

United States District Court
Northern District of California

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

STEVE RABIN, et al.,
Plaintiffs,

v.

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP,
Defendant.

Case No. 16-cv-02276-JST

**ORDER DENYING COLLECTIVE
CERTIFICATION**

Re: ECF No. 198

Before the Court is Plaintiffs Steve Rabin and John Chapman’s motion for conditional certification of their proposed collective action. ECF No. 198. They seek to certify a class of older applicants for employment at Defendant PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLC (“PwC”), alleging that such applicants were subject to age discrimination. As set forth below, the Court concludes that Rabin and Chapman are not substantially similar either to unqualified applicants or to deterred applicants, both of which categories are part of the larger collective action they seek to certify. Accordingly, the Court denies the motion.¹

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs filed this putative collective action on April 27, 2016. ECF No. 1. They allege that PwC “engag[es] in an intentional, companywide, and systemic policy, pattern, and/or practice of discrimination against [older] applicants” and “maintain[s] discriminatory policies, patterns, and/or practices that have an adverse impact on [older] applicants and prospective applicants.”

¹ The Court has filed this order under seal because it contains material subject to sealing orders. Within seven days of the filing date of this order, the parties’ shall provide the Court a stipulated redacted version of this order, redacting only those portions of the order containing or referring to material for which the Court has granted a motion to seal and for which the parties’ still request the material be sealed. The Court will then issue a redacted version of the order.

1 ECF No. 42 ¶ 115. Plaintiffs claim that PwC “maintains hiring policies and practices for giving
2 preference to younger employees that result in the disproportionate employment of younger
3 applicants.” Id. ¶ 6. According to the complaint, these practices also deter older applicants from
4 applying for positions at PwC in the first place. Id. ¶ 11.

5 Defendant PwC is a global accounting and auditing firm that employs more than 70,000
6 employees in the Americas. ECF No. 198-6 at 19-20, 44. By PwC’s own account, its “workforce
7 is strikingly young.” ECF No. 198 at 13 n.25. Two-thirds of its employees are in their 20s and
8 early 30s. ECF No. 198-4 at 115. Within that group, most are unmarried (75 percent) and without
9 children (92 percent). Id. “[F]or three out of four of them, PwC is their first job out of college.”
10 Id. In 2013, PwC predicted that “almost 80 percent of PwC’s workforce will be comprised of
11 Millennials.” Id. PwC’s chairman Bob Moritz explains that PwC has historically had a young
12 workforce, in part because “most hires will eventually move on to other firms or other careers.”²
13 In 2011-2012 PwC, along with the University of Southern California and London School of
14 Business, studied millennials in the workforce.³

15 PwC utilizes a central hiring system, with companywide policies and procedures for each
16 step of the hiring process, including job postings, interviewing, and hiring. Ex. 25. PwC also
17 maintains a central recruiting database. Ex. 58. Interview processes are governed by uniform
18 guidelines, and interviewers are trained centrally. Exs. 13, 25. Plaintiffs provide evidence about
19 PwC recruitment and human resources strategies which suggest that the company favors younger
20 employees and disfavors older applicants. For example, PwC emails refer to applicants over forty
21 as “too old,” “matur[e],” or “non-traditional,” and PwC interviewers utilized questions suggesting
22 that older applicants may not thrive with long hours or new technology. ECF No. 198-5 at 79
23 (describing some candidates as “too old” and some as “a bit young”); id. at 26 (referring to a
24 candidate as “mature”); id. at 35 (rating non-traditional candidate as highly as possible); ECF No.

25

26 ² Bob Moritz, The U.S. Chairman of PwC on Keeping Millennials Engaged, [https://hbr.org/2014](https://hbr.org/2014/11/the-us-chairman-of-pwc-on-keeping-millennials-engaged)
27 /11/the-us-chairman-of-pwc-on-keeping-millennials-engaged (Nov. 2014), cited in ECF No. 198
at 13 n.25.

28

³ Id.

