Participant number 26 – Female, 23, Newham

Part 2:

Interviewer: Can we start by talking about what you’ve put in box one please?

Interviewee: Yeah. So I’ve got the pub. Again, alcohol. [Laughs] If you put alcohol into an equation, if you get a lot of people and put alcohol in the middle of them, you would find that they’re probably gonna have chats as opposed to if you just put that same amount of people in a circle and left them to their own devices. So I also work in a pub. Um and I find that a lot of people there are chatty and you get to know a lot of people really instantly. Maybe it’s because a lot of the time I’m in a position where people have to talk to me ‘cause I’m asking a question. Is it- would you like this? Would you like that? What can I do for you? So I get the opportunity to talk to people quite a lot. So I’m gonna put the pub and also I’m gonna like put that as a thing that’s work for me. I’m work- I mean it’s customer service. I’ve got to talk to people. So I do get the opportunity to meet [interviewer: mhm] a lot of people. And I see other people meeting people just because they’re in that same venue and maybe they’ve had a drink or two and that they’re feeling a bit more confident than they normally would. [Interviewer: mhm] Plus it’s a place where I’d say lonely people go. A lot of lonely people go. We call a lot of pubs in my area death’s waiting room, which means that there’s a lot of old people there, and they’ve gone there to- just because they don’t wanna be in the house by theirselves anymore. So I think it is a place where people go to have a chat. I think that’s a big part of the British culture as well, going to the pub.

Interviewer: Mhm. What is it about going to the pub that attracts you. Or just…

Interviewee: If I had my way, I wouldn’t go as much as I- as- as I- well, I don’t really go much. I work there. But if I had it my way, I wouldn’t go there often with my friends. I’d much prefer to go- I like to be outside, so I prefer to be in the park. Plus I’m an extra cheap-skate so I’d rather buy alcohol and sit in the park and drink it than go to the pub and pay for service that isn’t that great anyway. Um but my friends like to go to the pub because my friends like to drink. That’s it really. They like to drink, wanna get out of the house, want the opportunity to meet people that they otherwise wouldn’t have met. [Interviewer: mm] So I think that’s what the main attraction- going to the pub. I think that’s always been the way. Even if you look back to… hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years ago, people were sitting around in little barns, drinking ale, dancing and chatting and having fun and that’s just the way that it was. [Interviewer: mm] Don’t know if that’s unique- u- I don’t think- that’s probably not unique to the U.K. but I definitely think that is definitely a part of the British culture. Drinking. Li- if they- what are they- even like within my family we say let’s drink and be merry. [Interviewer: mm] That’s like a big- let’s drink and be merry. It’s a Sunday thing to say, it’s a Christmas thing to say, it’s just the way that we are. Yeah uh friends’ houses- um did you want me to move onto the next one?

Interviewer: No, no, no, let’s focus on the first one. [Interviewee: yeah] Um I was just gonna ask, so it sounds like what you’re saying is you like that whole social connectedness that you can engage in at a bar or pub [interviewee: yeah] because maybe the drinking element can- can reduce barriers [interviewee: yeah. Yeah.] Mhm… [Interviewee: for sure] Um and then- and- and so you basically find that the pub is a- is a space where you can just connect with people. [Interviewee: yeah] Yeah. And how does that make you feel? In that situation, that environment?

Interviewee: I mean I can’t really complain about it because it’s nice. I mean it’s a nice place to go. However, if you have a problem with alcohol or a lack of discipline, lack of willpower, or you do have that internalised anger, you might not even realise that you’re using alcohol as a means of venting it as opposed to actually dealing with the root cause. So if you’re relatively strong minded and you sort of know where you wanna be, you know what your boundaries are, you’ll be alright. But if you’re not, that could lead to a really dangerous place. That could lead to a life of alcoholism, which… I- again, I think it’s quite common. [Interviewer: mm] Um… which is sad.

