years, there has been increasing interest in understanding how social class impacts the recruitment process within organizations. Recruitment serves as the gateway to employment, shaping the composition of the workforce and contributing to the perpetuation of social inequalities (Bowen et al., 1991). Therefore, examining the role of social class in recruitment is essential for comprehending the dynamics of social inequality in today's societies.

The recruitment process, which includes activities like job advertising, resume screening, interviews, and selection decisions, plays a critical role in determining who gets access to job opportunities (Brannon & Markus, 2013). During this process, individuals are assessed based on their qualifications, skills, and compatibility with organizational culture. However, emerging evidence indicates that social class significantly influences these evaluations, leading to unequal outcomes for candidates from different social backgrounds (Rivera, 2011).

The impact of social class on recruitment can be understood through various theoretical perspectives. Sociological theories, such as social stratification and social capital, provide conceptual frameworks for analyzing the mechanisms through which social class-based disparities occur (Bourdieu, 1994). Social stratification theory highlights the hierarchical arrangement of social classes and its impact on individuals' life chances. Meanwhile, social capital theory emphasizes the role of social networks and resources acquired through social connections, which can vary based on one's social class.

While previous research has explored the impact of other social factors, such as race, gender, and age, on recruitment, the influence of social class has gained prominence due to its pervasive nature and far-reaching consequences on individuals' lives (Adams & Weakliem, 2011). By

investigating social class-based disparities in the recruitment process, the primary goal is to uncover the mechanisms that perpetuate social inequality and inform interventions aimed at promoting greater diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

Relevance of the study

An in-depth examination of how socioeconomic classes affect recruitment processes is of utmost importance in contemporary society. This research explores the intricate relationship between social dynamics and employment opportunities, shedding light on potential biases and inequities in hiring procedures. It contributes to discussions about social justice and equality by examining how social class affects access to education, professional networks, and other resources. Furthermore, it offers valuable insights for businesses striving to create diverse and inclusive work environments. Additionally, researching this topic holds broader significance for talent acquisition strategies, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of untapped potential within disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. Ultimately, this research aligns with the broader societal goal of dismantling institutional barriers and fostering an egalitarian environment where a person's skills take precedence over their financial background.

Research question and purposes

In today's rapidly changing socioeconomic landscape, the role of social class in shaping individuals' access to opportunities is an increasingly important and practically relevant topic. The employment sector is a crucial arena where the implications of social class disparities become particularly evident. This study delves into the complex dynamics surrounding the influence of social class on the entire spectrum of recruitment processes, aiming to uncover subtle biases, structural obstacles, and disparities that can profoundly impact candidates from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Through a comprehensive examination of factors such as education, networking, and cultural capital, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how social class intersects with recruitment mechanisms. By identifying these influences, the study seeks to elucidate the extent of social class's impact on various stages of the recruitment process within Italian law firms. In doing so, this research not only advances academic knowledge but also offers insights that can inform more equitable human resource strategies and broader societal discussions on socioeconomic equality.

This thesis aims at examining the dynamics of the legal law firms in light of the reflections provided, with the ultimate goal of addressing a research question:

"Do social class and gender have an impact on the recruitment process of well-renowned Italian law firms and law departments within big multinational firms?"

This research question is answered by conducting a theory-testing, pattern matching, quantitative research based on primary data gathered from real job applications.

Ultimately, this research aims at making significant contributions to the existing academic knowledge in this field and provide practitioners with insights of recruitment standards within the law market, drawing on reputable sources. In particular, the research

objective of this study is to empirically investigate the influence of social class on the first stage of the recruiting process (i.e., resume screening for invitations to a job interview), aiming to identify potential biases, barriers, and disparities that affect candidates from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The study seeks to analyze how factors such as educational attainment, networking opportunities, and cultural capital interact with recruitment practices. Additionally, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader societal implications of social class-based inequalities in the context of employment, thereby fostering more informed public discourse and potential policy interventions.

Chapter 1

1. The importance of diversity in the workforce and its impact on organizational competitiveness

Diversity in the workforce has gained significant attention in both academic research and organizational practices. Diversity in the workplace refers to the presence of individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, identities, and experiences within an organization (Johnstone & Packer, 1987). It encompasses differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, socioeconomic status, and more (Lawler, 1994; Lawler, 1995). A diverse workplace acknowledges and values these unique characteristics, fostering an inclusive environment where all employees feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute their perspectives and talents (Shore & Wayne, 1993).

Diversity in the workplace goes beyond mere representation and focuses on creating an environment that promotes equal opportunities, fairness, and belonging for all employees. It recognizes that diverse perspectives and experiences contribute to creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. By embracing diversity, organizations can tap into a broader range of ideas, insights, and skills, leading to enhanced performance, adaptability, and overall success (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998). Moreover, workplace diversity aligns with the principles of social justice and equal representation, seeking to break down systemic barriers and biases that may exist. It fosters an environment where differences are celebrated, where individuals are not limited by stereotypes or discrimination, and where everyone can reach their full potential. To effectively manage diversity in the workplace, organizations often implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, policies, and training programs (Kalev et al., 2006). These efforts aim to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of diversity, encourage inclusive practices, and ensure that employees from all backgrounds have equal access to opportunities, resources, and career advancement. Furthermore, diversity in the workplace encompasses the variety of backgrounds, identities,

and experiences that employees bring to an organization (Armstrong, 2002). It fosters an inclusive environment where differences are respected, valued, and leveraged for the benefit of individuals and the organization (Cox, 2001).

In addition, the importance of diversity in the workforce and its impact on organizational competitiveness play a crucial role in organizational studies. Indeed, diversity has proven to a have a close relationship with the major organizational outcomes and performances.

1.1. Benefits of Diversity

Further examination of workforce diversification reveals that research has indicated that cultivating a workforce that is diverse and balanced has both advantages and obstacles (Cox, 1991). The presence of a diverse workforce offers numerous benefits to organisations in various facets of their operations. To begin with, the presence of diversity cultivates a heightened level of invention and creativity. The convergence of individuals with diverse origins, experiences, and viewpoints engenders a plethora of ideas and discoveries (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The presence of diverse perspectives within teams allows for the exploration of challenges from several aspects, leading to the generation of novel solutions (Hong & Page, 2004). Previous studies have demonstrated that teams consisting of individuals from diverse backgrounds are more inclined to produce innovative ideas and display higher levels of creativity in comparison to teams composed of individuals with similar characteristics (Janssen et al., 2004). In fact, the presence of multiple viewpoints and perspectives within diverse teams is crucial for promoting effective critical thinking, stimulating the emergence of novel solutions, and fostering innovation within organisations (Cox and Blake, 1991).

Furthermore, the presence of a diverse workforce contributes to the enhancement of problem-solving capacities. Diverse teams exhibit a wider array of knowledge, abilities, and views, hence enhancing their ability to address intricate problems with greater efficacy.

Research has indicated that heterogeneous teams exhibit superior performance compared to homogeneous teams when it comes to activities involving problem-solving. This advantage stems from their ability to draw upon a wider range of perspectives and methodologies, ultimately leading to more thorough and successful solutions (Mannix & Neale, 2005).

The presence of a diverse workforce enhances the quality of decision-making. According to Phillips et al. (2004), empirical evidence suggests that diverse groups have a propensity to enhance decision-making processes due to their ability to incorporate a broader range of perspectives and actively challenge the phenomenon of groupthink. By integrating a range of perspectives, organisations can mitigate biases and enhance the quality of decision-making, hence resulting in enhanced outcomes.

Moreover, the presence of a varied workforce contributes to an organization's improved comprehension of its client demographic. Organisations benefit from the inclusion of personnel from diverse cultural, ethnic, and demographic backgrounds as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the demands, interests, and behaviours of various client groups. According to Herring (2009), possessing this knowledge empowers organisations to create more customised products, services, and marketing tactics, ultimately leading to heightened levels of consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, these advantages may be particularly pertinent in certain contexts, such as when organisations engage in global expansion and achieve an international presence. This allows them to leverage diverse cultural perspectives in order to gain a deeper understanding of varied requirements across various geographical regions (Gassmann, 2001).

Finally, the act of embracing diversity and cultivating an inclusive work environment has the potential to bolster an organization's standing and entice highly skilled individuals to join its ranks. Research has indicated that individuals seeking employment, particularly those belonging to the millennial generation, deliberately pursue organisations that prioritise

diversity and inclusivity (PwC, 2015). According to Lawler (1994), organisations that place a high value on diversity and foster an inclusive environment are more inclined to attract a diverse pool of highly talented individuals. This, in turn, strengthens their capacity to innovate and remain competitive within the marketplace.

To summarise, the presence of a diversified workforce offers various benefits, including heightened levels of innovation, higher problem-solving aptitude, improved decision-making processes, deeper consumer comprehension, and the capacity to attract highly skilled individuals (Rivera, 2011). Organisations may enhance their competitive advantage and cultivate a flourishing and inclusive work environment by using the many perspectives, abilities, and experiences of their employees.

1.1.1. Social Identity theory and resource-based view as a tool to compare diversity and organizational performance.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of workplace diversity, the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) offer theoretical frameworks that can elucidate the connection between workforce diversity and organisational outcomes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The social identity theory offers valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the presence of diversity within the workforce. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals construct their self-concept and social identity based on their affiliations with various groups. Within the framework of workforce diversity, employees align themselves with diverse social collectives that are delineated by attributes such as gender, race, age, or nationality. Group identities have the potential to influence individuals' self-perceptions and their understanding of their position within the organisational context.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals experience an elevation in their self-esteem and job satisfaction when they see their group memberships as being positively valued within the organisational context. Individuals in organisations often undergo a psychological state characterised by feelings of affiliation, recognition, and integration, resulting in favourable consequences for the organisation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Employees who perceive that their different viewpoints and contributions are appreciated are more inclined to exhibit higher levels of engagement, motivation, and commitment towards their work. Consequently, this can result in increased productivity, enhanced collaboration, and overall performance improvement.

Moreover, the significance of inclusive organisational practises and supporting social norms in cultivating a favourable social identity is underscored by Social Identity Theory. When organisations establish a work atmosphere that fosters inclusivity, wherein all group memberships are valued and respected, it serves to cultivate a perception of fairness, diminish instances of discrimination, and bolster employees' sense of social identity. Consequently, this phenomenon leads to increased levels of job satisfaction, decreased rates of employee turnover, and enhanced organisational reputation.

In contrast, the Resource-Based View (RBV) places emphasis on the strategic significance of resources inside organisations, encompassing the aspect of workforce diversity. According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), organisations achieve a competitive edge by procuring and using distinctive and valuable resources that are challenging for rivals to replicate (Perez & Falcon, 2002).

Within the framework of diversity, the Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that an organisation might perceive a workforce characterised by variety as a valued asset. The presence of diversity within a group or organisation contributes to a wide range of information, skills, viewpoints, and experiences, which in turn can stimulate innovation, creativity, and

effective problem-solving. According to Ely and Thomas (2001), teams that exhibit diversity are more inclined to provide innovative ideas, tackle problems from many perspectives, and create distinctive solutions. This phenomenon has the potential to generate competitive benefits, including but not limited to product innovation, market response, and enhanced consumer comprehension.

The significance of efficient resource management and utilisation is likewise emphasised by the Resource-Based View. It is imperative for organisations to provide an atmosphere that fosters inclusivity and support, so promoting collaboration, open communication, and the interchange of varied ideas. Organisations may optimise the value and competitive advantage generated from diversity by efficiently utilising the varied resources present within their workforce.

In brief, the Social Identity Theory elucidates the manner in which workforce diversity impacts employees' social identity, job happiness, and broader organisational outcomes. The implementation of inclusive practises and the recognition of varied group memberships inside organisations have been found to have a favourable impact on employees' social identity and can significantly contribute to favourable organisational outcomes. The Resource-Based View places significant emphasis on the notion that diversity, in and of itself, represents a valuable resource for organisations. This resource is believed to contribute to the development of innovation, problem-solving capacities, and ultimately, competitive advantages. Through the integration of these theoretical frameworks, organisations have the opportunity to harness the advantageous impacts of diversity on employees' social identity, thereby utilising diversity as a strategic asset for achieving organisational success.

1.2. Drawbacks of Diversity

The presence of a heterogeneous workforce provides organisations with a multitude of benefits; yet, it also introduces a set of obstacles that necessitate careful management and navigation. First and foremost, the complexity of communication and coordination tends to increase in teams characterised by diversity. Misunderstandings and obstacles to effective collaboration can arise from disparities in language, cultural norms, and communication styles (Egan et al., 2008). Language constraints can impede the exchange of information and pose challenges in effectively communicating ideas and providing feedback. Furthermore, variations in communication patterns across cultures, such as the degree of directness or indirectness, have the potential to result in misunderstandings and discord.

Additionally, it is worth noting that teams comprised of individuals from varied backgrounds may encounter heightened levels of conflict and tension as a result of varying opinions, values, and experiences. The presence of diversity fosters the convergence of persons possessing distinct origins and beliefs, hence potentially resulting in conflicts arising from divergent opinions and approaches (Jehn, 1995). The presence of these conflicts has the potential to impede effective teamwork, impede the decision-making processes, and diminish the overall cohesiveness of the team. The effective management and resolution of these problems necessitates the possession of robust interpersonal and conflict resolution abilities. Moreover, the effective management of diversity within a workforce necessitates substantial dedication and allocation of resources. It is imperative for organisations to allocate resources towards the implementation of diversity training programmes, policies, and practises in order to foster inclusivity and address bias within their workforce (Dass & Parker, 1999). These programmes are designed with the objective of enhancing comprehension, mitigating prejudices, and cultivating a work atmosphere that embraces diversity and inclusivity.

Nevertheless, the implementation and maintenance of these programmes might require a significant amount of time and resources.

Moreover, there may exist difficulties associated with the resistance to change. According to Cox (1993), certain individuals may experience a sense of threat when faced with the introduction of varied abilities and ideas, since they may perceive them as potential challenges to their own positions or established methods. The process of addressing and surmounting opposition to diversity necessitates the implementation of proficient change management tactics, transparent channels of communication, and the endorsement of leadership in order to foster a cultural environment that actively embraces and appreciates difference.

Cultural conflicts and preconceptions may emerge within a heterogeneous workforce, giving rise to instances of discrimination, prejudice, and the establishment of subgroups. The presence of preconceived conceptions and biases stemming from cultural, ethnic, or gender disparities might impede collaborative efforts, curtail the prospects for achieving equitable representation, and foster an unfavourable work milieu (Ely & Thomas, 2001). To effectively tackle these concerns, it is imperative to engage in continuous education, promote awareness, and cultivate a climate that values respect and inclusivity.

In conclusion, the presence of a diverse workforce offers a multitude of advantages; nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge and tackle the potential obstacles that may arise. Some of the challenges that may arise in this context encompass communication intricacies, heightened levels of conflict, management that requires substantial resources, reluctance towards change, and the possibility of encountering cultural clashes and perpetuating stereotypes. By acknowledging and proactively addressing these obstacles, organisations can effectively utilise the advantages of diversity while minimising any potential adverse effects.

The significance of addressing the challenges associated with a diverse workforce should not be ignored. Extensive empirical research has been conducted to investigate the correlation between diversity and organisational outcomes. Numerous studies have repeatedly demonstrated favourable correlations between diversity and a range of organisational performance metrics, including financial performance, market share, and employee happiness (Homan et al., 2015; Kalev et al., 2006; Richard et al., 2004). Richard et al. (2004) did a meta-analysis which revealed a favourable association between diversity and financial performance across several industries. In a similar vein, research has demonstrated the potential detrimental impact of workforce discrimination on the long-term sustainability of businesses, specifically through compromised competitiveness. Pager (2016) has documented that companies that engage in discriminatory practises experience a decreased likelihood of remaining operational six years later. It has been postulated that this outcome is attributed to their inability to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Moreover, scholarly research has provided evidence that mere variety is insufficient in itself; organisations must also foster inclusive environments in order to fully realise the advantages of diversity (Kearney and Gebert, 2009). Inclusive practises, such as the implementation of equitable decision-making processes, the provision of diversity training, and the cultivation of supportive leadership, serve to facilitate the integration of varied perspectives and contribute to favourable organisational outcomes.

1.3. The discrimination hiring paradox

Numerous studies have provided evidence to support the notion that organisations that exhibit higher levels of employee diversity tend to experience a distinct competitive edge. The aforementioned benefit arises from a multitude of reasons, encompassing heightened levels of innovation, creativity, problem-solving aptitude, enhanced decision-making skills, improved comprehension of client needs, and broadened market penetration (Rivera, 2011). The aforementioned advantages stem from the many viewpoints, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds that individuals contribute to the organisation.

Nevertheless, the conundrum of discriminatory practises in the recruitment process, specifically pertaining to factors such as ethnicity, gender, religion, and other facets of diversity, presents a formidable obstacle to fully harnessing the benefits of diversity within the organisational setting (Shore & Wayne, 1993). The concept under consideration pertains to the inherent contradiction between the well-documented advantages of workplace diversity and the ongoing prevalence of discriminatory practises during the recruitment and selection procedures. The presence of diversity inside organisations has been empirically demonstrated to have a positive impact on organisational performance, innovation, and the cultivation of inclusive cultures. However, it is important to acknowledge that discrimination remains a formidable obstacle that must be addressed. The presence of discriminatory practises can impede the process of recruiting, selecting, and promoting persons belonging to underrepresented groups, thereby restricting their prospects and impeding the organization's capacity to fully harness the advantages that diversity offers (Pager, 2007).

