

The ideal job applicant and the influence of religious belief

A qualitative study on how recruiters interpret religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism, within hiring processes in Sweden

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Abstract

The Jewish population has been exposed for hate crimes throughout history all over the globe, and in recent years, antisemitism has increased significantly worldwide. The phenomenon of religious discrimination is a widespread prevailing issue in today's Sweden, not least within recruitment. This does not only affect the Jewish population, but also Muslims to a large extent, where both of these religious minorities have a much harder time becoming employed than Christians. Thus, it was deemed crucial to examine how recruiters interpret such discrimination within hiring processes in Sweden. Particularly, the authors were interested in examining antisemitism as of its absence in research and literature. In order to investigate this, a qualitative study was executed, where 13 semi-constructed in-depth interviews were conducted with recruiters and recruiting consultants. The empirics suggest that Muslims are at greater risk of being subjected to religious discrimination. This can be explained by the fact that Muslims tend to deviate geographically, culturally and visually from the Swedish norm, at least more than their Jewish counterparts. This in turn is problematic since the empirics point towards that recruiters tend to prefer job applicants like themselves. Through cognitive biases and sensemaking, job applicants are compared to a fictional ideal worker, where religious minorities seem to contradict with such a description. Thus, these indications explain why religious discrimination occurs as well as how recruiters interpret it.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Discrimination, Ideal job applicant, Recruitment, Religious belief

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Definitions

Table 1 - Definitions

Concept	Definition
Antisemitism	“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” - (IHRA, 2016)
Islamophobia	“[...] unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities.” - (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 4)
Recruiter	Refers to recruiters as well as recruiting consultants.
Xenophobia	“Attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.” - (European Commission, n.d.)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Religious discrimination in Sweden

January 27th, better known as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, reminds us of the persecution and genocide of Jews during World War II. Historically, this ethnoreligious group has been frequently victimized by hate crimes and still faces discrimination to this day. Accordingly, antisemitic incidents increased dramatically worldwide in 2021, fueled by radical left- and right-wing political movements, as well as the spread of antisemitic rhetoric and conspiracy theories on social media (BBC, 2022). Sweden is no exception to this. Reports published in June 2021 indicate that five percent of the Swedish population hold antisemitic attitudes with strong intensity (Bachner & Bevelander, 2021). In Malmö and Gothenburg, various antisemitic demonstrations and synagogue attacks have recently taken place (e.g. Torstensson, 2021; Carlson & Vickhoff, 2020; Trus, 2018; Söderqvist, 2019), where right-wing extremism or Israel-Palestine conflicts appear to play a major role in most of these cases. For instance, the synagogue attack in Gothenburg in 2017, is claimed to be a direct response by Palestinians to Donald Trump's diplomatic recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Abrahamsson et al., 2018).

In 2021, the Swedish government ordered Diskrimineringsombudsmannen (DO), a government agency, to examine the prevalence of religious discrimination, and how it interacts with ethnic discrimination (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2021). The progress report indicates that 52 percent of the notifications related to religious discrimination are also related to ethnic discrimination, and that a remarkably large part of the notifications concern Islamophobia (Brodin, 2022). Furthermore, 35 percent of all reported incidents of religious discrimination in 2021 were associated with the labor market, where several notifications relate to job applicants being disadvantaged during recruitment due to their religious beliefs.

1.2. Recruitment in Sweden

Recruitment can be done in-house or through recruitment consultancies. Regardless, such processes often start with conducting candidate profiles and publishing job openings. Usually, job vacancies are published on social media or on employment websites (Björkman, 2020). Thereafter, recruiters gather applications and carry out a variety of selection methods, including reviewing resumés, holding interviews, testing, and collecting references. Lastly, job applicants are evaluated, and the optimal candidate is offered employment (Ledarna, n.d.).

The main difference between the process of hiring in-house and recruiting through consultancies is the number of parties involved. Recruiting in-house translates to a two-sided relationship between the job applicant and the recruiter. Meanwhile, a hiring process through recruitment consultancies consists of a triadic relationship, including the job applicant, the consultant, and the employer. Hence, gathering and evaluating applications is done by an external actor, who then presents the best candidates to the employer. Since this study does not distinguish between recruiters and recruiting consultants, henceforth, the term ‘recruiter’ will be used for both actors.

The Swedish anti-discrimination law aims to protect equality, where one of the grounds of discrimination is religion. Nevertheless, such discrimination persists, both within recruitment and in society. To be able to understand why religious discrimination within recruitment occurs, focus lies on three concepts. The first is cognitive biases, i.e. systematic patterns of deviation from rationality in judgment. Another plausible explanation is sensemaking, which occurs when recruiters attempt to understand the candidate behind the application by filling in the gaps of information (Sandoval, 2008). Lastly, the concept of the ideal worker describes employees who devote every waking moment to work and prioritize it above all else, as supreme candidates (Acker, 1990). This could be another factor that partially explains why discrimination within recruitment exists. These concepts can be further studied in section 2.2.

1.3. Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to recruitment and discrimination studies by touching on a hitherto almost uncharted research field in Sweden, namely antisemitism. Furthermore, the thesis aims to generate awareness and broaden the perspective of how inequality portrays within recruitment, and to add to the framework of the ideal worker. The focus will be on investigating how recruiters interpret religious discrimination affecting the Jewish population within recruitment. This will be done by comparing antisemitism with Islamophobia. The research question is thus formulated as:

How do recruiters interpret religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism, within hiring processes in Sweden?

1.4. Delimitations

The study is delimited to recruiters’ interpretations of religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism, within recruitment and is geographically limited to Sweden. There is no distinction made between the hiring of executive positions and junior-level recruitment. Moreover, the study focuses on traditional forms of recruitment¹ and excludes methods of headhunting and recruitment

¹ Job applicants applying for open job positions

through labor-hiring agencies. The scope of the study was initially dedicated completely to antisemitism, but was later expanded to also cover Islamophobia. Incorporating another religion intends to serve as a reference point and to facilitate discussions regarding antisemitism. Lastly, the sample group consists of recruiters from various industries, assessing candidates for positions of different levels. The amount of professional experience differs widely, yet it did not seem to affect the interviewees' interpretations.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1. Discrimination literature

Discrimination is widely discussed in contemporary literature, where gender, age, and ethnicity, within a context of promotions, seem to be the most explored and influential topics. On the other hand, management literature covering recruitment is sparse. However, when discrimination against a certain characteristic is studied, a common method is to conduct correspondence tests that reveal discrimination during the initial stages of recruitment (Rooth, 2021). Scholars forward fictitious applications in response to advertised job openings, where the only distinguishing feature of the applications is the characteristic that is being tested (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, n.d.). For instance, studies show that job applicants with Swedish-sounding names are 50 percent more likely to be invited to interviews than those with names of Arabic origin (Carlsson, 2013). Another example is that religious minorities are 25 percent less likely to get a job offer than Christians (Eriksson et al., 2012).