Interviewer: Mhm. Did you wanna mention something about your friend’s house or…

Interviewee: Uh, it’s not- it’s not part of the pub, it’s just sort of um- it’s the next one for the place I feel most socially connected. [Interviewer: mm] Yeah. Um got quite a few friends at uni um that live on campus and um flat shares. Um even now I’m- I live in loads of different places. So I’m here sometimes- depends on where my work is the next day. Uh more often I’m here, I might stay at my boyfriend’s house, he might stay here or I might stay at one of my friends’ houses um so I’m lucky to have the opportunity to get to stay at a lot of different places and meet a lot of people. A lot of my friends live in flat shares um where they’ve got loads of young people um in them. Five or six other young people, so it’s nice to be able to go there and sit in a communal area and have a chat, again normally over a drink. Um interesting. But yeah, it’s nice to be able to go and meet other people um in their own houses, [interviewer: mm] which is cool. I feel like people are less inclined to put up that facade when you’re in their own environment, just because you can see things for what it is there.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that?

Interviewee: It’s a lot harder to pretend that you are the richest, smartest, like most intelligent person in the world when someone’s sitting in your bedroom that is and absolute state, do you know what I mean? It’s- if you’re allowing someone into your house, you’re allowing for them to see how you live. And people- I think people are a bit more genuine in those situations because you can see things for what they are there. Um it’s- it’s a lot harder for people to pretend to be something that they’re not when you’re in their own environment. Yeah.

Interviewer: Mm. It sounds like what you’re saying is uh, some people pretend to kind of be someone that they’re not, [interviewee: yeah] um but by being sort of in one’s house, those people don’t necessarily have the option to pretend to be somebody else.

Interviewee: Yeah. Again though, like I don’t- I- I don’t want for you to interpret- when I say pretend, I don’t want for you to inter- interpret it as people are even doing it consciously. I think it’s an unconscious thing. I think it’s something that people just do. You know? Um not everyone. But a lot of people, particularly young people, just do it. It’s- I have very- when I was- I was very young when I became aware of- that people were gonna think of me what I put to them. So even- even now, today, I can tailor what I want for people to think of me based on what I choose to tell them. You know? And that might not mean me lying, it might just me be saying something in a completely different way. But I’m not gonna go to my job at the pub and be the exact same persona as I am when I’m being a mentor. Um just because I don’t really care about being a role model when I’m in the pub, whereas if I’m being a mentor, I am expected to act as a role model. So there are a lot of things that I wouldn’t disclose, there are a lot of things that if I were to disclose, I may f- potentially fabricate them to- f- to make it more appropriate. Um if I was going to a work interview, there would be a lot of things that you wouldn’t see of me um there and then that you might actually see six months into the job because I feel like right cool, I’m alright to be myself now. Yeah so I don’t think it’s something that everyone does consciously, I think it’s just something that is like- maybe- it’s human behaviour, really. [Interviewer: mm] But the people that do do it on purpose, um… I can understand why it’s quite easy to do. Because you can- you can choose to use this skill in any way you want really, can’t you? And if you are feeling inadequate, then it probably is quite easy just to allow for people to, again, see what you want for them to see. But to up the ante on everything. [Interviewer: mm] Yeah.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about that

Interviewee: Um… I feel quite empowered really. Because… it’s a good skill to have. And if you use it right, then it can work in your favour. So I feel quite empowered that um… we do have the opportunity to put out there whatever we choose to put out there. And essentially be who you wanna be in that moment. Yeah. However it does make me sad that other people choose not to, but with regards to myself I feel empowered by it.

Interviewer: Even if that means for example being someone that you’re not?