Numerous research have successfully identified the primary components that contribute to this apparent contradiction. Implicit biases and prejudices are significant contributors to the paradoxical predicament. Although individuals may consciously strive to promote equality, it is important to recognise that implicit biases and prejudices can nevertheless exert an influence

on decision-making in the context of recruiting processes. Implicit biases refer to implicit attitudes and associations that have an impact on our perceptions and judgements. The presence of biases can potentially result in the favouritism towards candidates who align with stereotyped standards, so unintentionally placing those who deviate from these norms at a disadvantage (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). For example, empirical studies have demonstrated that applications that are identical in content but vary in the names of the applicants can result in variations in the rates of receiving callbacks, so highlighting the influence of implicit biases on the process of making hiring decisions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the organisational culture and norms present inside a given organisation can inadvertently sustain biassed recruiting practises. When recruiting and promotion choices rely on informal networks, referrals, or subjective factors, there is a potential for unintentional bias in favour of candidates belonging to dominant groups. In a similar vein, the absence of well-defined diversity and inclusion initiatives inside an organisation, coupled with a lack of proactive advocacy for these principles by its leaders, can result in the perpetuation of biassed practises (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

The presence of homogeneity in decision-making processes also contributes to the emergence of the discrimination paradox. The absence of diversity within decision-making bodies poses a potential risk of sustaining discriminatory practises. Homogeneous groups may have a tendency to possess comparable perspectives and experiences, hence posing difficulties in the identification and mitigation of biases. In contrast, decision-making teams that exhibit diversity possess a range of perspectives, hence facilitating the questioning of preconceptions and biases during the evaluation of candidates (Milkman et al., 2015).

In summary, the discriminatory paradox can be attributed significantly to the absence of accountability and openness. Organisations may encounter difficulties in recognising and remedying unfair recruiting practises as a result of insufficient accountability and transparency.

The absence of systematic data collecting and rigorous analysis may result in the failure to detect discriminatory patterns. The implementation of open hiring practises, diligent tracking of hiring outcomes, and periodic audits are of utmost importance for organisations in order to uncover and address potential biases and discrepancies.

2. Key terms

2.1. Social Class

The comprehension of social inequalities and its repercussions for individuals' lives is significantly enhanced by the consideration of the idea of social class. The concept of social class is a multifaceted framework that incorporates various elements, including economic, cultural, and social aspects (Wright, 2005). The concept of social class is a comprehensive and intricate construct employed to delineate the hierarchical divides present in a society, which are determined by people' socioeconomic status and other elements (Weber, 1946; Bourdieu, 1984). Various definitions of social class have been put forth by scholars and researchers, with each highlighting different aspects of inequality. According to Marx and Engels (1848), the concept of social class is delineated by the possession or absence of means of production. In this framework, the capitalist class, also known as the bourgeoisie, is characterised by their control of the means of production and their subsequent exploitation of the working class, referred to as the proletariat. The economic perspective being emphasised here underscores the fundamental dichotomy between individuals who own authority over the means of production and those who offer their work for sale. Weber (1922) further elaborated on this conceptualization by integrating other aspects of social stratification, such as social status and power. Weber's theoretical framework on social class encompasses economic dimensions, while also taking into account the social standing or prestige linked to an individual's career or lifestyle, as well as their level of political influence. In addition, Wright (2005) created a comprehensive framework for understanding social class that encompasses multiple variables, including economic resources, occupational status, and educational achievement. This approach acknowledges that social class is not exclusively determined by a single element, but rather influenced by a combination of economic, vocational, and educational conditions. The diverse definitions and frameworks presented contribute to a more profound comprehension of

the intricate nature of social class, hence furnishing a thorough elucidation of how socioeconomic elements intersect to generate and sustain social disparities within a particular culture.

Scholars have discerned multiple criteria employed for the purpose of classifying persons into distinct social strata, encompassing economic affluence, job status, and educational accomplishment.

Numerous studies have consistently indicated the significant impact of socioeconomic class on educational achievements. The study undertaken by Reardon and Portilla (2016) aimed to investigate the correlation between social class and educational attainment within the context of the United States. The researchers discovered that children hailing from more privileged social backgrounds exhibit a propensity for possessing enhanced opportunities to access educational resources, including high-quality educational institutions, supplementary activities beyond the curriculum, and more parental engagement. These factors collectively contribute to the achievement of higher levels of educational attainment. On the other hand, children belonging to poorer socioeconomic backgrounds frequently encounter several challenges, including restricted access to resources and limited exposure to educational opportunities, resulting in diminished academic achievements.

Moreover, there exists a correlation between social class and labour market outcomes, encompassing factors such as occupation and income. Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) conducted a seminal study that investigated the correlation between individuals' social class backgrounds and their subsequent class positions in England. The researchers discovered that persons belonging to higher social classes exhibited a greater propensity to attain lucrative and esteemed professional positions, whereas individuals from lower social classes encountered obstacles and experienced restricted opportunities for upward advancement within the occupational structure.

The aforementioned findings underscore the considerable influence of social class on the formation of educational and professional achievements. The access to resources, opportunities, and networks of individuals is influenced by their social class, which subsequently impacts their educational achievement and future employment chances (Rivera, 2015). It is imperative to comprehend the influence of social class on these outcomes in order to effectively tackle social disparities and develop interventions that foster equitable opportunities and social mobility.

2.2. Recruitment process

The recruitment process is a methodical and comprehensive strategy employed by organisations to attract, evaluate, and choose appropriate individuals for job openings. The hiring process comprises a series of interconnected procedures designed to assure efficiency and equity. The initial stage in the process entails doing a comprehensive job analysis, wherein pertinent data pertaining to the job's prerequisites, encompassing essential skills, qualifications, and experience, is collected (Armstrong, 2002). This particular step aids organisations in the development of precise job descriptions and person specifications, which subsequently serve as guiding documents for the succeeding stages. The subsequent phase is sourcing, wherein organisations proactively engage in the process of identifying possible candidates. This can be achieved through diverse avenues, including job boards, online platforms, social media, employee referrals, and professional networks (Breaugh, 2018; Wright et al., 2019). Sourcing strategies are designed with the objective of attracting a wide range of highly qualified candidates.

The third phase entails the process of screening, wherein applications and resumes are carefully assessed to identify individuals who satisfy the predetermined criteria. Screening techniques encompass preliminary evaluations, such as skills assessments, cognitive ability tests, or personality assessments, which serve to further refine the pool of potential candidates (Lamont, 2009). The fourth stage is the process of interviewing, wherein chosen candidates undergo evaluation through various modes such as face-to-face, phone, or video interviews. Interviews offer a valuable occasion to evaluate the qualifications, interpersonal competencies, problem-solving proficiencies, and alignment with the organisational culture of candidates (Kehoe et al., 2017). Various forms of interviews, including structured, unstructured, and behavioural interviews, are employed as means of acquiring pertinent information (Heslin, 2009).

After conducting the interviews, the subsequent stage involves the process of selection and decision-making. The ultimate hiring choice is made by assessing the information collected from the preceding steps. The process may encompass several measures like as reference checks, background screenings, and more evaluations in order to verify the qualifications and appropriateness of the candidates (Wright et al., 2019). The process of making decisions frequently entails the involvement of various important parties, including recruiting managers, human resources professionals, and occasionally senior executives, in order to guarantee a well-informed and impartial selection (Bullock & Limbert, 2012). Ultimately, after a candidate has been chosen, the organisation proceeds with extending a job offer, engaging in negotiations over the terms of employment, and facilitating the onboarding process.

2.3. Socioeconomic status

The idea of socioeconomic status (SES) is intricate and incorporates several economic, educational, and occupational variables. These indicators are used to assess an individual's or a family's social and economic position within a given community. According to Adler and Newman (2002), it signifies an individual's ability to obtain and manage diverse resources, opportunities, and social connections. Socioeconomic status encompasses three key components: income, education, and occupation.

Income is a fundamental element that signifies the financial assets of an individual or a household. According to Adler and Newman (2002), it encompasses several forms of income, including incomes from job, investments, government assistance, and other sources. Income can be assessed using a range of measures, including yearly household income, personal income, and the income-to-needs ratio. The income-to-needs ratio compares an individual's income to a predetermined threshold, such as the poverty line.

Education is a significant aspect that pertains to the level of formal education achieved by an individual. The concept pertains to the process of obtaining information, skills, and credentials through formal education and further learning. The measurement of education can be determined through several indicators, such as the duration of formal schooling, as well as the acquisition of educational degrees or certificates (Galobardes et al., 2007).

The concept of occupation pertains to the specific type of labour that an individual undertakes, and is closely linked to factors such as social status, level of expertise, and financial remuneration. The measurement of occupational status commonly involves the utilisation of standardised scales, such as the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) or the Occupational Prestige Score (OPS). These scales allocate scores or ranks to various occupations based on criteria such as their social standing, skill requirements, and potential for income generation (Adler & Newman, 2002).

The assessment of an individual's socioeconomic status entails the collecting and quantification of several components, resulting in a thorough measurement of their socioeconomic position. Researchers and policymakers utilise diverse methodologies to quantify it. The composite index method is a viable approach that involves amalgamating various indices of socioeconomic status (SES), including income, education, and occupation, into a unified index by the application of suitable weighting techniques (Galobardes et al., 2007). The composite index presented herein offers a concise representation of an individual's socioeconomic status (SES). In an alternative approach, scholars have the option to employ categorical measures that assign individuals to certain socioeconomic status (SES) groups, including low, middle, or high SES, using specified thresholds or criteria (Adler & Newman, 2002). The classification of socioeconomic positions is based on income levels, educational achievement, and occupational status, so offering a comprehensive framework for categorising individuals.

In general, the assessment of socioeconomic status facilitates a more comprehensive comprehension of individuals' socioeconomic standings, their availability to resources, and their prospects within the societal framework. This facilitates the examination of the associations between socioeconomic status (SES) and many outcomes, including disparities in health, gaps in educational success, and inequities in the economy, by academics and policymakers.

3. Theoretical perspectives

3.1. Social reproduction theory

The theory of social reproduction provides a comprehensive framework for examining the mechanisms by which social disparities and structures are maintained and passed down from one generation to the next. The theory discussed in this statement has been formulated and advanced by acclaimed scholars Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. It emphasises the intricate dynamics of economic, cultural, and social elements in the perpetuation of social hierarchies and power dynamics (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Social reproduction theory fundamentally argues that social systems possess processes that uphold and perpetuate prevailing inequities. These mechanisms function by means of a multitude of interrelated processes.

Education is of paramount importance in the process of social reproduction. The allocation of quality education and educational resources is frequently differentiated according to social class, resulting in persons from privileged socioeconomic origins enjoying enhanced prospects for achieving academic excellence. Educational institutions have a tendency to sustain prevailing social hierarchies by the replication of cultural norms, attitudes, and knowledge that are congruent with the dominant social groupings.

Additionally, it has been argued that cultural practises play a role in the process of social reproduction (Jewel, 2008). People belonging to various socioeconomic groups undergo socialisation processes that lead to the development of unique cultural frameworks. These frameworks subsequently influence their behaviours, interests, and goals. The prevailing culture, sometimes linked to privileged socioeconomic strata, is typically esteemed and incentivized within societal establishments, such as the job market (Jewel, 2008). The possession of cultural capital confers persons from privileged origins with a distinct edge in

the attainment of employment, advancements in career, and other avenues of upward social mobility.

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the significant impact of social networks and socialisation processes on the phenomenon of social reproduction. According to Jewel (2008), individuals belonging to higher socioeconomic classes frequently possess the advantage of accessing prominent networks and connections, which in turn aids their entry into coveted vocations and positions. Family connections, alumni networks, and other forms of privileged social affiliations serve as channels via which individuals from privileged backgrounds can access and acquire chances and benefits within the labour market.

The social reproduction theory highlights the role of social class in shaping individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and networks, hence perpetuating a cycle of either advantage or disadvantage that spans multiple generations. Individuals hailing from privileged origins typically possess a higher degree of economic, cultural, and social capital, which facilitates the perpetuation and consolidation of their positions of authority and advantage. On the other hand, persons hailing from socioeconomically disadvantaged origins encounter several obstacles and a dearth of prospects, hence maintaining their marginalised position within society (Jewel, 2008).

Through an examination of the mechanisms involved in social reproduction, this theoretical framework provides valuable and critical insights into the intricate dynamics of social class and the perpetuation of inequities within modern societies.

3.1.1 Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction

The Social Reproduction Theory, closely linked to Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the processes through which social inequalities are reproduced and perpetuated across generations (Figure 1).
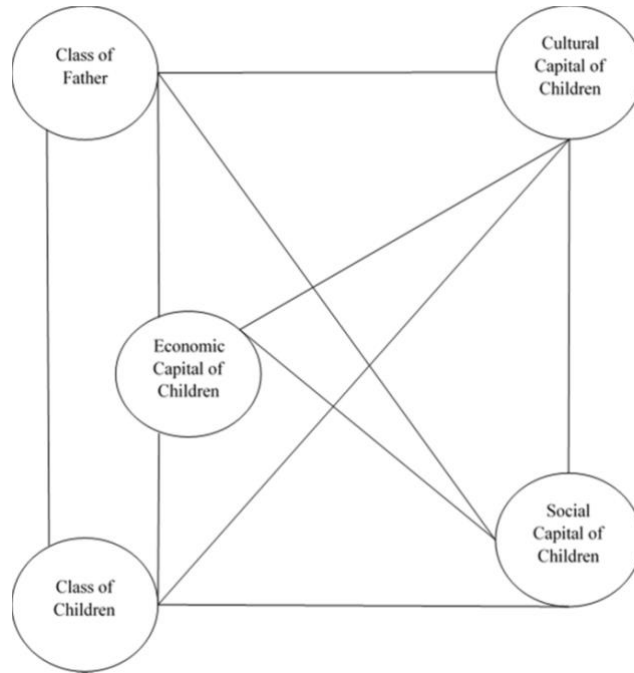
Figure 1. *Social Reproduction Theory. Source: Abbasi, S.U.R.S. & Mahmood (2021)*

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, as elucidated in his seminal publication "Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture" (1977), elucidates the intricate dynamics between social, cultural, and economic elements in the perpetuation of social stratification. Bourdieu's theoretical framework places significant emphasis on the pivotal role played by cultural and symbolic capital in perpetuating social disparities. Bourdieu posits that economic considerations pertain to the impact of people' social class background on their access to educational resources and opportunities, therefore shaping their acquisition of knowledge, skills, and credentials. Based on the aforementioned idea, persons belonging to higher socioeconomic strata exhibit a greater propensity for acquiring educational advantages and certificates, hence rendering them more appealing to employers in the context of recruitment. Cultural capital encompasses persons belonging to elevated social strata who possess cultural knowledge, competencies, and preferences that are esteemed by prevailing social factions. The possession of cultural capital can provide benefits during the hiring process, as employers may

consider persons from privileged social backgrounds as possessing the desired cultural alignment with their organisations.

Finally, the social variables underscore the significance of social ties and networks in the process of recruiting. Individuals belonging to higher socioeconomic strata frequently possess broader social networks, encompassing familial ties, attendance at prestigious educational institutions, and membership in esteemed social organisations. These networks have the potential to give individuals with privileged access to job possibilities, as those belonging to higher social classes tend to receive recommendations and referrals from powerful connections at a higher rate.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction introduces the notion of habitus, which pertains to the internalised dispositions, habits, and behaviours that individuals acquire through their processes of socialisation. The habitus has a significant role in shaping the perceptions, desires, and actions of individuals, and it exhibits a strong association with their social class origins. It serves as a reflection of how individuals traverse and interpret the social realm, so supporting the prevailing social structure and sustaining social disparities.

The Social Reproduction Theory, in its broader scope, builds upon the findings of Bourdieu by encompassing a variety of mechanisms that extend beyond the realm of education. The concept of social reproduction comprises various elements such as social networks, family structures, economic structures, and cultural practises. These elements collectively contribute to the perpetuation of social disparities. For example, persons belonging to privileged social classes often possess access to powerful social networks, which facilitates their ability to gain employment chances through the use of connections and referrals.

In brief, the Social Reproduction Theory, which expands upon Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, offers a sophisticated comprehension of the mechanisms by which social inequalities persist and are passed down from one generation to the next. The focal point lies

on the significance of cultural and symbolic capital, educational institutions, social networks, and habitus in the perpetuation of social class divisions. The presented framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between social factors in perpetuating social disparities. It also offers useful insights into the mechanisms that uphold social class dynamics in modern countries.

3.1.2 Application to the recruitment process

The utilisation of the Social Reproduction Theory, namely Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, offers significant perspectives on the impact and configuration of the recruiting process by social class (Rivera, 2012). An example of the utilisation of this theory is the notion of cultural matching, as discussed in previous studies (Rivera, 2012; Pager et al., 2009). Bourdieu argues that managers frequently prioritise applicants who possess cultural capital that is congruent with the prevailing culture inside the organisation. The practise of cultural matching serves to establish a perceived alignment between the candidate and the values, standards, and expectations of the organisation. For example, individuals belonging to higher social strata who have undergone socialisation within the prevailing cultural norms may exhibit appropriate etiquette, communication patterns, and preferences that align with the expectations of employers. Consequently, this might confer them with a competitive edge throughout the process of recruiting (Rivera, 2012).

An further utilisation of the idea involves the examination of educational qualifications during the process of recruiting individuals (Grusky, 2019). According to Fernandez et al. (2000), Bourdieu's theory highlights the significance of social class in determining individuals' access to high-quality education, which subsequently impacts their attainment of educational degrees. During the process of recruitment, companies frequently utilise educational qualifications as indicators of a candidate's competencies and future prospects. Individuals

belonging to higher social strata, who have enjoyed privileged opportunities to acquire superior education and attend esteemed educational establishments, may possess academic qualifications or certificates that are highly esteemed by employers, so conferring them a competitive edge over candidates hailing from lower social classes (Grusky, 2019).

The Social Reproduction Theory emphasises the significant significance that social networks play in the recruitment process. According to Bourdieu, persons belonging to higher social classes possess a greater likelihood of accessing influential networks and connections, hence exerting a substantial influence on their employment opportunities. Recommendations and referrals obtained from these networks might offer candidates advantageous prospects that may not be accessible through conventional means. The recruiting process can be influenced by the advantage that candidates from higher social classes possess in social networks, hence contributing to the perpetuation of social disparities (Fernandez et al., 2000).

Additionally, the idea acknowledges the existence of unconscious prejudices related to social class within the recruitment process. Recruiters may possess implicit preconceptions and stereotypes regarding candidates hailing from diverse social classes, thereby resulting in biassed assessments and determinations. These biases may emerge in diverse manners, such as exhibiting a preference for individuals who possess characteristics linked to higher social strata or inadvertently eliminating applicants from lower social strata. It is imperative to acknowledge and alleviate these subconscious biases in order to foster impartiality and equality within the recruitment procedure (Pager et al., 2009).