However, there seems to be few prevailing studies dealing with antisemitism in Sweden, and those that exist can be divided into two categories: antisemitism as a phenomenon, and studies where antisemitism is merely one of many topics discussed (Kvist Geverts, 2020). Notably, the majority of antisemitism research is conducted by scholars in academic departments of history. Furthermore, Kvist Geverts argues that “*Antisemitism constituted a blind spot in Racism Studies in Sweden*”, and that parts of it could be explained by the fact that discrimination towards Jews “*tend to be either unseen or characterized as ‘un-Swedish’*”. Nevertheless, there is at least one study that examines, inter alia, whether being Jewish affects job applicants within recruitment. The results indicate that Jews indeed are discriminated against, and that they are 26 percentage points less likely to receive a job offer compared to Christian candidates (Eriksson et al., 2012).

Despite widespread agreement that discrimination exists, the reason why it occurs is less apparent. One explanation is that recruiters apply sensemaking to fill in the gaps of the applications they receive (Sandoval, 2008). Sensemaking is grounded on prejudices towards job seekers’ identities and qualities based on their ethnicity or religion, as well as role requirements for what the job seeker has applied for, and in what organizational context the job would take place. As a result, minority applicants may not be perceived as qualified in the eyes of recruiters, leading to a discriminating assessment of the applicant whether it was consciously or unconsciously made by the recruiter.

2.2. Theory usage

2.2.1. Understanding discrimination

Sensemaking

The concept of sensemaking was constructed by Karl Weick and is a meso-level management framework, applied to understand organizational behavior. It explains how people mutually make sense and create structure of the unknown, and which turns thought into action (1995). These structures do not have to be true, realistic nor accurate, they just have to be plausible and allow people to act upon these understandings. Weick claims that organizations are social situations in which intrasubjective meanings turn into intersubjective meanings through interaction with other organizational members. In these interactions, artifacts are exchanged and new mutual shared ways of thinking and interpreting things are created. The function of the organization is that it can turn these intersubjective meanings into generic meanings, for instance turning them into norms, policies, or behavioral patterns. Thus, one could argue that people pick up attitudes and values from their surroundings, and unconsciously make them their own.

Often, the sensemaking process takes place instantly in a subconscious manner, making it possible for the individual to act immediately and effectively (Craig-Lees, 2001). In a hiring context, sensemaking occurs when recruiters try to make sense of the applicant behind the application. From the provided information, recruiters aim to understand who the applicants are, and whether they are suitable candidates for the position based on individual attributes, the requirements of the job, and the environment surrounding the job (Sandoval, 2008).

Cognitive biases

Cognitive biases are systematic errors in thinking which occur when people are processing and interpreting data in their surroundings as a way for the brain to simplify information processing (Cherry, 2020). These biases work as a rule of thumb and help to make sense of the world, which in turn influence judgements and decisions. Stereotyping is one example of such biases, and is an unconscious process in which the human brain generalizes people with a common feature, whether it is religion, ethnicity, gender, or something else (McLeod, 2015). In other words, people tend to categorize themselves and others into different groups. Scholars claim that these attitudes are learned and reinforced from media, as well as through social interactions (Cohen Abady, 2019). Hence, there could be a generational transmission of antisemitic attitudes, which explains why such discrimination and prejudices persist. However, individual differences within such a category are unconsciously neglected, which exaggerates the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This results in so-called *outgroup homogeneity bias* and hence facilitates ingroup favoritism, which explains why recruiters tend to prefer candidates like themselves (Cohen Abady, 2019).

Furthermore, people tend to process information that aligns with one's existing beliefs, and in extension ignore contrary evidence, a phenomenon known as 'confirmation bias' (Lundh, Montgomery & Waern, 1992). Such behavior results in an overconfidence in personal opinions and thus leads to improper decisions. Within a recruitment context, an example of this is when the recruiter adopts one-sided information about a group from the media, or during an interview when the recruiter only processes negative behavior of applicants belonging to a specific group.

Ideal worker

The ideal worker is a concept derived from scholars' theories that workplace policies and practices contribute to employee expectations that favor men (Acker, 1990). Ideal workers are employees who devote every waking moment to their work and prioritize it above everything else. The need for employee flexibility and adaptability disfavor women, as they are still primarily responsible for children and household chores. The prejudice that mothers cannot work full-time or long shifts, that they are less rational, more expressive, and less committed, make them less ideal workers (Benard & Correll, 2010). Women are hampered by all these factors from excelling in their careers and reaching leadership positions. However, other factors than gender might affect individuals for the same reason.

Realistic conflict theory

The realistic conflict theory (RCT) explains intergroup hostility and holds that limited resources, such as job scarcity, causes increased conflicts between competing groups, thus resulting in increased prejudice, discrimination, and violence towards the out-group (Şerif, 1996). For instance, research show a positive correlation between increased antisemitism and economic downturn (Legge, 1996). This could also be an explanatory factor to the increasing antisemitism worldwide during 2020 and 2021, when the pandemic was at its worst and hit the economy the hardest.

Scapegoating is an extreme form of RCT, and refers to the phenomenon where frustrated or unhappy people project their anger on groups that are relatively powerless, disliked, and visible in society. It tends to happen during difficult economic or political times, and where the target to blame is not obvious. Because of their visibility and historical weakness, Jews have often been blamed since they historically have been few in number, defenseless, and lacked a homeland (Cohen Abady, 2019).

2.2.2. Relation between theories and actors within recruitment

Sensemaking, cognitive biases, and the ideal worker together explain the triadic relationship between the job applicant, the recruiter, and the employer. Firstly, the employer conducts a candidate profile based on the ideal worker. Recruiters then compare this profile with applicants' competencies and visual appearances, using their own cognitive biases. In addition, the recruiter uses sensemaking to fill in the information gaps of the applicants. This includes what the person is like, and whether the individual is deemed to be a suitable candidate for the position. Lastly, the recruiter then presents the best candidates to the employer, who then evaluates and compares them against the ideal job applicant based on his/her own perceptions, influenced by cognitive biases and sensemaking. Figure 1 represents the process of hiring through recruitment consultancies, yet, it can also be applied to in-house recruitment by following the dualistic relationship between the job applicant and the employer visualized below.

RCT, however, was a concept explored during the interviews which do not directly affect recruitment, yet has a clear link to sensemaking. The authors interpret it as RCT existing in society, in which recruiters pick up attitudes and values unconsciously. Artifacts of this kind affect the subconscious of individuals, and in extension also recruiters, influencing their actions. Conclusively, the above-mentioned theories are possible to relate to one another, as they are all plausible explanations for why discrimination within recruitment occurs.

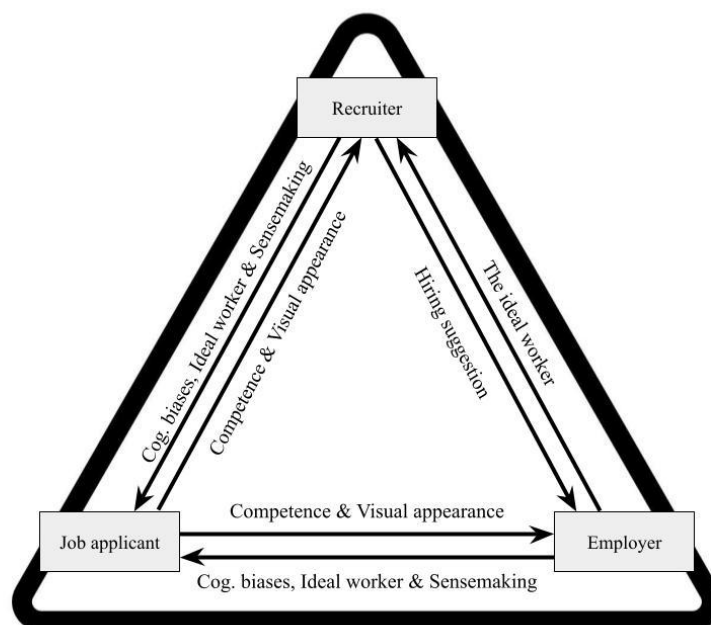


Figure 1: Triadic relationship between actors within recruitment and the connection to the theories.