Interviewee: I’ve got to a point now where I can only- I only- I would only do that in a situation where I feel like I have to. Um but then the- for me, the minute that I notice that I’m not being myself, I would then think about how I can tailor my own behaviour to be more like the person that I’m trying to be. So if I- I swear quite a lot, so I wouldn’t go to an interview and swear all the time. But then for me, if I’m going for an interview and I’m incredibly well spoken for an hour, I wouldn’t then look back and say you’re- you’re a bad person because you swear. I would then say so you know that you have the potential not to, in spite of being that version of yourself. And I would then aspire to be that version of myself a little bit more. [Interviewer: mm] Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you wanted to say about that box?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: ‘Kay. Uh thank you. Can we start by talking about what you put in the next one please?

Interviewee: Yeah so- this box? Or here?

Interviewer: No no no, the lonely bit. So this one. The- the box number two.

Interviewee: Okay. Oh, I do have some more stuff here if you wanted me to just to go over it really quickly.

Interviewer: Uh okay.

Interviewee: Yeah so I’ve got the gym, because my gym has… pardon- classes. And the intention of those classes is to get people together. [Interviewer: mm] And I- my gym actually can pair you up with people that’ve got common goals. So they’re not gonna pair you up- for me, who’s trying to lose weight with someone who is trying to gain weight. So they would put me- they’d say okay, right guys, buddy pump class has started, I want Jess with so and so, and you’d spend that hour working out together, maybe having a conversation, getting to know each other a little bit, you have the opportunity to exchange details if you want to at the end, go to the gym together. So I do feel like it’s quite social in thy gym, which is nice. [Interviewer: mm] Yeah. [Interviewer: thank you] Um and then my home. Like I said, I’ve still got the opportunity to be around all the time. Me and my cousin are the exact same age. We were born six weeks apart so that’s really nice that I’ve got the opportunity to spend too much time- uh quite a bit of time with her. [Unintelligible 10:16- interviewee whispering] So that is a- not amazing. Um [interviewer laughs]… but things like that happen all the time, don’t they? Um so there are negatives and positives to living in a house where- like I would hate to live entirely by myself. I’d hate it. [Interviewer: mm] It’d just be awful. I’m really sc- I- I get quite scared. I- I’ve lived alone and like having my- I’m like my mum, coming to stay with you. I can’t- I don’t like living alone. [Interviewer: mm] It’s just not- it’s not for me. [Interviewer: mm] Don’t think I ever will, to be honest. Um yeah. [Interviewer: mm] Not for me. Um and yeah work. Work. I’m really lucky in that I got the opportunity to um, in my role, um I get a young person for- it could be two days I’m gonna meet this young person, be able to try and work with them to get them back into a mainstream school. It could be two years. So I- I’ve gone into work before and there’s been eight young people for me to work with that day that I’d never met before. That’s eight personalities, eight opinions, eight voices. Um so I think that’s really social. Obviously, it’s not a friendship but it’s still human interaction. Um and there’re a lot of agency staff that come in that- it’s nice to be around like-minded people that are all trying to do the same thing. Because you- it’s funny, kids will always turn around and say to you you’re only doing this for the money and you say listen, there is a lot easier ways to make a lot more money [laughs] than doing this. So it’s nice to be around like-minded adults that also have the same like values and beliefs and that’s a good- I think that’s a good foundation for a friendship.

Interviewer: Mm. Is there anything else you wanted-

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewee: So again, the place that I feel most lonely, I’m gonna touch on public transport, again lack of eye con- lack of conversation and eye-contact. I spend quite a bit of time on public transport. So that’s a place where I don’t necessarily feel the most lonely but it becomes very apparent to me how many people there actually are around me. Because before that, you only really- you think about the world and how many people there are, but you only really- in terms of like a name and a face, you think about the people that you actually know on a personal level, you’re not gonna think about Sandra from Essex that you’ve never met before. That’s essentially you making an imaginary person in your head. So sometimes when I do go out and I get on the train and I get on a bus, I’m like oh my god, this city has got so many people in it. Why couldn’t I find someone to do something with me on Thursday evening? [Interviewer: mm] Yeah. So it’s not that I feel lonely, although I do feel lonely, but it’s not just that. It’s that it reminds me of the potential, which kind of makes me feel even more lonely. Yeah. [Interviewer: mm] Um do you want me to just right- keep running through…?

