Participant 39 – Female, 22, Tower Hamlets

**I:** Can we start by talking about what you’ve put in Box 1 please?

**R:** Okay, so I’ve written not having people to turn to during hardships, not having a close-knit family and friends. So in some sense, I don’t think I can relate to this, because I have a very close-knit family and very close friends. However, I feel like when I thought about… I was trying to think of what makes someone lonely…

**I**: Of course…

**R**: And people that are lonely are usually…personally, I feel like a lot of the things I deal with, if I was alone in that sense, it would be really hard but the reason I get through things is because I share it with my parents or talk about it to my cousin or go out with my friend to just get my mind off things. So that’s why I wrote this. For me, that’s an example of loneliness, I think. Yeah, anything else, shall I…?

**I:** I was going to ask you some questions about that.

**R**: Okay.

**I**: So, it sounds like what you’re saying is, you know, you associate with not having basically people to talk to or rely on during hardships, during difficult times, that’s what you associate with…

**R**: Loneliness, yeah.

**I**: And so when you say not having people to turn to during hardships, can you tell me more about that?

**R:** So for example, if there’s something that I’m going through that’s a difficulty or I might feel like it’s a hardship or something that’s putting me through a hard time, I always find that it makes me feel better when I can like turn to my best friend or turn to my mum who sometimes not even gives advice, sometimes just someone listening to you really helps and the funny thing is, the next day, you probably realise it’s not actually so much of a big deal and you’re kind of over it. That initial feeling of being able to speak to someone or just let someone know how you feel or just having someone listen to you, I think, it impacts you a lot in not feeling lonely, I guess.

**I:** So it sounds like you value friendships and you value having people around?

**R:** That’s correct, yeah, I really do.

**I:** And how does that make you feel, if you have someone to talk to or rely on in times of difficulty?

**R:** I guess it makes you…like you said, rely on, it’s true, it’s a good feeling when you know that there are people there that you can genuinely rely on or people that always have your best interest at heart and they wouldn’t…if you are feeling a certain way or if something has gone wrong, they would go out of their way to help you, encourage you to overcome it.

**I:** How does that make one feel if they didn’t have the people to rely on during times of difficulty?

**R:** I can only imagine that, if someone didn’t have that, it would probably make you feel a bit isolated and i don’t want to say lonely, but lonely. And it probably isn’t…because sometimes, I feel like there are certain things that happen, which aren’t such a big deal, however, when you sit there and overthink it yourself, it becomes a bigger deal in your head than it actually is, that’s how I feel anyway. So when you share it with someone else, it kind of brings you back to reality. In the larger spectrum of life, it probably isn’t such a big deal. So obviously anyone who doesn’t have someone to turn to, they would just be feeling all these things to themselves, which probably isn’t a very nice feeling.

**I:** It sounds like overthinking can be associated with the experience of loneliness.

**R**: I guess, yeah.

**I**: Can you tell me more about that?

**R:** I the sense that… I don’t really know. But I think when for example, you’re alone, you obviously don’t have someone to go to, and if it is something that you are constantly just thinking about it to yourself, then that can just have a negative impact overall. But saying that, there are sometimes when it is good to be alone in some sense, sometimes if you just give yourself some time and space to think things through you do sort of just see the bigger spectrum of things. I guess it works both ways, I guess it just depends what the situation is.

**I:** It sounds like what you’re saying is being alone can work both ways.

**R:** Being alone can be a positive, but can also be a negative, I would say so, yeah.

**I:** Depending on what the situation is?

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** I’m just trying to read what you’ve said…not having people to turn to during hardships…

**R**: …Not having a close-knit family and friends.

**I**: Would you in your opinion…when you say not having a close-knit of family or friends, are there differences in terms of having a close network of friends compared to having a close network of family. Can you tell me more about that?

**R:** Well, I guess in terms of your family, like your siblings and your parents, they are your family and always have your best interest and they are people who you can… well they live under the same roof, that is my family, so the people you see day in and day out and even with friends, I would say, sometimes, you don’t need to be related to people. People that you meet along the way, there are situations, like I would say I have some friends which are literally family to me now, because we are very close and they are people that I would treat like family and turn to like my family. So, it depends in terms of with friends and family, it depends what type of friend they are. So, my closest friends to me are on the same rank as my family. Then again, that’s not everyone. There are some friends that you meet along the way at university or your workplace, you become a bit close to them but obviously they are not really your close friends, if you see what I’m saying, yeah.