1 198-4 at 28; ECF No. 198-8 at 55. Plaintiffs also explain that recruiters appear disinterested in
 2 older applicants at recruiting events. ECF No. 198-8 at 32; *id.* at 92; *id.* at 248. PwC features
 3 predominantly young people on its website. ECF No. 198-6 at 1.⁴

4 Plaintiffs also allege that PwC steers older applicants into less desirable seasonal positions,
 5 referred to as the Flexibility Talent Network (“FTN”), which have lesser benefits and fewer
 6 opportunities for training and career advancement. ECF No. 198 at 16. Moreover, PwC recruits
 7 along two separate tracks, “campus” and “experienced,” and much of PwC’s associate hiring is on
 8 the campus track. PwC interns come exclusively from campus hiring and 85-90% of interns
 9 convert into full-time associates. Exs. 45, 90. Moreover, PwC spends far more money on campus
 10 recruiting than it does on experienced track recruiting. Ex. 42.

11 Plaintiffs now seek to certify a collective action of “all individuals aged 40 and older who,
 12 from October 18, 2013 forward, applied or attempted to apply but were not hired for a full-time
 13 Covered Position (Associate, Experienced Associate, and Senior Associate) in the Tax or
 14 Assurance lines of service.” ECF No. 198 at 26-27. Putative collective action members who
 15 “attempted to apply” are also called “deterred applicants.” *See, e.g.*, ECF No. 211 at 28; ECF No.
 16 218 at 20.⁵ To qualify for one of these covered positions, applicants must have a bachelor’s or
 17 master’s degree in a particular field (for example, accounting or taxation), a minimum grade point
 18 average (“GPA”), a commitment to obtain a certified public accountant (“CPA”) license, and
 19 between zero and four years of experience. ECF No. 198-7 at 1-16.

20 Plaintiff declares that he Steve Rabin applied for a position as a Seasonal Experienced
 21 Associate at the age of 50. ECF No. 198-8 at 208-09. At his interview, a senior manager asked,
 22

23 ⁴ For example, the declaration of Kelli King states, “the pictures on PwC’s website depicted only
 24 younger people, and its promotional quotes include statements like, ‘I went to PwC out of
 25 college.’” ECF No. 198-8 at 159. Cynthia Woolbright declares that “when I visited PwC’s
 26 website in 2014 and 2017 to look at job postings and apply for jobs, I noticed that the website
 27 featured mostly young people.” *Id.* at 251. Joycelyn Wooten states that “PwC’s website, which
 28 features college campus career fairs and on-campus interviewing, also illustrates that PwC’s
 recruitment efforts are mainly focused on young, college-aged individuals.” *Id.* at 260.

⁵ This group is not every “deterred applicant,” but only that subset “who applied to FTN (i.e., non-Covered) positions and those who expressed interest in applying to the Covered Positions but whom PwC screened out or steered away before they could apply.” ECF No. 218 at 20.

1 “The people in the cubicles are much younger than you. How would you fit in? Would you be
2 able to work for a younger manager or director?” Id. at 209. Rabin answered the question
3 satisfactorily, but was not hired for the position. He states that he could tell from the question and
4 the manager’s tone of voice that he “viewed [Rabin’s] age as a disadvantage.” Id. Rabin also
5 states that he attempted to apply on a separate occasion for an Associate position posted on PwC’s
6 “campus” website, but was unable to do so because he did not have a school email or mailing
7 address. Id. at 210.

8 Plaintiff John Chapman declares that he was qualified for a position at PwC, and applied
9 “numerous” times while he was between the ages of 45 and 48, but never received a position. Id.
10 at 61. In a 2014 interview, a PwC manager asked Chapman whether he would be comfortable
11 working with young people. Id. at 61-62. The manager “admitted that this was likely an
12 inappropriate question to ask a candidate.” Id. at 62. Chapman did not get the job. During his
13 three-year job application period, Chapman “attended several PwC ‘meet and greet’ and pre-
14 interview events where [he] met approximately twenty to thirty PwC Associates, Experienced
15 Associates, and Senior Associates. None of them appeared to be over the age of 30.” Id. While
16 PwC employees described Chapman in internal emails as “very smart” and thought “highly of
17 him,” ECF No. 198-5 at 73, they also described him as “non-traditional,” “matur[e],” and “not the
18 right fit.” Id.; ECF No. 197-5 at 27.