Since the research field concerning antisemitism within recruitment has not been examined to a large extent, there are no established frameworks with models or theories to apply from earlier published studies of the authors' knowledge. Thus, there are limitations to the theories selected. RCT has no direct connection to religious discrimination within recruitment, yet to society at large, and the ideal worker only includes gender as a ground of discrimination for promotion, something that the authors have identified as a research gap.

2.3. Research gap

There seems to be a research gap in who is perceived as the ideal worker, a concept that describes difficulties for women to reach top management positions. Nevertheless, it does not consider whether someone is hired or not, which in turn affects one's chances of climbing the career ladder. Besides gender, there seems to be additional factors that determine whether candidates are perceived as ideal. Age, ethnicity, and religion were mentioned several times in the interviews as common grounds for discrimination, where the latter two have a distinct link and are within the scope of this study. Moreover, the field of antisemitism within recruitment and management research is a blind spot and hitherto almost an uncharted topic, despite increasing hate crimes across the world. This caught the attention and interest of the authors to investigate further.

3. Method

3.1. Research approach

This study was conducted with a subjectivist ontology and through the lens of an interpretive research philosophy. The authors see reality as a complex construct: it is socially constructed through culture and language, where time and place play significant roles. Therefore, people experience different social realities. In turn, this implies that interpretation of data plays a pivotal role in the research process. This approach was deemed suitable for the aim and research question at hand. Furthermore, methods of qualitative research were conducted, namely a balance of in-depth and semi-structured interviews. An interview template consisting of open questions covering discrimination in general as well as religious discrimination focusing on antisemitism, enabled to capture recruiters' interpretations. With only a few sample questions, this allowed for a climate of discussion and follow-up questions. In the course of qualitative research and interview processes, a deeper understanding of the prevalence of antisemitism, and how recruiters interpret it, was developed. These enriched learnings facilitated the examination of the most relevant theories. Thus, the theory section was continuously developed, in line with an inductive approach.

3.2. Interview approach

3.2.1. Pilot interview

To become familiar with the concept of conducting interviews and to test the applicability of the interview guide, a pilot interview was conducted with an interviewee possessing particular knowledge of how it is to live as a Jew in today's Sweden. The interviewee was deemed knowledgeable, which hopefully would lead to contribution with relevant information for thesis development.

3.2.2. Data collection and sample group

When investigating hiring processes, recruiters were deemed to be the most suitable group. As the study aimed to reflect how recruiters across Sweden interpret antisemitism within recruitment, the concept of maximum variation sampling was applied. This allowed for purposive selection of respondents based on gender and geographical location, hence ensuring breadth and comprehensiveness by bringing authenticity to the study (Shannon, Hambacher 2014). During early February 2022, participation from 64 recruiters was requested via email and social media. This resulted in 13 semi-constructed in-depth interviews during late February and March (see further description in Appendix 1). Although recruiters from across Sweden were approached, only two interviewees operated outside Stockholm. However, several of those that were operating in Stockholm, originated from other cities, both within and outside of Sweden, and were therefore able to draw conclusions from experiences in Stockholm and elsewhere.

The sessions were held in Swedish (12) and English (1), the native languages of the interviewees, in order for the respondents to express their thoughts and interpretations freely. Similarly, all sessions contained 10-15 minutes of introduction and establishing contact to enhance the likelihood of honest answers. Then, the meeting transitioned into an interview between 30 and 70 minutes, with a mean and median duration of 45 and 43 minutes respectively. Consistently, one author asked the questions and headed the interview, while the other took notes and transcribed the dialogue. Due to geographical distances, a tight schedule, and Covid-19 related issues, the interviews were conducted both on-site (4) and remotely (9) via digital applications that allowed replicating face-to-face interviews.

The initial intention of the preconstructed interview template was to first cover questions concerning discrimination within recruitment in general, to then cover detailed discussions regarding religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism. During the interviews, areas such as background of the problem, reason of its existence, and ideas of how to solve it, were discussed. After six interviews, there was sufficient data to notice patterns in the answers of the respondents, whilst still not capturing in-depth reasonings of the issue. Thus, some of the interview questions were altered halfway through the data collection to capture more nuanced reasonings about certain topics. Specifically, why some religious groups are discriminated against at a higher extent (see further description in Appendix 3 and 4).

3.2.3. Method discussion

As of the interpretive research paradigm, four factors were to affect the trustworthiness of the study: dependability, credibility, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Firstly, it is known that the research design of interpretive studies might indicate a lack of standardization. Semi-structured interviews could lead to concerns about reliability and dependability issues. To mitigate interviewer bias, both authors were present during the interviews, and the template with open questions was followed. Moreover, the authors' tone of voice and non-verbal behavior were kept in mind in order to avoid influencing the respondents' answers, and thereto, validation questions were asked to avoid misinterpretation. To mitigate interviewee bias, it was crucial to establish a comfortable environment to facilitate that completely honest answers were provided. Thus, prior to the interviews, the authors initiated a friendly chat and reminded the respondents that their identity would remain anonymous. Furthermore, since the sample group on one hand could be argued as quite small, the mentioned sample variation contributes to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other recruitment settings, and in extension also to the generalizability and transferability of the study.

3.3. Data coding

By pursuing a thematic analysis within an inductive approach, themes were derived from data retrieved from the interviews. Such themes were not predetermined, nor was a framework of themes imposed to examine the data based on existing theory. Instead, the occurrence and recurrence of existing themes were distinguished by comparing the interviews and searching for differences and similarities of content and behavior. By analyzing the content of the transcribed interviews, it was found that many respondents mention similar observations and interpretations from their professions. Thus, such themes provided an overview of the empirical material and simplified the later on conducted analysis. Then, coding was used to categorize the relevant themes, leading to sub-themes (second-order), which constitute the structure of the headings and subheadings in the empirics.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Throughout the study, various ethical considerations were pursued. Firstly, the participants were informed via email regarding the aim of the study and how the arrangement of the interviews were to be, which included that the interviews were not to be recorded. Also, since the study regards sensitive data, and to avoid clashing with GDPR-regulations, the interviewees were completely anonymous throughout the entire study. Secondly, a consent form for participation was sent out to ensure that the participants understood the terms for the interviews and what personal data to be collected.

4. Empirics

All respondents seem to agree that discrimination within recruitment is a significant problem. How discrimination manifests and which groups that are most likely to be affected is, however, still uncertain. A common theme that emerged in most of the interviews is references towards an ‘ideal job applicant’. The recruiters mention that applicants often are compared with a fictional ideal employee, who takes multiple factors into account, e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, and religion. This acts as a foundation in the formation of the requirements profile. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents also mention that it is common to hire candidates that are similar to the already existing employees within a company.