**I:** Is there anything else you want to say about that box?

**R:** No.

**I:** Thank you. Can we talk about what you put in Box 2 please?

**R:** So, I wrote being in a new environment and meeting new people, it can make someone feel lonely at first. So, in terms of that, for example, if you’ve got a new job or say at first, when you enrol into university, at first, as much as you are…you want to be an open and friendly person, at first, although you probably don’t show it to everyone, but inside you can feel quite lonely, because everyone is new and you are still starting to build those bonds and friendships, or even with your colleagues and sometimes, they don’t develop into friendships, just knowing that you are around these people in your lessons, just getting to know people and sometimes, for example, in the sense that, for example…at university there can be groups of people who are from all over the world. At first, that can be a bit daunting, because you all sort of have a different… what’s it called… a different…not mentality, but yeah kind of. But you might find that when you get to know people, the loneliness would go because you become used to how people are and you get along with them. If that makes any sense what I just said.

**I:** So it sounds like being in a new environment…whatever it might be, because it’s a new environment and you’re having to adjust…?

**R:** Yeah, that’s what it is. But then again, it depends on who you are as a person as well. Because if you just… it depends… because when you go into the new environment first and you are lonely, then fair enough, we all experience that because we don’t know anyone. However, you need to make the active effort to get to know people or be a bit more open and friendly and because if you’re a new person, people would want to get to know you as well. So I guess that’s how you would overcome this form of loneliness.

**I:** So it sounds like this transition period where you go from one thing to another can cause loneliness?

**R:** Yeah, I guess.

**I:** And then it’s up to you, kind of, how active you want to be to get to know people…

**R:** Yeah. Or sometimes, I feel like, for example, when you are at work, sometimes you don’t really actively make the effort, does this sound bad, you don’t make the effort to get to know people, but you just end up, because you are working together or studying together and you end up just getting to know people. So sometimes it’s not even a conscious thing that you’re actively being like ‘Hi, I’m trying to get to know you or meet you’, sometimes it’s more that it naturally happens.

**I:** And how does that make you feel, being in that situation of being in a new environment and not knowing new people?

**R:** At first, I feel like sometimes you can feel a bit nervous, because you don’t know what you are going into or how it would be, but I guess you just have to take it as ‘it is what it is' and you need to get through the first bit and then you’ll be fine. And I feel like that comes with age as well. When I was younger, I would be a bit more ‘Oh god, I don’t know anyone there and so forth’. However, now it’s fine. I feel like I would eventually get to know people, so it’s fine.

**I:** So it sounds like you kind of, as you grow…

**R:** I feel like your personal experience has an impact as well in how you deal with these situations, because in some sense as you grow older, you experience more of these situations. In a way, you sort of become used to it and it’s not really, you don’t really feel nervous or worried about what you will encounter because you know that you will get through it and it’s fine.

**I:** When you say experience, could you tell me more about that?

**R:** I don’t know. I feel like, there are so many, for example, jobs, workshops, university, there are so many situations that you go to that are new. And because I feel like I’ve been through so many of these situations, you meet new groups of people and I don’t know any people there, I’ve become sort of used to it now. So I can not feel so lonely in that situation, because I know that I would sort of get to know people.

**I:** Okay, so you are saying that by experience, you don’t experience as much loneliness if you’re in new environments again?

**R:** Because you sort of take it in a positive way. Personally, I would say. In the sense that, if I were to do something, I can’t think of an example, but say a workshop or something, or training. There would be a time where I would question whether I would do that alone. But if it’s something I really want to do now, it wouldn’t stop me now because I know I will be by myself. I wouldn’t mind being in by myself, because there will be other people there that I will meet and I don’t think it’s as daunting to sort of get to know people if that makes any sense.

**I:** When you say it is not as daunting, can you tell me more about that?

**R:** When you’re young and you’re going to a new environment, a new place, sometimes you can feel a bit alone, because you don’t know how people are but then through time and experience, it makes you realise that it’s not that bad and you can meet people and be fine.

**I:** So it sounds like what you’re saying is, as you get older, basically you don’t experience the impact of transition as much?

**R:** Yeah, that’s correct. I would say that’s the case.

**I:** Because you have gone through that and you know that eventually you will meet people.

**R:** But then again, I feel like it also depends on the type of person you are. Some people are shy and quiet. For people like that, they may find it a bit more difficult to straight away to adjust in a new environment. But there might be other people that are quite loud and confident, who might not feel like that. But sometimes, I feel like you can put on this show that you’re a certain, you can try to be very confident, because when you go to a group interview, that’s the key thing that you’re looking at. But inside, you might be feeling worried or might be feeling lonely, because you don’t know anyone in that environment.