19 Both Rabin and Chapman state that their inability to obtain employment at PwC has hurt
20 their larger career prospects. According to Rabin, “a significant portion (probably the vast
21 majority) of accounting opportunities that [he is] interested in require ‘Big Four’ accounting
22 experience.⁶ In other words, PwC (in tandem with its three main competitors) functions as a
23 gateway employer in the accounting industry. [His] inability to secure a job with PwC has
24 negatively affected [his] efforts to secure other accounting employment.” ECF No. 198-8 at 62.
25 Similarly, Chapman states that “as a ‘Big 4’ firm, [PwC] functions as a gateway employer for the
26 accounting industry.” Id. When Chapman has interviewed at other employers, they have asked
27

28 ⁶ The Big Four firms are the four largest accounting firms: PwC, Deloitte, KPMG, and Ernst & Young.

1 why he did not have Big 4 experience or why he was not currently working at a Big 4 firm.

2 Plaintiffs also offer the written testimony of Dr. David Neumark, a labor economist. Dr.
3 Neumark studied preliminary hiring data from PwC and found “very strong statistical deviations
4 from age-neutrality in hiring . . . strongly consistent with discrimination in favor of younger
5 applicants.” ECF No. 198-3 ¶¶ 5, 14, 21. Neumark concluded that over a three-and-a-half year
6 period, PwC hired younger applicants six times more often than older applicants. *Id.* ¶¶ 5, 14,
7 Table 1. In his deposition, Neumark explained that he did not assess whether older applicants
8 were discouraged from applying to PwC. ECF No. 211-4 at 9. Likewise, Neumark did not assess
9 whether any other variables which correlate with age played a role in the statistical disparity. *Id.*
10 at 13-14.

11 23 individuals have already opted into the collective action, and 28 collective members and
12 potential members, who applied to covered positions and were qualified but rejected, submitted
13 declarations in support of Plaintiffs’ motion. ECF No. 198-1 at ¶¶ 127-155.

14 **II. LEGAL STANDARD**

15 Plaintiffs seek collective certification of their Age Discrimination in Employment Act
16 (“ADEA”) case under the standards set forth under the Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA”), 29
17 U.S.C. § 216(b). The ADEA incorporates the collective action procedures of FLSA, set forth in
18 29 U.S.C. § 216(b). *See* 29 U.S.C. § 626(b); *Lewis v. Wells Fargo & Co.*, 669 F. Supp. 2d 1124,
19 1130 (N.D. Cal. 2009) (“[B]ecause ADEA incorporates § 16(b) of the Fair Labor Standards Act
20 into its enforcement scheme, the same rules govern judicial management of collective actions
21 under both statutes. . . .”).

22 29 U.S.C. § 216(b) provides that actions against employers may be brought “in any Federal
23 or State court of competent jurisdiction by any one or more employees for and in behalf of himself
24 or themselves and other employees similarly situated.” A suit brought on behalf of other
25 employees is known as a “collective action,” a type of suit that is “fundamentally different” from
26 class actions. *Genesis Healthcare Corp. v. Symczyk*, 569 U.S. 66, 74 (2013) (citing *Hoffmann-La*
27 *Roche Inc. v. Sperling*, 493 U.S. 165, 169–70 (1989)). For example, unlike in class actions,
28 members of a collective action must file a “consent to sue” letter with the court in which the action

1 is brought creating an opt-in class. 29 U.S.C. 216(b). Also different is that “‘conditional
2 certification’ does not produce a class with an independent legal status, or join additional parties to
3 the action.” Genesis, 569 U.S. at 75. Collective actions allow aggrieved employees “the
4 advantage of lower individual costs to vindicate rights by the pooling of resources.” Hoffman–
5 LaRoche, 493 U.S. at 170.

6 Certification requires a showing that the potential class members are “similarly situated.”
7 Lewis, 669 F. Supp. 2d at 1127 (citation omitted). A majority of courts, including district courts
8 in this circuit, follow a two-step process for determining whether a class is “similarly situated.”
9 See Harris v. Vector Marketing Corp., 753 F. Supp. 2d 996, 1003 (2010); Lewis, 669 F. Supp. 2d
10 at 1127.