The application of the Social Reproduction Theory to the recruiting process enables organisations to get a more profound comprehension of the influence of social class on hiring outcomes. This approach also facilitates the identification of solutions aimed at mitigating bias and fostering a recruitment process that is more fair in nature. This comprehension can provide

insights for initiatives aimed at improving diversity, inclusivity, and social mobility inside organisations, as well as addressing the continuation of social disparities in employment.

3.2. Stereotype content model

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) is a comprehensive psychological framework proposed by Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) to explain the cognitive processes underlying the formation and structure of stereotypes. The model suggests that people evaluate social groups based on two fundamental dimensions: warmth and competence. Warmth refers to perceptions of a group's friendliness, trustworthiness, and intentions towards others, while competence pertains to judgments of a group's abilities, skills, and expertise. These dimensions are considered universal and play a critical role in shaping social perceptions and behaviours. According to the SCM, the combinations of warmth and competence give rise to distinct patterns of stereotype content. The model identifies four different primary categories of stereotypes based on these dimensions (Figure 2):

Warmth	Competence	
	Low	High
High	**Quadrant 2** **Paternalistic prejudice** low status, not competitive pity, sympathy e.g., elderly and disabled people, housewives	**Quadrant 1** **Admiration** high status, not competitive pride, admiration e.g., in-group, close allies
Low	**Quadrant 3** **Contemptuous prejudice** low status, competitive contempt, disgust, anger, resentment e.g., welfare recipients, poor people	**Quadrant 4** **Envious prejudice** high status, competitive envy, jealousy e.g., rich people, feminists

Figure 2. Stereotype Content Model. Source: Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002).

- High Warmth, High Competence: Groups classified as high on both warmth and competence are typically admired and respected. They are seen as capable, successful, and deserving of high social status. Examples of groups falling into this category include professionals, leaders, and members of the in-group.

- High Warmth, Low Competence: Groups characterized by high warmth but low competence are often perceived as needing help, protection, or paternalistic care. These groups elicit feelings of sympathy and may be seen as requiring assistance. Examples include the elderly, individuals with disabilities, or those facing adversity.

- Low Warmth, High Competence: Groups that are viewed as low on warmth but high on competence are often the target of envy or resentment. They may be seen as competitive threats or as exploiting their abilities for personal gain. Examples of such groups include high-status professionals, wealthy individuals, or successful out-groups.

- Low Warmth, Low Competence: Groups categorized as low on both warmth and competence tend to be disregarded, marginalized, or even despised. They are often stigmatized and face negative stereotypes. This category may include certain marginalized or disadvantaged groups in society.

The Stereotype Content Model suggests that these dimensions of warmth and competence shape intergroup attitudes, behaviors, and treatment. They influence social judgments, interpersonal interactions, and discrimination towards different social groups. The model has been widely applied in various fields, including social psychology, organizational behaviour, and intergroup relations research, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of stereotypes and their consequences.

3.2.1. Stereotypes based on social class

The Stereotype Content Model places its primary emphasis on the aspects of warmth and competence. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that socioeconomic class has the potential to impact the views and stereotypes attributed to various groups. The Stereotype Content Model offers valuable insights into the perceptions and beliefs connected with various social strata, specifically regarding stereotypes based on social class. Stereotypes frequently associate individuals belonging to higher social classes with attributes such as competence, achievement, and intelligence, hence justifying their elevated social standing (Kraus & Keltner, 2013). According to Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007), individuals belonging to this group may be commonly regarded as diligent, knowledgeable, and endowed with a diverse set of assets and prospects. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that these stereotypes can also depict individuals from higher social classes as deficient in displaying warmth, exhibiting traits such as arrogance, entitlement, and a detachment from the lived realities of those belonging to lower socioeconomic strata (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

The middle class is often associated with stereotypes that encompass perceptions of moderate degrees of competence and kindness. According to Cuddy et al. (2007), the middle class can be perceived as possessing average levels of intelligence, success, and resources. According to Kraus and Keltner (2013), individuals frequently exhibit characteristics that are commonly linked to traits such as diligence, accountability, and the pursuit of equilibrium in various aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these stereotypes exhibit variability in diverse cultural and societal settings, and their formation can be shaped by several factors, including economic circumstances and cultural norms.

On the contrary, stereotypes pertaining to individuals belonging to lower socioeconomic strata often depict them as deficient in both competence and friendliness. Individuals in this group may face stigmatisation characterised by perceptions of laziness, lack of motivation, and

deficiencies in abilities or educational credentials (Fiske et al., 2002). This social class may be connected with negative traits, such as reliance on social welfare, subpar work ethic, or involvement in criminal activities (Cuddy et al., 2007). The persistence of social inequities encountered by individuals from lower socioeconomic strata is exacerbated by the presence of these stereotypes, leading to their marginalisation.

It is imperative to use prudence while engaging with stereotypes, as they are overarching assumptions that fail to encapsulate the intricacy and multiplicity present within social strata. Additionally, it is important to note that preconceptions can be shaped by various cultural, economic, and historical elements, and it is crucial to recognise that there are individual differences within every socioeconomic class. It is imperative to engage in the critical examination and comprehension of these stereotypes in order to foster social cohesion, mitigate biases, and establish societies that are characterised by greater equity.

3.2.2. *Influence on hiring decisions*

The impact of social class preconceptions on hiring decisions can have substantial ramifications for employment prospects and results. Existing research indicates that the presence of stereotypes has the potential to exert an influence on the formation of biassed evaluations and decision-making procedures within the context of recruitment and selection.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that prejudices rooted in social class have the potential to engender biases during the initial evaluation of job candidates. Hiring managers or recruiters may form judgements regarding an applicant's competency or appropriateness for a position based on their perceived social status. An illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the experiences of individuals belonging to lower socioeconomic classes, who encounter prejudice in the form of diminished prospects or restricted entry to esteemed

positions. This bias is rooted in preconceptions that link them to lower levels of competence or perceived inadequacy in terms of qualifications (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Additionally, it is important to consider that prejudices rooted in social class have the potential to impact the evaluations conducted during interviews and assessments. According to Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, and Keltner (2011), there is a possibility that hiring managers exhibit an unconscious bias towards candidates from higher socioeconomic classes, considering them as possessing greater competence and suitability for the position. This bias has the potential to influence the perceived compatibility between the candidate and the organisation, hence impacting the probability of being chosen for the position.

Furthermore, it is important to note that social class prejudices can also be observed through the phenomenon of "cultural matching" biases, which refers to the tendency of decision-makers to show preference towards job candidates who possess comparable social class backgrounds to their own (Rivera, 2012). This phenomenon has the potential to sustain disparities and curtail inclusivity within organisations, since individuals hailing from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter supplementary obstacles in their pursuit of prestigious roles.

In general, the impact of social class prejudices on hiring decisions underscores the necessity for consciousness and endeavours to alleviate bias in recruitment methodologies. Organisations have the ability to employ many tactics, like structured interviews, blind resume reviews, and diversity training, in order to mitigate the influence of prejudices and establish hiring processes that are impartial and just.

3.3. Institutional theory

The field of institutional theory offers a comprehensive conceptual framework that facilitates the comprehension of how organisations are impacted and moulded by their wider institutional surroundings. Institutional theory, as conceptualised by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), asserts that organisations are shaped not just by rational decision-making and market dynamics, but also by the influence of social, cultural, and regulatory institutions. These institutions encompass a variety of elements, such as established protocols and guidelines, recognised professional benchmarks, prevailing cultural principles, and societal conventions. In accordance with institutional theory, organisations endeavour to attain legitimacy by adhering to the prevailing institutional pressures. The categorization of institutional forces encompasses three primary forms: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Coercive pressures manifest as a result of external influences, including legal frameworks, rules, and governmental bodies, which necessitate organisational adherence to prevent potential penalties or sanctions. Normative pressures arise from the influence of professional and societal norms, which prescribe the acceptable conduct and practises within a certain industry or society. Organisations adhere to these principles in order to obtain acceptance and approval from pertinent stakeholders. Mimetic pressures manifest when organisations replicate successful practises of other organisations, particularly in contexts characterised by uncertainty or ambiguity, when explicit rules or established best practises are lacking. Organisations can mitigate uncertainty and enhance their legitimacy by adopting strategies that emulate successful organisations. The significance of institutional contexts in influencing organisational behaviour, practises, and structures is emphasised by institutional theory. The application of this concept has found extensive use across several disciplines, encompassing areas such as organisational behaviour, sociology, and management. It has contributed valuable

insights into subjects such as isomorphism, organisational change, organisational legitimacy, and the dissemination of innovation.

3.3.1. *Institutional Factors Affecting Recruitment*

In the context of organisational dynamics, institutional considerations exert a substantial influence on the configuration and implementation of recruitment procedures. These elements cover a diverse set of institutional influences that exert impact on the norms, practises, and expectations pertaining to the process of hiring. One crucial institutional component is to the legal and regulatory framework. The recruitment processes of organisations are subject to adherence to norms and constraints set forth by employment legislation and anti-discrimination policies. The aforementioned laws serve to uphold principles of fairness, equal opportunity, and safeguard individuals against discriminatory practises that stem from attributes such as race, gender, age, or handicap (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).

Recruitment is significantly influenced by industry and professional standards. In certain sectors or occupations, there exist defined standards and conventions that delineate the requisite abilities, competencies, and professional backgrounds considered indispensable for specific positions. The establishment of these standards frequently arises from professional associations, industry groups, or collective agreements, and subsequently influences the recruiting criteria employed by organisations (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Organisational legitimacy and the assurance of candidate competence and expertise within their respective sectors are facilitated through the adherence to industry and professional standards.

Educational institutions and accrediting bodies constitute an additional institutional aspect that influences the process of recruiting. The perceived quality and suitability of candidates are influenced by the reputation, ranking, and accreditation of educational programmes and institutions. Recruiters frequently evaluate the educational histories and qualifications of

candidates as potential indicators of their abilities, expertise, and likelihood of achieving success in particular positions. The aforementioned institutional element underscores the significance of educational qualifications and their impact on candidate evaluation within the context of the recruiting process.

Recruitment practises are influenced by the prevailing cultural and social standards within a given culture. These norms are indicative of wider societal expectations, attitudes, and prejudices pertaining to social classifications such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or regional affiliation. They have an impact on the perceived alignment between applicants and the culture of an organisation or the norms of an industry. For example, it has been observed that particular occupations or sectors may exhibit a correlation with distinct social class origins, resulting in implicit biases during the hiring process that tend to favour individuals from more privileged social classes (Rivera, 2020). Cultural and social norms have the potential to exert impact on various aspects of recruitment, including selection criteria, decision-making procedures, and the general dynamics of the recruitment process.

Recruitment practises are influenced by circumstances at the organisational field level. The recruitment strategies of organisations are influenced by various factors such as industry trends, technical breakthroughs, and competitive dynamics. In order to uphold legitimacy, remain competitive, or attract high-quality personnel, organisations operating in the same industry may choose to respond to these institutional pressures by using comparable recruitment strategies (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002).

It is imperative for organisations to possess a comprehensive comprehension of the institutional elements that influence recruiting in order to develop equitable, inclusive, and efficient procedures for hiring. By maintaining an understanding of these characteristics, organisations can proactively address potential prejudices, guarantee adherence to legal obligations, and develop recruitment strategies that foster diversity, equal opportunity, and

selection based on merit. Organisations that demonstrate proficiency in navigating the institutional environment of recruiting are more inclined to attract a varied pool of highly skilled candidates and improve their overall talent acquisition strategies.

3.3.2. Implications for Social Class and Recruitment

The use of institutional theory holds significant significance for comprehending the interplay between social class and recruiting procedures within organisational contexts. The concept of social class pertains to the stratified divisions present in society, which are determined by individuals' possession of economic, social, and cultural resources. The aforementioned divisions can have a substantial impact on recruitment results, as individuals belonging to distinct social classes may possess varying levels of access to resources, opportunities, and networks.

An important inference derived from institutional theory is that socioeconomic class has the potential to influence the institutional context in which organisations function. In many instances, institutional pressures, including industrial standards and cultural norms, frequently serve to mirror and sustain social class hierarchies. For example, it has been observed that some occupations or sectors may exhibit a disproportionate representation of persons belonging to privileged social strata, hence perpetuating the benefits associated with social class during the recruiting process (Rivera, 2020). This phenomenon can be observed in the form of implicit biases and preferential treatment towards individuals belonging to higher social classes, who possess cultural capital, educational qualifications, or social networks that are considered desirable within the given institutional framework.

The concept of isomorphism, emphasised by institutional theory, pertains to the phenomenon wherein organisations adhere to institutional rules in order to acquire legitimacy and societal acceptance. Within the realm of recruiting, organisations have the potential to

embrace practises and criteria that are in line with the tastes and expectations of individuals belonging to higher social classes. This strategic alignment serves the purpose of bolstering the organization's legitimacy and reputation. The potential outcome of this phenomenon is the marginalisation or inadequate representation of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may lack comparable resources or conform to prevailing cultural standards (Lamont, 1992).

Furthermore, the acquisition of educational qualifications has considerable importance in the recruiting process, with persons belonging to higher socioeconomic strata typically enjoying enhanced opportunities to get admission into esteemed educational establishments. The continuation of social class advantages in recruiting can be influenced by institutional variables, including the prestige and certification of educational programmes. According to Lamont (2009), individuals belonging to higher social classes may have had the opportunity to receive education from prestigious institutions, which are more likely to be acknowledged and esteemed by recruiters. Consequently, this could result in these candidates receiving preferential treatment throughout the selection process.

Moreover, social networks and connections play a crucial role in the process of recruiting, with persons from privileged socioeconomic classes typically having access to broader and more influential networks. These networks have the potential to offer persons from lower socioeconomic groups with useful information, referrals, and opportunities that may not be equally accessible to them. Consequently, the recruiting process inside institutions may unintentionally contribute to the perpetuation of social class inequalities by maintaining unequal access to networks and opportunities (Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2016).

It is imperative for organisations that seek to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in their recruitment processes to acknowledge and comprehend these ramifications. Organisations are required to engage in a thorough analysis of their institutional environment, actively question

and address any biassed norms and practises, and adopt strategic measures to minimise the impact of social class on recruitment results. This may entail implementing blind recruitment strategies, proactively sourcing people from different backgrounds, and offering training and resources to mitigate unconscious biases during the selection process.

Chapter 2

4. Empirical Research on Social Class and Recruitment

4.1. Socioeconomic Status and Hiring Outcomes

The impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on employment outcomes has been extensively examined, uncovering notable inequalities associated with an individual's SES. Numerous studies have presented empirical data about the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on employment prospects and results. An example of this may be seen in Pager's (2007) field experiment, where it was observed that individuals with greater social standing, as indicated by criteria such as prestigious educational background and rich residential areas, were more inclined to receive favourable responses in the form of callbacks for job interviews. In a study conducted by Judge and Cable (2004), it was found that there is a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and job attainment. The research indicated that those with a higher socioeconomic level are more likely to obtain better-status employment and earn greater pay.

The observed discrepancies in employment outcomes can be ascribed to a range of causes. A crucial determinant is in the benefits derived from socioeconomic privileges, including but not limited to the availability of high-quality education, influential social connections, and possession of cultural capital. According to existing research, individuals hailing from higher socioeconomic class backgrounds tend to benefit from superior educational possibilities, enrol in esteemed academic institutions, and possess access to resources that augment their employment prospects. The aforementioned benefit is applicable to the recruitment procedure, wherein employers may place importance on credentials linked to elevated socioeconomic standing, such as esteemed educational institutions attended, as indications of proficiency and alignment with the company (Rivera, 2012).

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that biases have the potential to exert an influence on the process of employment, so contributing to the perpetuation of inequities. According to the findings of Rivera's (2012) research, it was observed that hiring managers frequently utilise indicators such as educational background and involvement in prestigious extracurricular pursuits as substitutes for socioeconomic status (SES) when assessing potential candidates. The utilisation of indicators associated with socioeconomic factors can potentially create disadvantages for candidates originating from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as they may have encountered limited opportunities and resources. Consequently, these individuals may encounter obstacles in obtaining employment, which restricts their ability to progress socioeconomically and perpetuates existing inequalities.

In order to tackle these concerns, scholars and professionals strongly advocate for the adoption of inclusive recruitment strategies. The study conducted by Dobbin and Kalev (2016) highlights the significance of employing standardised criteria and organised interviews as a means to address biases related to status and facilitate equitable evaluations. Furthermore, scholars have proposed many measures to address socioeconomic gaps in hiring outcomes, including the implementation of efforts that promote diversity and inclusion. These initiatives encompass targeted recruitment methods and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

In summary, it can be concluded that there is a notable correlation between socioeconomic status and hiring results. Individuals who originate from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to experience advantages in terms of work possibilities and job attainment. Socioeconomic biases can contribute to the perpetuation of gaps, hence impeding the progress of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, via the implementation of inclusive hiring practises and the promotion of diversity and equal chances, organisations can endeavour to

create a more equitable employment market that takes into account individuals' abilities, talents, and potential, irrespective of their background.

4.1.1. *Perceived Fit and Socioeconomic Status*

Perceived fit, a pivotal element within the recruitment procedure, pertains to the subjective assessment of the extent to which an individual's values, culture, and qualifications correspond with those of an organisation. Research has demonstrated that socioeconomic status (SES) plays a substantial role in shaping the judgements of fit among hiring managers. According to existing research, persons who come from higher socioeconomic origins are frequently viewed as exhibiting a stronger alignment with organisations. One example is a study conducted by Judge et al. (2009), which revealed that hiring managers had a tendency to link persons from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds with higher levels of competence, intellect, and leadership potential. This association subsequently results in a greater perceived alignment between these individuals and the organisational culture. The research indicates that individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are believed to possess valuable abilities, experiences, and cultural capital that are connected with success in the organisational setting. This view adds to the belief that these applicants are a good fit for the organisation. In a similar vein, Krannich et al. (2019) conducted a study that centred on management roles and revealed that those with higher socioeconomic status (SES) were more prone to receiving positive evaluations as suitable candidates, in contrast to those with lower SES. The findings of the study indicate that the prejudice observed in this context can be attributed to the perception that individuals with higher socioeconomic status (SES) possess the requisite qualifications and experiences that are deemed essential for achieving success in managerial positions.