**I:** So you’re saying that sometimes, people put a mask to cover up their sense of loneliness like being or presenting themselves as more confident, as louder, but inside they are actually being quite lonely?

**R:** Possibly. I’m not saying that’s everyone. But I’m saying that it could be a possibility as well, not in all situations but in situations for example, when you are going for a job interview, a key thing, but it’s that phrase when you ‘fake it till you make it’. When you go to a job interview, the key attributes that they are looking for, for example, they wouldn’t want someone who wouldn’t engage, or wouldn’t talk or show the skills they are looking for. So, sometimes you might actually feel like inside, not even lonely, but you might feel a bit nervous or you might not be as confident but you know that this is how you should get across. But then, even though you are consciously making yourself feel confident, it shows that confidence is in you as well. Because that’s where it comes from. Because to a certain extent, you can’t just fake it, you see what I’m saying.

**I:** I want to relate that to outside the interview context and see how it would relate to your everyday experience to loneliness. Can you tell me more about how that masking can relate to people expressing how they feel and connecting with people and so on?

**R:** Outside work, I am not actually sure how someone would do that, because I feel like when you go for an interview or go back to an interview situation, it is a short-term thing and you kind of have to consciously make the decision to pick out the skills that the employer wants. However, on the outside wold if you are feeling lonely and you often feel unhappy, I don’t think it is so easy to mask it in that sense, and if that’s how you are being, why would you want to fake it that you’re not feeling lonely and your happiness then. So, I don’t really think on the long-run it is possible. But then again, there are people that do.

**I:** When you say in the long-run, could you tell me more about that?

**R:** So in the sense that, in the long run, I mean on the outside. For example, an interview is a short amount of time. It is like a one-to-one interview, where you know you are going to show these certain skills that you’ve got. But then, on a day-to-day life, you can’t just fake or put on an act.

**I:** So it sounds like what you’re saying is, if you take for example, you experience of loneliness, you may not necessarily cover that or mask it?

**R:** Yeah, possibly. I feel like that would be something that it is very hard to mask because that is your feelings. If I am feeling a sort of way, I find this goes back to box 1, I would need to turn somewhere, to my family or friends. Because if I’m feeling a certain way, until I got it, I won’t just be able to sit here or I would show that is how I’m feeling instead of covering or hiding it.

**I:** So it sounds like even if it is negative or it shows that feeling lonely or sad.

**R:** Yeah, that is true. But again, it would only be to people who I’m very close to who I would go to, I wouldn’t be able to just go around expressing it to everyone. But give myself half an hour or a few hours, then I will just think about it and get over it. It’s not that much of a big deal and there are bigger things in life that people are worried about.

**I:** Is there anything else you want to say about this box?

**R:** No.

**I:** Before we go onto Box 3, I just want to go back to Box 1 and ask you one more question. You said basically that not having people to trust, not having people to turn to, especially in times of difficulty can make one feel lonely. So especially in that situation you would feel lonely. So how would that make you feel, being in that situation, if you were in that situation?

**R:** I’m trying not to say lonely, because it’s the word we’re talking about. It would make you feel really upset, unhappy, that’s about it.

**I:** Thank you. Is there anything else you want to say about either Box 1 or Box 2?

**R:** No, that’s fine.

**I:** Okay, thank you. Could we talk about what you put in Box 3 please?

**R:** By myself, secluded, isolated. I just put the three separate words, because I feel like it makes a long big part of someone being lonely. I feel like for as long as you isolate yourself and you keep yourself away from people, that would only make the situation worse. When I think of someone alone, I think of someone that is by themselves and someone that is sort of isolated, so I feel like it’s the group of words that goes together to describe someone who is lonely. And I feel like a big part of overcoming loneliness, is sometimes, you have to make the conscious effort as well to try and do things with people or try to do things that will make you feel happy than just sitting there and feeling sorry for yourself for making this situation worse, which I don’t want to make it worse, I don’t want to disregard people who genuinely feel like that they probably can’t help it. There are people, with people like that, it’s not really their fault how they are feeling. However, if you do feel like that and you need help, people should reach out for help and I feel like if there are different services, I don’t actually know what services, but I feel like there are things out there if you even google it that can probably help you. Or join your local … and do some classes and get back into mingling with people and that.