11 At the first step, alternatively called “the notice stage” and “conditional certification,” the
12 court considers whether the plaintiff submitted sufficient evidence to justify the conditional
13 certification of the class and the sending of notice of the action to potential class members. Lewis,
14 669 F. Supp. 2d at 1127. In making this determination, “the court requires little more than
15 substantial allegations, supported by declarations or discovery, that the putative class members
16 were together the victims of a single decision, policy, or plan.” Id. (internal quotation marks
17 omitted). In other words, “[b]ecause the court generally has a limited amount of evidence before
18 it, the initial determination is usually made under a fairly lenient standard and typically results in
19 conditional class certification.” Leuthold v. Destination Am., Inc., 224 F.R.D. 462, 467 (N.D. Cal.
20 2004); see also Lewis, 669 F. Supp. 2d at 1127. “The fact that a defendant submits competing
21 declarations will not as a general rule preclude conditional certification.” Harris v. Vector Mktg.
22 Corp., 716 F. Supp. 2d 835, 838 (N.D. Cal. 2010); see also Ramirez v. Ghilotti Bros. Inc., 941 F.
23 Supp. 2d 1197, 1203 (N.D. Cal. 2013) (“[C]ourts need not even consider evidence provided by
24 defendants at this stage[.]”).

25 “At the second step of the two-step inquiry, ‘the party opposing the certification may
26 move to decertify the class once discovery is complete.’” Heath v. Google Inc., 215 F. Supp. 3d
27 844, 852 (N.D. Cal. 2016) (quoting Adams v. Inter–Con Sec. Sys., Inc., 242 F.R.D. 530, 536
28 (N.D. Cal. 2007)). At that stage, the court evaluates the collective action under a stricter standard

1 for “similarly situated.” Lewis, 669 F. Supp. 2d at 1127. At that point, the court considers several
2 factors, “including the disparate factual and employment settings of the individual plaintiffs; the
3 various defenses available to the defendant which appear to be individual to each plaintiff; fairness
4 and procedural considerations; and whether the plaintiffs made any required filings before
5 instituting suit.” Id. “Considerations involving the merits of claims are more appropriately
6 addressed at the second stage of the analysis when [fewer] facts are in dispute.” Kellgren v. Petco
7 Animal Supplies, Inc., No. 13CV644 L KSC, 2015 WL 5167144, at *4 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 3, 2015).

8 **III. DISCUSSION**

9 To show that certification is appropriate, Plaintiffs “must provide substantial allegations,
10 supported by declarations or discovery, that the putative class members were together the victims
11 of a single decision, policy, or plan.” Saleh v. Valbin Corp., 297 F. Supp. 3d 1025, 1033 (N.D.
12 Cal. 2017) (internal quotations and citations omitted). Stated differently, Plaintiffs must show that
13 there is “some identifiable factual or legal nexus [that] binds together the various claims of the
14 class members in a way that hearing the claims together promotes judicial efficiency and comports
15 with the broad remedial policies underlying the FLSA.” Russell v. Wells Fargo & Co., No. 07-
16 CV-3993-CW, 2008 WL 4104212, at *3 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 3, 2008). Plaintiffs argue that they have
17 offered more than sufficient evidence to show that PwC deliberately recruits and hires younger
18 workers to the detriment of older workers, and that these documents, witness declarations, and
19 statistical analyses “bind[] together” the class members’ claims and make collective adjudication
20 appropriate. ECF No. 198 at 28.

21 PwC argues that this evidence does not show a company-wide policy or practice. The
22 company describes ageist comments by PwC personnel as “anomalous.” ECF No. 211 at 13-14.
23 PwC focuses on minor differences between the experiences of the declarants, for example that
24 “some applied through their colleges despite being over 40, while others applied to Associate-level
25 positions online rather than on campus,” or that “some declarants attended PwC recruiting events
26 and felt ignored or unwelcome, while others attended similar events and were encouraged to
27 apply.” Id. at 10-11. Finally, PwC notes that Dr. Neumark’s statistical evidence is subject to
28 alternative interpretations that are inconsistent with liability. Id. at 16-18.