“The phenomenon of an ideal worker is mainly a result of ignorance, and is certainly influenced by social media such as LinkedIn. Hence, discrimination occurs more or less unconsciously.” - Interviewee G

4.1. Religious discrimination within recruitment

Religious discrimination manifests to various degrees depending on which religion one is practicing. Multiple religious groups share the prejudices against them not working as much as their atheist, or Christian, counterparts, according to the interviewees. For instance, some respondents express that believers must pray certain times a day during their working hours, and take time off, besides the already established Swedish holidays, to celebrate their religious festivals. During the interviews, it was also mentioned that Jewish women might be discriminated against, and perceived as lazy since they might pick up their children early from daycare in accordance with Shabbat².

4.1.1. Antisemitism

Overall, all of the respondents are convinced that antisemitism is a significant societal issue. Nevertheless, only one has encountered it within recruitment. This single respondent, who is a practicing Jew and whose company has connections to Israel, has experienced discrimination both as a recruiter and as an entrepreneur. The interviewee mentions that as a Jew, one must put up with all kinds of antisemitic comments when negotiating in business contexts, such as ‘Why should you have so much more? Stop with your Jewish stuff’ or ‘Stop being such a Jew now’. The respondent also mentions that even though such comments are generalizations rather than direct violations, they are examples of antisemitism.

² On Fridays, Jewish preschools close earlier due to the Jewish day of rest.

Furthermore, the interviewee explains that such comments are due to historical and imprinted views of Jews, as standing together and being part of the upper class of society. Apart from extreme hate crimes by certain groups, few Jews in today's Western society are explicitly oppressed, isolated or harmed by others. Instead, there have been clients that have refused to do business with the interviewee's company due to its connection to Israel, as cited below.

*"Jews associated with the upper class have reinforced the prejudices. All good Hollywood movies throw such comments."*³

*"Clients actively refuse to do business with my company just because of its connections to Israel."*⁴

4.1.2. Islamophobia

Like the mentioned study by DO (see section 1.1), the empirics suggest that Islamophobia is concluded by a majority of the respondents to be the most intensified religious discrimination. A common view of why this is the case is that Jews and Christians have more in common than Muslims have with either religious group. Also, linked to the previously discussed concept of the ideal worker, Jews are culturally more like 'ethnic Swedes', according to the interviewees.

In addition, the perceived importance of affinity can be linked to another phenomenon that was mentioned during the interviews, namely some kind of 'proximity principle'⁵. Simply put, those who spoke of this phenomenon claimed that the further (geographically distanced) one is from another ethnic group, the less one identifies with it. Geographical distance, in turn, contributes to increased differences in culture, values, and visual appearances between groups. The combination of these aspects determines whether people view others as similar or different to oneself, a conclusion that a majority of the respondents agree upon. For instance, one example of why there exists Islamophobia within recruitment is that Islam's values might clash with the Swedish view of women and equality, mentioned by the respondents. Two female recruiters mention that they have met job applicants who have not wanted to shake their hands because of their gender, due to their religious faith.

"It is hard for recruiters, you do not want to discriminate against an individual's religious belief, nor hire someone who discriminates against women." - Interviewee D

³ Interviewee not identified due to sensitive data of religious faith, in accordance with GDPR-regulations

⁴ ibid

⁵ Not to be confound with Milgram's behavioral experiment

Although Judaism and Islam originate from a similar region of the world, Jews usually do not stand out as much from the Swedish norm compared to Muslims, which is due to differences in visual appearance, according to the interviewees. Highlighted by the respondents is that religious attributes of the Muslim community, such as hijabs and niqabs, have a negative impact on the perception of the job applicant. Such religious attributes could be perceived as foreign and different compared to the normative Swedish appearance. In addition, it has also been mentioned as easier to identify Muslims compared to Jews and Christians, who often wear nothing more than a discrete necklace with the Star of David or a crucifix, at least in Sweden.

“It is easier to identify Muslims compared to Jews. [...] If you wear a niqab in Sweden, you won’t get a job.” - Interviewee M

“It is much more obvious if someone wears a hijab rather than a necklace with a small crucifix.” - Interviewee J

4.2. Religious discrimination in society

Throughout the study it was found that society influences recruitment to a large extent, which is why the empirics have been segmented into one part concerning discrimination within recruitment and one part that reflects discrimination in society. The empirics indicate that the groups discriminated against in society may not always be the same as within recruitment. For instance, ageism and sexism were factors frequently referred to when discussing discrimination within recruitment. However, such forms of discrimination were not once mentioned at a societal level. Contrastingly, there are indications of both religious and ethnic discrimination existing within recruitment, as well as in society at large.

4.2.1. Antisemitism

Most respondents state that the majority of the population in Sweden does not hold antisemitic attitudes, at least not openly. Just as within recruitment, Jews might be exposed to antisemitic comments or political stances towards Israel. However, the societal consequences of antisemitism have escalated and become a threat for the first time in decades, according to an interviewee⁶. A majority of the other respondents agree upon the societal development of antisemitism, where several believe that increased immigration and hate crimes are related. Hence, many interviewees suggest that some of the existing antisemitism could be an ‘imported issue’.

⁶ Interviewee not identified due to sensitive data of religious faith, in accordance with GDPR-regulations

“The question is, does antisemitism really exist among Swedes, or is it a reaction by newcomers?” - Interviewee D

“I believe that there is religious discrimination in Sweden. However, I doubt that Christians or atheists are the ones responsible for it. Rather, it might be Jews, Muslims or other religious groups that oppress one another.” - Interviewee H

Some respondents refer to the same phenomenon, and mention that they know of people from the Middle East who are possessing an Islamic faith simultaneously as possessing antisemitic opinions. The respondents continue by mentioning that there is a lot of tension between Jews and Muslims due to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In other words, some interviewees believe that antisemitic attitudes mainly are held by Muslims. Furthermore, many respondents believe that there are geographical differences in antisemitic attitudes. There seems to be a common perception that antisemitism is associated with Skåne, and certainly Malmö. Some interviewees identify a connection between increased hate crimes in Malmö and immigration, and once again refer to the historical conflicts between Jews and Muslims.

“Malmö is the gateway to Sweden and many immigrants, such as those from the Arab world with Muslim faith, settle there.” - Interviewee N

Respondents also portray differences of urban and rural perspectives on antisemitism. The most usual explanations presented is that Stockholm, as a bigger and more ‘evolved’ city, has been spared antisemitic hate crimes, at least to a larger extent. Antisemitism is generally associated with smaller cities across Sweden, where low-educated population and job scarcity are common, according to the interviewees.

“In smaller villages, there is often job scarcity and high unemployment. Highly educated people tend to move to bigger cities where there are more job opportunities. Those who stay tend to blame Jews and foreigners for stealing their jobs.” - Interviewee K

Interviewee K continues:

“There is a lot of trash talking in the countryside. I come from a small village where attitudes that prevailed during World War II still exist, as Nazi values are inherited.”

This explanation is shared by other respondents:

“Small towns are generally slower to develop, and xenophobic views still persist.”

