

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The myth of cultural fit in recruitment job interviews

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**Abstract**

This article aims to examine the complex linguistic and cultural dynamics of recruitment interviews where recruiters played multiple roles of gatekeepers and facilitators by unpacking how “cultural fit” is co-constructed in recruitment interviews. Drawing on ethnographic data collected from one of the world's largest recruitment agencies, we explore how power dynamics manifest in “friendly” rapport-building interview conversations between interlocutors of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in an Inner Circle context. Our analysis shows that candidates are required to play a power game, demonstrating alignment with recruiters' agendas and complying with recruiters' dictated level of appropriateness in conversational style, such as formality and code. Candidates who are less familiar with their roles in the power game masked by the conversation style of faking friendship are left at a disadvantage and labeled as unsuitable cultural fit. These findings highlight the previously overlooked influence of recruiters in shaping interview outcomes.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Existing socio- and applied linguistic research focuses on the disadvantages and ideology-based prejudice (Gumperz, 1992) minority candidates face during the job interview process. These disadvantages are attributed to factors, such as narrative inequality (Blommaert, 2001), communications skills (Bostrom, 2011), nonverbal skills

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(Goodall & Goodall, 1982), the ethnic penalty (Heath & Cheung, 2006), and linguistic penalty (Roberts, 2011). It has been argued that “indirect discrimination” (Roberts, 2021) occurs when minority group candidates are evaluated against their “White” counterparts in a “British interview” context. Within the British interview construct, people, often of the White middle-class background, hold influential positions of power by functioning as gatekeepers (Fairclough, 2015, p. 77). While these studies are valuable in understanding factors that lead to unsuccessful job interviews among candidates of minority backgrounds in Britain, there is an underlying assumption that there exist certain norms of British interviews that outsiders need to comply with. This article aims to demystify the so-called British interviews in increasingly superdiverse contexts and examine the complex dynamics of recruitment interviews where recruiters of ethnic minority backgrounds play the multiple roles of gatekeepers and facilitators. Through analyzing conversational dynamics, such as rapport building, storytelling, humor, and small talk in an Inner Circle context, the study brings attention to the previously overlooked role of interviewers in contributing to interview outcomes. By doing so, the study extends beyond an exclusive focus on candidates’ performance and ethnicity and contributes to a nuanced understanding of the linguistic and cultural factors of interviews.

In what follows, we first problematize the notion of British interviews and introduce recruitment interviews, a specific type of interview setting examined in the study reported in the article. We then discuss the notion of cultural fit and review the conversational features associated with interviews in the literature before we report on the context of the study, analyze the data and discuss the findings.

## 2 | CONTEXT

### 2.1 | The “British” interview

Prior research mainly focuses on the candidates’ approach to being interviewed under a predefined, predetermined, static, formal, and unchanged structured job interview process that is based on dominant cultural ideals of a British job interview. The concept of a “British interview” implies that employment interviews in the United Kingdom have certain cultural qualities that might be defined as “British.” Roberts (2012) discuss the British job interview’s expectations as “discursive regimes” that prioritize specific presentation styles, such as combining institutional and personal modes of communication and using the situation, task, action, and result narrative structure. The concept of “standard language ideology” draws attention to the issue of language-based discrimination (Lippi-Green, 1997; Milroy & Milroy, 1998) that penalizes marginalized social groups. Historically, it has also been suggested that certain backgrounds are more advantageous in the job market compared to others, resulting in social and economic repercussions for individuals from industrial cities in the United Kingdom who do not modify their accents from urban accents of the industrial north to class specific, received pronunciation (Milroy, 2000).

However, according to Duchene et al. (2013), the current British interview process relies heavily on a competence model that is primarily influenced by the neo-liberal new capitalism or “new work order.” Similarly, Roberts et al. (2008) highlight that an individual with little understanding of the British interview process encounters challenges in adapting to the interviews, leading to increased expectations in their interactions during the interview. While these studies are helpful in unearthing inequalities, the assumption seems to be that there is a specific set of norms for “British” interview procedures. However, with the workplace becoming increasingly diverse (Samašonok et al., 2023), a growing number of people of minority backgrounds take up recruiter roles in superdiverse contexts, bringing with them a cocktail of cultures, experiences, their own views about ideal candidates, and their own ways of decoding meaning. Therefore, it would be important to examine how increasing diversity on both sides (recruiters and candidates) impact on the so-called British interview and what implications these dynamics may have in enabling fair chances of interview success.

## 2.2 | The significance of recruitment interviews

The recruitment agency is a business that aims to match candidates to available or potential roles. More often than not, local recruitment agencies recruit in their specific local area, where they are best placed to find local candidates looking for work. In this context, a recruiter may be looking for companies to work with to market candidates who they believe are the right fit for: the hiring company's vacant job role, the organizational culture, and the expectations of the hiring manager. Hofhuis, et al. (2016) emphasizes the crucial role of recruiters in promoting workforce equality by attracting diverse hires. Equally, recruiters have a significant impact on the process that contributes to workplace inequality. The recruitment interview is viewed as an interpersonal and intercultural process, wherein subjective impressions are formed, such as a recruiter's liking and affinity toward a candidate. Prior studies have regarded preference toward a candidate as a subjective process, which is influenced by the presence of homosociality and homophily in their decision-making (Rivera, 2012, 2015). Consequently, there has been a contention that recruiters, whether deliberately or unconsciously, seek resemblances. Specifically, the recruitment process is the stage when "cultural matching" occurs, and where recruiters evaluate proficiency and seek applicants who are "culturally similar" (Rivera, 2015, p. 999). Bencharit (2018) reveal the importance of alignment in demonstrating commonalities in job interviews as being key criteria for a successful outcome.

## 2.3 | Cultural fit

The phrase "cultural fit" is closely associated with the idea of assimilation. Bye et al. (2014) emphasize the concept of cultural fit as a means of investigating the social and cultural aspects of assimilation for people, social groups, enterprises, and organizations. More recently, however, cultural fit has been criticized as a blanket term used by recruiters to reject candidates who do not conform to their norms and biases, while "cultural add" was coined as a phrase to promote diverse hiring practices as a candidate's difference adds value to the organization (Montgomery, 2022). The latter has also been criticized by not solving the problem of cultural biases in the recruitment process.