The impact of socioeconomic status on the perception of fit holds considerable consequences for both recruiting practises and social fairness. Unintentionally, biases that

favour candidates from better socioeconomic origins can perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities and impede the inclusion of diverse individuals within organisations. In order to address the influence of these prejudices, it is imperative to foster consciousness and knowledge dissemination among individuals responsible for hiring. According to Aguinis and Bradley (2014), offering instruction on subjects such as diversity and inclusion, unconscious biases, and the significance of examining a wide array of qualifications and experiences can contribute to mitigating the impact of socioeconomic status on perceived fit. The utilisation of organised interviews, standardised evaluation standards, and diverse hiring panels can enhance the objectivity and inclusivity of candidate assessments, hence mitigating the potential impact of socioeconomic status on the review process.

The recruiting process is subject to prejudices related to socioeconomic position, which can influence the perception of fit. The inclination to link individuals of higher socioeconomic status (SES) with a more suitable match might impede diversification and sustain socioeconomic inequalities. Organisations can endeavour to cultivate a more inclusive work environment by undertaking initiatives such as increasing awareness, imparting education, and adopting impartial evaluation techniques, which take into account a varied array of qualifications and experiences.Hiring managers may inadvertently form a subconscious connection between persons from comparable social backgrounds and a higher degree of compatibility inside the organisation, resulting in biassed assessments during the hiring procedure. The research findings offer valuable insights into the influence of unconscious connections on perceived fit. In a field experiment done by Milkman et al. (2015), it was observed that evaluators exhibited biases in favour of candidates who possessed similar socioeconomic traits. The research findings indicated that assessors had a tendency to provide more favourable ratings to candidates who possessed comparable educational backgrounds and participated in similar leisure activities. The presence of these shared qualities fostered a sense

of familiarity and commonality, hence contributing to the perception of a stronger alignment with the organisational culture. In a similar vein, the study conducted by Judge et al. (2018) revealed that recruiting managers frequently linked persons from more privileged social class origins with a higher likelihood of achieving success inside the organisational context. The correlation between social class and membership in this organisation may arise from the presumption that individuals of higher social status possess the requisite abilities, experiences, and cultural knowledge that correspond with the organization's values and expectations.

The presence of unconscious associations between hiring managers and candidates from comparable social backgrounds has the potential to bring biases into the recruiting process. The prejudice stems from the underlying assumption that individuals with comparable socioeconomic features will exhibit greater integration within the organisation and make significant contributions to its overall performance. Nevertheless, these prejudices have the unintended consequence of perpetuating socioeconomic inequality and constraining the representation of diverse individuals in the workforce.

In order to address the impact of these subconscious connections, it is advisable for organisations to adopt tactics that foster consciousness and minimise prejudice in the process of making employment choices. Training hiring managers on unconscious biases, diversity, and inclusion has the potential to enhance their understanding and facilitate the development of more objective assessment practises. The implementation of organised interviews and standardised evaluation criteria has the potential to mitigate the influence of subjective biases and foster a more impartial and equitable review procedure.

In summary, it may be inferred that the recruiting process may be influenced by unconscious associations between hiring managers and candidates who share similar social histories, hence impacting the perceived fit between the two parties (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The presence of biases stemming from these relationships may result in the inclination to favour candidates who possess similar socioeconomic traits as the assessors.

4.2. Social Class Bias in Selection Procedures

The possible influence of social class prejudice on selection procedures might significantly affect the outcomes of employment processes, leading to discernible disparities. A plethora of research have presented compelling evidence supporting the presence of biases that demonstrate a tendency to favour candidates originating from more advantaged social class backgrounds throughout various stages of the selection process. In a study conducted by Rivera (2012), the author examined elite professional service organisations and found that hiring supervisors often exhibit a preference for candidates who come from more privileged social class backgrounds. The presence of these biases has the potential to result in the exclusion of persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, hence perpetuating inequalities in employment prospects that are contingent upon social class. The existence of bias in the recruitment procedure can be ascribed to the tendency of hiring managers to engage in cultural matching, whereby candidates who share similar socioeconomic characteristics are perceived as more compatible with the firm. Koen et al. (2011) conducted a study to examine the selection techniques utilised in graduate recruiting. The results of this study indicate the existence of bias favouring individuals from higher social class backgrounds, particularly inside prestigious institutions. The study's findings suggest that these biases stem from assumptions about shared values, experiences, and cultural knowledge associated with those from more privileged social backgrounds.

Organisations possess the capability to employ many strategies with the objective of promoting fairness and inclusivity in order to alleviate the impact of social class bias in selection processes. One potential approach entails the use of structured interviews that prioritise the use of standardised assessment criteria, thereby reducing the influence of personal biases and associations with socioeconomic status (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Blind recruiting practises encompass the deliberate concealment of identifiable information, such as names or

educational histories, with the aim of mitigating the impact of social class bias and fostering selection decisions that are solely based on merit. Furthermore, the endeavour to enhance the understanding of hiring managers regarding the existence and possible consequences of social class bias holds the promise of fostering more conscious and equitable decision-making protocols. The successful enhancement of efforts to minimise bias and develop equitable practises in selection procedures can be achieved through the introduction of diversity and inclusion training that specifically focuses on addressing social class biases. Furthermore, the adoption of a comprehensive approach that incorporates the utilisation of multiple recruitment channels and the intentional targeting of candidates from diverse social class backgrounds can effectively broaden the pool of applicants and improve opportunities for individuals from lower socioeconomic strata (Brannon & Markus, 2013).

The potential for social class bias to infiltrate selection procedures can lead to disparities in the outcomes of employment processes. The existence of biases that demonstrate favouritism towards individuals originating from higher social class backgrounds can lead to disadvantages for individuals belonging to lower social classes, hence perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities.

4.2.1. Social Class and Cognitive Ability tests

Social class has been found to have a significant influence on the performance of individuals on cognitive ability tests, contributing to disparities in outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals from higher social class backgrounds tend to perform better on cognitive ability tests compared to those from lower social class backgrounds. A study by Tucker-Drob and Bates (2016) examined the association between socioeconomic status (SES) and cognitive ability across different age groups and found a positive relationship, with higher SES individuals exhibiting higher cognitive ability scores.

The study suggested that the advantages associated with higher social class, such as access to quality education, intellectual stimulation, and resources, contribute to the development of cognitive skills and, consequently, better performance on cognitive tests. Furthermore, a meta-analysis investigated the relationship between social class and cognitive ability in the context of employment selection and found that individuals from higher social class backgrounds tend to have higher cognitive ability scores, which can confer advantages in hiring decisions and subsequent job performance.

The impact of social class on cognitive ability test performance raises important considerations for fairness in selection procedures. The advantages and opportunities afforded to individuals from higher social class backgrounds can perpetuate inequalities and create barriers for those from lower social class backgrounds. To address these disparities, organizations can adopt strategies to ensure equitable assessment and selection practices. This may involve using multiple assessment methods that capture a broader range of skills and competencies beyond cognitive abilities alone. Additionally, providing support and resources, such as test preparation materials and training, to individuals from lower social class backgrounds can help level the playing field and enhance their performance on cognitive ability tests (Campion et al., 1997).

Social class exerts a notable influence on cognitive ability test performance, with individuals from higher social class backgrounds generally demonstrating better performance. This highlights the impact of socioeconomic advantages, such as access to quality education and resources, on cognitive abilities.

4.2.2 Social Class and Interview Processes

The interview processes are significantly influenced by social class, impacting all facets of the encounter and perhaps resulting in differences in outcomes for candidates with diverse

social class origins. Numerous studies have elucidated various mechanisms via which social class dynamics have influence on the dynamics of interviews. To begin with, it has been suggested that persons hailing from higher social class backgrounds may possess certain benefits throughout the interview process (Cheng & Tracy, 2013). The aforementioned benefits encompass enhanced proficiency in communication, heightened aptitude in self-presentation, and an expanded reservoir of cultural knowledge, all of which can have a favourable impact on one's performance during interviews (Rivera, 2012). Individuals belonging to higher social classes frequently enjoy superior educational possibilities, resources, and networks, hence augmenting their proficiency in interviews and overall presentation. These benefits can be observed in the form of increased self-assurance, improved ability to express one's experiences, and a seamless alignment with the anticipated criteria of interviewers.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that prejudices and stereotypes pertaining to socioeconomic class have the potential to exert a substantial impact on the assessments made during interviews. The study conducted by Judge et al. (2018) has brought attention to the phenomenon wherein interviewers may unknowingly demonstrate a preference for candidates who display behaviours or traits aligned with the social norms of higher socioeconomic classes. These interviewers perceive such individuals as being more suitable or appropriate for the position, often associating them with professionalism. This prejudice has the potential to lead to disparate evaluations and judgements that disproportionately benefit applicants from more privileged social class origins, hence restricting the options accessible to persons from less privileged social class backgrounds. Biases may emerge due to presumptions regarding competency, social aptitude, and cultural compatibility, hence reinforcing disparities rooted in social class (Derous et al., 2015).

The imperative nature of rectifying social class prejudices within interview procedures cannot be overstated, as it is essential for promoting equity and ensuring equitable access to

opportunities. There are several measures that organisations can do in order to reduce the influence of social class on the interview process (Diemer & Ali, 2009). The implementation of structured interviews, which involve the use of standardised questions and evaluation criteria, can effectively mitigate subjective biases and promote a more uniform evaluation of all candidates. According to Eriksson and Lagerstrom (2012), providing training to interviewers on diversity and inclusion, which encompasses the recognition of social class prejudices, has the potential to improve their impartiality and mitigate the impact of social class dynamics in their assessments. Moreover, the integration of interviewers from diverse socioeconomic class backgrounds might enhance the inclusivity of the interview process. In addition, the implementation of blind interview techniques, which involve concealing identifying information such as social class background, can serve to eliminate prejudices and promote a more impartial evaluation of individuals' qualifications and potential.

Hence, it can be argued that interview procedures are substantially influenced by social class dynamics, which in turn have an effect on the way perceptions, evaluations, and outcomes are formed (Feldman & Ng, 2007). The possession of a higher social class background confers certain advantages, but biases stemming from social class stereotypes might impact interview performance and decisions, hence leading to discrepancies in chances for candidates. Organisations can actively pursue the reduction of social class biases and the promotion of fairness and equal opportunities in the interview process through the implementation of structured interviews, the provision of diversity and inclusion training, the diversification of the interviewer pool, and the utilisation of blind interview techniques.

4.3. Organizational Practices and Social Class

The influence of social class on organisational practises can have a profound impact, resulting in unequal opportunities and outcomes for persons with diverse social class backgrounds. Numerous studies have shed light on the various manners in which socioeconomic class might exert effect on organisational practises. The recruitment and selection procedures may inadvertently exhibit a bias towards candidates with privileged social class origins. The study conducted by Lamont and Lareau (1988) pertaining to professional service corporations discovered that these organisations frequently employ recruitment tactics that exhibit a preference for individuals originating from recognised educational institutions and personal networks. This practise reinforces social class advantages by exhibiting a tendency to disproportionately favour candidates from higher social class origins. In a similar vein, it is worth noting that social class can exert influence on the criterion for promotion. This is because individuals hailing from higher social class backgrounds tend to enjoy privileges such as mentorship, access to resources, and enhanced visibility within the organisational context. Consequently, they are more likely to encounter favourable circumstances that facilitate their career progression (Friedman et al., 2009). Social class dynamics can exert an influence on networking opportunities within an organisation. Individuals hailing from privileged socioeconomic class origins may exhibit broader social networks, which afford them advantageous connections and knowledge, thereby conferring them an edge in obtaining possibilities that enhance their careers (Rivera, 2016).

In order to mitigate social class inequities within organisational practises, it is imperative for organisations to embrace inclusive methods that foster diversity, equity, and social mobility. According to Eriksson and Lagerstrom (2012), implementing recruiting and selection procedures that are transparent and take into account a wider array of qualifications and experiences can effectively mitigate the impact of social class privileges. This approach can

also promote equitable chances for individuals from various social class backgrounds. The implementation of mentorship and sponsorship initiatives can offer valuable assistance and direction to individuals hailing from disadvantaged socioeconomic situations, enabling them to surmount obstacles and gain access to essential resources crucial for their professional progression. Furthermore, it is possible for organisations to incorporate networking events and activities that serve to enable connections and promote equitable access to valuable networks. This approach ensures that every employee is provided with an equal opportunity to cultivate professional contacts and broaden their prospects (Eriksson & Lagerstrom, 2012).

Social class dynamics have a significant impact on organisational practises, leading to the perpetuation of gaps in opportunities and outcomes. The accidental favouring of individuals from higher social class backgrounds in recruitment, promotion, and networking practises might result in limited prospects for individuals from lower social class backgrounds. Through the implementation of inclusive initiatives, organisations can proactively endeavour to mitigate social class inequities, foster diversity, and establish a work environment that is characterised by more equity.

4.3.1 Organizational Culture and Social Class

The relationship between organisational culture and social class dynamics is intricate, as it exerts an impact on the values, norms, and practises prevalent inside an organisation, hence moulding the experiences of employees belonging to diverse social class backgrounds. Numerous studies have demonstrated that socioeconomic class holds significant influence in shaping and sustaining organisational culture. Individuals hailing from more privileged social class backgrounds possess the capacity to introduce their own set of values, interests, and viewpoints within the organisational context, so exerting an influence on the prevailing culture (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The impact of social class can be observed through a range of

manifestations, including the emphasis placed on specific behaviours, communication patterns, and professional norms that are typically associated with individuals from higher socioeconomic strata. Organisations that are affected by higher social class norms may place a high importance on assertiveness, self-promotion, and confident communication techniques. The tastes and practises of persons from higher socioeconomic classes may also influence dress regulations, leisure activities, and networking practises within the organisation (Rivera, 2012). The presence of these dynamics has the potential to unintentionally establish obstacles and foster feelings of exclusion or marginalisation among employees who come from lower social class backgrounds, as their personal values and behaviours may not correspond with the prevailing cultural norms (Fiske et al., 2002).

The intricate and multifaceted relationship between organisational culture and socioeconomic class has attracted considerable research within the fields of organisational sociology and management studies. Scholarly investigations have shed light on the manner in which organisational culture, comprising commonly held beliefs, values, and practises, can serve as a reflection and perpetuation of social class hierarchies within work environments. According to Lamont and Lareau (1988), it is contended that prevailing organisational cultures frequently correspond with middle-class principles and standards, encompassing individualism, assertiveness, and self-expression. The presence of this alignment has the potential to erect obstacles for persons belonging to lower socioeconomic classes who may exhibit distinct cultural orientations, placing emphasis on collectivism, obedience to authority, or values centred around community. Certain individuals may encounter difficulties in navigating and achieving success inside organisations that prioritise cultural norms associated with the middle class (Fiske et al., 2002).

Additionally, Liff and Ward (2001) conducted a study examining the impact of social class on recruiting procedures. Their findings revealed that prevailing organisational cultures

often exhibit a preference for individuals who possess characteristics and qualifications associated with the middle class. The aforementioned inclination has the potential to sustain social stratification within work environments, as persons belonging to lower social classes may encounter barriers in obtaining suitable career prospects as a result of cultural incongruity. The results of this study indicate that organisational cultures may intentionally or unconsciously perpetuate social class hierarchies by favouring certain cultural orientations that are consistent with the middle-class values that dominate inside the organisation.

Moreover, a number of researchers have recognised the presence of microcultures based on social class within organisational settings. Microcultures can arise as a result of informal networks, similar experiences, and common social origins. These microcultures have the potential to impact decision-making processes, resource allocation, and possibilities for career advancement. Individuals belonging to higher social strata may benefit from privileged access to powerful networks and informal channels of power, so accelerating their professional advancement and further solidifying their privileged status within the organisational hierarchy. Conversely, persons belonging to lower socioeconomic strata may experience marginalisation within these social networks, which can restrict their access to possibilities for upward mobility. This perpetuates social class disparities and contributes to the perpetuation of societal inequalities.

In order to tackle these concerns, educators and professionals have advocated for the cultivation of inclusive cultures inside organisations, which acknowledge and appreciate varied cultural orientations and experiences. Organisations can effectively address the influence of social class on organisational outcomes, foster equal chances for career progression, and establish a workplace climate that is more inclusive and fair by recognising and adapting diverse cultural norms and preferences.

In order to mitigate potential differences in social class within organisational culture, organisations might implement initiatives that foster inclusivity, diversity, and cultural sensitivity. This can entail deliberately recognising and incorporating varied perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds into the organisational structure. The establishment of an inclusive and appreciative workplace for employees of diverse socioeconomic class origins can be achieved by the prioritisation of respect, empathy, and open discussion. Transparency in decision-making processes and fair possibilities for professional progression can be promoted by organisations, thereby mitigating biases that may emerge from social class dynamics (Greenhaus et al., 1990). The implementation of training and development initiatives aimed at increasing understanding of social class matters, cultivating cultural proficiency, and facilitating discussions on diversity and inclusion can effectively augment the organisational climate and contribute to the establishment of a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

The organisational culture of a given institution is substantially influenced by social class dynamics, which in turn impact the values, norms, and practises that are observed inside the organisation. Organisations can cultivate a more equitable and inclusive organisational culture that acknowledges and values the contributions of employees from diverse social class backgrounds by actively advocating for inclusivity, embracing a range of opinions, and nurturing cultural sensitivity (Heslin, 2005).

4.3.2 Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

Diversity and inclusion initiatives are increasingly recognized as essential strategies for organizations to foster a more equitable and inclusive work environment. Research has highlighted the benefits of diversity and inclusion initiatives, both for individual employees and the organization as a whole. For instance, a meta-analysis by Lamont and Lareau (1998)

found that diversity initiatives positively impact employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance. These initiatives can enhance employee engagement, creativity, and innovation by fostering a climate of psychological safety and belonging. Moreover, diversity and inclusion initiatives have been shown to improve organizational outcomes, including financial performance and decision-making quality (Herring et al., 2009). By valuing and integrating diverse perspectives, organizations can access a wider range of ideas, insights, and approaches, leading to better problem-solving and decision-making processes.