- Interviewee C

“If you are a closed-minded individual, and perhaps come from a small town, you may be more intimidated by the unknown. The smaller the town, the more similar the people.”

- Interviewee N

4.2.2. Islamophobia

During the interviews, Muslims were commonly identified as scapegoats. Hence, interviewees were asked why Muslims, if so, are oppressed to a higher extent compared to other religious groups. In addition to the already mentioned cultural and visual deviations, media was identified as a source of negative influence by a vast majority of the interviewees. The respondents argue that media affects people's prejudices about certain groups and strengthens already existing stereotypes, and many are convinced that the tone against Islam has worsened since the refugee crisis in 2015, just as it did after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

“The public debate has created opinion corridors [...] we are highly affected by the media and our surroundings. It is easy to connect such incidents [war and violence in the suburbs] with people from the Middle East, who often are Muslims.” - Interviewee M

“Muslims in the suburbs are portrayed in a certain way in the media.” - Interviewee I

4.3. Ethnic discrimination

The empirics show an evident connection between religion and ethnicity. Comprehensively, several of the respondents mention that non-European groups more often are exposed to discrimination within recruitment, especially people with African or Arabic origin. Depending on where in Africa an individual originates from, the grounds of discrimination seem to be varying. Just as people originating from the Middle East, individuals from certain African countries (such as Northern Africa) are heavily associated with Islam, and are in turn at risk of being exposed to Islamophobia. Examples of such Islamophobia is that the Swedish society seems to have a more open-minded attitude towards accepting Ukrainian refugees, from the ongoing war with Russia, compared to their Afghan and Muslim counterparts, which were referred to several times by the interviewees.

Meanwhile, people originating from Sub-Saharan Africa, are instead at greater risk of being exposed to racism connected to skin color rather than religion, according to the respondents. Hence, visual appearance seems to be a vital explanation to which groups are being discriminated against. When asked why these groups were discriminated against to a higher degree, rather than for instance people originating from Latin America, who also possess visual features that differ from the Swedish norm, four respondents mention the proximity principle as an explanation. Several respondents mention that people generally prefer others who are like themselves, and in this case, Latin Americans were referred to as more alike Swedes compared to people originating from the Middle East or Africa.

“While Latin America geographically is further away from Sweden than the Middle East and Africa, that region shares many cultural elements with Spanish culture as a result of the colonization of America, which in turn is perceived to be closer and more Swedish in nature.”

- Interviewee K

“ [...] it is the visual appearance that is discriminated against more than anything else because man is so single-minded towards many things.” - Interviewee G

“People with deviant names, skin colors, and origins are more likely to be discriminated against than those who conform to the norm.” - Interviewee A

Consequently, several interviewees mention that recruiters often recommend the ‘safe option’, i.e. job applicants that fit into the norm and the candidate profile presented by the client.

“One wants to play it safe when recruiting for certain positions.” - Interviewee I

Additionally, another reason why discrimination within recruitment affects people from the Arab world to a greater extent, is that the average Swede, and thus in extension the overall recruiter, possesses less knowledge of such cultures and general ways of living, compared to more closely related regions, according to the interviewees.

4.4. Preventive measures

Another theme that was discussed is how the respondents suggest to prevent discrimination within recruitment. This, in combination with the discussion regarding what actors having the biggest possibility of implementing such measures, constituted the closure of each interview. In general, the respondents believe that the legislation must be reviewed and possibly strengthened, to prevent discrimination within recruitment. Nevertheless, all respondents were convinced that a combination of

individual and societal responsibilities is required to prevent discrimination within recruitment, and several different measures were therefore presented.

4.4.1. Anonymous recruitment

The most common measure brought up during the interviews is to anonymize the process. Conducting selection processes of candidates in a more anonymous manner, i.e. using support systems to exclude names and pictures from resumés, would possibly protect the job applicant to suffer from discrimination. On the contrary, some respondents state that the less that is known of an applicant, the more the minds of recruiters want to fill in the gaps.

“There are certain systems, such as ATS, which filter out personal traits such as names, and photos. [...] Instead, we take factors such as experience and education into account. The conditions for more companies to implement such systems exist, but few are willing to take the step.” - Interviewee J

4.4.2. Standardized recruitment

A closely related measure to anonymization, brought up by several respondents, is to standardize recruitment. This does not necessarily cover anonymization, but instead making sure that every job applicant experiences the same process when applying for a position.

“Standardized recruitment is probably the right way to go. Asking applicants the same questions, leads to a focus on competence. Otherwise, it is easy to get into side tracks that create biases, which might affect the outcome of the recruitment.”
- Interviewee H

4.4.3. Artificial intelligence

Another potential measure to prevent discrimination within recruitment, discussed by a majority of the respondents, is implementation of artificial intelligence (AI). Such an implementation would contribute to anonymization and standardization of the recruitment process. However, this is a controversial topic within the industry. Some respondents state that recruitment is leaning towards less human contact, and that this will result in more equality. On the other hand, other respondents mention that AI is programmed after human behavior, and since discrimination originates from humans, machines will imitate such behavior. One interviewee mentions studies where only male job applicants had been considered for a position when evaluated by AI, even though female profiles had as much experience and competence.

4.4.4. Group assessment

An additional mentioned preventative measure is to implement group assessment, which refers to that several recruiters are part of the hiring process in order to mitigate the risk of job applicants suffering from discrimination. By allowing the candidate to meet more recruiters, more opinions are considered when the selection is to be completed. This might on the one hand be time consuming, but on the other hand worth it to decrease discrimination, according to the interviewees.

5. Analysis

The following section is based on the empirical material originating from the interviews and aims to analyze the recruiters' interpretations of religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism, within hiring processes in Sweden. Furthermore, an analysis regarding what such a phenomenon is based on, and how it connects to society as a whole, will be executed.

5.1. Religious discrimination within recruitment

When the respondents were asked about the most common forms of discrimination within recruitment, the empirical findings suggest ageism, sexism, as well as ethnic and religious discrimination to occur most frequently. However, due to the scope of the thesis, the authors decided to rather focus on the religious discrimination and its distinct linkage to ethnicity. Henceforth, an overall assessment of religious and ethnic discrimination is pursued. This linkage can in turn be analyzed based on several sub-areas, that explain why such discrimination exists and why antisemitism is not as a distinct issue as Islamophobia.

5.1.1. Proximity principle and visual appearance

Religious attributes

From the empirics, it is apparent that the proximity principle finds expression within recruitment. A common mentioned feature is that visual appearance tends to affect who is discriminated against. When talking about religious attributes, a necklace with the Star of David was the one most identified with the Jewish population, as Jews in Sweden seldom wear any other attributes than that, according to the interviewees. However, when referring to Islam, most interviewees only mentioned religious attributes worn by Muslim women. This is probably due to that the equivalent to a hijab or a niqab do not exist among Muslim men in Sweden to the same extent.