**I:** So it seems that what you’re saying is that someone who is by themselves, secluded and isolated is one who actually experiences loneliness.

**R:** I would assume so, yeah.

**I:** And when you say that they keep themselves isolated. Can you tell me more about that?

**R:** Away from family, away from friends, away from social activities. They are sort of very to themselves, that’s what I would describe someone who is isolated.

**I:** I think I remember you mentioned they keep themselves isolated, as in they it is a conscious decision? I remember you saying something along those lines.

**R:** I think I did. I’m not sure how someone can do that, to be honest, how they can keep themselves isolated, but I feel like it’s something that is always just doing their own thing by themselves, without other people around them.

**I:** Being by themselves, sorry what did you say?

**R:** Someone who keeps themselves by themselves and doesn’t really include themselves in, I keep going back to family and friends, but doesn’t include themselves in friend circles or family circles or even other social events. They are very much out of the picture.

**I:** How does it make them feel to be in that situation?

**R:** They would definitely be feeling lonely. You are literally by yourself and sometimes you need to enjoy yourself or unless they have nothing … but if they’re for example very down all the time, and they are very lonely and on top of that, they sort of keep themselves to themselves they won’t get out of that negative feeling or negative space but if they do sort of get around people and do things with them or have a good time, it could probably help them overcome the feeling of loneliness.

**I:** And what you say secluded, can you tell me more about that please?

**R:** I feel like I just wrote it as a synonym of isolated to be honest. Because they sort of have the same definition, don’t they, secluded and isolated. Again, it’s the whole thing of someone keeping themselves to themselves, which isn’t always a bad thing because sometimes people are genuinely happy in that state. However, I feel like on the long run, when you are completely away from people or friends or even just things in your society, it could only make you feel worse. And sometimes, I feel like it’s the whole, for example, people that don’t have a job, they could have thought in the long run, if they are completely by themselves and they say they don’t have a job, that could make them feel lonely as well. Because sometimes, if you are not mingling with your family and friends and everyone else, you have some regularity in your life, you are going to your job and that, you have some time out to talk to people. I feel like… is really important. These people still have time to, even if it’s because it’s work, you are forced to communicate. But it fits for example somewhere where you have colleagues around you, that still sometimes, that whole conversation sort of helps overcome the feeling of loneliness.

**I:** So what you’re saying is, let’s say if you for example, if you weren’t included in your family and friends but then had your work colleagues and you basically speak to them, or you are forced to speak to them, that would help the sense of loneliness.

**R:** Yeah, I think that would help overcome it. But then again, because of the way you ask me this question, it makes me think, when you said in terms of forced to talk, it’s true because sometimes you get lonely and … you don’t really get along with your work colleagues and you talk to them because it’s because of work purposes, deep inside you might still feel that loneliness, because you can’t actually open up to them. It’s very much a formal interaction, so to a certain extent, I would say that that would help get rid of the loneliness, but I feel like for someone who is feeling extreme loneliness, even that little bit of interaction might help them.

**I:** So it sounds like what you’re saying is, not being able to open up to people can actually make you feel lonely?

**R:** That’s correct. I would say that’s a huge part of loneliness, is when you feel like there are things that you have to keep to yourself and you can’t discuss it or you can’t talk to other people. I would say that impacts loneliness, because then you feel like it’s just your problem to yourself and you feel like no one would understand you sort of, you see what I’m saying.

**I:** I want to discuss a couple of things you mentioned, you said no-one could understand you and also that you can’t share your problems to others. Can you tell me more about that please?

**R:** I wouldn’t be able to give you an example, but hypothetically, but in the sense that sometimes it might not even be something that is such a bad thing or whatever. It might just be something that you feel petty. It’s usually the petty things, because you tell people to speak to someone about it, they just won’t see your perspective of why someone said something, so silly or someone did something silly and it made you feel upset or it made you feel a certain way towards them. And it’s sometimes that whole thing when you, it’s usually the people that aren’t closest to you that sometimes you can have petty little arguments with them or whatever, but they gain that can make you feel lonely because if it’s people that are close to you and you’re sort of, you have petty little arguments, these are people that you would normally turn to. However, because it is to do with them, you can’t turn to them. And these are probably the people that most understand you. However, that’s probably when you would feel lonely because the people that you would seeing you alive, but the people you would normally turn to obviously they are the people that you probably can’t turn to in that moment of time. But then, I guess sometimes, when you cool it off and you think about it, like I mentioned before, then you realise, actually there’s a way but you can sort of realise, I’d like to talk to you about something and then sort of talk it out.