Interviewer: I was just gonna ask you, so it sounds like what you’re saying is um- um y- London has a lot of people um, you’re probab- you’re surrounded with a lot of people but uh- or London is- per se has a lot of people and the city but… you s- but you find it difficult sometimes to- to have friends that you could get together, for example on a Thursday evening.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, it is quite difficult. I guess ‘cause everyone- we’re just working all the time. Um there will always be someone that isn’t, there’ll always be someone that is free, I guess it’s just about having the confidence to go and- and seek friendships and meet more people and have a- let’s say a longer list of potential people to spend that time with. But I mean I am only twenty-two and I’ve got quite a lot of friends. I guess by the time I get to in my thirties, I’d like to have a lot more friends that are a lot more open and that I’ve met in different places, in different countries, on different courses, different- different jobs. Um yeah. I think that’s something that will improve for me, but at this stage, I am- it is quite alarming to note- when you notice how many people there are here. Versus how many people you can actually call up on a random whim and say what are you doing? Do you wanna do something?

Interviewer: Mm. So it sounds like what you’re saying is it’s difficult to make friends in London.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think depending on your personality though. I think it does depend on your personality. Um I’ve got a friend who’s incredibly confident, although that does go back to the alcohol she drinks every day, and she makes friends every single day. But I don’t know how she would be if she didn’t drink. To be fair.

Interviewer: Mm. So how does it make you feel, like being in London and… and- and finding it difficult to make friends in the city?

Interviewee: Again, for me, I’m not that- I don’t get upset by it, ‘cause I’ve got enough friends and I’ve got a partner but it just makes me feel really sorry for people that aren’t in that same- same place.

Interviewer: Mm.

Interruption.

Interviewer: Um, okay so it sounds like what you’re saying is um… what makes you feel- well, just being in London and not being able to make friends- [interviewee: yeah] like you’re surrounded with a lot of people but then you can’t actually make connections with people or build friendships with them.

Interviewee: Mmm… I could. Um more often than not I could sort of choose not to, ‘cause I am sort of content. But it does make me wonder what if. And um… I think that I’ve got quite good social skills. A lot of the young people that I meet don’t have those social skills because they are very much- their- their uh social development-

Interviewer: Because they’re very much- what, is it because they [interviewee: the phone] wouldn’t get out-

Interviewee: The- the phone. [Interviewer: oh] They’re very um- oh of course yeah. Um they’re- a lot of their social development has come from interacting with people on an online basis. Even- it- it’s insane. You see w- in- in the school that I’m in, on the playground, they would message each other in a group chat while they’re standing right next to each other. So their actual verbal communication skills are not- are not on par. Which makes me feel sad and concerned about- right now that’s being monitored by us, but when that’s not being monitored, that’s gonna become and every day, normal thing. They may go on to teach their children that’s the way that you communicate with people, which makes me just think wow- what’s it- what is it gonna be like in the future? [Interviewer: mm] How are people gonna talk to each other? [Interviewer: hmm] Are we just gonna sort of have like a little device on the side of our head that tells the person next to you that Jess is feeling happy. Instead of you know saying I’m having a really nice day. Is that- and I think that’s dumbing us down. It’s bringing a- if used correctly, it’s something that could be incredible. But just like an iPhone, on a day to day basis, the things that you can do with an iPhone are amazing, but the things that a lot of people do on an iPhone are very basic. And they’re- they’re not- they’re not stretching their skills whatsoever with it at all.

Interviewer: Mm. And when you said it’s difficult to- to- to make friends in the city, tell me more about that.