Religious attributes might be identified from the attached picture in the application documents, but also during a potential interview. The empirical findings suggest that certain religious attributes, such as hijabs and niqabs, are more easily recognized than for instance a necklace with a Star of David or a crucifix. On the other hand, one could also argue that Jews in Sweden are not as easily recognized because they might consciously hide their religious characteristics. This could be due to fear of oppression, possibly originating from past experiences of persecution, such as the Holocaust, but also from increased hate crimes against Jews across the globe today. The question then is why do Muslim women keep wearing their head coverings, when there is a high risk of being exposed to Islamophobia which delimits their chances of getting a job? While not supported by any empirical data, it is believed by the authors that some practicing Muslims might continue wearing their religious attributes

in protest as a result of the increased negative attitudes towards their community. They might feel the need of standing up for themselves, as well as for others in the Muslim community, fighting for their rights in a peaceful way. Furthermore, not wearing any religious attributes could put believers at odds with their self-image and create rifts with their religion. Thus, hiding a necklace below one's shirt is easier than hiding a religious head covering.

Nevertheless, the empirics illustrate that those applicants who wear Islamic attributes are more likely to be discriminated against within recruitment than those practicing other religions, regardless of visible accessories. This is due to cognitive biases and the widespread Islamophobia in society, which individuals (recruiters included) tend to pick up through unconscious sensemaking. Overall, the visual factors seem to be crucial as they make it easier for recruiters to subconsciously assess whether an applicant fits into one's preconceived notions about what the person receiving the job should be and look like.

Names

The authors further believe that names can be another example of visual attributes, which in turn might have a negative impact on the hiring process for Muslims, especially for men. In resumés, recruiters can interpret visual factors by assessing the name of the job applicant. Names can give identification of ethnicity, and in extension also religion as of the determined connection between those factors. Cohen and Levi, for instance, are common Jewish surnames. Since the Jewish population is defined as an ethnoreligious group, there is thus a direct link between name, religion, and origin. Similarly, Mohammed and Ali are popular surnames in the Arab world, and hence highly associated with Islam.

The connection between name and origin, and in extension also religion, facilitates incorrect interpretations and assumptions of people. These preconceptions are in turn affected by the media and its influence on the increasing Islamophobia in Sweden. It is possible that as a result of this, Muslim men will be more associated with violence and war than Muslim women, since women are rarely reported to be involved in incidents connected with radical Islamism. People with Jewish names, on the other hand, might not be exposed to the same structural oppression since the Jewish population in general is more accepted in Sweden. One contributing factor could be that Jews in Sweden have lived here for generations, and many times have Swedish-sounding names, making them more difficult to distinguish as foreign and different. Contradictory, the Muslim population has not been present in Sweden for equivalent amount of time, and few with Islamic faith have Swedish-sounding names. Hence, there are different grounds of why Muslim men and women are being exposed to

discrimination, as well as to why Jews are not being discriminated against to the same extent, leastways in Sweden.

Cultural differences

Another possible reason why Jews are not discriminated against to the same extent compared to Muslims, is because it traditionally has been more common to simultaneously be identified as both Jewish and Swedish. This could be due to the fact that one has had Jewish relatives living in Sweden for generations, which historically has been more common than for Muslims. Thus, it is usually more common as a Jew living in Sweden today to appear as 'Swedish', compared to the Muslim counterpart. This is the case since many Jews probably have adapted to the secularized Swedish culture for generations, and hence to some extent also lost one's roots to ancestors' origins, as well as their religion. However, this will probably change for coming generations, since Sweden has pursued a large immigration of Muslims in recent decades, who in the future also will be considered as 'Swedish'.

In addition to the fact that Muslims seem to be thought of as less 'Swedish', compared to Jews, Muslims are also easier to identify due to religious attributes, and thus thought of as foreign and different, which acts as a catalyst for the widespread Islamophobia. This could be due to man's fear of the unknown, by acting more comfortable in its innermost homogenous circle. Thus, excluding the out-group in favor of the in-group. Also, since Sweden is one of the most secularized countries in the world, people practicing a religious belief, particularly Muslims, are even easier to distinguish, which again leads to a contradiction to the norm. The fact that Muslims are discriminated against to a greater extent compared to Jews is therefore not entirely due to the fact that they practice different religions, but rather that it is often easier to distinguish Muslims as foreign and different from 'ethnic Swedes'.

Geographical distance

Alongside visual appearance and cultural differences, the empirics point towards that geographical distance often has an impact on which groups that are at greater risk of being discriminated against. Geographical distance often serves as a basis for cultural differences and differences in visual appearance, which together lead to the risk of feeling excluded and thus associated as foreign and different. The Jewish population has historically been more present on the European continent compared to Muslims, which may have led to Muslims feeling more geographically alienated than Jews. This may thus serve as an explanation for why Jews are not discriminated against to the same extent as Muslims.

5.1.2. The ideal job applicant and the influence of religion

It has earlier been concluded that visual attributes contribute to who is perceived as the ideal job applicant, since such attributes could give identification of age, gender, ethnicity, and religion, factors all mentioned by interviewees as grounds of discrimination. The ideal job applicant manifests in the requirements profile as well as during interviews and evaluations of candidates, who are compared with a fictional supreme job applicant. Recruiters' unawareness of their ignorance towards certain groups being excluded from the recruitment process is further strengthened by the media's influence on the requirements profile. In addition, confirmation biases are catalyzed by the media, which in interactions with other people strengthens already existing biased opinions.

Prejudices towards various ethnicities and religions seem to affect certain groups negatively within recruitment. Assessing candidates based on stereotypes results in individual differences within such a category being unconsciously neglected, exaggerating the differences between 'us' and 'them'. Hence, stereotyping leads to an outgroup homogeneity bias, i.e. interpreting people with similar characteristics as homogeneous, and thereby possibly leading to discrimination within recruitment. In addition, since recruiters tend to want to 'play it safe' when recruiting for a position, individuals who do not clash with the norm of how a candidate should be and look like, as well as who appears to be more alike the recruiter, are often preferred. In-group favoritism thus puts other candidates at disadvantage, compared to those that are deemed to be more ideal for the position.

The applicants being most discriminated against were first and foremost ethnicities originating from the Arab world, such as the Middle East and certain parts of Africa, according to the empirical findings. People originating from these regions are often believed to be Muslims, even though that is not always the case. Furthermore, as ethnicity and religion are linked, people of Arabic, and sometimes also African, origin are not only exposed to prejudices linked to their ethnicity, but also to Islamophobia regardless of them practicing Islam or not. Islam in turn, is exposed to various prejudices, among other things its view of women, which collides with the Swedish view on equality. Muslim men that practice a more traditional form of Islam can be denied the position if they are not willing to shake hands with their female colleagues due to their faith. In addition, Muslims seem to be stereotyped as violent, which further hinders their career opportunities.

Moreover, there are perceptions that religious employees work less as they might pray certain times a day or take time off to celebrate religious holidays. Jews might pick up their children early from daycare on Fridays due to Shabbat, which might affect the perception of Jewish women within recruitment. Thus, religious job applicants are likely not to be assessed as ideal, since there is a perception of them not prioritizing work over their personal life.