1 These differences, while perhaps significant at a later stage of the case, are insufficient to
2 defeat conditional certification. In Heath v. Google, an ADEA case alleging age discrimination in
3 hiring computer engineers, the defendant made similar arguments in opposing conditional
4 certification. 215 F. Supp. 3d at 854 (arguing that the only uniform policy is an antidiscrimination
5 policy, and that age-related comments by recruiters and interviews were mere “stray remarks”).
6 That court concluded that the defendant’s arguments went to the merits and should be addressed at
7 a future stage. Id.; see also c.f. Deatrck v. Securitas Sec. Servs. USA, Inc., No. 13-CV-05016-
8 JST, 2014 WL 5358723, at *4 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 20, 2014) (reserving the consideration of “disparate
9 factual and employment settings” and “various defenses available to the defendant with respect to
10 each plaintiff” for the second stage of the certification process). Here, the Court likewise
11 concludes that Plaintiffs have adequately shown a uniform decision, policy, or plan on the basis of
12 PwC’s centralized and uniform hiring policies, and the substantial evidence of age disparities in
13 hiring. ECF No. 198 at 13-25 (including declarations, PwC human resources policy documents,
14 and statistical analyses showing a central uniform hiring policy which results in age disparities in
15 hiring). PwC’s arguments to the contrary would be better addressed to the second stage of the
16 proceedings.

17 The Court’s inquiry does not end there, however. In addition to a showing that “the putative
18 class members were together the victims of a single decision, policy, or plan,” Plaintiffs must
19 show at this stage that they are “generally comparable to those they seek to represent.” Villa v.
20 United Site Servs. of Cal., No. 5:12-CV-00318-LHK, 2012 WL 5503550, at *13 (N.D. Cal. Nov.
21 13, 2012). Plaintiffs seek to certify a collective of “all individuals aged 40 and older who, from
22 October 18, 2013 forward, applied or attempted to apply but were not hired for a full-time
23 Covered Position (Associate, Experienced Associate, and Senior Associate) in the Tax or
24 Assurance lines of service.” ECF No. 198 at 26-27. PwC argues that under Plaintiffs’ broad
25 proposed class, “unqualified applicants . . . are not similarly situated to Chapman and Rabin, who
26 allege they were qualified for the positions to which they applied,” and received an interview.

27

28

1 ECF No. 211 at 18.⁷ Plaintiffs do not dispute that their proposed collective includes unqualified
2 applicants.

3 As to this point, PwC's arguments are more persuasive. The difference between Rabin and
4 Chapman on the one hand, and facially unqualified applicants on the other, prevents the Court
5 from conditionally certifying the class. "Although the standard for conditional certification at the
6 notice-stage is lenient, there *is* a standard." Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at 850 (emphasis added). A
7 plaintiff "need not show that his position is or was *identical* to the putative class members'
8 positions; a class may be certified . . . if the named plaintiff can show that his position was or is
9 *similar* to those of the absent class members." Labrie v. UPS Supply Chain Sols., Inc., No. C-08-
10 3182 PJH, 2009 WL 723599, at *4 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 18, 2009) (citing Edwards v. City of Long
11 Beach, 467 F. Supp. 2d 986, 990 (C.D. Cal. 2006)) (emphasis added). Chapman and Rabin cannot
12 make this showing, because they are not similarly situated to facially unqualified applicants.

13 PwC requires applicants to have a degree in a relevant field, have earned a minimum
14 undergraduate GPA, and, for Experienced and Senior Associate positions, relevant work
15 experience. ECF No. 198-7 at 1-41. PwC does an initial screen for basic qualifications, and only
16 interviews candidates who pass the initial screen. ECF No. 212-3 at 24-25. This initial screen
17 significantly narrows the pool of applicants. ECF No. 211 at 21. Chapman and Rabin were
18 facially qualified: they possessed a college degree in a relevant major, had attained the required
19 GPA, and had passed the CPA examination. ECF No. 198-8 at 61, 208. As such, they passed the
20 initial screen and received interviews. Id. Not only will the inquiry as to their claims be different
21 from the one as to unqualified applicants' claims, but it is hard to imagine how unqualified
22 applicants could ever be part of the class, given that an ADEA plaintiff "must show, among other
23 things, that he was qualified for the position." Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at 857.

24 This case is like Heath. In that case, the court considered a motion to conditionally certify an

25
26 ⁷ PwC makes additional arguments against certification including: (1) that campus recruiting is
27 lawful, ECF No. 211 at 10; (2) that many recruiters do not know applicants' age when they reject
28 them, Id. at 24-25; and (3) that it is legal to conduct a generation focused workforce study, ECF
No. 212-3 at 11. The Court declines to address these arguments because a discussion of the merits
is not appropriate at this stage. Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at 855.