To address these biases, alternative interview methodologies have been developed in robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), which seek to reduce prejudice in the recruiting process (Kammerer, 2022; Naim et al., 2018). Advancements in robotics and AI are being directed toward reducing prejudice in the recruiting process. This problem is well recognized due to the availability of alternative interview methodologies and the development of robots or AI technologies to address these biases (Kammerer, 2022; Naim et al., 2018). Employing robots and AI in job interviews is regarded as a progression toward achieving greater objectivity in hiring judgments, hence enhancing fairness. Nevertheless, the use of robots for comprehending cultural compatibility has demonstrated more complexity in the absence of human involvement. Kammerer (2022) emphasizes the progress made in employing AI for evaluating suitability in hiring procedures by analyzing vocal cues, facial expressions, and nonverbal gestures. However, despite the intention to reduce human biases in the process, there remain additional challenges related to algorithmic bias and data privacy. Similarly, while it is proposed that interviewers might give a false image of the applicant (Cuddy et al., 2015), Nørskov et al.'s (2022) research discovered that face-to-face interviews were considered more equitable compared to robot-mediated interviews. This is because humans possess the capability to offer emotional reactions and establish a connection with the applicant (Rivera, 2015), and "ultimately, the crucial factor is the chemistry between the client and the candidate" (Kinnunen & Parviainen, 2016, p. 12). This study therefore aims to further highlight the complexity of the interview process, where chemistry and connections are key to the success criteria, and where the recruiter facilitates cultural fit, and the candidate demonstrates that they are marketable.

## 2.4 | Doing rapport through faking friendship

Asymmetrical power dynamics between interviews and candidates is often reported in the literature and recruitment interviews (Gumperz, 1999; Roberts, 2011; Nørskov et al., 2022). Dissimilar to the context of a job interview,

however, recruiters aim to portray themselves and the companies they represent in a favorable manner that attracts good candidates. Simultaneously, they strive to bring out the best in the candidates who they interview, in order to successfully match them to suitable job roles. From this perspective, the candidate can be seen as a commodity that the recruiter markets to their clients. Doing this effectively requires a key human skill of rapport building, which the current state of robotics and AI have yet to master. Recruiters utilize rapport building skills to relate, understand, and connect with their clients and candidates. Much ambiguity, however, surrounds what rapport is and how it is practically done by interlocutors (Prior, 2017). In a different context, Duncombe and Jessop (2012) link “faking friendship” with “doing rapport” while examining participant interview research methods. They elaborate that through faking friendship in doing research, interviewers are conscious about how they come across and the messages that they send to the interviewees. The aim is to establish both rapport and trust, while minimizing social distance. To build good rapport, it is advised that interviewers should therefore “keep eye contact, speak in a friendly tone, never challenge, and avoid inappropriate expressions of surprise and disapproval; and practice the art of the encouraging but ‘non-directive’ ‘um’” (p. 111). Duncombe and Jessop (2012) also comment on the nature of friendship demonstrated in this kind of research method: “If this is ‘friendship’, then it is a very detached form of it” (p. 110), unveiling the presence of a form of doing friendship that is not true to the nature of being friends. Instead, it is two strangers forming a false sense of being friends very quickly in a professional setting. In our analysis, we adopt the term “faking friendship” from Duncombe and Jessop (2012). We use this term to describe the way the recruiter hides the ascribed power dynamic and performs a sense of friendliness of two strangers who have just met, but work within specific parameters of informality and friendliness, dictated and assessed by the recruiter. We shall explore how faking friendship plays out in the power game in recruitment interviews.

### 3 | THE STUDY

This study draws on video-recorded recruitment interview data from a project with the title of “doing cultural fit in superdiverse context” carried out by the first author (Bonelli, 2022). The methodological framework employed in this study is ethnography. The first author, who has previously worked in a recruitment setting, conducted 3 months of ethnographic research in two branches of one of the world’s largest recruitment companies based in London. The recruitment agency specializes in recruitment for general staffing, IT, legal and finance, while aiming to provide their clients with the “right” candidate. They supply candidates to both the private and public sector, and as a well-known high street agency, see themselves at the forefront of having high standards in hiring practices and processes.

Acting as an action observer, the researcher visited each branch once a week over the course of 3 months. After successfully obtaining consents, the candidates were given two questionnaires to complete, one prior to the interview and the other after the interview completion. The first questionnaire gained insight into the candidate’s background; their work history, qualifications, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and so forth. While following the candidate’s interview with the recruiter, the candidate was asked to complete a questionnaire about the interview process, the potential outcome, how they think the interview went, their own performance, and their views on the recruiter’s interview style. Similarly, the recruiters were also asked to complete background questionnaires and provide feedback on all candidates. Furthermore, 3 months after the interviews had taken place, the researcher revisited both agencies to identify which candidates had been successfully placed.

A corpus of over 30 hours of video-recorded interviews were collected between 30 candidates and nine recruiters. The candidates were not controlled demographically. The candidates were individuals who were seeking office-based employment as managers, accountants, IT professionals, sales representatives, personal assistants, secretarial and administrative roles, and other office support positions. All participants lived and worked in London.

It should be noted that the candidates taking part in this study have already been vetted by the recruiters. The selection process for the candidates could have happened in the following ways: the candidate submits their CV in response to a job advertisement, a recruiter search using an online job board, or candidate walk-ins where a candi-

date visits the branch and hands their CV to a recruiter. The recruiters would review CVs to identify candidates who they deem suitable for current or potential job openings. The candidates who have been called in to interview have already undergone a preliminary vetting telephone interview. During this telephone conversation, the recruiter gets to know the candidate, assessing whether the candidate who looks appealing on paper, could be selected to come into the branch for an interview. The recruiter would subsequently inquire about the candidate's availability, suitability for the position(s), travel preferences, and their existing employment status. After evaluating the candidate's suitability for the post, the recruiter would extend an invitation for an in-person interview in the branch.

4 | MISALIGNMENT: AN UNSUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW (STEVE AND ZENAB, INTERVIEW A)

Steve, the candidate, has a history of temporary blue-collar contracts. He is looking for another temporary contract, this time, within a warehouse. Steve expresses his interest in wanting to operate a forklift; however, he has yet to obtain a license. He has been struggling to find work after an injury, which he attempts to explain to Zenab, the recruiter. Over the phone, Zenab felt that she may have some suitable positions available for Steve and invited him to come into the branch for a face-to-face interview. Steve is a White British and lives in London, while the recruiter, Zenab, is from Pakistan, having previously lived in Pakistan and Bradford before moving to London. Further information about their backgrounds is given in Tables 1 and 2.

