Participant 38 – Part 1 – Female, 22, Tower Hamlets – part 2

**I:** (Interviewer)

**R:** (Respondent)

**I:** Thank you very much. We move on to Part 2 now. Can we start by talking about what you put in Box 1 please?

**R:** So, a place where I feel the most socially connected is when I go to the gym or swimming. I am a very active person and every day during the week, I have something to do and I feel socially accepted in these places because these are people who I see once or twice a week and they don’t know me and I don’t know them, so I am able to speak to them about certain things and open up to things, because first of all, they won’t judge me, and even if they do, it slightly doesn’t bother me at all, like, it doesn’t bother me in any way because they don’t know me so I can speak to them about certain things, like I can tell them ‘Oh, I’ve done this …’ They won’t be like oh my god, you know… It’s just more like getting, speaking to each other back and forth and I’ve noticed that when I do go swimming and we are doing laps in the pool, I have made friends, not friends… but swimming buddies and we talk about certain things, about our personal life, they tell me about their partner and I’m telling them about my partner and back and forth constantly and I know they won’t judge me so this is where I feel socially acceptable because I don’t get judged. I see them once or twice a week and we just get on with our life but we come back and we talk completely different topic and there’s no judgement, there is nothing unhealthy about that.

**I:** Sounds like what you’re saying is, you feel comfortable you feel comfortable talking to semi-strangers?

**R:** Yeah, like my hairdressers, someone who I’ve seen once in six months and I still talk to them about my life. They probably won’t see me again or won’t remember me for another six months. I sometimes prefer opening up to stranger because they don’t know me as much.

**I:** I mean, you can say that you sometimes open up to strangers because they don’t know you as much, can you tell me more about that?

**R:** So, like I said, my friends, because they know me inside and out, I feel as though they judge me, they’re like ‘how can you do this’ it becomes a sense of disappointment maybe. With a stranger, there is no disappointment there…

**I:** You say disappointment, could you tell me more about that?

**R:** For example, if I say something and if something I’ve never done before, or it’s just seen as wrong, they might judge me. Whereas, a stranger wouldn’t care if I do it or it’s not their problem if I did do it. It’s just being socially accepted in your loop of friends, if your friends know you inside out and they know everything about you, and you are doing something that they don’t except you to do, it just becomes like ‘oh my gosh, she’s done that’. It just becomes all that gossiping and judging someone, whereas a stranger doesn’t really say ‘oh gosh, really, you’ve done that or this’. It’s more like, okay so what now type of thing.

**I:** It sounds like what you’re saying is, sometimes you worry that your friends may judge you?

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** How does that make you feel?

**R:** To be fair, I don’t mind, It doesn’t make me feel anything, I don’t feel sad about it, I don’t feel happy about it, it’s just very neutral because like I said, certain things I keep to myself and I prefer it that way, because the less people know, the better. It doesn’t really affect me in any way and even if they were to find out certain things about me and my personal life and they were judging me, I feel like as you get older, you realise these things don’t matter anymore, let them judge you and let them feel a certain way towards you because you’ve done that and this is your mistake but you, I have to deal with it, not them, so what’s their issue. It’s all about positive thinking and looking clear about going forward or being like gosh, I’m disappointed and now what am I going to do and what am I going to tell them. I don’t care anymore type of thing, like okay I’ve done this but what’s there to talk about, I’ve done it, even talk and gossip about it with other people, I don’t mind but you know, what are you going to get out of it.

**I:** And you also mentioned religious place mosques?

**R:** So, as I’ve mentioned I’m Muslim and where I feel socially connected is when I go to the mosque, especially during Ramadan. We all have the same spiritual values, making sure, for example, making sure during Ramadan that we break our fast at the same time and it keeps you a sense of happiness and a sense of belongingness, you are following something and you are all praying towards something. You are praying for something, and it just gives you a sense of happiness rather than feeling lonely, even if you were to feel lonely, you can’t feel lonely because you have all these people around you and they are doing the same thing as you and like I said, when you go to a Mosque, it is full of strangers so even if you talk to someone about certain things, they wouldn’t judge me because firstly, they are in a religious place, secondly they would most likely provide you with support if you need help with anything and you just feel like a sense of belongingness when you are in a religious place.