Interviewee: I would say it’s difficult under no influence. Under the influence, it’s a lot easier. So again, I would just- I would just go back to that. I don’t know whether it’s just that we’re lazy, that we can’t really be bothered, that we feel fulfilled because we have got that social media interaction that we feel like well actually I’ve got enough people in my life, I don’t- I can’t really be bothered to go out and meet new people. Maybe it’s that. Maybe it’s- I don’t know, fear. Um I don’t really have this said issue, really. Although there have been times where I’ve sort of looked in my group- having friends that- well my school friends that I’m still really good friend with that are not particularly aware of much other than what’s going on right in front of them has made me really want to branch out and meet new people. But I believe in the law of attraction, so I asked for that and then I put the work in. And now I’m in a position um where that- that’s the situation. And I have met a lot of people. I’ve got a lot of friends that are quite a bit older than me, which is nice. Um just because I think it- it’s just different. Completely different. Different morals, different beliefs, different values, different objectives um, which is cool. But someone who hasn’t got the mind set to go and actively seek that. And if they don’t, then that could be quite sad. Like you’re just sort of left with what you- what you’ve dealt wi- what you’ve been dealt with. These are the friends [interviewer: mm] th- these are gonna be your friends. Might not be good friends, might be toxic friends, but you don’t really have the social skills to go out and make more friends so it just is what it is. [Interviewer: mm] And I very, very much believe that you are… or that the person that you’re gonna be in five years is largely based on the information you take in, the things that you believe and don’t believe, the books that you read and the people that you surround yourself with. If you’re surrounding yourselves with toxic people… how’s it gonna be? For you? In the future? Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to say about that?

Interviewee: This column here?

Interviewer: Mm.

Interviewee: Uh I’d just say that what makes me sort of the most sad, is that there are- this is quite a green city. If you look at some other cities, there isn’t much greenery. If you look at London from above, there’s a lot of parks, there’s a lot of trees, there’s a lot of places for people to go and chill out and interact. For adults. Because they normally set up businesses that’s gonna benefit by making someone money. So th- let’s open up this trendy new place in Hoxton for everyone to come and sit and eat pizza. Great for adults. But for young people- younger people than I am, you can’t- so- so I suggested that we go to the park. Me and you going to the park is completely fine. But one of my students going to the park with their friend to have a chat and have their phone oh so happily on the side like that is just not gonna happen, because there is a big gang problem. In Newham in particular. Um big gang problem, big drug problem, big violence problem. Erm which isolates people. Makes them stay in their house. Um or be like cool I’m gonna go there anyway, but then like bad things could happen. You end up getting a lot of people sort of loitering around, which is again not safe. Um especially with the likes of the recent acid attacks and things like that. So um I think the gang and violence issue that we have here is causing for people to feel lonely. [Interviewer: mm] And it- it’s- it’s- it’s creating limitations for young people. So, in South London- I did some work in South London- I remember being completely shocked because there was a group of young boys that were in the same class, same age, same interests. But they couldn’t be friends. Because one of them lived on a road that had black bins outside their house, and the other one lived two roads down where the bins are blue. So you’re part of blue-bin gang, and you’re part of black-bin gang and if we cross paths, then we have to stab each other. Because of the colour of the bin that is outside your house. That ter- that whole territorial issue that was happening in that particular area was insane. Like killing for a post code that was doing absolutely nothing for them. [Interviewer: mm] But that was like- their dad had taught them that. And then their grandad had taught them that. That was so like deeply ingrained into what they thought was true and what was not. It’s really hard to work with young people like that and try to help them see anything other. Because you believe what your parents tell you. You only get to a certain age where you’re like oh maybe my mum wasn’t right about this, and my dad wasn’t right about that. But in that community, there was what seemed to be quite a big ego and pride issue. So you can’t tell them their dad’s wrong about that, [interviewer: mm] especially from a professional point of view. You could have parents proper coming for you um and contacting people above you to say that they- you’ve offended them. You can’t really be of- offend people. So it’s quite difficult to work with young people that have that sort of warped mentality. But it’s really normal [Interviewer: mm] It’s really like a- let’s say average behaviour here.

Interviewer: Mm. Um is there anything else you wanted to say?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay well thank you very much.