This is Zenab's second interview of the day, and she has three more interviews scheduled after Steve's. This interview is one of her shortest and one of the two unsuccessful ones. The entire duration of this interview spans only 14 min. By contrast, the remaining three successful applicants have an average interview duration of 21 min and 9 s.

The candidate, Steve, is invited to play a power game where Zenab initiates the faking of friendship dynamic. Steve misaligns with the required level of formality deemed acceptable by the recruiter Zenab through his choice of code. The following example demonstrates how the process of faking friendship can penalize a candidate who is unfamiliar with the power game and its requirements.

TABLE 1 About the recruiter.

About the recruiter—Zenab					
Age range:	25–30	Codes:	English Urdu London English	Lived elsewhere?	Yes, Pakistan and Bradford
Gender:	Female	Is English L1?	Yes	Work:	Retail Recruitment
Heritage:	Pakistani	Resides in:	London	Education:	A-level

TABLE 2 About the candidate.

About the candidate—Steve					
Age range:	25–30	Codes:	English London English	Lived elsewhere?	No
Gender:	Male	Is English L1?	Yes	Work:	Warehouse, bricklayer, forklift operator
Heritage:	English	Resides in:	London	Education:	GCSEs

## 4.1 | Opening sequence

Prior to this face-to-face interview, the interlocutors have already engaged in the initial prescreening conversation over the phone, where Zenab has asked Steve to come in for an interview and to register with the agency. Zenab tried to call Steve prior to the interview. Being unable to get hold of Steve by phone, Zenab left Steve a voicemail. After addressing this with Steve, the topic of problematic mobile phone technology dominates the opening sequence of the interview.

### Extract A (R: Zenab, C: Steve)

1. R: how's it been goin' for you
2. C: been not bad it's alright
3. R: perfect so I've just got all of your details (shuffling through papers)
4. heyer [sic] an you can just quickly take me through so this is just for
5. yourself erm just to see how the customer service has been with from XXXX today
6. umm oki doke now I called you this morning but your phones been
7. turned off so I [left a voicemail]
8. C: [yeah my] phones bein' a right pain in the backside at the moment
9. R: oh [really]
10. C: [yeah] it just keeps losin' reception for no apparent reason
11. [I don't know]
12. R: [ahhhh do] you know what I had that quite I think it was about four
13. weeks ago I had that for two and a half weeks my phone [wasn't working]
14. C: [Eyrr] it's been
15. like it for about [four days now]
16. R: [Does it say no] service on that
17. C: Yeah constantly
18. R: Yeah tha you know what it is I think [what phone to d'you have]
19. C: [then it's got full] bars but its errrr
20. Samsung buh I'm on network free [sic] [an I think]
21. R: [do you]

22. C: its them
23. R: Yeah it would be because when I went I had I got the iPhone six just
24. recently
25. C: (nods) mmm (good eye contact, nods enthusiastically)
26. R: ermm an so I live in sort of XXXXX XXXXX an it I think it was one day
27. randomly it just went off
28. C: Mmm
29. R: And it just constantly jus kept turning on and off and it made me go to
30. apple n they exchanged the phone for me an in the end it turned out that
31. it was a network in the west Drayton area that was down for two and a
32. half [weeks]
33. C: [Mmm]
34. R: Yeah so when I got into the area there was no network at all it was like
35. living in like (laughs)
36. C: Yeaahh (laughs)
37. R: Countryside n [i]
48. C: [s]ee your voice mail still hasn't even come through
49. R: Yeah that's it [my text won't come] through voicemail
40. C: [So (shrugs shoulders) I was unaware]
41. R: people where tryin' to call me it would go straight to voicemail (listing
42. tone) I was thinking oh my God is this what it was like in the ancient days
43. [I was] like I wouldn't survive at all (laughs)
44. C: [yeah] (laughs)
45. C: yeah you feel naked without your phone innit
46. R: yeah definitely [I- I thi used]



The recruiter, Zenab, opens the interview with a question “how’s it been goin’ for you” (line 1). Steve answers this question “been not bad it’s alright” (line 2). Examining the style of the first part of the adjacency pair, it is both informal and non-specific. Without context, this utterance has many meanings. The second part of the adjacency pair is equally as informal and non-specific. In the same vein, what is not bad? What is alright? Within this context, however, the assumption could be made that the references made to “it” in lines 1 and 2 relate to “job hunting.” Steve’s response maintains the ambiguity by not questioning what exactly Zenab is referring to. Instead, Steve uses the expected second pair part, serving the purpose of small talk (Holmes, 2001) while aligning with Zenab’s position of power, as the interviewer and gatekeeper within this encounter.

Zenab adopts an informal language style taking a relaxed and friendly approach, possibly aligning with her perception of the candidate’s linguistic repertoire. Being a gatekeeper within this encounter, the recruiter, by position, has control over the communicative event, and in her opening utterance, she establishes the language that “may/ must be used” as well as the “genre of discourses allowed” (van Dijk, 1996), both of which are informal. In other words, the recruiter has set an informal interview tone, possibly to build rapport.

The empty small talk between lines 1 and 2 leads to an abrupt topic shift associated with the bureaucratic nature of the interview requirements (line 3). Here, Zenab mentions that she has “all of” the candidate’s details, and in the same turn, she also asks Steve to (1) take her through his CV (lines 4–5), (2) discuss in particular the customer service element of his role(s) (line 6), and (3) mentions that she has attempted to call Steve but his phone was off (lines 6 and 7). In one conversational turn, Zenab asks four questions. In lines 6 and 7, the last question she poses to Steve, she questions Steve’s reliability by not answering her phone call. The utterance could be described as confrontational through the use of the adverb “now” in the declarative statement “now I called you this morning but your phones been turned off, so I left a voicemail.” Even though she does not use an interrogative utterance, the recruiter still requires an explanation by drawing the candidate’s attention to her action of leaving him a voicemail. The implied question is whether the candidate has received the voicemail, shifting the responsibility to Steve to offer a credible explanation.

The candidate has understood that the declarative utterance requires a response and argues that the reason for not being able to answer her call is because Steve’s mobile phone is “bein’ a right pain in the backside” (line 8). The acceptable level of formality understood by the candidate is revealed in this utterance. Steve uses hyperbolic language to express his annoyance with the problems faced with his mobile device. Here, hyperbole is used to persuade the recruiter of his trustworthiness, with the aim of obtaining a more sympathetic response.