**I:** Sounds like a common shared element can actually make you feel more socially connected.

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** And you have family and friends?

**R:** This is something where I feel socially connected when I do go out with my friends or family and we do go out for a meal etc. I feel as though it’s a good and happy environment and everyone is really in a good sociable mood, so you can talk about certain things and it depends on the mood really, but when you talk about certain things, you feel slightly connected rather than feeling lonely. People around you, you’re talking about certain things and everyone is just communicating and having a good time so rather than feeling upset and lonely and distance, you feel connected with everyone, you just mingling with everyone.

**I:** Sounds like you like that sort of aspect of communicating with people, mingling with everyone?

**R:** Yeah. That happy atmosphere.

**I:** A happy atmosphere is basically when you are there with your friends or family, enjoying your meal, catching up and talking about different topics and things like that?

**R:** Yeah. And everyone is in a good mood. That’s when life feels socially connected. I feels as if it was a good night, you can go home in a positive mood rather than you feel as though you are lonely and for example, when I said to you I struggled to fit in at work, I used to go home really upset and lonely, I still feel a bit frustrated, and I just wanted to get into bed, whereas when you go out with friends and family, when you go out, and you feel socially accepted and socially connected, you go home happy and in a better mood.

**I:** Is there anything else you want to say about Box 1?

**R:** No, that’s all.

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

**R:** Like I said earlier, it’s entering a new place, for example, going to university or work I felt the most lonely. It’s all about that transition phase, no one really talks about that big jump, when you go from university to work, when you go from college to university, it’s like a completely different jump. It’s a completely different level of work. Nobody talks to you about that transition, how you are going to fit in etc and I felt really lonely because obviously I had to make completely new friends when I went to university and friends from different backgrounds, from different ethnicities from completely different lifestyles from partying and clubbing and as a Muslim person, I never really, I don’t do clubbing or drinking, so it was really difficult to make friends with these people. But, as time went on, I was able to actually make friends with different people and we just found a mutual ground.

**I:** These are the colleagues you are talking about or uni?

**R:** People at university.

**I:** This is the jump from school to college?

**R:** Yeah. For me, college to university was a very big transition for me. It was a completely different environment with different age groups, different people. It was really difficult at first. It’s just like the same transition from university to work. It’s just that whole transition phase, where you are trying to fit in and struggling and just trying to making sure you are doing the right things and just keeping yourself to yourself until you’ve actually communicated with the people.

**I:** When you say you know, making sure you are making doing the right things, tell me more about that.

**R:** When I say doing the right things, what I mean is, for example, at work you are always trying to make sure you are not making mistakes, making sure your work is correct and up-to-date, just to try to earn their trust and your place within the company, earn your name really in the company and so just trying to make sure you are in the manager’s good books and trying to give off a really good impression.

**I:** Sounds like what you’re saying is, you want to be looked good at in front of people

**R:** Yeah, correct.

**I:** how did it make you feel when you are back at university especially in the early years and you saw everyone going out and partying and drinking and so on and you didn’t necessarily connect with that lifestyle?

**R:** To be fair, when I. Partying and drinking didn’t really interest me so it didn’t bother me, it was more like okay But when they started drinking, I was like okay I’ll make my way home. Clubbing isn’t really my type of environment and when you hear stories, like the club was terrible, everybody was drunk and vomiting, I hate stuff like that, I’d rather be at home watching tv in my slippers rather than at a club where everyone is vomiting, so it doesn’t really interest me, which is why it didn’t interest me that much.

**I:** How did it make you feel when you saw all your friends going to the destination together and you didn’t necessarily participate in and seeing everyone doing it and you not doing it?

**R:** I think it slightly did affect me in terms of, oh, I should have gone with them etc but then I would see stories later and how this and that happened. Like I said, social media, you only show what you want to show them, you don’t really see what happens behind the scenes. It doesn’t interest me, so at first I just thought, not jealousy or resentment, maybe a bit of an outcast because my friends are not more slim as I am and it had a huge impact on my social life, but as time has gone on and I’ve managed, social media, I just don’t, it doesn’t really interest me and I don’t mind, it’s okay, I had a good time, I would just go home or I would just go somewhere rather than going to the club with you.

I**:** Is there anything else you want to say about Box 2?

**R:** No, not that I can think of.

**I:** Okay, thank you very much.