

Veronica: Hi my name is Veronica McKenzie from the Haringey Vanguard project. I am now interviewing Angela or Ange as she's known. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Angela: Hi my name's Angela. I'm turning 50 this weekend, looking forward to that. At the moment I do sewing, I teach people with mental health illnesses how to sew. That's it really at this moment. You'll get to know me a bit more through the interview.

V: So where were you born and where did you grow up?

A: Okay, so I was literally born in the Hackney, Stamford Hill in a house and basically that's where I stayed all my life and I grew up in Hackney and I still basically live in Hackney till today.

V: So did you not move around to other parts of London?

A: I did but for some reason, I always ended up back up in Hackney. I mean, I'm being up in West London, South London.

V: You were in Haringey at one time, weren't you?

A: Yeah, I was in Haringey, Tottenham, Wood Green and now I'm back in Hackney again so something's pulling me back there. I don't know what you know, Hackney's good.

V: So what was your upbringing like?

A: Um, I think for the time, it was as you could say is normal as most people. I mean, there's five of us brought by my mom on her own and obviously it was a struggle because it was five of us and my mom was a single parent but I feel that we had a good life still, you know, I mean, okay, she just struggled to make ends meet but we didn't go without and I don't if that's because we had each other, you know, we didn't feel the pressure of the struggle if that makes sense. My mom never really put it on us so yeah I think we had a good upping and is cool, especially in the 70s in Hackney.

V: And so are you from, what's your that ethnic background would you say?

A: My parents are from Barbados. Been there of loads of times and my mum ended up going back there to live.

V: And so how long ago was that?

A: What, that my mom went back? My mom went back 2000. She bought a nice little house out there and settled there, but it didn't last long because she passed away out there in 2007, but at least she got to go back.

V: Okay.

A: All the hard work paid off for her.

V: And so do you still go back?

A: I am, to be quite honest, I've only been back once and I was meaning to go about this year but obviously because of the virus going around, I don't know if I'm gonna go back this year. It's not the same no more. I mean, when I went back to Barbados, it was mainly to visit my family. The last one that was standing was my mother. I mean, I got cousins but I'm not really close to them so to go back, it doesn't feel the same anymore. I'm going back to visit my mom at her grave, do you know what I mean? It's not a holiday, it's not anything like that for me anymore, so yeah, I'm hoping to go back this year, if not, next year.

V: And so when you were growing up... How do you identify in terms of your sexuality? Do you identify as lesbian?

A: I hate that word for some reason. I don't know why, I just say I'm gay, yeah. Growing up, you know what, it wasn't an issue. If anything, the issue was with myself growing up and not being able to come out. I mean, the thing is there was no one around me making it difficult. I don't know if it was just the way it was at that time. There wasn't many black and gay people around that I knew of or anywhere to go and meet other gay people and so I didn't come out, I feel, until I was quite late in life, which would be 25-26. And then you know, you realize oh there's the Rio, what goes on in the Rio, you know, the Rio, a cinema down in Dalston?

V: Yes.

A: And that was when I had my first glimpse of Black gay ladies so I was thinking, oh! And then when I eventually did come out this gay, it was like nothing, no one batted an eyelid. It was like okay Ange, we know anyway. Okay, you knew before me yeah, okay, that was it really. So yeah, it weren't no issue me coming out, none whatsoever.

V: When would you say was the first time that you thought you might be gay?

A: Well I would say from an early age. I would say around 11/12? But you know back then they called it puberty init, when you start thinking that you may be attracted to the opposite sex, I mean to the same sex. So you put it down to puberty and I'm thinking okay maybe that's that and then as you're getting older, you know, you're getting into that little kind of group where you try to, I don't know back in then, big earrings and everything so I forgot about it if that makes it sense. Not forget but I thought let me just roll with what's going on and then as I got older I was thinking this ain't for me. You know, this really ain't for me, this ain't the life I want to live and that's when I started looking into where I could actually go to meet more gay people.

V: So you were dating men at the time.

A: Yeah if you can call it, probably abusing them, turning them mad because they couldn't... A lot of them said that I was functioning like a man and you know had been cooking me dinners and washing my clothes. So I think I messed up a couple of guys on the way out yeah, which was bad. We made them better men.

V: So do you remember the first gay space that you went to? You mentioned the Rio, do you remember what it was like?