1 age discrimination collective action against Google. Named plaintiff Cheryl Fillekes sought to
2 certify a class under the FLSA consisting of persons over 40 who interviewed in-person for certain
3 positions at Google. Id. at 853. The district court conditionally certified that class. Another
4 plaintiff, Robert Heath, sought to conditionally certify a different class consisting of “all
5 applicants” for certain specified jobs from 2010 to the present “who were 40 years of age or older
6 at the time of their application[,] and who were rejected for the position.” Id. at 855. For that
7 proposed class, there was no requirement that class members have been invited for an in-person
8 interview or passed any kind of screening. The district court declined to certify that class because
9 although Heath was facially qualified, the “proposed class would include an unknown number of
10 applicants who demonstrate no plausible qualifications for the job.” Id.; see also Trinh v. JP
11 Morgan Chase & Co., No. 07-CV-1666, 2008 WL 1860161 (S.D. Cal. Apr. 22, 2008) (declining
12 to certify collective for failure to show Plaintiffs were similarly situated to class members). The
13 court noted that “there are likely to be wide disparities in the class members’ qualifications and/or
14 experiences” such that certification was inappropriate. Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at 857-58.⁸

15 Similarly here, it is clear that facially unqualified applicants are included in Plaintiffs’
16 proposed class. “[Rabin’s] vast class would include every individual applicant over the age of 40
17 without regard to their qualifications, including, for example, a lawyer applying for [an
18 Experienced Associate].” Id. at 857. Because Plaintiffs Rabin and Chapman were facially
19 qualified when they applied, ECF No 198-8 at 61, 208, the Court concludes they are not
20 substantially similar to facially unqualified applicants.

21 Plaintiffs argue on reply that limiting the class to qualified applicants prevents them from
22 attacking discrimination in the initial screening process itself. ECF No. 218 at 19-20. They note
23 that PwC recruiters are permitted to exercise discretion in the application of the screening criteria,
24 such that “an offer can be extended to a candidate with any GPA,” and that while “[m]ajors *should*

25 _____
26 ⁸ The collective action the court declined to certify in Heath was *narrower* than Plaintiffs’
27 proposed collective. The plaintiff in that case sought to certify a collective of all rejected
28 applicants for particular positions within Google who were over 40. Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at
855. In addition to all rejected applicants over 40, the proposed class in this case includes deterred
non-applicants over 40. ECF No. 198 at 26-27.

1 be relevant to the specific [line of service] desired,” and that “[t]ypical majors are Accounting,
2 Finance, Business, and MIS/Computer Science,” no particular undergraduate major is actually
3 required. *Id.* (quoting Exs. 153, 154) (emphasis added by Plaintiffs). They allege that the
4 screening process itself is another mechanism by which PwC discriminates against older
5 applicants, given that pre-interview rejection rates are higher for older applicants than younger
6 ones. *Id.* at 19. While there may be merit to Plaintiffs’ claims about the screening process – a
7 question the Court does not decide – the fact remains that neither Rabin nor Chapman is typical of
8 a facially unqualified applicant. Plaintiffs must find another way to challenge discrimination in
9 the initial screen, either through its existing named plaintiffs – who were rejected at the initial
10 screening stage for some jobs, although they were facially qualified – or through a different named
11 plaintiff, if they wish to do so.⁹

12 Likewise, Rabin and Chapman are not similarly situated to potential class members who
13 were deterred from applying, because they *did* apply. ECF No. 212-3 at 28. In fact, Plaintiffs do
14 not identify any individual deterred from applying who was over forty. ECF No. 198-8 at 171
15 (declarant Salvador Maciel explaining he was deterred from applying just before his 40th birthday;
16 all other declarants applied). Other courts in this circuit have concluded that plaintiffs who
17 applied could not represent those deterred from applying in an ADEA collective certification case
18 because they were not similarly situated. *Pines v. State Farm Gen. Ins. Co.*, No. SACV89-
19 631AHS(RWRX), 1992 WL 92398, at *12 (C.D. Cal. Feb. 25, 1992).