Steve talks about the phone as “it just keeps losin’ reception for no apparent reason,” highlighting the uncontrollable nature of technology by personifying the phone as having a mind of its own. Steve conveys his helplessness in the situation as the issues with the phone happen for “no apparent reason,” expressing himself as a victim of unreliable technology. Further disappointment is shown through his uncertainty, “I don’t know” (line 11), illustrating his hopelessness by not knowing what to do, or how to improve the situation.

Agreeing with Steve on the topic of faulty mobile devices, Zenab provides her own anecdote (lines 12–34). Zenab attempts to align her views with the problems Steve faces with mobile technology. Similar to Steve, she also uses a hyperbolic expression stating that she would not “survive” without a phone, stressing her dependence on the technology (line 43). Steve agrees with Zenab’s view (line 44) “yeah” and laughs with the recruiter. Steve aligns his language with her use of metaphoric language (line 45) “you feel naked without a phone innit.” Although the interlocutors align in their style of language, both informal and metaphoric, Steve’s lexical choice does not match the same level of informality that Zenab uses. The candidate uses the lexical items “innit” and “naked” that misalign with the recruiter’s use of code. Applying Lipovsky’s (2006) views on the role of signaling systems in conversations, where different systems can lead to misinterpretation, it appears that Steve may not have recognized or misinterpreted the recruiter’s expected level of formality. The absence of explicit negotiation or definition could have led Steve to rely on his own signaling systems, potentially interpreting the interview as more casual.



## 4.2 | Emotional (mis)alignment in professional talk

Concluding the topic of mobile phone reception and network issues, Zenab shifts topic by asking if Steve would like a warm beverage. After the candidate politely declines her offer (lines 55–58), Zenab initiates more “professional talk” (lines 59–60). It is at this moment that the *actual* job-specific interview questions commence. Zenab notices the brevity of Steve’s tenure in his positions. Steve offers a clarification. Steve explains that the brief tenure in his job roles is attributed to a work-related incident. Steve endeavors to construct a compelling depiction of the ramifications of his injury.

### Extract B (R: Zenab, C: Steve)

55. R: it’s crazy do you want a tea of coffee or anything
56. C: nah I’m fine [thanks]
57. R: [are] you sure
58. C: y[eahhh]
59. R: [okay] ummm so your last position was in j- so that was only July to
60. August was that a temp position
61. C: err that was a temp yeah but in February I had err well my foot got run
62. over by a forklift
63. R: oh no- (*in the same breath*) where was this temp position from sorry
64. C: erm XXXX did I not write that
65. R: so was this from an agency or
66. C: err yeah that was from an agency yeah
67. R: and that was is it S XXXX agency
68. C: XXXX no that’s XXXX carpets the agency was err new staff but yeah
69. I’ve err I was walkin’ around on I re-fractured my toe again so I took some
70. time off
71. R: (*writing*) okay so that was from new staff ermm agency
72. C: yeah
73. R: and erm (tuts) where where are they based
74. C: err St. Albans

75. R: (writes) okay so this was from July twenty sixteen up until august
76. C: yeah
77. R: erm is it XXXXX
78. C: yeah
79. R: Okay (*writes in silence*)
80. R: And was that just the duration of the the role
81. C: Yeah literally that's all it was an liy one day I woke up and couldn't walk
82. C: so
83. C: I had to go back to the hospital and and
84. R: oh it that why you came to an end
85. C: yeah cus I had to have another like four weeks off
86. R: (*writes*)
87. R: and then you were working from July fifteen to July sixteen ah ermm
88. C: XXXXX
89. R: how was that for you
90. C: err it was alright until they ran me over
91. R: (*looks, blinks, processes*) so who was it- how did that happen
92. C: err well I used to work in the freezah keepin' frozen [foods]
93. R: [yaaaah]
94. C: an dermm for' lift driver was drivin' the wrong way an der took it upon
95. himself to go between a gap (*uses hands to illustrate*) dat big
96. R: (*recruiter does not look*) yeah
97. C: and he was supposed to stand because I used to wear a headset
98. R: mmm
99. C: so you get lost in that really follo[win] what they're sayin' [errm]

100. R: [mm] [ Yeah ]
101. C: an he never sounded his horn either told me to go that location
102. (*points to the right with hand*) I put my foot out (*swipes air*) woom
103. (*shrugs shoulders*)

Questioning the short work durations on Steve's CV, Zenab poses the following question (lines 59–60), “so your last position was in j- so that was only July to August was that a temp position.” Steve has understood that there is the implicit meaning behind Zenab's question and interprets a need for further explanation detailing why the role was so short (lines 61–62). The candidate takes the opportunity to shift the topic after answering the recruiter's question. In doing so, Steve does not violate the question–answer sequence (Harris, 1989). Steve answers the question by first confirming that the position in question was a temporary assignment before informing the recruiter of an accident he had at work. The candidate's topic shift is accepted by the recruiter who offers a short sympathetic response in line 63 “oh no” before immediately asking Steve “where was this temp position from.” Zenab then asks Steve to provide the name of the agency that found him this position. In this instance, Zenab is trying to find a lead that could become a new business opportunity for her. Finding leads is important to recruiters such as Zenab who both seek their own clients and find their own candidates.

While it is customary for recruiters to inquire about leads during candidate interviews, Zenab's timing of asking about leads can be seen as lacking empathy. This prompts Steve to redirect the conversation toward discussing the specifics of his injury, potentially to emphasize the legitimacy of his decision to take on a temporary position. In lines 69–70, Steve declares that he “re-fractured” his toe again. Zenab does not acknowledge or empathize with his injury. Instead, she shifts the topic back to the agency “okay so that was from the new staff agency” (line 71). In this adjacency pair, the candidate invites the recruiter to provide an empathetic response. Zenab, however, does not align her second pair part to the candidate's first pair part, demonstrating a lack of sympathy. The misalignment in the intended and received emotional response is a turning point in pace and tempo as this slows down when Zenab confirms the dates of employment and silently takes her notes. The pauses and shift in tempo indicate an awkwardness that arises from empathetic misalignment.

The candidate continues to provide the recruiter with more information regarding his work injury. This time, Steve provides further information regarding the severity of the injury to justify the short duration of the role. On this occasion, however, the emphasis is on the impact of the injury. In lines 81–83, Steve states that he “woke up and couldn't walk” so he had to “go back to the hospital.” The severity of the injury is concluded by the need to seek medical attention. The recruiter conveys her understanding of Steve's justification for the short period of time spent working in this role and clarifies whether the injury resulted in the role coming to an end (line 84). The candidate depicts the long-term impact of the injury as he had to “have another ‘four weeks off work’” (line 85). Here, the candidate uses emotive language to justify the short duration of work.