A: Oh, um, right, the Rio it was just something that they were doing outside so that weren't really... I wouldn't say that was my first real gay rave or whatever. There was one in South London that my friend took me to and I can't remember whereabouts it was but it was cool. I just sat there and felt really at home and comfortable. You know, watching all the pretty ladies walking by and everything, you know. So yeah, I can't remember exactly where it was but then I think I started going somewhere. It's either Velvet Room or what was the other one called? Oh. Liberty.

V: Liberty on Oakbar.

A: Yeah, so there I would say yeah and then there was Southtopio, house parties.

V: Sorry.

A: Yes, so the Liberty, Velvet Room and then Bootylicious. And a lot of the house parties which were the best. House parties. I would say, was the best. It was just such a lovely atmosphere and you could actually sit down and talk and it was kind of like all your own age group as well so you was all on the same level so I did prefer house parties. I haven't been to one for a very long time. So yeah, they were a couple of clubs that I knocked about in afterwards when I came out.

V: And did you have like a group of people that used to hang out with or crew?

A: Ha, a crew. You see, I'm not that sort of person to have a gang of friends or anything like a crew of friends. I used to move around with different people. I had like, okay I got my main friends but I would venture outin other people's groups, you know, see where they're going, what they're up to and what they're doing. But I mean the people that I was knocking around at the time, I probably only keep in contact with one now, you know. I don't know what happened to the rest but one I still really do keep in contact with.

V: And so in terms of when you used to go out and meet people you said that was very comfortable. Did you start having relationships quite soon after coming out?

A: Yeah, within a week mate. So yeah, it happened quite quickly within a week but that

relationship didn't last long. I think that was my first relationship or experience with a woman so it didn't last long and so yeah that only lasted for a couple of weeks and then you know, you get the feel of everything and then you move on init. But yeah so, after that I think it took me a couple of weeks and then I was in a relationship with someone else. God that sounds really bad init, but that one lasted for about two to three years, yeah.

V: Okay. So would you say it was your first proper relationship then?

A: With a woman yeah yeah, I wouldn't say the first one was, no. The second one yeah and we got on really well. We got on really really well. So yeah that I would say that one was my first real relationship, proper relationship with a woman and it ended good as well. I mean, like, you know, we ended on good terms and we stayed friends.

V: Which is unusual.

A: Yeah. I don't know. I mean, like I think with me, I'm the sort of person that, I usually like a relationship to end well because I don't want that on my shoulders as I go through life, you know. I like to try and sort things out properly. So with her, I was able to do that and that's how we remained friends, you know. Because after her, though we've made friends, I don't think I dated someone for a very long time afterwards, you know yeah. So we've managed to stay friends and then we both got into relationships with other people which was cool.

V: So was she known to your family? Were you known as a couple within your family?

A: Yeah on both sides, both sides. I mean, like with my mom, we didn't actually have the conversation of me being gay. Okay, it weren't even a thing of me having to say 'oh mummy I'm gay' whatever. It's like she knew. And she would meet my girlfriends, invite them around for dinner, I mean, there'd be times when I'd be phoning up my girlfriend and saying where are you and they'd say they're at my mom's, dya know I mean? And I'd say what you're doing there? 'Oh I saw your mom so de de de whatever' you know, and when we split up, my mom would ask me where they gone and I'd say they're mad. And my mum would say she really liked her and I'd say she's mad, you know, we can't have mad people in the house and that's how I got through it so we didn't actually talk directly about it but my mom knew and you know, she'll come in my house and have dinner with my girlfriend and that and you know, so yeah, so it weren't actually discussed but it was just known.

V: And accepted.

A: And accepted yeah. Because my mom would always asked me where they gone and I say they're mad. And she'd be upset. 'But I really liked that one' 'But she's mad mummy, yeah we mustn't have her back in your house yeah.' 'Cos my mum would do that, she would invite them back round to try to get us to talk.

V: Oh okay.

A: Yes so I had to tell my mum that they're mad and not allowed back in her house.

V: Kind of a mediator.

A: Yeah if she likes them yeah, but she liked all of them anyways, so yeah.

V: So do you think, in terms of how your life has been since you came out as gay, how is that changed? Like, is it something you think about?

A: No I mean. You know what to be quite honest with you only recently within the last year, I thought about it and when I came out as gay, I started hanging off with mainly gay people and all the straight people that was in my life before, I sort of cut them off which I shouldn't have done but obviously I was having the time of my life init being gay and it's only like the last year or so, I really connected back with my old friends and now I worked it out that, you know, being gay doesn't mean you can't have straight people around you, you know, going to straight places and things like that. And it's only now that I realized this which is quite sad, you know.