5.1.3. Media and social influence

As aforementioned, media is often reporting of war, violence and terrorism connected to Islam. Traditionally, such events have not infrequently taken place in the Arab world or been executed by Muslim extremists or terrorists. Examples of such are the war against ISIS, the Taliban occupation in Afghanistan, the 9/11 attacks, and various other terrorist attacks, which may have contributed to prejudices of Islam as a hostile religion. In Sweden, the terrorist attack in April 2017 on Drottninggatan, as well as the ongoing violence in the suburbs of the bigger cities across the nation, have come to affect many Swedes on a closer level. In turn, this might work as an unconscious prejudice against Muslims. Media's contribution to an already sensitive issue has then spread via various channels over time, and acts as a catalyst to the escalation of today's Islamophobia. These types of media, in combination with social interactions with friends, family and colleagues, tend to influence people to a large extent. Sensemaking and cognitive biases thus contribute to the negative attitudes towards people with a Middle Eastern or Northern African origin, and in extension also towards Muslims.

5.2. Religious discrimination in society

5.2.1. Opposing groups and geographical differences in attitudes

Different ethnicities and religions can function as opposing groups, which may contribute to discrimination towards the out-group. This could in turn partly explain the prevailing antisemitism and Islamophobia in Sweden, mainly found on a societal level, but also within recruitment to some extent.

A common perception is that antisemitism is especially connected to Skåne, and certainly Malmö. Some interviewees identify a connection between increased hate crimes towards Jews in Malmö and the influx of Muslim immigrants. Several respondents express that since Malmö is one of the most southern Swedish cities, it functions as the gateway to Sweden. Thus, many immigrants choose to settle there, which includes both Jews and Muslims, which in turn might be a reason for why such conflicts arise in Malmö to a higher extent. These incidents once again refer to the long-running conflict about the holy land, Israel - a sparse resource according to RCT. Hence, some of the prevailing antisemitism could be explained as an 'imported issue'.

Furthermore, these conflicts and violations can in turn be an explanation of the increasing xenophobia in Sweden. Hate crimes performed by people with an Islamic faith could be seen as a consequence of failing integration, which in turn evokes frustration among citizens. Consequently, this dissatisfaction causes all individuals perceived as being of Arabic origin (and in extension expected to be Muslims) to be blamed and scapegoated, resulting in conflicts between 'ethnic Swedes' and immigrants.

Interestingly, the empirics do not suggest that there is widespread Islamophobia within the Jewish population in Sweden, despite the intensified Israel-Palestine conflict. This in turn shows that the recruiters, and in extension most likely also average Swedes, possess a better image of Jews in general compared to Muslims.

A further relevant theme that was concluded from the interviews is that there seems to be differences in xenophobic attitudes between cities and rural areas. For instance, the most frequent explanation to why Stockholm has been spared with antisemitic hate crimes is that the capital is a multicultural, big and 'evolved' city, with a greater acceptance of norm-breaking appearance. However, Islamophobia manifests and is believed to have a connection to the radical Islamism that has shaken the city during the last decade. These incidents have been reported frequently in media, which has impacted the increasing negative attitudes towards Muslims, and people assumed to be practicing Islam.

Antisemitism is instead associated with smaller cities across Sweden, at least to a higher extent. The empirics indicate that the most palpable reason for this is due to job scarcity, which most often is found in smaller towns in the countryside where a majority of the population is low-educated, which could result in frustration and scapegoating, e.g. foreigners 'stealing' the locals' jobs. Evolvment in the countryside is lagging, which could explain the persisting Nazi-values, mentioned by one of the interviewees. Moreover, as another interviewee puts it, "*the smaller the town, the more similar the people*" which exaggerates the 'we against them' attitude. These are all explanatory factors to why minorities are the ones to blame as they are easier to identify in a homogeneous small town. Such behavior, however, does not only affect Jews, but also Muslims, where the latter seem to be even more scapegoated as of the media's reporting and the overall discussed failure of integration.

The realistic conflict theory thus explains discrimination on a societal level, such as opposing groups and the conflicts arising between them. The theory can, however, in turn be used to explain how societal values affect discrimination within recruitment. This is due to its mentioned connection to sensemaking where recruiters pick up attitudes and values unconsciously from their surroundings, which in turn may influence their actions and therefore function as the basis for discrimination within recruitment. Thus, perhaps such values exist to a greater extent than what this thesis portrays, since many recruiters are unaware of the absorption by others through interactions, inherited behavior, and medial impact.

6. Discussion

In this section, a discussion regarding preventive measures hindering discrimination within recruitment is presented. Since this is not in line with the research question, it is presented as a separate discussion. However, the preventive measures serve as implications of the analyzed material, and from the empirics, four interventions were presented.

6.1. Anonymous recruitment

Anonymous recruitment was mentioned as an intervention for mitigating biases, and in turn discrimination, in the selection phase in which application documents are being assessed. A vast majority of the interviewees suggest that anonymous recruitment would decrease the amount of information that a job applicant could be discriminated against. For instance, removing the attachment of picture and name would make it impossible for recruiters to assume the ethnicity and religious faith of applicants. Additionally, some respondents state that the less that is known about applicants, the more the minds of the recruiters want to fill in the gaps. This aligns with the theory of sensemaking, which is pursued unconsciously. Hence, anonymization might rather result in setbacks.

6.2. Artificial intelligence

In the case of AI, the reasoning differed significantly. Some argue that AI, as a form of anonymizing applications, likely will be the future of recruitment, whilst others claim it to be even more problematic than human recruitment. Those who mention the latter argue that since AI is built and programmed by humans, it is impossible to create an employment assessment that is completely unbiased. All in all, a majority of the respondents seem to agree that regardless if AI is the future of recruitment or not, the technique is not sufficiently developed to use today. In addition, since the technique is not established in the labor market, it will require massive costs to develop the technology but also to train staff for it to be managed properly.

6.3. Standardized recruitment

Meanwhile the above preventive measures mitigate the tendency for discrimination in the selection phase, standardized recruitment reduces the risk of discrimination occurring during the entire recruitment process. Standardized recruitment implies that applicants will experience the same procedure when applying for a job, e.g. performing identical tests and being asked the same questions. Optimally, the questions should be predetermined and only cover areas connecting to the candidates' competencies. By following these questions, this mitigates the risk of recruiters going off-topic, and hence reducing the risk of various biases affecting the choice of candidate. Many respondents claim this as the most effective way to reduce discrimination within recruitment, yet, standardized

recruitment only spares applicants from being discriminated against by non-visible factors. During the interviews, however, the visible factors will be evident that might negatively affect those deviating from the norm.

6.4. Group assessment

Another potential preventive measure is to apply group assessment when choosing the optimal candidate for a position. Implementing this could increase the likelihood of group diversity, making recruiters less likely to base their decisions on biases and might thus benefit candidates who are not perceived as the ideal job applicant. On the other hand, some recruiters argue that the recruiting industry is quite homogeneous. Would there then be diversity within the group? Arguably, this would rather result in not much of a difference compared to individual assessment. There is also an enhanced possibility for groupthink, especially within homogeneous groups. There is thus no obvious answer as to whether such a preventive measure does more good than harm.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Answering the research question

The empirics suggest that there exists religious discrimination within recruitment, where the candidate is unconsciously compared with an ideal job applicant, which in turn is based on the concepts of an ideal worker, sensemaking, and cognitive biases. However, it seems like such discrimination is more apparent towards Muslims, rather than Jews. This could be explained through what many recruiters refer to as the ‘proximity principle’, where geographical distance, culture, values, and visual attributes determine whether people view others as equals or foreigners. Nevertheless, recruiters tend to prefer candidates who are like themselves. This in turn explains why Muslims are more discriminated against than Jews, as many refer to Muslims as different from ‘ethnic Swedes’.