The recruiter remains silent as she writes her notes, again, not using any empathetic language to convey her emotional alignment with his situation. The recruiter breaks the silence by asking “how was that for you?” (line 89). Not specifying what exactly the recruiter is after in such an answer, Steve responds “it was alright until they ran me over” (line 90). The candidate reverts to the topic surrounding his injuries. Zenab looks up at the candidate, blinks a few times showing a sense of confusion and asks how the injury happened (line 91). The recruiter's perplexed countenance suggests that this response may not align with her expectations. Zenab's question about the incident finally provides an opportunity for Steve to delve into the specifics of the injury.

The candidate takes this opportunity to describe the event in detail. He blames the forklift driver for breaking protocol in three different ways: (1) the driver went the wrong way (line 94); (2) the driver attempted to fit between a tight space (line 95) and (3) the driver should have remained stationary (line 97) or at least, used the horn (line 101) when

moving. There is momentum built in this description as he recounts the story and ends with the onomatopoeic item “woom” (line 102) for emphasis. Steve attempts to build a picture. The build-up of the event that leads to the moment of the injury as described by the onomatopoeic item “woom” has a dramatic effect. This leads to the following question, why would Steve put so much emphasis on his injury? Dutton et al. (2014) argue that compassion plays a crucial role in the workplace, particularly in interview studies. They suggest that compassion fosters a stronger emotional connection between individuals, leading to increased trust. Dutton et al. elaborate that the process of compassion starts with a stimulus that causes pain, leading to suffering in an individual in three interrelated processes: perceiving the suffering, experiencing empathetic concern, and taking action to alleviate the distress. Therefore, Steve recognizes the necessity of presenting a compelling justification for his brief work durations and absences from work in order to avoid appearing indolent. An empathetic reaction would demonstrate comprehension, indicating that the recruiter acknowledges and empathizes with the situation. Without this emotional connection, Steve continues his account of the event to obtain credibility. He therefore reverts to the topic of the event until he is given the floor to recount this story.

From the recruiter's perspective, it could be argued that Zenab's interest in the details of the agency that offered him the temporary employment may stem from either formality or a real interest to learn more about the specific aspects of the temporary role. However, the interview's main focus shifts to agency-related questions in relation to every role on his CV, a topic that was not delved into as within her interviews with successful candidates. During these interviews, Zenab prioritized gathering information about the candidates' work history and educational background. She also skillfully adjusted their responses to match her desired criteria. However, the most significant aspect of her usual approach was her ability to establish a personal connection and actively engage in the conversation while extracting the necessary information. In other words, in Zenab's interview with Steve, Zenab deviates away from her usual method of interview.

Zenab's responses and questions (mis)lead and (mis)direct Steve to incorrect paths of conversation. As a result, he spends a significant amount of time attempting to defend his short-term positions instead of emphasizing his skills and expertise. In this regard, Zenab is in a position of power to find Steve a new job role, who in turn endeavors to persuade Zenab that he possesses the qualities of a reliable and trustworthy candidate. Zenab does not provide a platform nor a fair forum for the candidate to showcase his capabilities. Furthermore, specific to Zenab's situated identity as the interviewer (Zimmerman, 1998), she has the right to ask questions. By not asking the right questions, Zenab is unable to obtain the necessary information to fairly assess the candidate based on his work history, duties, capabilities, and skills. In a study conducted by Mieroop (2019), it was discovered that candidates resort to employing “narratives of vicarious experience” when their identity as a “good candidate” is threatened. This typically happens when recruiters bring attention to flaws in their CV. Similarly, Campbell and Roberts (2007) stress the need for applicants to effectively combine professional and personal communication in order to create acceptable identities necessary for interview success.

The importance of being perceived as trustworthy (Kerekes, 2006) and convincing (Roberts & Campbell, 2005) has been recognized as crucial for the outcome of the interview (Kerekes, 2006). This process is achieved by engaging in negotiation and collaboratively constructing appropriate identities. The professional identity refers to the set of professional standards and behaviors expected by the organization (Lipovsky, 2006), whereas personal identities are formed through interactions between the recruiter and the candidate. A candidate's ability to present themselves well is crucial for a successful interview. However, it is equally necessary for the interviewer to accept and appreciate the candidate's presentation. Throughout the performance, the candidate is required to achieve a suitable equilibrium (Reissner-Roubicek, 2017) and integrate their personal and professional identities to a degree that is deemed satisfactory by the recruiter representing the agency and their clients. The recruiter may face difficulties in accepting the trustworthiness of a candidate if it is called into doubt during the interview (Candlin & Crichton, 2013). This is particularly accurate when there are disparities in the processes of co-creating meaning against differing objectives. The disparities in objectives that derive from misaligning in negotiating Steve's trustworthiness are evident in that Steve focuses on his work accident, while Zenab focuses on generating company leads by understanding which local

companies are open to working with recruitment agencies. Due to the type of questions being asked, neither of the interlocutors focus on discussing skills or experience that meet the potential job requirements, consequently, leading the path to an unsuccessful interview outcome.

### 4.3 | Post-interview feedback

In the post-interview feedback, Zenab commented on the candidate being “casual” and describes his use of language as “inappropriate.” Zenab expressed a lack of trust in the candidate’s commitment to attending work or remaining in a role for a significant duration, suggesting that shorter roles would be more appropriate. Zenab mentioned that he would be difficult to place. She commented on Steve “very casually saying words like backside” and noticed that he wore a “hoody,” but again suggested that this could be due to the nature of work he is looking for – “He seems like the type that might not go in or would leave a post quickly” but he would be “good for short term jobs.” Zenab highlighted that they do not have the type of work that Steve is seeking. Given that Steve has been invited to interview based on the skills and experience indicated in his CV and an initial telephone interview, Zenab should have been aware that she does not recruit in this area. It could be argued that Zenab has interpreted Steve’s use of code and his trustworthiness as being unsuitable for the positions she hires for. Arguably, her perspective may have been formed quite early in the interview, based on his initial use of the casual phrase “pain in the backside.” This could explain why Zenab started requesting information about new “leads” instead of the candidate’s employment history.