V: So you don't have two separate lives, you can have one.

A: No yeah definitely, you don't have to have two separate lives and if the people around me accept me for who I was and who I am but yet, I decided to sort, not cut them out my life, but not be around them as much as I should have been because I was out doing whatever I was doing, being gay if that make sense. Yes, so it's only now I realized that, you know, that's the one mistake I feel that I made.

V: So if you were to... But obviously this is how you felt at the time.

A: yeah, but I do think it was a mist- not a mistake. I think.. I can't explain it. I think there was people around me, obviously. I'm not gonna blame people around me, but they were going through hard times having been in straight environments which I was quite happy to be with them and go around being in gay environments all the time, dya know what I mean, and forgetting my friends. So you know, it was on me, it's not on no-one else, it's on me and it was all down to my own actions which I accept but now I'm reconnecting with my life as a whole, whether it's gay, straight, whatever it's me and whoever's around me and that's important to me, so it doesn't matter if they're gay, straight or whatever, whoever is important to me, they're around me now.

V: And was that easy, to come reconnect with people?

A: Oh yeah no it was easy but I think what's what it is is me feeling the comfort of being around my old friends again, does that make sense?

V: Yeah, yeah.

A: And being comfortable and you know, reminiscing about the old days because I'm on about people that I connected back with when I was 13.

V: Wow.

A: Yes, so you know, it was like, obviously I'd been around them still but not how I am now. It's really, it is a nice feeling to have everybody around you now who's meant to be around you. Regardless of their sexuality.

V: Right and were any of them surprised that you turned out to be gay?

A: Oh no, I told them before. You know, they knew I was gay from the beginning but it was just like, I wouldn't go to the straight clubs with them no more, I wouldn't be going out to dinner with them. I'd be going 'oh no I'm going out with my gay friends, see you later!' and you know and then they had children and they all settled down. 'I'm going out, I'm going raving' when they were being mothers, do you know what I mean? We didn't separate that much but in terms of socialising and everything like that, I was more running up and down the street if that makes sense, doing whatever I was doing and but now kind of reconnected with that and with them and in my eyes, I've got the best of both worlds now.

V: Okay. And were you part... did you used to go on the pride marches or get involved in any of that?

A: I never done none of that and it's not that I didn't want to. To be honest with you, I just don't like walking. So you know, I'm not that sort a person to walk up and down the street so I would go to the after bit, you know, like up West End and the raving of it all. The actual marching, nah I just don't do the walking. So no, yeah.

V: So how do you think things have changed over the course of the time that you've been out as gay?

A: I think I like the fact that the younger generation can be more open and they're more accepted. And they can be themselves, how they are, from an early age, you know, that's the bit I love the most about it all and hopefully our age group done that for them or helped them get there, you know, to make it easier for them to be more open and gay at such an early age. The other thing I've noticed is that there's not much clubs around no more. Or maybe there is or maybe I'm just old and don't know. Because I always say I don't go Bootylicious no more because I actually feel old there, but there's not really much clubs for our age group I feel. That's the only thing I think that's changed.

V: There's not, there's not at all.

A: Yeah so that bit's a shame really, you know, there's not much. I mean like Southtopia was still open, I'd be venturing down there and sitting down having a little drink and maybe a little boogie dance stage, you know. You know, that's the the main thing I think has changed. Also that people are more open on the work front. Being at work and being more comfortable and that's a good thing, you know, as well. I mean, I used to work for the government and I saw the changes in the government, you know, from when I started working there, how it was quite racist, quite sexist, homophobic, but now everything's changed now and people are openly gay at work. You know, the racism level's gone down, well, hidden and you know, so yeah, they're the changes I've seen and I figured for the best.

V: So when you were working for the government, were you not out?

A: No I wasn't out in the government because the environment that I worked... Um, I could have been out and, here's the thing, a lot of people said to me, like if someone came up to me at work and asked me if I was gay I would say yes. You know, but I didn't talk about my... I'm quite a private person as it is, right. Me being gay, I didn't think it was their business right, if I'm making sense. If you was to ask me if I was, and I felt that you are asking me for the right reasons, as in me and you are friends and you're not just gonna try and carry the information all over the place, then yeah I say yes I am. And the first thing they say Ange are you gay? And I said well, why do you want to know, dya know what I mean. If they don't come back with a good answer then that's none of your business then, you know, so I wouldn't say I weren't out. I mean, if you look at me, I am gay, you can see that I'm gay but it weren't a thing that I would sit and discuss my personal business with them at work. I used to keep my work life separate and I still do that now. My work and my personal life are two separate things and work is at work and when I leave there my social life and my home life, that's me then yeah. I mean, I started new job and I still haven't said to people I'm gay but if you saw me, you know I am, but it's like I said, I'm a private person.