Most recruiters do not seem to have experienced antisemitism within recruitment, yet believe that it is a societal problem, partly due to an increasing immigration of groups with a history of conflict with Jews. Thus, many interviewees believe that it is an imported problem. This acts as an explanation of why antisemitism is not an equally widespread phenomenon within recruitment, since the proportion of immigrants in society at large is small, and even smaller within the field of recruitment. However, in accordance with sensemaking, people could unconsciously pick-up attitudes and values from their surroundings, and internalize them. Hence, if there are opinions of antisemitism in society, it should also exist within recruitment, but the unconsciousness of biases and behavior could explain why the recruiters did not have experienced it. Thus, antisemitism could possibly be more prevalent within recruitment than what the empirical findings present.

Another explanation for why antisemitism does not seem to be especially prevalent within recruitment could be that ‘ethnic Swedes’ possessing obsolete prejudices and opinions of Jews seldom work within the field of recruitment. The empirics suggest that such attitudes often are apparent in parts of Sweden where fewer people possess a post-secondary education, and where job opportunities are limited. Another interesting phenomenon is the form of antisemitism that one of the recruiters, who is a practicing Jew, encounters in the profession. This refers to the fact that some people tend to avoid doing business with the company since it is associated with Israel. Could this be a tendency of a new form of antisemitism manifesting among average Swedes?

Concludingly, it seems relevant to discuss why Muslims seem to be discriminated against to a higher extent compared to Jews, which mainly has to do with visual appearance. This in combination with recruiters’ biases, and Jews often being associated with geographically closer countries, explain why Jewish candidates more often are considered as closer to the ideal job applicant than their Muslim

counterparts. Together, these phenomena explain why religious discrimination occurs, but perhaps even more importantly, how recruiters interpret it.

7.2. Contribution and implications

The study contributes to the theory of the ideal worker, which originally illustrates why men are favored over women within recruitment. However, in this study, it has been established that there are other grounds of discrimination than gender that contribute to who is thought of as the ideal worker. Both ethnicity and religion appear to affect the impression of applicants and in extension the possibilities of becoming employed. Moreover, women are still being discriminated against at a higher extent compared to men with the same origin and faith. By considering the discussed preventive measures, as well as being aware of one's own cognitive biases, recruiters can mitigate the risk of religious discrimination to occur.

7.3. Limitations and future research

Regarding the overrepresentation of recruiters operating in Stockholm, the results might have been different if more respondents residing from elsewhere would have been interested in participating in the study, as of the discussed geographical differences in opinions. Also, if there had been possibilities to adjust the sample group, by interviewing Jews, perhaps different data would have been received. Furthermore, the study can be developed to cover a larger field of discrimination within recruitment. By doing so, it can be determined what other groups are affected by discrimination, besides ethnic and religious. As mentioned, a theory reflecting the core of the main content, is the ideal worker. The empirics refer to that discrimination in the form of ageism is frequent, and can thus be further explained by the theory of the ideal worker in future research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Table of interviews and respondents

Interviewee	Gender	Location	Experience in recruitment	Recruits	Type of interview	Date	Duration
A ⁷	Female	Stockholm	N.A.	N.A.	On-site	2022-02-21	30 min
B	Female	Stockholm	8 years	Junior positions and middle managers within HR and administration	On-site	2022-02-22	43 min
C	Female	Stockholm	7 years	Junior positions and middle managers within sales and marketing	On-site	2022-02-22	47 min
D	Female	Stockholm	7 years	Senior positions within tech and IT	On-site	2022-02-25	70 min
E	Female	Stockholm	5 years	Middle managers and senior positions within building and construction	Digital	2022-02-28	40 min
F	Female	Stockholm	9 years	Senior positions within sales, marketing, accounting, administration and IT	On-site	2022-03-03	45 min
G	Male	Stockholm	3 years	All kinds of positions within operations and logistics	Digital	2022-03-04	46 min
H ⁸	Male	Stockholm	12 years	All kinds of positions within sales, HR and accounting	Digital	2022-03-07	42 min
I	Female	Stockholm	11 years	Senior positions within PR, marketing and sales	Digital	2022-03-08	47 min
J	Male	Gothenburg	3 years	Senior positions within IT	Digital	2022-03-08	36 min
K	Male	Karlstad	18 years	All kinds of positions within white-collar occupations	Digital	2022-03-10	41 min
L	Male	Stockholm	1 year	Middle management and junior positions within sales	Digital	2022-03-10	30 min
M	Male	Stockholm	25 years	Senior positions within finance	Digital	2022-03-11	61 min
N	Male	Stockholm	4 years	Junior positions within white-collar occupations	Digital	2022-03-15	43 min

⁷ Refers to the initial pilot interview

⁸ From here, the second interview template was established

Appendix 2. Email sent to recruiters (translated to English)

Hi [First- & Last name]!

My name is [First- & Last name] and I am a third-year student at the Stockholm School of Economics. My thesis partner and I are currently writing our bachelor thesis within management, where we plan on executing a qualitative study examining how recruiters interpret antisemitism and other forms av religious discrimination within hiring processes in Sweden. Hence, we are wondering whether you are interested in participating in a fully anonymous interview with us at the beginning of March? Such an interview would not be recorded and last for approximately 45 minutes, but we are flexible and can thereby adapt the interview to your requests. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

[First- & Last name]

Appendix 3. Interview template A (initial version)

1. Tell us a bit about yourself!
 - a. For how long have you been a recruiter/recruiting consultant?
 - b. What types of roles do you assess: within which field and at what level?
2. What is your impression of potential discrimination within recruitment in Sweden?
3. Are there groups that are more discriminated against than others?
 - a. If so, why do you believe that is the case?
 - b. Has it changed over time? Why/why not?
 - c. Does this type of discrimination take place to varying degrees in different industries, as well as in different organizational contexts (recruitment processes, organizational cultures, organizational hierarchies etc.)?
4. What is your impression of potential antisemitism within recruitment in Sweden?
 - a. What is the background for this?
 - b. Has it changed over time? Why/why not?
5. What could be done in order to prevent potential discrimination from occurring within recruitment?
6. Who bears the ultimate responsibility for bringing about change, and who is most likely to succeed with it?

Appendix 4. Interview template B (finalized version)

1. Tell us a bit about yourself!
 - a. For how long have you been a recruiter/recruiting consultant?
 - b. What types of roles do you assess: within which field and what level?
2. Are there ethnic groups which are more discriminated against than others within recruitment?
 - a. If so, why do you believe that is the case?
3. What is your perception of how discrimination towards religious groups manifests in Sweden?
 - a. Is religious discrimination present within recruitment?
 - b. Are there religious groups who are being more discriminated against than others?
 - c. If so, why do you believe that is the case?
 - d. Has it changed over time? Why/why not?
4. What is your impression of potential antisemitism within recruitment?
 - a. What is the background for this?
 - b. Has it changed over time? Why/why not?
5. What could be done in order to prevent potential discrimination from occurring in recruitment processes?
6. Who bears the ultimate responsibility for bringing about change, and who is most likely to succeed with it?