The candidate described this interview as “it went ok” but he did not get to speak “too much about the job,” he has used agencies before, where they “call him for work,” which he obtains through referrals, but he has not had much experience with this type of interview, so he did not know what to expect. He did, however, feel confident that the recruiter will find him work and will need to just “give her references” when she got back. Returning to the agency 3 months later, Zenab stated that she did not put him forward for any of her roles as he was not a good “fit” for the roles she recruited for. At the time, she was also heavily recruiting for temporary jobs for a local airport, which included packing positions. Steve was not considered for these roles.

## 5 | FAKING FRIENDSHIP: A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW (YASMINA AND STAR, INTERVIEW B)

### 5.1 | Background

Yasmina, the candidate, is looking for a new role and openly expresses dissatisfaction with her current customer service position at the head office of a renowned fashion brand. Star, the recruiter, has invited Yasmina for a face-to-face interview. Star believes that she may have some suitable upcoming positions for one of her clients. Both Yasmina and Star are of ethnic minority backgrounds, having resided outside of the United Kingdom and speaking Tagalog and Farsi as their first languages, respectively. Further information about their backgrounds is given in Tables 3 and 4.

The candidate, Yasmina, is invited to play a power game. Within the opening sequence, Star initiates the interview with the faking friendship dynamic, where Yasmina successfully aligns with the informal nature of the recruitment interview in the attempt to display friendship; however, she still manages to successfully align with the ascribed power asymmetry that is hidden in this type of interview.

### 5.2 | Opening sequence

The candidate, Yasmina who has been called into interview, is seen immediately by Star after completing her candidate forms. Star takes Yasmina’s completed forms and asks Yasmina to take a seat opposite her. Then Star asks Yasmina to

provide her passport so that she can scan a copy for their right to work checks. Yasmina opens her bag, takes out her passport, and hands her passport over to Star. Star opens the passport before curiously flicking through the pages. The conversation begins with small talk, where the interlocutors discuss the look of the new passport.

**Extract A (R: Yasmina; C: Star)**

1. R: mine didn't have tha' (*referring to the passport*)
2. R: like literally buh I've jus [I ju]
3. C: [did] you see all the pages
4. R: (*reaches for the passport*)
5. C: it's so beautiful
6. R: I know I've seen it before and I just [thought]
7. C: [it's like]
8. R: (*flicking through pages*) like
9. C: it's like [all the]
10. R: [why wasn't] mine like this
11. C: (*giggling*) I know all my friends were saying that
12. R: No buh I've
13. C: It's my first passport
14. R: Look
15. C: I know its soo beautiful its jus everyone was looking at [it] (*laughs*)
16. R: [I kn]ow an I literally jus
17. renewed it in January an I thought why doesn't mine look like this
18. C: you can request a new one
19. R: nahh that's another eigh'y th hundred pounds I was like nah eighty
20. pounds something its [so expensive]
21. [I'll] deal with wha I've got at the moment
22. (*Both laugh*)
23. R: I'm sure it will be pretty in twenty twenty six when I will renew again
24. C: (*laughs*) Yes
25. R: buh yeh no thank you for comin'
26. C: (*mumbling*) thank you for your time
27. R: so we're jus goin' to go through registration erm you notice period

TABLE 3 About the recruiter.

About the recruiter – Star					
Age range:	25–30	Codes:	English London English Spanish Tagalog	Lived elsewhere?	Yes, moved to London age 11 and lived in Spain for 1 year.
Gender:	Female	Is English L1?	No, Tagalog	Work:	Sales Customer service Recruitment
Heritage:	Pilipino Chinese	Resided in:	Philippines	Education:	Postgrad LPC

TABLE 4 About the candidate.

About the candidate – Yasmina					
Age range:	35–40	Codes:	English Farsi	Lived elsewhere:	Yes, Iran
Gender:	Female	Is English L1?	No, Farsi	Work:	Customer service Personal Assistant Web developer Admin Accountancy
Heritage:	Iranian	Resided in:	Iran	Education:	BSc

The opening sequence of this interview could be considered informal, and the introduction is characteristically playful. There has been some contextual understanding and alignment in how the recruiter and the candidate begin to accept and respond to each other's performed persona and Star's strategic moves of compliment at the cost of self-denigration in her obvious attempt to build rapport.

In response to Star's playful whining (lines 1, 12, and 14), Yasmina responds by mirroring this playfulness. In line 3, Yasmina interrupts Star in a way that signals delight and enthusiasm on the topic as she willingly takes on a role that would align with Star's playful complaining. The interruption here does not function as dominance or hostility (Goldberg, 1990; West, 1979), but instead a form of meta-messaging indicating "interpersonal rapport" where it can be described as more of an overlap. This meta-messaging is characterized by a convergence of thoughts and emotions, often occurring at moments of heightened intensity and fast-paced interaction. It can evoke positive responses from those who perceive the conversation as exceptional, particularly among individuals who prefer this particular style of communication (Tannen, 1983). The positive emotions placed within this form of overlap is evidenced by Yasmina's utterance as she playfully teases by exaggerating about the beauty of the passport that she has and the recruiter wants. She accomplishes this by not only acknowledging the beauty of her passport but also asserting that her friends, as well as "everyone" who has laid eyes on it, have all praised it.

In this example, the conversation is very friendly. The personal and playful nature of the interaction masks the power dynamics. Star possesses power similar to that of a "superior," allowing her to initiate the conversation with casual conversation, in this case, small talk (lines 1 and 2). The recruiter uses small talk to soften the perception of the asymmetrical power dynamic (Holmes, 2009). Star is granted with ascribed power to control the direction of the interview and the conversation. The applicant demonstrates alignment by willingly assuming a subservient role, relinquishing authority to the recruiter, and adapting her behavior to match that of the recruiter (lines 2, 3, 10, 11, 14, and 15), therefore allowing Star to steer the conversation. The act of engaging in casual conversation while acknowledging the ascribed power dynamics has contributed to a friendly and more personal interaction. Yasmina demonstrates her ability to comprehend, adapt, and successfully engage in the power dynamics of the power game that she has been



invited to play. She achieves this by allowing the recruiter to lead and respond in a way that aligns with the intended requirements of the recruiter's utterance. For example, in lines 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, and 15, Yasmina responds playfully to the playful nature of Star's utterances, while in lines 23 and 24, where Star mentions that the passport will still be "pretty in twenty twenty six" not taking up Yasmina's suggestion to renew early, Yasmina responds by laughing and agreeing "yes" (line 24). In line 25, Star begins to shift to more formal discourse, moving away from the laughter and playful nature of the previous utterances to formally expressing gratitude for Yasmina's presence in the interview. Yasmina aligns with this by mirroring Star's tone and responds to Star's gratitude by equally thanking Star for "her time" (line 26). Yasmina is therefore playing the power game by accepting and successfully responding to Star's initiation of rapport building tactics through "faking friendships" while acknowledging power dynamics through her ability to match discourse, tone, conversational cues, and lexis.