To effectively implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, organizations can adopt a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, leadership commitment and accountability are crucial in driving change and setting the tone for inclusivity. Senior leaders need to champion diversity and inclusion, establishing clear goals, policies, and practices that promote a diverse and inclusive workforce. Secondly, organizations can focus on developing inclusive recruitment and retention strategies. This can involve implementing unbiased hiring practices, expanding recruitment channels to reach a diverse talent pool, and providing support and mentorship programs to underrepresented groups (Terry et al., 2000). Additionally, fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and open dialogue is vital for creating a psychologically safe environment where employees can express their diverse perspectives and experiences. Training programs that raise awareness of unconscious biases, promote cultural competence, and foster inclusive behaviors can further support diversity and inclusion efforts (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006).

Diversity and inclusion initiatives are instrumental in promoting an equitable and inclusive work environment. Organizations can benefit from the positive impact on employee outcomes and organizational performance. By committing to diversity and inclusion, implementing unbiased recruitment practices, fostering an inclusive culture, and providing

relevant training, organizations can create a workplace that embraces diversity, values different perspectives, and ensures equal opportunities for all employees.

5. The effect of social class on perceptions of job applicants' suitability for employment

The effect of social class on perceptions of job applicants' suitability for employment is a complex and multifaceted topic that has been studied in the field of sociology and organizational psychology. It revolves around the idea that social class can influence how individuals, including hiring managers and recruiters, perceive and evaluate job candidates during the hiring process (Jones & King, 2014).

Some potential effects of social class on perceptions of job applicants' suitability for employment can be explained through two main theories: status characteristic theory and the relational demographic theory.

5.1.1 Status Characteristic Theory

The Status Characteristic Theory, formulated by Joseph Berger, Morris Zelditch, and their associates, is a sociological theory that offers valuable insights into the ways in which social traits, such as social class, exert impact on interactions and outcomes within social groupings. Status Characteristic Theory posits that individuals possess specific traits that are socially recognised and that these characteristics determine the level of status or prestige they hold. Consequently, these characteristics play a significant role in how individuals are assessed and treated within group settings (Berger et al., 1972). The recruitment process is significantly influenced by social class, which functions as a status feature.

The concept of social class is a complex construct that incorporates various dimensions, including but not limited to income, occupation, education, and wealth. Individuals hailing from more privileged socioeconomic class backgrounds frequently enjoy enhanced access to a wider array of resources, social networks, and educational prospects. Consequently, individuals belonging to this category frequently receive elevated social standing within their respective organisations and are regarded as possessing greater competence and influence (Ridgeway,

1991). Based on the theoretical framework, individuals engage in the evaluation of others by considering their perceived social class, hence ascribing greater levels of competence, expertise, and leadership aptitude to persons belonging to higher social classes. The evaluation process has a significant impact on group dynamics, as it tends to favour persons with higher social class traits, granting them greater opportunities for participation, influence, and leadership roles.
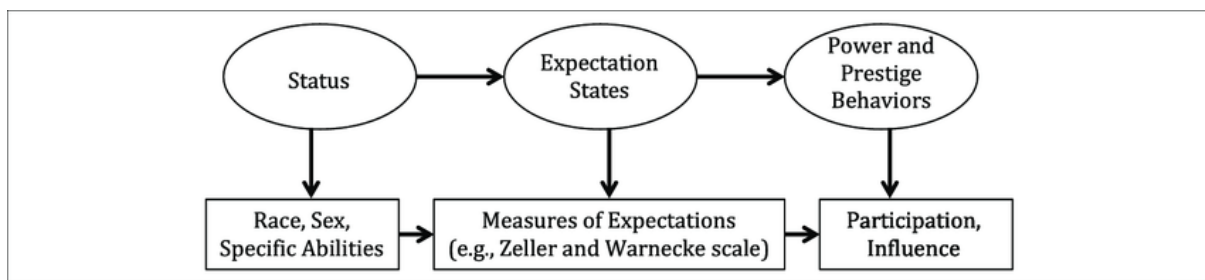

Figure 3. Status Characteristic Theory; Source: Melamed & Kalkhoff 2017

An illustrative instance may be found in the study conducted by Ridgeway (1991), which demonstrates that persons hailing from higher social class origins tend to be chosen as leaders and have their opinions and ideas esteemed to a greater extent in group situations. Conversely, persons hailing from lower socioeconomic origins may encounter obstacles in establishing their influence and garnering recognition for their efforts, while possessing pertinent talents or knowledge. The aforementioned processes serve to sustain social disparities within collectives and have the potential to result in the marginalisation of persons belonging to lower socioeconomic strata (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2008).

Social class, similar to race and gender, is often linked to distinct attributes. Categorical cues, which have an impact on the processing of social class disparities, pertain to an individual's "position outside the group rather than directly to performance within it" (Ridgeway et al., 1985, p. 964). Categorical signals encompass numerous characteristics such

as skin colour, age, and less overt indicators including actions and features that are commonly linked with specific social groups. These indicators or status aspects each communicate distinct meanings. Negative attitudes towards individuals from lower social classes often involve the notion that they lack education, exhibit laziness, and demonstrate social irresponsibility. Conversely, favourable views of the poor or lower social classes are characterised by the belief that they possess capabilities, display affection, and exhibit friendliness (Cozzarelli et al., 2001).

Bourdieu (1984) posits that individuals belonging to the upper class manifest their social status by means of their verbal communication, clothing preferences, and creative selections. Individuals belonging to higher social classes exhibit a lower frequency of grammatical errors and do not typically exhibit regional or cultural accents in their speech patterns. When it comes to clothing, individuals belonging to a higher social class exhibit a lesser concern for obtaining optimal value for their monetary investments, instead displaying a preference for attire that exudes elegance and sophistication. Furthermore, individuals of higher socioeconomic status tend to engage in the consumption of classical music, possess a piano, and acquire furnishings from antique dealers as opposed to department stores, as suggested by Bourdieu (1984).

According to the status characteristic hypothesis proposed by Berger et al. (1972; 1977), individuals tend to hold larger expectations for the behaviour of targets who possess a higher status. Within the realm of personnel selection, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits that the perception of a job prospect as possessing a higher status leads hiring managers to hold elevated expectations for the candidate's future job performance. Consequently, the influence of status features on our expectations and ideas about individuals has been observed (Wagner & Berger, 1997). According to Berger et al. (2002), a status characteristic refers to a social attribute that categorises individuals into distinct groups based on perceived differences in

status value and beliefs about the varying performance abilities or personal traits of individuals within those groups.

A comprehensive comprehension of the implications of Status Characteristic Theory in the context of social class is crucial for effectively addressing social disparities and fostering a society that is characterised by fairness and justice. By acknowledging the significance of social class in shaping assessments and results within collectives, individuals and institutions can strive to mitigate the effects of social class prejudices. Efforts may encompass the implementation of decision-making processes that foster inclusivity, the provision of equitable chances for participation and leadership positions, and the promotion of understanding of the influence of social class on group dynamics (Kraus & Keltner, 2013). This phenomenon has the potential to foster the development of more inclusive and equitable group settings, wherein individuals from diverse socioeconomic class backgrounds are afforded equal opportunities to actively participate and get acknowledgement for their respective competencies.

5.1.2 Relational Demography Theory

Relational Demography Theory is a social psychological framework that focuses on how demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and social class, influence interpersonal processes and outcomes within workgroups or organizational settings (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). According to this theory, individuals are more likely to form connections and build relationships with others who share similar demographic attributes. These similarities can create a sense of familiarity, comfort, and shared understanding among group members, leading to the formation of homogenous subgroups or cliques (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). For example, individuals from similar social class backgrounds may share similar values, experiences, and perspectives, which can facilitate stronger connections and enhance cooperation within their subgroup.
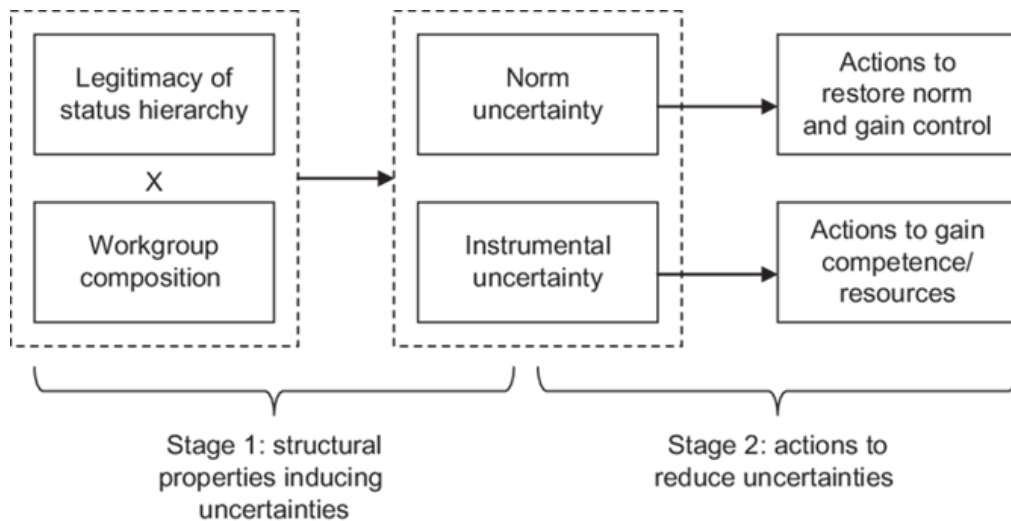
Figure 4. Relational Demographic Theory; Source: Chattopadhyay & Elizabeth 2011

The theory of Relational Demography also emphasises the experiences of individuals who differ from the dominant group or who constitute a numerical minority within a group (Avery, 2003; Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011). For example, it is possible that persons hailing from lower social class origins may experience being in the minority when surrounded by a mostly higher social class group (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). The status of being a minority can give rise to emotions of exclusion, loneliness, and potential prejudice. Individuals may encounter difficulties in establishing connections and achieving complete assimilation into a group as a result of variances in social origins, cultural allusions, or resource availability. This phenomenon can lead to a reduction in the availability of opportunities for individuals to engage, exert influence, and participate in decision-making processes within the group.

Furthermore, the theory of Relational Demography highlights the significance of demographic dissimilarity in influencing the processes of social categorization within groups (Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011). Individuals possess an inherent inclination to classify other individuals according to their demographic attributes, a phenomenon that can exert an impact on the manner in which perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped in interpersonal interactions. Within the realm of social class, individuals have the propensity to

form stereotypes or biases rooted in preconceived notions or assumptions concerning others hailing from diverse social class backgrounds. The phenomenon described can result in the formation of social categories that impede the ability of groups to effectively cooperate, communicate, and coordinate their actions (Ibarra, 1999).

In order to proficiently navigate the intricacies of relational demography dynamics, it is imperative for organisations to acknowledge and appreciate the significance of demographic diversity. It is recommended that individuals strive for a state of equilibrium between the advantages associated with homogeneity, such as enhanced comprehension and unity, and the benefits derived from heterogeneity, such as a wide range of perspectives and increased creativity (Peters & Terborg, 1975). This entails the establishment of an inclusive setting that places importance on and utilises the diverse attributes and experiences of persons hailing from various socioeconomic class backgrounds. The enhancement of understanding, collaboration, and decision-making within different workgroups can be achieved through the promotion of cross-group encounters, the development of open communication channels, and the encouragement of the exchange of diverse perspectives.

The comprehension of Relational Demography Theory offers valuable perspectives on the influence of social class and various demographic characteristics on the dynamics and results of groups (Ibarra, 1999). Organisations can cultivate inclusive and productive work environments by efficiently managing the dynamics of relational demography and taking into account the impacts of demographic variety. This approach allows organisations to harness the advantages of both homogeneity and heterogeneity.

In the realm of recruitment, Relational Demography Theory posits that individuals who share similar socioeconomic class backgrounds are more inclined to establish ties and foster rapport with one another. This phenomenon may manifest itself at various professional networking occasions, job interviews, or other phases within the recruitment procedure. There

exists a heightened probability of common beliefs, experiences, and opinions when recruiters and hiring managers possess a comparable social class background to that of job seekers. The existence of a common history can foster a feeling of familiarity and connection, resulting in favourable perceptions and assessments of job candidates who come from comparable social class backgrounds.

On the other hand, individuals belonging to lower social class origins may encounter difficulties during the process of job recruitment. The presence of persons from higher socioeconomic classes within the recruiting team could potentially lead to a detachment or a lack of shared understanding. The presence of disparities in social backgrounds might lead to restricted possibilities for establishing rapport or establishing a sense of connection, which can unintentionally influence assessments and impressions of job candidates originating from lower social class backgrounds.

Moreover, according to Relational Demography Theory, persons who come from lower social class backgrounds may experience social categorization processes that have the potential to result in biases or preconceptions. Recruiters or hiring managers who belong to higher social classes may possess preconceived conceptions or prejudices regarding individuals hailing from lower social class backgrounds. These biases have the ability to impact individuals' views and assessments, potentially resulting in unconscious or intentional discriminatory practises during the recruitment process.

6. The relationship between law firms' hiring practices and high-class human beings.

The recruitment landscape of law firms often reflects a preference for candidates with backgrounds in prestigious disciplines, which can be attributed to a confluence of historical traditions, cultural norms, and institutional variables that have influenced hiring practises within the legal profession. For a considerable period of time, elite law firms have been closely linked to a distinguished standing for exceptional quality and distinction, prompting them to actively recruit individuals from esteemed educational establishments (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). There is a common perception that individuals who have obtained their degrees from highly regarded law schools and prestigious universities possess exceptional intellectual ability and are more likely to achieve success. This perception is rooted in the historical focus placed on academic accomplishments within the legal profession. As a result, law firms place a great priority on the recruitment of applicants from elite universities in order to uphold their reputation and appeal to prestigious clientele who place importance on the perceived knowledge and skills possessed by attorneys with such institutional affiliations.

Networking is a crucial aspect of the legal profession, and those who have pursued prestigious courses may possess a notable edge in establishing significant relationships (Rivera, 2012). Access to powerful networks is often facilitated by affluent families and privileged social circles, enabling candidates to obtain references and recommendations from key persons within the legal profession. The aforementioned associations not only augment the prominence of candidates throughout the recruitment procedure but also contribute to the perpetuation of socio-economic hiring prejudices within legal organisations.

Furthermore, the assessment of cultural compatibility between prospective applicants and law firms holds significant importance in the process of making recruiting decisions (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Law companies frequently give preference to candidates whose backgrounds are congruent with the firm's existing culture, social conventions, and values. Candidates who

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have pursued disciplines associated with high social status may be perceived as better suited to the elitist and exclusive culture that is often found in prestigious law firms. The accidental consequence of cultural homogeneity is the reinforcement of a bias towards candidates who share similar backgrounds, resulting in the underrepresentation of those from lower socioeconomic levels.

The inclination of legal firms to prioritise high-class subjects might be attributed to the risk-averse nature of their employment selections (Rivera, 2012). Legal employment sometimes entails situations with significant consequences, prompting employers to perceive applicants with prestigious educational backgrounds as more reliable options. This perception stems from the assumption that their academic accomplishments reflect their capacity to effectively navigate intricate legal issues. As a result, individuals who come from more privileged academic disciplines tend to receive preferential treatment compared to equally capable candidates from less advantaged backgrounds, so maintaining social disparities and impeding the promotion of diversity within the legal field.

The inclination to align hiring practises in legal firms with individuals possessing prestigious educational backgrounds can be ascribed to longstanding customs of scholastic distinction, the impact of influential professional connections, considerations of cultural compatibility, and a tendency to avoid potential risks. The comprehension of the influence of these factors on recruiting is crucial for cultivating more inclusive and diverse hiring practises in law firms, despite their deeply rooted presence in the legal profession.

Chapter 3

7. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to conduct a quantitative research that tests theories and matches patterns to examine the significance and influence of social classes in the recruiting procedures of law firms and law departments in big Italian corporations.

Quantitative research focuses on the examination of data patterns in order to construct or validate theoretical conceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This methodology is frequently utilised to examine complex phenomena or assess current ideas in unique contexts.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this technique exhibits the following characteristics:

- Objective Understanding: Quantitative research offers a methodical and systematic framework for examining phenomena, enabling researchers to maintain objectivity throughout the course of the study. Researchers can derive findings based on evidence rather than personal biases or subjective interpretations by gathering numerical data and utilising statistical analysis. The maintenance of objectivity is of utmost importance in order to provide findings that are both reliable and credible.

- One of the primary advantages of quantitative research lies in its capacity to demonstrate causal correlations between variables. By employing experimental designs or employing advanced statistical approaches, researchers are able to ascertain the degree to which alterations in one variable have a direct impact on another.

- Generalizability is a key aspect of quantitative research, as it frequently incorporates large sample sizes to improve the applicability of the findings to broader groups or contexts. This element holds significant importance within the realm of social sciences, as researchers strive to comprehend the behaviours, attitudes, and trends exhibited by many heterogeneous

groups. The ability to apply research findings to broader contexts provides decision-makers, policymakers, and practitioners with practical implications that can be generalised.

- The quantitative research approach places a strong emphasis on the principles of transparency and replicability. Academics meticulously record their research techniques, data collection tools, and statistical analyses, thereby enabling fellow researchers to reproduce the study and verify the findings. This particular component enhances the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge and promotes confidence in the validity of research findings.

- Data-driven decision making is a crucial factor for achieving success in many fields such as business, public policy, and healthcare. Quantitative research plays a crucial role in furnishing the requisite data and conducting analysis to substantiate decision-making procedures that are grounded in evidence. Quantitative research can be utilised by policymakers to evaluate the effects of various policy actions, enabling them to make educated decisions. Similarly, corporations can employ this approach to make well-informed marketing and investment choices. In the healthcare sector, healthcare providers can customise treatments by relying on empirical evidence.

- Quantitative research plays a substantial role in the advancement and validation of theories. Researchers contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective professions by conducting studies that either test established hypotheses or suggest novel ones. The iterative nature of theory building and testing serves to enhance the fundamental principles of academic disciplines and promote intellectual advancement.

- Quantitative research enables researchers to construct models that possess the ability to forecast and predict future outcomes. In the field of economics, the utilisation of predictive models can effectively contribute to the anticipation of market trends and provide valuable insights to guide financial decision-making processes. Predictive models play a crucial role in

the field of epidemiology by facilitating comprehension of disease transmission dynamics and the formulation of efficacious disease control strategies.