**I**: So it sounds like what you’re saying is if you have a dispute with someone you normally turn to, that can make you feel lonely. And how does it make you feel being in that situation?

**R**: Well, if I was in that situation, well obviously, it wouldn’t probably be a nice feeling and it would make you feel a bit upset, I guess. But, on the long run, I feel like it wouldn’t, I feel like at first when these things would happen, you would think to yourself, it’s a big deal. But I think with everything, if you give it a bit of time, you overcome it and you think of a solution. Because with anything, at first you get, whether it’s a petty argument or whether you’re feeling upset, at first you get all overwhelmed and flustered but through time, you can overcome that. But then, I guess everyone is different and people deal with things differently. So someone who is extremely sense of loneliness maybe they don’t have the ability, because in my mindset, I feel like with anything you eventually just get over it. But with someone that feels extreme sense of loneliness, they probably can’t make themselves do that. Or maybe that’s not the may they think of things.

**I**: Would you say that…

**R**: In the way that I said I personally would think that eventually, anything that happens is not the end of the world. Eventually, everything has a solution and you can overcome things. Sometimes, you might feel a certain way about something. But sometimes for a long period of time, but eventually you’d find a solution, a way to overcome it. However, for people that, I’m just saying, there were moments of time where I felt lonely because of for example anything. It wouldn’t last because I feel like eventually make up with this person or speak my mind or etc. However, someone that there are people that probably do feel lonely on the long-run and that for some people it might not be so easy to overcome it. That’s what I meant by that.

**I**: Just to reflect back, just generally speaking, not having people to turn to and not having people that, like being misunderstood or feeling that people don’t understand you makes you feel lonely?

**R**: Yeah, I would say that does play a role in loneliness.

**I**: Is there anything else you would like to say about Box 3?

**R**: No, that’s fine.

**I**: Thank you. Can we start talking about what you put in Box 4 please?

**R**: So I just drew a stick figure, a person. And then I put another group of people in stick figures. And it just again sort of brings in what I’ve been talking about all this time and it shows this person by themselves and this group of people all hustled together. So I feel like this, in a way, reflects loneliness when you’re… well not always, because I guess sometimes you are happy doing things by yourself and just getting on with your day-to-day life. You don’t always need to do things with someone or people. But, I think this does sort of just, at face value, it does sort of reflect one person alone and all of these people together.

**I**: So when you say that, you know, this person is alone, on your own and these people are a group of people… how does that make this alone person feel being sort of separated from this group of people?

**R**: So this could make them feel lonely and alone. And they could feel a bit detached from the other group of people. Obviously, I don’t know. When I drew this, in my head, I didn’t know who this person and these people are or anything like that. But, this person is detached from these people.

**I**: I was wondering whether you could give some examples of what this group might involve? Like what is this person thinking? Is it an individual person?

**R**: That this group of people have togetherness, they are… they have each other. They can do things together. But then again, you don’t know the dynamics in this group. For all you know, this person could be better off being by themselves and if, for example, this is a very negative space to be in, they might be better off being here than there. It all depends when you look deep into the picture and you start giving an explanation, there’s so many different ways you can interpret it in some sense. But I just drew it just to show someone being alone and a group of people together.

**I**: So it sounds like what you’re saying is, seeing people being together and doing things together and having things done together and you not being a part of that, assuming that you want to be a part of that, can make you feel lonely?

**R**: That’s correct, yeah. That is true. That is sort of, you can’t interpret it the way I am trying to portray with the picture.

**I**: And how does that make you feel… seeing other people together and you not being a part of that?

**R**: Not me personally, but I feel like this person, how could they feel… I don’t know. If there was a group together and they were doing something together, this person could feel left out. They could feel sort of, like, oh I wish I could do that or I was able… or had people around me, or group of friends that like are like this, this is how the person alone could be feeling in their mind. Or if only they would be included in what this group is doing.

**I**: Yeah, so it sounds like what you’re saying is, the individual person would wish to feel neglect and they feel kind of left out, as you said. They would feel like why can’t I have that?

**R**: Yeah.

**I**: I wish my family could be like that.

**R**: Mmh.

**I**: Is there anything else you want to say about Box 4?

**R**: No