The result of the initiated power game is that despite being strangers in a professional setting, Star and Yasmina quickly establish a connection through small talk that appears genuine and effortless, while showing a level of professionalism that can be switched on and applied when appropriate, thus demonstrating adaptability that could be easily used and applied to align with different hiring managers, who have different expectations of formality. The importance of finding a balance between rapport, friendliness, and professionalism is dependent on the hiring managers' levels of acceptable formality, where research on job interviews held by company managers suggests that while a CV secures an interview, their personality determines the outcome of the interview (Kinnunen & Parviainen, 2016). As a result, the power game serves the objective of evaluating the marketability of applicants, determining their suitability for roles where they have the highest likelihood of outperforming other contenders.

At the start of this interview, rapport building is distinguishable through the shared and separate instances of laughter. Within this short exchange, there are four instances of the human emotion laughter (lines 11, 15, 22, and 24). There is a "collaborative nature of humour" (Zhu, 2019, p. 38), where successful humor requires mutual understanding and the intent of inclusion. Humor acceptance requires three steps: recognition, understanding, and appreciation (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Therefore, in Star's attempt to "include" Yasmina, by making her feel comfortable (lines 6, 8, and 10), it is Yasmina's response that indicates acceptance through her process of recognition, understanding and appreciation (line 11). This is then received by the recruiter as an attempt to actively align with her own effort of using humor. In this case, being humorous by playfully moaning about why her passport "isn't like this" (line 10), which elicits a giggle from Yasmina before Yasmina teases about all her friends also saying why their passports are not like that (line 11). It is noticeable that Yasmina has accepted and successfully aligned with Star's style of humor, which has resulted in her conforming to the ingroup status. This means that those who share the same style of humor can use it as a way to show their affiliation and unity. It can also be used as a bonding method by reinforcing the group's solidarity through mirroring each other's behavior. It is noteworthy to highlight the control that the recruiter implicitly displays as although it may seem that laughing together can decrease the perceived difference in authority and create a sense of unity among participants, the way these occasions of shared laughter are organized and distributed actually reinforce and perpetuate the dominance of the roles of the interviewer and interviewee (Glenn, 2010). As a result, laughing together is displayed in line 22, where after complaining about wanting a passport as "beautiful" as this one, Star laughs as she says that after considering the cost it will still be beautiful when she goes to renew hers, the candidate laughs with her which shows that not only has the candidate aligned with the ascribed situated identities but also that she is able to understand and play the power game that she was invited to play by the recruiter. This success in alignment of the ascribed power identities through co-operation with the recruiter's lead in humor has enabled both effective small talk, as well as setting the foundations of a positive rapport to be built.

### 5.3 | Post-interview feedback

Star indicated that that she had to moderate and slow down her speech to "adjust with" Yasmina's. She observed that she was finishing Yasmina's "sentences for her" as she "understood what she was saying but she couldn't convey it."

Despite the candidate's pace as Yasmina "spoke slow," she still "spoke well." She felt that the candidate was "very aware" about what she was saying and considered the words that she was using, "She paused and thought about her answers." She perceived the candidate as being "very reserved, composed" and noticed her composure in her posture as the candidate "sat back."

The candidate rated the interview as being "excellent." She felt that the interview was "very friendly and relaxed," and she hoped that she interviewed well. She sought to employ a "positive approach." She perceived that the recruiter was seeking a "key skill set like office tools, also someone confident, positive, and ready to take on a challenge." The interview met Yasmina's expectations. She felt that there were no cultural differences. She noticed that it was different to Iranian interviews that she had in the past as "in Iran there is less conversation involved and more of skill test."

From the post-interview feedback, it is evident that both interlocutors felt that the interview was successful and went well. The candidate gave the highest rating to describe how she felt the interview went, while Star recognized that Yasmina will be easy to place in another position, even if she helped Yasmina convey her intended meaning.

After returning to the agency 3 months after the interview took place, Star mentioned that Yasmina was placed in a role very quickly and started her new job as a pricing coordinator for one of Star's clients.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

The themes of power and faking friendship are highly significant in both examples. Both interview openings demonstrate similarity in an informal approach in recruitment style interviews, which immediately commence with the power game masked in discursive practices of faking friendship. Focus has been given on how the interlocutors "do" power negotiation, while being mindful of contextual and hidden power dynamics in order to achieve interview success within the context of a recruitment agency interview. Foucault (1981) discusses power in a manner that is applicable to this particular context where power can have a relational nature. The examples illustrate this relational phenomenon, which is present within the dynamics of a power game. In this context, power is utilized to evaluate the candidate's marketability based on their ability to display adaptability. This is because the CV gets the candidate the interview, but the ability to impress the hiring manager by differentiating themselves from the competition enhances the likelihood of securing the role. It is important to note that the recruiter's intention behind the faking friendship dynamic is to make the candidate feel at ease as the purpose is to enhance trust through successful rapport building, leading to more effective communication. When two individuals trust and understand each other, communication becomes more open and in-depth (Zakaria & Musta'amal, 2014). As such, the recruiter believes that they are able to obtain a more authentic and relaxed representation of the candidate. However, this is not always the outcome. Steve's interview has shown that disguising the asymmetrical power dynamics through faking friendship can put unaware candidates at a significant disadvantage. Therefore, responsibility for the interview outcome can be argued as a joint one between candidates and recruiters, not solely reliant on the candidate's interview ability, as suggested in previous research in the field. This is exemplified by Zenab's failure to ask appropriate questions, which had a detrimental effect on the interview result, leaving Steve unable to discuss his work history or showcase his skills. Unlike Steve, Yasmina has recruitment interview experience, and as a result, she demonstrates her awareness of the faking friendship dynamic by successfully aligning with Star's chosen level of informality. Yasmina participated in the power game through their playful exchange while using the appropriate level of formality and code that demonstrates both interpersonal and professionalism through synthesizing these forms of discourse, which sets a good foundation for rapport to be built further in the interview.