The importance of theory in this particular manifestation is further substantiated by Heale and Twycross (2015) in terms of its capacity to enhance knowledge and comprehension across many academic fields and practical contexts. The methodical and rigorous methodology employed in data gathering and analysis enables researchers to examine intricate phenomena, detect patterns, and establish causal links among variables. Heale and Twycross (2015) argue that quantitative research offers a crucial degree of objectivity and reliability, which is necessary for deriving accurate findings and making decisions based on facts. Furthermore, this particular study methodology facilitates the investigation of extensive datasets, hence augmenting the ability to draw conclusions that can be applied to broader populations or circumstances. Quantitative research is of paramount importance in various disciplines like psychology, sociology, economics, and public health, as it significantly influences policy formation, informs intervention strategies, and tackles complex societal issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, it plays a significant role in the advancement of ideas and models, establishing the fundamental basis for future research endeavours. The overarching importance of quantitative research is in its capacity to offer empirical evidence and data-driven insights that contribute to both scholarly pursuits and practical implementations.

7.1 Research design

A randomised resume audit study was done as a component of the quantitative analysis, as outlined by Correll et al. (2007). In the context of the highly competitive legal employment landscape, a study was conducted wherein fictitious applications were submitted to prominent law firms. The objective of this study was to examine the potential impact of gender and social class background indicators on the probability of receiving a positive call-back response. Furthermore, it is important to note that the research was carried out in compliance with the principles outlined in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical criteria set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA). The study obtained ethical approval from the ethics committee of LUISS Guido Carli.

The utilisation of a randomised audit resume study, alternatively referred to as matched-pair testing, serves as a research approach with the objective of examining possible instances of prejudice within the context of hiring procedures (Nunley et al., 2015). The aim of this study is to assess potential disparities in terms of callback rates, interview invites, or job offers, based on different attributes (Gaddis, 2018). These studies have been utilised in various nations and industries to provide insight into the implications of discriminatory hiring practises. The significance of conducting randomised audit resume studies is in their capacity to reveal concealed biases within the recruiting process, as highlighted by Nunley et al. (2015). Through the deliberate manipulation of a single variable inside resumes, researchers are able to discern whether specific traits, such as gender or ethnicity, lead to differential treatment in the context of recruitment (Gaddis, 2018). The implications of these studies have significant ramifications for politicians, organisations, and society as a whole. According to Nunley et al. (2015), these initiatives contribute to the cultivation of consciousness regarding unconscious bias, hence stimulating organisations to reassess their recruitment strategies and adopt measures that foster diversity and inclusivity. Furthermore, the findings of these investigations make a valuable

contribution to the advancement of evidence-based interventions and regulatory frameworks designed to address and mitigate discriminatory practises within the labour market (Carbonaro & Schwarz, 2012). In the pursuit of fair employment chances for persons of all backgrounds, randomised audit resume studies have emerged as a crucial tool for firms seeking to establish more egalitarian and varied workforces.

The audit procedure also yields two significant advantages. In contrast to observational data, the utilisation of a randomised experimental design is initially employed, hence providing more direct proof of causation (Pager, 2003; Gaddis, 2018). In this particular instance, the audit methodology is employed to ascertain the causal impact of these signals on employers' decision-making processes. It also assists in disentangling the influence of discrimination from other mechanisms within distinct labour market segments. This is achieved through the random allocation of social class and gender signals to resumes that are otherwise identical (Carbonaro & Schwarz, 2012). Furthermore, audit studies aim to collect data regarding the behaviours of legitimate employers who believe they are engaging in the process of picking authentic applicants for available job vacancies. The external validity of audits is thus greater in comparison to laboratory examinations, as demonstrated by previous studies (Correll et al., 2007; Gaddis, 2018). The focus of our analysis was on internship roles, as Carbonaro and Schwarz (2012) have noted that the majority of new hires at large legal firms are recruited through internship programmes. In addition, it is important to note that contrary to popular belief regarding the brevity of internships, a significant proportion of interns are actually offered employment opportunities by employers (Bertand & Mullainathan, 2004).

7.2 Data Collection

7.2.1 Curriculum Vitae

Curricula vitae were established to delineate the candidate's scholastic background, occupational engagements, and supplementary involvements. A total of four distinct resumes have been developed, with two resumes representing each gender and their corresponding social class. This design follows a two-by-two factorial design, where gender (male vs. female) and social class (high vs. poor) are the two factors being considered. Undoubtedly, this constituted a vital measure aimed at ensuring equitable representation of individuals from diverse social strata, encompassing both genders, in the pool of potential candidates. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the persons involved in the study, along with the specific elements contained within their respective baseline resumes. Every curriculum vitae encompassed the entirety of the applicant's professional background, scholastic accomplishments, aptitudes, linguistic proficiencies, and personal interests. In order to ensure a rigorous and unbiased experiment, each of the four resumes were standardised to possess identical attributes, including academic achievements, educational institutions attended, international experiences (internship and Erasmus), language proficiency levels, birth year, certifications, and soft skills. The sole disparities seen pertained to the appellations, contact details, genders, employers, titles of theses, and pastimes of the candidates. The presence of shared elements in resumes from candidates of diverse genders and social classes facilitated a more accurate analysis of the influence of variables such as addresses and hobbies, which may indicate candidates' social backgrounds, on the recruitment procedures of prestigious law firms and departments.

The utilisation of second-tier law schools, as opposed to the most prestigious institutions, was employed in order to facilitate the examination of the various aspects that influence an individual's likelihood of securing a high-status occupation without possessing an

educational background from a "super-elite" institution (Rivera, 2015). Each candidate possessed a postgraduate degree in Law from La Sapienza University, together with an Erasmus exchange experience either at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium) or the Université Catholique de Lyon (France). There are numerous advantages associated with opting for these particular colleges as opposed to very prestigious law schools. Firstly, this approach allows us to broaden our attention to a bigger demographic of job seekers, rather than solely focusing on individuals who have attended prestigious educational institutions, which represent only a small segment of the entire labour market. Furthermore, it is observed that students hailing from a more diverse array of social class backgrounds possess a heightened likelihood of gaining admission to a prestigious, albeit second-tier, law school. This can be attributed to the fact that highly esteemed law schools exhibit a preference for admitting students originating from the uppermost decile of household income (Fisher, 2012). Moreover, considering that all the candidates are residents of Rome, the geographical proximity of La Sapienza University, where the experiment was conducted, proved to be advantageous from a logistical standpoint.

In relation to the candidates' professional experiences, all individuals possess a three-month internship background at local small law firms situated in Rome, as well as a further three-month internship either at the United Nations Office in New York (USA) or at the European Commission in Brussels. The decision to include these two internships in the curriculum vitae (CV) was made with the intention of enhancing its appeal to recruiters. This was achieved by incorporating two positions of comparable prestige. In addition, it has been demonstrated that possessing a varied range of legal internships in terms of both the operational sector and geographical location of the law companies is highly advantageous and crucial for optimising the likelihood of securing positions at prestigious law firms (Ashley, 2010). Elite law firms are widely recognised for their expertise in managing intricate and diverse legal

issues, frequently catering to customers spanning a wide range of industries and sectors. In the context of prospective professionals pursuing opportunities in leading law firms, it is widely recognised that a diversified history of internships holds significant relevance. According to Dickens (1999), the aforementioned qualities encompassed in the individual's profile include adaptability, a comprehensive range of skills, a grasp of various clientele, wide networking capabilities, dedication, and a competitive advantage. According to the author, leading law firms strive to offer great legal services to customers from diverse industries and backgrounds. As a result, individuals who possess a range of internship experiences are more likely to make valuable contributions to the firm's overall performance.

In order to provide a fair and unbiased evaluation of candidates, the resumes were standardised with regards to soft skills and language competences.

Table 1: list of all the items included in each of the resumes.

Law School
• **Law Degree at La Sapienza University in 2022**
• **Erasmus programme at Universitè Catholique de Louvain / Université Catholique de Lyon**
• **Final grade: 110/110**
Work Experience
• **3-months internship at major law firm in Rome**
• **Legal Intern at ONU, New York City / Legal intern at the European Commission, Bruxelles**
• **Academic tutor at La Sapienza University**
Competences
• **C1 in English**
• **B2 in French**
Skills

- **Soft skills: team building, leadership, time management**

- **IT skills: Office, Google suite and MacOS**

7.2.2 Cover letters

In addition to resumes, cover letters were developed and sent as part of the application procedure. In the current job market, cover letters adhere to a standardised structure and content, serving as a vital component in the process of candidate evaluation. A cover letter serves as a customised means of introducing oneself to the prospective employer, wherein the hiring manager is addressed by name and the candidate conveys a distinct interest in the legal company or organisation. Furthermore, this practise allows the individual to emphasise pertinent abilities, achievements, and legal background that distinguish them as an exceptional fit for the role (Barnett, 2019). In addition, the cover letter provides candidates with the opportunity to proactively address any potential problems or holes in their CV, while also showcasing their proficient communication and writing abilities, which are crucial qualities within the legal field (Turner, 2018). According to Smith et al. (2017), applicants can enhance their desirability as candidates by aligning their personality, values, and work ethic with the prevailing business culture. This strategic approach emphasises the possible compatibility between the applicant and the organisation. In each application, a customised cover letter has been included together with the resume, incorporating all relevant components.

7.2.3 Experimental Design

In our study, each law firm office was provided with two distinct resumes originating from individuals belonging to the same social class. These resumes were assigned signals denoting relative social class background (upper or lower) as well as gender (male or female). Importantly, all professional and academic experiences were held consistent throughout the

resumes. We have made the decision to provide two separate resumes, each belonging to individuals from the same social class, to every law firm. This choice is based on two primary justifications. Initially, we have dispatched resumes of both a female and male candidate to each legal firm in order to investigate the potential significance of gender in their recruitment procedures. Furthermore, the resumes sent to each law firm were deliberately selected from individuals belonging to either the high or low social class. This deliberate selection aimed to mitigate any biases and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender and social class on the recruitment process.

Gender was indicated by the applicant's given name. According to Correll et al. (2007), the inclusion of one's first name at the top of a résumé serves as a prominent and distinct indicator of gender. Differences in social class background were shown by a compilation of minor resume elements, as presented in Table 2 and elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

7.2.4 Signals of Social Class Background

The selection of the materials utilised to symbolise the backdrop of social class, as depicted in Figure 2, is a direct outcome of prior scholarly investigations on indicators of class. It is important to emphasise that our objective in selecting these indicators was to elicit clear perspectives on applicants' relative social class backgrounds, rather than to provide a comprehensive representation of the average higher- or lower-class applicant.

Our initial focus was on the applicant's given name, as it serves as a notable indicator of socioeconomic class. The names Consuelo and Antonio can be considered suitable control signals due to their relatively neutral connotation in terms of social class. In contrast, the family names Lavinia and Tancredi possess a lengthy historical background and a persistent affiliation with the upper class in Italy.

One potential indicator of socioeconomic status can be identified through the examination of the second set of indicators, specifically the residential address located in either the most affluent or the most impoverished districts of Rome. This phenomenon can be attributed to the observation that central areas of cities tend to exhibit higher levels of affluence compared to their peripheral counterparts. In this particular instance, Lavinia and Tancredi were situated in two highly central districts inside the city of Rome, specifically via del Corso and viale dei Parioli. On the other hand, Consuelo and Tancredi were positioned in via di Centocelle and via della Magliana, respectively.

According to Bourdieu (1984), the final parts were lifestyle characteristics that functioned as cultural class signals. Two signals representing participation in sports and one signal indicating musical choice were included. According to Erickson (1996), sports have a significant role in establishing social distinctions among different socioeconomic groups. Contrary to popular belief, there exists a prevailing notion that sports exhibit a greater degree of democracy compared to conventional cultural practises. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that socioeconomic status plays a substantial effect in the division and hierarchical arrangement of athletic engagement (Kane, 2003; Stempel, 2005). Since the inception of their academic journeys, we have categorised applicants based on their involvement in several sporting disciplines, such as football, Latin American dance, or horseback riding. All three of these sports encompass both team-oriented and individual performance aspects. However, horse riding, particularly when pursued in exclusive clubs, is often linked to the higher socioeconomic class. On the other hand, football and Latin American dance tend to be more prevalent among individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Green et al., 2010).

Furthermore, in the concluding section of each curriculum vitae (CV), we included a segment titled "Hobbies and Interests," wherein we emphasised personal interests, musical

preferences, and involvement in volunteer activities. Bourdieu (1984) posits that musical preferences has the potential to serve as substantial indicators of social class. In light of the often observed association between classical music and higher levels of education and income, we exhibited a preference for this genre in the context of considering a candidate from a higher socioeconomic background. Tancredi and Lavinia have been assigned the responsibility of examining the harp and organ, but Consuelo and Antonio will be focusing on the guitar and drums, which are often associated with lower socioeconomic strata.

Table 2. Overview of the resumes' features manipulated to obtain high vs low social class backgrounds.

	Higher-Class Combination	*Lower-Class Combination*
First name	Tancredi	Antonio
	Lavinia	Consuelo
Address	Viale dei Parioli	Via della Magliana
	Via del Corso	Via di Centocelle
Sport	Horse riding	Football
	Horse riding	Latin American Dance
Hobbies & Interests	Organ	Drums
	Harp	Guitar
High schools	Classic high school	Technical high school
	Classic high school	Technical high school

The combination of resume elements shown in Figure 2 overall worked as a signal for gender and socioeconomic class. Just to be clear, our intention while creating these resumes was to create views of candidates who were obviously male or female and from comparatively higher- or lower-class backgrounds. All the information in Figure 1—specifically, all professional experiences and educational accomplishments, including the applicant's performance in law school, employment history, and undergraduate academic

accomplishments—was the same throughout each resume. In contrast, as seen in Figure 2, resumes were modified in accordance with the markers of higher and lower social classes. Importantly, these high vs. low social class signals were not chosen arbitrarily. Indeed, to select the specific signals that can properly indicate the belonginess to a specific social class an online rating was conducted. Data collection was administered online via the Prolific, a commonly used platform for the recruitment of study participants.

A total of 101 (50 M, 49 F, 2 NB; age = 29.31 ± 6.89 s. d) participants took part in the survey, after providing informed consent. Each participant was asked to rate six categories of items, namely male names, female names, neighborhoods, type of high school attended, sports and musical tastes. For each of these categories a series of options were provided, and participants were asked to rate to which extent each on them was associated with a low vs. high social background on a 7-points Likert scale where 1 corresponds to low social class and 7 to high social class. The comprehensive list of items used for the rating, along with the mean scores and standard deviations is provided in table 3. In order to select the low and high social class signals, the highest and the lowest scores for each category were selected. Furthermore, to ensure that the differences across the lowest and the highest scores were meaningful, a paired t-test was conducted to statistically compare the scores obtained. All the comparisons were found statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Results on the rating data. The table provides for each item of every category the average score and the standard deviation.

Categories	Item	Average	Dev.st
Female Names	Consuelo	3.34	1.27
	Francesca	3.70	0.94
	Barbara	3.76	1.09
	Martina	3.81	0.94
	Giorgia	3.84	1.04
	Laura	3.87	0.96
	Valentina	3.87	1.01
	Giulia	4.04	0.94
	Costanza	4.17	1.11
	Beatrice	4.77	1.11
	Lucrezia	4.82	1.16
	Virginia	4.98	1.12
	Ludovica	5.00	0.97
	Augusta	5.09	1.31
	Ginevra	5.18	1.20
	Lavinia	5.21	1.20
	Mario	3.46	1.01
	Francesco	3.58	0.93
	arco	3.69	0.97
	Andrea	3.71	0.90
	Alessandro	3.98	0.97
	Federico	4.14	0.87
	Valerio	4.27	1.06
	Giulio	4.39	0.98
	Cesare	4.48	1.15
	Giuseppe Maria	4.61	1.60
	Ludovico	5.04	1.02
	Augusto	5.21	1.07
	Ottavio	5.32	1.00
	Aurelio	5.37	1.17
	Tancredi	5.58	1.21
Neighborhoods	Magliana	2.97	1.16
	Centocelle	2.99	1.08
	Tor Pignattara	3.11	1.18
	Tiburtina	3.12	0.95
	Garbatella	3.44	1.29
	Prenestina	3.45	0.99
	Casal Bertone	3.92	1.03
	Olgiata	4.10	1.18
	EUR	4.41	1.23
	Flaminio	4.56	1.05
	Collina Fleming	4.63	1.19
	Trieste	4.71	1.08
	Prati	4.96	1.19

	Centro Storico	5.66	1.12
	Parioli	5.87	1.29
High School	Vocational	2.74	1.03
	Hotel Management	2.88	1.01
	Industrial	3.25	0.94
	Commercial	3.46	0.86
	Social Sciences	4.18	0.78
	Language	4.32	0.87
	Musical	4.74	1.24
	Scientific	4.98	1.00
	Classic	5.50	1.07
Sport	Football	3.18	1.10
	Boxing	3.19	1.02
	Latin-American Dance	3.24	1.12
	Basket	3.84	0.80
	Aerobics/Gym	4.05	0.80
	Yoga/Pilates	4.56	0.84
	Competitive swimming	4.56	0.90
	Paddle	4.83	1.24
	Skating	5.09	0.99
	Ballet	5.20	1.03
	Tennis	5.29	1.17
	Ski	6.07	0.89
	Sail	6.36	0.85
	Horse-riding	6.47	0.79
Music	Drums	3.49	0.92
	Guitar	3.52	0.83
	Bass	3.73	0.96
	DJ Console	3.86	1.28
	Flute	4.03	1.30
	Saxophone	4.77	1.10
	Piano	5.32	1.07
	Violin	5.56	1.06
	Harpsichord	5.57	1.18
	Organ	5.69	1.06
	Harp	6.21	0.93

Chapter 4

8. Statistical Analysis

After conducting the resume audit study, the collected data can undergo analysis and segmentation in several ways. Firstly, it can be divided into positive callbacks, the likelihood of receiving such callbacks, and further segmented by cities. Additionally, it can be broken down by the type of firm, which includes Italian law firms and legal departments within large multinational corporations. Furthermore, the data has been processed to create segments based on social class and gender. This segmentation aims to provide a clearer understanding of the influence of social class and, subsequently, gender on the four primary segmentations that were previously formulated.