20 In their reply brief and at the hearing on this motion, Plaintiffs attempted to recast “deterred”
21 applicants as those who actually applied, but were steered away from covered positions into
22 seasonal positions, and those who expressed interest in applying, but whom PwC steered away.
23 ECF No. 218 at 20; ECF No. 231 at 36 (arguing that plaintiff Rabin should be considered a
24 “deterred applicant” because “[a] recruiter reached out to him and steered him towards one of
25 these FTN roles as opposed to inviting him to a full-time covered position”). As an initial matter,
26

27 ⁹ While Rabin and Chapman did not pass the initial screen or receive an interview for some
28 applications, ECF No. 198-8 at 61, 208, they were facially qualified on each occasion they applied
because they possessed the requisite GPA, degree, and other qualifications.

1 this new definition is not consistent with either the complaint or the dictionary. The complaint
 2 states that “PwC’s policies and practices have the effect of *detering* prospective applicants ages
 3 40 and older *from applying* and denying job opportunities to those individuals ages 40 and older
 4 who do apply.” ECF No. 42 ¶ 11; see also id. ¶ 13 (same). And Merriam-Webster defines “deter”
 5 to mean “to turn aside, discourage, or prevent from acting.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate
 6 Dictionary 340 (11th ed. 2012). More importantly, Rabin and Chapman are not similarly situated
 7 to the class they seek to represent because they did in fact apply to covered positions. ECF No.
 8 198-8 at 61, 208.¹⁰

9 Because Plaintiffs are not similarly situated to the class they seek to represent, the Court
 10 denies the motion to certify the proposed collective. The Court will not attempt to narrow the
 11 Plaintiffs’ proposed class to cure the defects the Court identifies in this order. Rather, the Court
 12 denies the motion without prejudice so that Plaintiffs can propose a class to which they are
 13 similarly situated, and Defendants can defend against that proposed class. See Rivera v. Saul
 14 Chevrolet, Inc., No. 16-CV-05966-LHK, 2017 WL 3267540, at *11 (N.D. Cal. July 31, 2017); see
 15 also Heath, 215 F. Supp. 3d at 858 (rejecting Plaintiff’s request to narrow a class if the court
 16 concluded Plaintiff was not substantially similar to that class because to “do so would improperly
 17 prevent [Defendant] from identifying infirmities in such an alternative definition and deprive the
 18 Court of sufficient evidence and argument on which to base such a determination”).

19 ///

20
 21
 22 ¹⁰ The Court need not address the merits at this stage but notes that little case law supports the
 23 proposition that deterred applicants can maintain an ADEA collective action. Wynn v. Nat’l
 24 Broad. Co., 234 F. Supp. 2d 1067, 1102 (C.D. Cal. 2002) (dismissing without prejudice because
 25 the court was “highly skeptical” of plaintiffs’ ability to plead an ADEA collective on the basis of
 26 deterred applicants but allowing plaintiffs to amend so individual applicants could attempt to plead
 27 futility of applying); Pines, 1992 WL 92398, at *12 (declining to certify deterred applicants). But
 28 see Hyman v. First Union Corp., 982 F. Supp. 1, 8 (D.D.C. 1997) (concluding that an employee
 who expressed interest in applying to a position but was told he was overqualified could be added
 to an ADEA collective action).

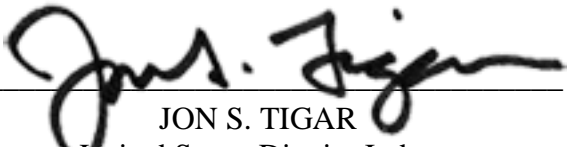
As Plaintiffs admit, “identifying some types of deterred applicants could [also] pose
 ascertainability challenges.” ECF No. 218 at 20. Plaintiffs argue their class is ascertainable
 nonetheless because PwC maintains a list of potential applicants in its “Smashfly” database, which
 tracks individuals interested in working at PwC. Id. at 21-22. But the Court need not address the
 question now because it concludes the class cannot be conditionally certified for other reasons.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court DENIES the motion without prejudice. Plaintiffs may file an amended motion for collective certification within thirty (30) days. Failure to cure the deficiencies identified in this order or failure to file a subsequent motion within 30 days will result in a denial with prejudice of conditional certification of FLSA collective action.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: July 26, 2018



JON S. TIGAR
United States District Judge

United States District Court
Northern District of California

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28