Yasmina's interview exemplifies how a candidate can effectively navigate the requirements of the power game by skillfully adapting their discourse, formality, and conversation style to assimilate to the recruiter's expectations, all while establishing a positive connection. The candidate must possess adaptability and awareness of the power dynamics, enabling the recruiter to take lead while they interpret contextual cues to determine the appropriate level of formality for each topic that signals both friendliness and professionalism. Similarly, Steve's interview illustrates how

a candidate can misunderstand the expectations of the power game by incorrectly gauging the level of formal communication deemed suitable for the recruiter. This dynamic is unique to the recruitment agency interview due to the fact that recruiters are responsible for screening suitable candidates for multiple hiring managers, each with their own set of expectations. Consequently, recruiters regard adaptability as an essential attribute for individuals to be perceived as “marketable.” The marketability of a candidate is assessed through a power game in which the candidate must showcase their interpersonal and professional skills, while adeptly managing the complexities of faking friendship using the appropriate code and level of formality that the recruiter deems acceptable.

Language plays a crucial role in how cultural fit is enacted during recruitment interviews, where stylistic variety is imperative in the way in which interlocutors align within the faking of friendship dynamic. Regional variety and L2 speakers of English did not affect the interview outcome. For instance, Yasmina, a second language English speaker, had a successful interview outcome, while Steve, who speaks English as his first language, did not. Yasmina received positive feedback for her speaking skills, including the observation that she “spoke well.” Steve’s interview feedback also included comments on his use of language; however, his use of language was described as “inappropriate” and casual.

The notion of a “British job interview” presents challenges when investigating job interviews in superdiverse interview settings. Previous research in the field indicates that minority groups face a challenge in conforming to a dominant perspective encapsulated in the generic reference term. This implies that individuals who are less familiar with the British interview process encounter greater difficulties in adapting to the interviews and experience additional demands during the course of the interaction (Roberts et al., 2008). However, this study highlights that the perception of a candidate demonstrating cultural fit is determined by the recruiter’s personal worldview and their involvement in the interaction. As a result, it can be challenging for a candidate to do cultural fit, who are then dismissed on grounds of not being a good “fit.” Cultural fit places emphasis on candidates to conform to the norms and standards established by the recruiter, agency, and hiring client company—a perspective so far not recognized in the existing literature.

This issue of cultural fit in this context is particularly pertinent to the interview style employed by recruitment agencies because the assessment framework relies on the recruiter’s individual comprehension of the hiring company’s corporate culture and their own interpretation of the agency’s culture. This additional layer of gate-keeping and matching making implies that a candidate must have the capacity to harmonize with the varying perspectives and demands of their potentially culturally different assessors—the recruiters. For example, in faking friendship, the recruiter determines the appropriate levels of informality based on subjective judgment through their own personal perspectives and preferences. This does not provide a fair and level interview process to candidates and as such, suitable candidates may be dismissed as not a good cultural fit. Arguably, the recruitment interview process that takes place in a superdiverse context is more complex than what the commonly used phrase “British interview” suggests. Today’s candidates are required to be able to adapt to different norms and expectations in superdiverse interview contexts, a skill which they must demonstrate through the power game masked by the faking friendship dynamic.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that it is necessary to unpick the precise nature of the recruitment interview and how a prominent aspect of the recruitment interview, known as the power game, allows recruiters to exploit the so-called cultural fit as a tool for discrimination. This article enhances the existing body of knowledge by presenting the concepts of the power game and faking friendship as key conversational techniques that are unique to the recruitment interview. It is specific to the recruitment interview because of the recruiter’s goal to find good candidates that they can match to existing or potential roles advertised by current or prospective clients. Recruiters strive to find marketable and likeable candidates, candidates who they consider to be a good fit (which includes cultural fit) with the prospective company and hiring manager(s) that they work with. Consequently, this has implications on the interview

format. Specifically, many candidates are unaware of the necessary discursive practices required in faking friendship dynamic that are crucial to the successful outcome of the power game. They are also expected to align with the recruiter's linguistic register (i.e., level of appropriate formality) while showing awareness of the hidden power dynamics. As illustrated in our analysis, such practices are exceedingly complex in superdiverse settings, where expectations, interpretations, and views differ.

The findings highlight the previously overlooked influence of recruiters in determining successful interview outcomes. This shifts the focus and responsibility from solely evaluating the candidate's interviewing skills to recognizing the collaborative and dynamic nature of the negotiation process, where the recruiter's interviewing abilities are also shown to have an impact on the interview outcome. The interview process is complex, and its outcomes depend on the collaborative effort of both parties. This is evident in the turn-by-turn sequence, where code, tone, and conversational cues are negotiated. In the context of recruitment job interviews, it is argued that while it is necessary to blend personal and institutional discourses (Campbell & Roberts, 2007), there is also a specific kind of personal discourse that is considered appropriate, and this is assessed by the recruiter through the candidate's use of code, formality, and responses to contextual cues. The recruiter possesses the ability to ask appropriate questions, display emotional alignment, and guide and direct the interview, affording the candidate the chance to showcase their expertise, skills, and present the best version of themselves during the interview. However, where the recruiter does not ask appropriate questions, demonstrate emotional alignment, or appropriately direct or guide the interview when playing the power game, this leaves the candidate at a distinct disadvantage at attaining interview success. In the same way, candidates who are unfamiliar with the unwritten rules of the power game are also left at a significant disadvantage.

The paramount importance of addressing the implications of the power game in recruitment interviews lies in the fact that recruitment agencies have a responsibility to foster and employ equitable methods and fair practices that promote equality, inclusivity, and diversity in their recruitment processes. Such practices help to promote diversity in local communities and workforces. Due to the absence of standardized procedures, highly qualified individuals may be overlooked if they are not perceived as a suitable cultural fit by the recruiter, where the inherent bias in these procedures can result in discrimination. As indicated in the literature, despite attempts to mitigate bias through the utilization of AI and rebranding the concept from "cultural fit" to "cultural add," the issue of bias remains prevalent. AI by itself is inadequate in handling the emotional elements of interviews that establish a rapport between interlocutors, while "cultural add" is merely a change in phraseology. This is because, even if it is called "cultural add," recruiters still need to match candidates to their perception of a company culture and their own understanding of the requirements of the job description. Hence, the issue of bias exists. It is therefore imperative that when working within superdiverse contexts, such practices and their implications are addressed. Agencies in superdiverse settings should therefore move away from recruiter-controlled power-dominated practices and instead adopt a candidate-centric approach to create a fair, equitable and more level playing field.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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