To test the statistical significance of the effects, we have employed a univariate model, which focuses on analyzing individual variables separately. In statistical analysis, a univariate model simplifies the process by examining one variable at a time. This approach is straightforward and commonly used in statistics for comprehending and describing the behavior of a single variable.

Univariate models have several   notable characteristics and advantages. First, they are straightforward to implement and interpret, as mentioned by Petropoulos and Svetunkov in 2020. Second, they provide clarity by isolating one variable, allowing us to understand its distribution, characteristics, and patterns. This simplicity and clarity are particularly valuable when exploring data or conveying results to individuals who may not have a technical background (Petropoulos & Svetunkov, 2020).

Hence, to test our core hypothesis - namely the effect of gender and social class on the percentage of positive callbacks – a univariate model has been conducted using the callback (i.e., dummy variable, coded as 1 for positive callback and 0 for negative feedback or no feedback) as dependent variable, while the social class (high vs. low), gender (male vs. female)

and their interaction term were entered in the analysis as fixed effects. Further, covariates for size, company type, city and ID were included in the analysis. To elaborate, we have categorized firm size into three levels: 1 signifies the smallest firms with fewer than 20 employees, while 3 represents the largest firms with over 80 employees. Location-wise, we have assigned a value of 1 for firms based in Rome and 2 for those in Milan. Concerning firm type, we have labeled firms as 1 if they are law firms and 2 if they are law departments within multinational corporations. Lastly, each firm that received an application has been assigned a distinct ascending ID number. The only situation where the same ID number is assigned to the same firm is when multiple applications have been sent to the same law firm, indicating they have multiple job openings.

As a second step, other exploratory analyses were conducted to inspect the role played by other variables in the positive callback rates. In particular an additional univariate analysis was run on the callbacks including also the city (Rome vs. Milan) as a fixed effect along with social class (high vs. low) and the gender (male vs. female), as well as the second and third level interaction terms. Further, size, company type and ID were included in the analysis as covariates.

Similarly, an additional model was run on the callbacks including also the company type (firm vs. department) as a fixed effect along with social class (high vs. low) and the gender (male vs. female), as well as the second and third level interaction terms. This model also included the covariates size, city, and ID.

9. Results

9.1 Positive call backs

Table 4, presented below, presents the primary outcomes of the experiment concerning the positive callbacks received from the submitted job applications. In total, there were 696 different applications, resulting in 83 interview invitations. This translates to an overall callback rate of 11.9%, which aligns with the expected callback rate for applicants seeking positions in large law firms, particularly those who excel academically but do not come from extremely prestigious law schools, as indicated by Rivera in 2015.

Table 4: Total number of positive call-backs received.

	Female	Male	Total
High	23	41	64
Low	5	14	19
Total	**28**	**55**	**83**

However, it is important to note that the distribution of callbacks across various treatment conditions was far from equitable. Notably, male applicants from higher social classes accounted for a substantial portion, receiving a total of 41 positive responses, representing 49% of the total positive responses recorded following the resume audit study. In contrast, females from the lowest social class received only 6% of the total positive responses, comprising just 5 positive responses out of 174 applications submitted by females belonging to the lowest social class.

The graph provided below offers a visual representation of the callback rates for all four categories of applicants.
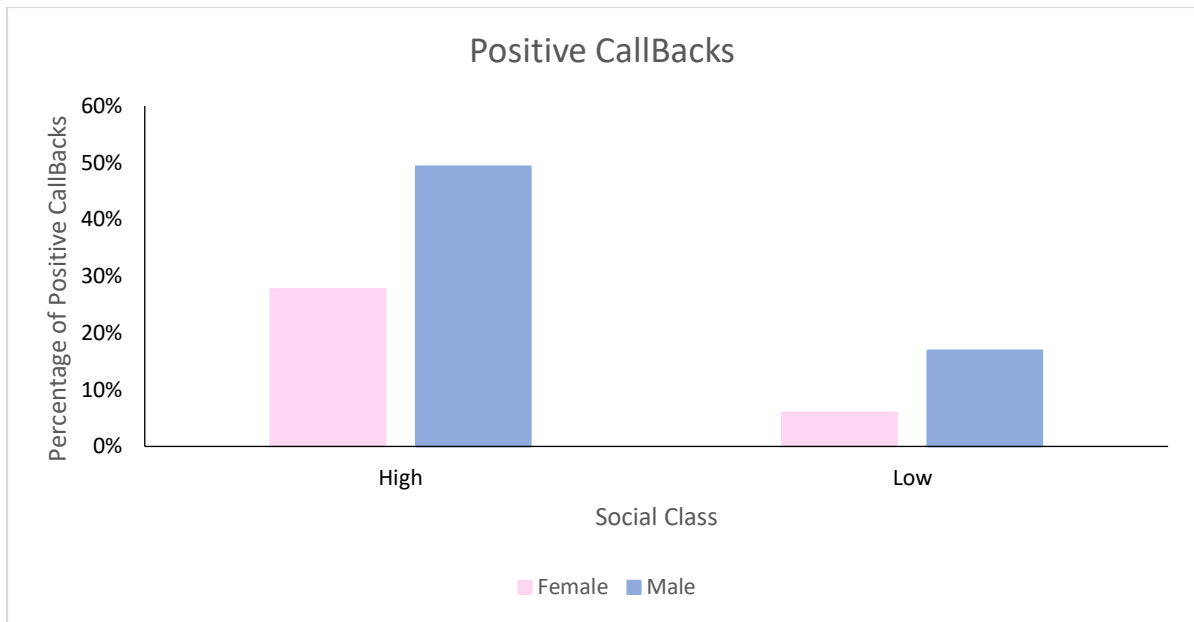
Figure 5: *percentages of positive call-backs segmented by social class and gender.*

As demonstrated by the graph, there is a significant disparity between the callback rates for males and females. It is evident that males from higher social classes have nearly 80% more chances of securing recruitment compared to females from lower social classes. Furthermore, males from more privileged social backgrounds exhibited a 30% higher likelihood of receiving callbacks compared to their counterparts from less privileged backgrounds. When focusing on females, those from higher social classes demonstrated almost a 35% higher likelihood of receiving callbacks, underscoring the pivotal roles that both social class and gender play in the recruitment processes of law firms.

In summary, the analysis highlights the significance of gender and social class in the recruitment procedures of law firms and legal departments across two major Italian cities, namely Milan and Rome.

The table below shows the univariate model regarding the total number of positive call-backs received. This is indeed important to detect whether the results previously showed on the impact of gender and social class on the overall number of call-backs are statistically significant when analyzed separately or combined.

Table 5. Results of the univariate model conducted on the callbacks using social class (low, high), gender (male, female) and their interaction term as fixed effects.

	β	F	p
Size	0,030	0,332	0,565
City	0,062	0,687	0,407
Type	0,122	1,366	0,243
ID	0,141	1,569	0,211
Gender	0,870	9,720	**0,002**
Class	2,340	26,130	**0,000**
Gender * Class	0,091	1,021	0,313

Upon examining the table, it becomes evident that gender and social class stand out as the only factors with statistical significance. Specifically, gender ($\beta = 0,87$, $F_{1, 786} = 9,72$, $p = 0,002$) demonstrates a statistically relevant impact, indicating that gender plays a pivotal role in the number of call-backs received, with males receiving significantly higher number of positive callbacks. Additionally, social class ($\beta = 2,34$, $F_{1, 786} = 26,13$, $p = 0,000$) exhibits a highly statistically significant effect, underscoring its influence on individuals' likelihood of securing a job in the legal industry. High social class candidates received a significantly higher positive callbacks as compared to the low social class counterpart.

Moreover, the univariate model enables us to explore the significance of the interaction between gender and social class. This helps us discern whether there is a primary effect attributed to either gender or social class, and if there exists an interaction effect among all the variables. The interaction between gender and social class is denoted by Gender*Class ($\beta=0,09$, $F_{1, 786} =1,02$, $p= 0,313$). The absence of a statistically significant interaction reveals that the effects of gender and social class are additive. For males, being male provides an advantage, but being a male from a higher social class confers an even greater advantage in terms of receiving interview callbacks. Conversely, being female represents a disadvantage in this study; however, being a female from a higher social class mitigates this disadvantage,

indicating that females from higher social classes have a better chance of receiving a positive call back.

9.2 Probability of a positive call-back

Based on the results shown above, it is crucial to evaluate the likelihood of receiving a positive callback while considering both gender and social class as contributing factors. Presented in Table 6 below is the comprehensive breakdown of the total number of resumes dispatched, categorized by social class and gender.

Table 6: Breakdown of the total number of resumes sent

	Female	Male	Total
High	202	204	406
Low	193	195	388
Total	**395**	**399**	

As evident from the table, there exists a favorable equilibrium in the distribution of applications between those attributed to males and those assigned to females. Specifically, a total of 395 resumes were submitted on behalf of females, while 399 were sent for males. This approach was adopted strategically to minimize potential biases in terms of the number of resumes received by organizations, ensuring a fair representation across both gender and social class spectrums.

With the total count of resumes dispatched to each organization at our disposal, it became feasible to calculate the probability of receiving a callback while considering the combined influence of gender and social class. To gain a more comprehensive insight into the discerned pattern, the subsequent graph furnishes a clearer representation of this trend.
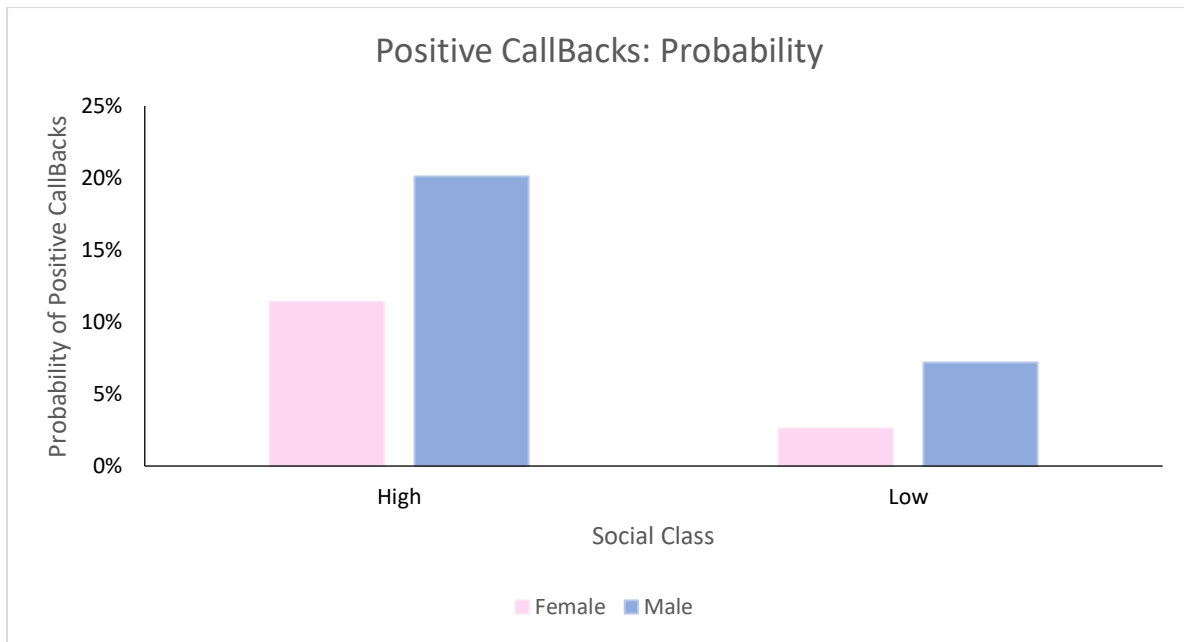
Figure 6: *Probability of receiving a call-back segmented by social class and gender*

When examining each column individually, it becomes evident that the highest likelihood of receiving an interview invitation is associated with high-status males, boasting a substantial 20% probability. Conversely, females from lower social strata exhibit the lowest likelihood of securing employment, with a mere 3% probability. This stark contrast is further emphasized when evaluating gender alone, without considering social class. In fact, as illustrated by the graph, men possess a 50% higher chance of gaining employment compared to women. Additionally, when gender is removed from the analysis, it becomes apparent that individuals hailing from more privileged social backgrounds enjoy a 30% greater probability of being hired. When these two factors are considered in conjunction, the findings reveal a disheartening pattern where females face significant discrimination in their pursuit of legal positions, particularly those from lower social classes who encounter virtually no opportunities for interview invitations.

9.3 Positive call-backs by city

As previously stated, the study was conducted by taking into consideration law firms and law departments operating only in Milan and Rome. Assessing also whether the city in which the firm operates contributes to the discrimination previously discussed is extremely important for the study. The graph below puts into comparison the percentages of being called-up between Milan and Rome.
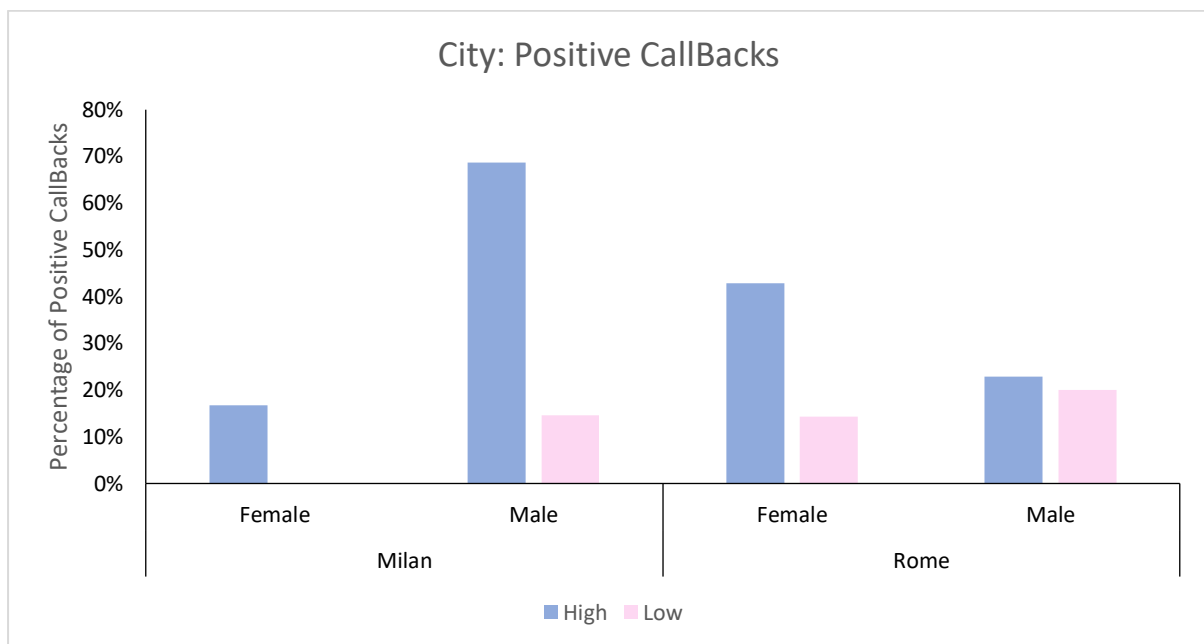

Figure 7*: Comparison of the positive call-backs between Milan and Rome*

The graph distinctly presents contrasting outcomes. Starting with Milan, it is evident that high social class males secured a substantial 69% of positive callbacks among all the applications they submitted, in stark contrast to their lower-class counterparts who received positive responses for only 17% of their applications. Furthermore, high social class females were the sole recipients of positive feedback, achieving an overall rate of 17% out of all the applications submitted in Milan. Notably, none of the females from lower social classes passed the initial screening process, underscoring that, particularly in Milan, both gender and social

class serve as significant sources of discrimination within the recruitment processes of major law firms.

In contrast, the results stemming from applications to Rome paint an entirely different picture. As depicted by the preceding graph, females enjoyed a considerably higher percentage of positive callbacks, comprising 57% of the total. In contrast, males in Rome experienced a notably lower callback rate compared to females, accounting for just 43% of the total positive callbacks received from firms based in Rome. A closer examination reveals that females from higher social classes have a 30% higher likelihood of being hired, while males exhibit a relatively balanced callback rate of approximately 22% out of the total callbacks received from Rome.

Consequently, the results obtained from Milan demonstrate a contradictory and diametrically opposite trend when compared to those from Rome. This underscores that in Rome, social class continues to play a pivotal role in the recruitment processes of law firms, while gender does not appear to be a prominent source of discrimination. Conversely, the findings from Milan emphasize that both gender and social class significantly contribute to discrimination within the recruitment processes of major law firms.

The table below shows the univariate model regarding the total number of positive callbacks received segmented by the city of origin of the various law firms. This is indeed important to detect whether the cities have a statistical importance and impact on the chances of being hired.

Table 7. Results of the univariate model conducted on the callbacks using social class (high, low), gender (male, female), city (Rome, Milan) and their second and third level interaction terms as fixed effects.

	β	F	p
ID	0,147	1,695	0,193
Type	0,109	1,261	0,262
Size	0,040	0,458	0,499
Class	2,149	24,856	**0,000**
Gender	0,677	7,836	**0,005**
City	0,052	0,599	0,439
Class * Gender	0,048	0,554	0,457
Class * City	0,421	4,869	**0,028**
Gender * City	1,456	16,842	**0,000**
Class * Gender * City	0,763	8,824	**0,003**

As for the previous model, the dependent variable has been kept constant, with the only difference represented by the fact that, to understand if Milan and Rome are statistically relevant, different interactions between covariables have been considered. Indeed, the interaction between gender and class, city and class, city and gender and lastly city gender and class have been analyzed.

The analysis appears to be a regression analysis with multiple predictor variables, examining factors that may influence the likelihood of receiving a positive callback in the hiring process.

Individual Predictor Variables:

The fixed effect of social class (β = 2,149, $F_{1, 783}$ = 24,85, p= 0,000 suggests that the type of class a candidate belongs to is statistically significant in predicting callback rates. Candidates from high social class have significantly higher positive callback rates.

The effect of gender (β = 0,677, F 1, 783 = 7,83, p = 0,005) was also statistically significant. It implies that male participants show a higher positive callback rate a compared to the female counterpart.

As for the covariates (ID, type, size) none of them appeared to exert a statistically significant effect (all p > 0.05), indicating that these variables may not have a substantial impact on callback rates.

Interaction Terms:

The Class * Gender interaction (β=0,048, $F_{1,\,67}$ = 0,554, p = 0,457) suggests that the interaction effect is not statistically significant. On the other hand, the Class * City interaction (β = 0,421, $F_{1,\,67}$ = 4,86, p = 0,028) and the Gender * City interaction (β = 1,45, $F_{1,\,67}$ = 16,84, p= 0,000) appeared to be statistically significant. This implies that the effect of class and gender on the callback rates may be influenced by the city where the hiring process is taking place. Indeed, as it is possible to notice from the graph (Figure xxx) the both the effects of gender (male > female) and social class (high > low) are more pronounced in the city of Milan as compared to Rome.

Finally, the third level interaction Class * Gender * City (β = 0,76, $F_{1,\,67,69}$ = 8,82, p= 0,003): also indicated that the interaction is statistically significant. This means that the effect of class on callback rates may vary depending on gender, or vice versa.

In summary, the analysis suggests that there are statistically significant relationships between certain predictor variables (Class, Gender) and the likelihood of receiving a positive callback in the hiring process. Additionally, interactions between these variables (Class * Gender, Class * City, Gender * City) are also statistically significant, implying that the effect of class and gender on callback rates may vary depending on the city where the hiring process occurs. These findings raise concerns about potential discrimination in the hiring process based on class, gender, and city, and further investigation or corrective actions may be necessary to address these disparities.

9.4 Positive call-backs by company type

Applications were sent to both major Italian law firms but also to law departments within big multinational firms operating in the Italian territory. As part of the study, it is also important to discern whether law firms and law departments have different views on assessing candidates and whether the discrimination in hiring shows similar results or is more intrinsic in any of the two types of firms: law firms or law departments. The graph below shows an overview of the positive call-backs received, segmented by type of firm.
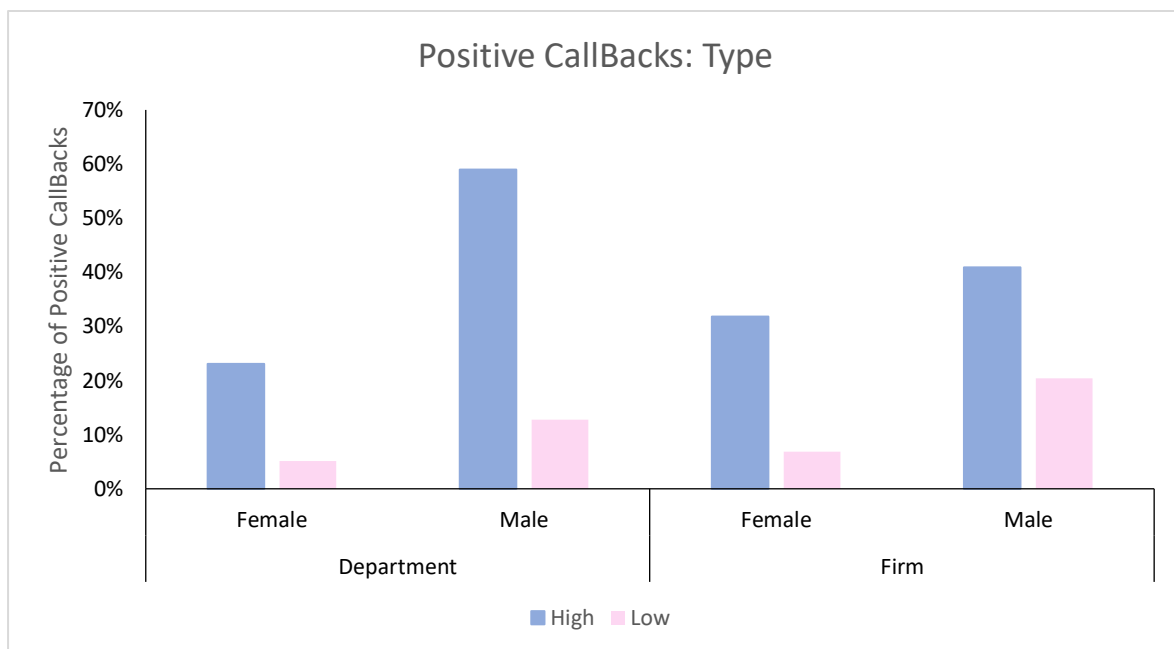

Figure 8: *Overview of the positive call-backs received, segmented by type of firm.*

It is clearly visible that the graph shows a straightforward result. Starting from law departments, males from a high social class received 59% of the total positive call-backs, in comparison to lower class males who received a positive outcome only for the 13% of all the applications. In addition, females from high social class received positive feedback with an overall score of 23% out of all the applications sent, while females from low social class only 5%. Thus, males from high social class have around 30% more chances of being hired compared to males from low social classes, while females from high social classes have 22%

more chances compared to female from low social classes. These results prove that, specifically for law departments, both gender and social class are represent a major source of discrimination.

Moving to Italian law firms, the results gained from the applications show a similar scenario. Indeed, as shown by the previous graph, females, with an overall score of 32% of positive call-backs, had a much lower percentage of positive call-backs compared to males. Indeed, males from a high social class experienced a total 41% out of the total number of positive call-backs received from law firms. Diving deeper, it is noticeable that females from a higher social class have 25% more chances of being hired, while males from a high social class showed 50% more chances of being hired compared to the ones coming from lower social classes

Thus, results deriving from both law firms and law departments show that both gender and social class represent a major source of discrimination when it comes to the major law firms' recruitment processes.

The table below shows the univariate model regarding the total number of positive call-backs received segmented the type of company (law firm vs. law departments) to which applications have been sent. This is indeed important to detect whether law departments or law firms have a statistical importance and impact on the chances of being hired.

Table 8. Results of the univariate model conducted on the callbacks using social class (high, low), gender (male, female), type (law firms, law departments, Milan) and their second and third level interaction terms as fixed effects.

	B	F	p
ID	0,105	1,179	0,278
Size	0,028	0,316	0,574
City	0,058	0,658	0,418
Class	2,662	30,008	**0,000**
Gender	1,075	12,122	**0,001**
Type	0,122	1,371	0,242
Class * Gender	0,188	2,124	0,145
Class * Type	0,362	4,084	**0,044**
Gender * Type	0,242	2,727	*0,099*
Class * Gender * Type	0,307	3,466	*0,063*

Individual Predictor Variables:

The fixed effect of Class (β = 2,882, $F_{1, 783}$ = 30,00, p = 0,000) and Gender (β = 1.075, $F_{1, 783}$ = 12,12, p= 0,001) indicates that both class and gender are highly statistically significant predictors of the hiring process outcome.

These values suggest that candidates from different classes (high > low) and genders (male > female) have significantly different outcomes in the hiring process, which is a strong indicator of potential discrimination.

On the other hand, regarding the covariates size (β= 0,028, $F_{1, 783}$ = 0,316, p= 0,574), city (β= 0,058, $F_{1, 783}$ = 0,658, p= 0,418), type (β = 0,122, $F_{1, 783}$ = 1,371, p = 0,242) were found non-significant.

Similarly, also the class by gender interaction ($\beta= 0,188$, $F_{1,783} = 2,124$, $p= 0,145$) do not show statistically relevant results.

On the other hand, the Class * Type Interaction ($\beta= 0,242$, $F_{1,783} = 4,084$. $P= 0,044$ suggests that the interaction between class and type is statistically significant. This interaction implies that the effect of class on the hiring process outcome may depend on the type of company (i.e., law firms vs. low departments). In other words, candidates from different classes may experience different hiring outcomes depending on the type of position they are applying for. Looking at the graph (figure xx) it is possible to notice how the effect of social class, favoring high class candidates over low-class ones, appears to be more pronounced in the law departments of big corporations, as compared to the law firms.

The Gender * Type Interaction ($\beta= 0,242$, $F_{1,783} = 2,727$, $p= 0,099$) indicates that the p value -despite not being statistically significant – is close to the conventional significance level of 0.05. This suggests that the interaction between gender and type may not be statistically significant, although it suggests that there exists a potentially relevant trend. In particular, this result appears guided by the slightly stronger tendency to favor male over females in law departments of big corporations as compared to law firms.

Similarly, the Class * Gender * Type Interaction ($\beta= 0,307$, $F_{1,783} = 3,466$, $p= 0,063$), appears only marginally significant, as the p-value is 0.063, which is close to 0.05 but not statistically significant. This suggests that the combined effect of class, gender, and type on the hiring process outcome may not be statistically significant, although it suggests a potentially relevant trend.

In summary, the analysis strongly suggests that there may be discrimination within the hiring process based on class and gender. Both class and gender have significant effects on the hiring outcome, and the interaction between class and type is also significant, indicating

potential variations in outcomes based on class and type. However, the interactions involving

gender (Gender * Type and Class * Gender * Type) are borderline in significance.

Chapter 5

10. Main findings

A notable pattern has been identified through an analysis of the curriculum vitae submitted to legal firms in Italy. Individuals displaying signs of membership in upper social strata are more likely to obtain interview opportunities for careers within legal companies. These occupations commonly provide wages that are three to six times greater than the remuneration offered to recent law school graduates in alternative employment fields. These chances propel individuals to the upper strata of the country's economic distribution, occasionally denoted as "the lawful 1 percent." It is imperative to acknowledge, though, that the influence of social class indicators exhibits notable variations contingent upon gender.

The provision of higher social class signals does actually confer a more pronounced benefit to men as compared to women. However, women hailing from better social class origins continue to have greater privileges in this aspect as compared to their counterparts from lower social classes. This observation implies that although there has been an increase in diversity within the legal profession in terms of demographic representation over the last fifty years, there continues to be a persistent advantage for those who are both of higher socioeconomic status and male in terms of employment opportunities.

The study done in the United States by Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) provides potential explanations for this advantage. In this study, recruiters were requested to assess CVs based on many dimensions. The findings of this study indicate that evaluators perceived applicants from higher social classes as more suitable for the elite culture and clientele of large law firms, despite having identical law school records, professional experiences, and undergraduate academic achievements. It is important to acknowledge that the data used to determine the social class of applicants, such as their permanent address and interests (e.g., music, sports), hold little significance in the evaluation of candidates.

Although there was indeed a correlation between greater social class and more favourable ratings for men, it is crucial to emphasise the main outcome of the study, which pertains to gender-based discrimination. There was a clear and significant preference for men over women. Lower-class women were excluded from receiving a callback, unlike their higher-class male counterparts and even lower-class women. This highlights the inherent presence of discrimination based on both gender and social class in the recruitment procedures of legal firms.

Expanding upon the previously introduced univariate model, it becomes apparent that social class and gender emerge as the primary determinants. It is worth noting that there is a lack of interaction between these two elements, suggesting that their effects are additive in nature rather than being contingent upon one another.

Finally, the investigation of the geographical distribution of law firms and their respective classifications, including whether they operate as in-house legal departments within multinational organisations or as autonomous law firms, produced compelling results. In relation to the city of origin, an intriguing outcome surfaced, characterised by a contradictory nature. The recruiting processes of legal firms in Rome are still significantly influenced by social class, whereas gender does not seem to be a notable factor of discrimination. In contrast, the research conducted in Milan highlights the noteworthy influence of both gender and social class in the context of discriminatory practises observed during the recruitment procedures of prominent legal firms. Moreover, the statistical analysis revealed significant findings on the interplay between gender and city of origin, as well as social class and city of origin. These results underscore the considerable importance of both gender and social class in the decision-making process of employers when evaluating job applicants.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that gender and social class are substantial factors contributing to prejudice during the recruitment procedures in prominent law firms and

multinational corporations' law departments. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that law departments demonstrate a greater propensity for discrimination based on individuals' social classes and genders in contrast to conventional Italian legal companies.

10.1 Managerial implications and future research

The present study adds to the extant scholarly discourse on demographic inequalities within the realm of the sociology of law. This study specifically illuminates the persistent importance of social class markers in influencing the level of access individuals have to the most financially rewarding and esteemed sectors of the legal profession in Italy. Our study distinguishes itself from prior research on social class in legal professions by providing empirical evidence that demonstrates employers' involvement in discriminatory practises when selecting candidates for employment, based on markers of social class. The significant salary disparities between these highly sought-after positions and other types of legal employment, coupled with their function as pathways to prestigious roles such as judiciary and politics, have broader implications. Our research findings not only shed light on the distribution of economic resources within the legal profession (Rivera and Tilcsik, 2016), but also highlight the unequal access to symbolic and political power in society.

The primary focus of this study pertains to the legal profession; nonetheless, its results have broader significance for our comprehension of employers' decision-making processes in hiring. Hiring decisions have typically been conceptualised by sociologists as being impacted by various criteria, including the educational and professional qualities of applicants, their social connections, as well as considerations of gender and ethnicity (Pager and Shepherd, 2008). Nevertheless, previous scholarly works have indicated that prejudice is not solely confined to gender and ethnicity, but also encompasses additional attributes such as sexual orientation (Berger et al., 1972) and parental status (Correll et al., 2007).

The present study offers empirical support for the notion that social class indicators play a substantial role in the evaluation of candidates and the subsequent decision-making processes related to employment. In the realm of hiring, quantitative research commonly operates under the assumption that an individual's social class background, if acknowledged,

exerts an indirect influence on job outcomes by way of their educational attainment or qualifications. In addition, it is worth noting that although field tests have shed light on the significance of social class markers in the hiring process (Jackson, 2009), they have not conclusively determined the extent of their influence when educational qualifications are considered.

Hence, empirical evidence substantiates the claim that prestigious companies actively practise discrimination on the basis of an individual's social class markers, irrespective of comparable academic and professional credentials, and notwithstanding the inclusion of other assessment procedures. Furthermore, our study reveals a significant synergistic impact of gender and indices of socioeconomic status on the recruitment process for legal posts. Within a wider framework, our research emphasises the role of labour market discrimination as a mechanism that sustains and strengthens social class privileges, extending beyond the domain of formal education (Rivera, 2020). The significance of comprehending the intersectionality of social class and gender in the examination of employment inequities and social hierarchy is underscored.

The majority of research conducted on hiring disparities tends to examine the influence of a single attribute in isolation, without taking into account other relevant factors. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that individuals exhibit a multitude of qualities that might potentially intersect or clash with one another, resulting in unforeseen or paradoxical consequences in terms of their evaluation (Rivera and Tilcsik, 2016). Our research findings indicate that individuals who are viewed as belonging to a higher social class tend to have higher expectations and have more favourable outcomes in the labour market. This association holds true for both men and women, although there is a notable preference for men in this regard. In conclusion, our research highlights the importance of understanding the impact of

different combinations of status indicators on labour market outcomes, which is essential for gaining insights into economic inequalities.

The present study's results emphasise the ongoing need to implement updated hiring protocols that might mitigate the impact of bias and stereotypes, with the aim of promoting workforce diversity inside organisations.

10.2 Limitation of the study

The delineations of the study's boundary conditions provide promising options for future research. Our research focused on the examination of class discrimination within a labour market characterised by prestige and high wages. It is imperative to acknowledge that the degree of discrimination based on social class indicators, as well as its interplay with gender, may exhibit variability within alternative occupational contexts. The labour market has a high degree of selectivity. Discrimination predicated on social class indicators and gender dynamics may potentially be mitigated within labour markets that exhibit lower levels of competitiveness. Class and gender effects can also be observed in stereotypically feminine positions or jobs.

It is also plausible for there to be diversity within the market of law firms. The applicants in question opted to submit their applications directly to corporations, as opposed to utilising the on-campus hiring process. Law firms, in the second scenario, create lists of educational institutions with whom they have formed connections and allocate a predetermined number of interview and job offer opportunities to students from each respective school. It is customary for firms to refrain from establishing interview or offer quotas specifically for students hailing from selective yet non-elite educational institutions. The observed correlation between selectivity and discrimination suggests that the degree of class discrimination or the magnitude of the commitment penalty may be more pronounced in our group compared to law students who choose for on-campus recruiting.

In addition, it has been observed that instances of discrimination are more prone to transpire in situations where the evaluation of applicant quality is challenging or lacks clarity (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Therefore, it is plausible that individuals like ourselves, who possess exceptional academic performance but hail from non-elite educational institutions, may encounter heightened levels of class-based discrimination compared to candidates from

prestigious schools. This is due to the fact that employers may have increased confusion regarding the calibre of our qualifications. Therefore, it is possible to observe a reduction in class discrimination or a decrease in the intersectionality of class and gender among those who have completed their studies at prestigious legal schools.

In our study, we specifically examine employer discrimination during the application process. It is worth noting that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may opt out of pursuing these job opportunities, instead choosing to pursue employment in organisations that prioritise social impact or possess a more diverse workforce. However, it is also possible for the converse to be true. Due to the exorbitant expenses associated with law school education, persons hailing from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds may exhibit a larger propensity to seek employment in legal firms. This inclination can be attributed to their heightened burden of student loan debt and the allure of the substantial remuneration typically offered by such organisations. There is a dearth of empirical research that systematically investigates the rates at which students from different social classes apply to large law firms.

Conclusion

Despite myths of a classless society, gender and especially social class of origin plays an enduring role in shaping individuals' life chances and economic trajectories. This thesis advances the study of social class signals in Italy, especially between Milan and Rome, beyond the realm of formal schooling to employment. Through a randomized field experiment, we provide the first empirical demonstration that elite law Italian employers indeed discriminate—albeit unevenly between the sexes—by applicants' social class signals. When hiring for top jobs such as law positions, employers consider not only applicants' human and social capital, gender, and race, but also class markers found on their resumes.

In addition, while social class and gender have both revealed to be significant in the selections process for law positions, the integrations between these two factors do not show signals of discrimination. Indeed, following the univariate model, the effect of gender and social class is addictive, showing that being a man is favourable than being a woman, but being a man from a higher social class is even more favourable than men from lower classes. In comparison, females have proven to be more discriminated in the selection process than man, but females from higher social classes have been proven to have more chances of being hired compared to females from lower classes.

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