V: And do you think that the younger people look up to you know, people of our generation? Or do they want to do their own thing?

A: What do you mean, sorry?

V: Do you meet younger people who identify as being lesbian, gay, bi or trans and they-

A: Yeah I think they do look up to us advice. I've got one young man who was a she, she's turning into a he and she's been coming to, he's been coming to me for advice because I'm quite close to his family so I've sort of been the mediator in between him and the family, you know, I'm getting the family to do research, him going through the transition and you know, just sitting down getting them to have dinner together, you know, because it is still quite hard I mean. Although I'm saying our age, people our age are still not 100 about everything that's

going on, you know they don't understand everything that's going on still and I feel that we still do need to explain to them what's happening so yes, so the younger generation definitely do look up to us and look for advice from us, yeah.

V: Okay. Recording.

A: So yeah when I started dating women, what I found difficult was the fact that they wanted to play these roles of, you know, one should be butch and one should be femme and I'm one for cleaning my house, cooking, doing all what the so-called femme was meant to do although people class me as a butch. So I found that quite difficult in trying to role-play, if that makes sense and I didn't like I don't like the idea of roleplay. I mean, I want to be me and I would want my girlfriend to be who she is, no role playing going on. We do what we both do together and no one has to be the cook, no one has to be the person who's washing up and cleaning while the other one goes out and provides. I don't believe in that, I never have and even when I was in a straight relationship, that wasn't the case either. We pulled together as one so I did find that quite difficult and you know, I'm hoping to meet someone who's on that same level as myself without the role play, just me and them and that's one thing I found quite difficult in a relationship whereas they expected me because I wore trousers to be the man when I'm not a man. I'm a female and I'm glad to be a female and I never wanted to be a man, you know, the way I dress is because that's the way I'm comfortable, you know, and that's one of the issues I have in a relationship is that the roleplay, I don't fit in there needs to be one.

V: Right. And you think that's your truth even today?

A: I think it's more so in today like with the younger generation. No. Our age group, no, I think our age group now. I think we're quite secure ourselves and we know what we we can do as an individual. We don't need no one there to put the bins or to make the food for us, we know what we're doing. But in the younger generation. I think it's more stronger going on now. They're trying to copy Americans, yeah because I had that same conversation when I was in America, you know, they're saying that the butch has to go and provide and do all this while the wife... I'm thinking no, you both go out and provide, you both come in and cook, you both wash, you both do everything together, you know, but that's the only main problem I had dating a woman and what else would I say? Mood swings, yeah. I've had to deal with mood swings though with guys, I'm not gonna lie, they got mood swings, but maybe just the guys that I was dating or I made them every mood swings. I don't know but mood swings, I had to deal with that. I think I'm quite a laid back sort of person and you know and I'm not really open as in, is it like talking wise, sensitivity so I think with women they want to hear a bit more coming from you and that usually causes arguments within my relationships because I'm not that sort of person. I'm quite private. I'm even private in my relationships. It don't make sense but yeah, if I'm a sort of person, if there's something bothering me, I tend to deal with it on my own.

V: Okay.



A: And I don't want to put it on my partner because at the end of the day, I see as my problem whereas my partner will be saying no, it's our problem. I find it quite hard to share my problems and that usually causes a lot of arguments as well. With a guy, I don't think they really care that much, do they?

V: But with a woman, they want to...

A: They just say you deal with it, you're strong. Yeah, but apart from that everything else has been okay. I haven't had any real issues.

V: Have you ever faced homophobia?

A: Um.

V: That you can think of.

A: Once. I can only say once. It was really weird. I was in the bagel shop down Brick Lane and what happened was my girlfriend at the time went in first and some guys in there must have been trying to chat up and she wasn't responding to them. And they probably got vexed so I came after because I was parking the car and then it was two black guys as it goes, so one of them went 'oh that's why, because they're lesbians' and de de de de. And then my girlfriend turned away and said don't say nothing Ange and I wanted to, you know me, I wanted to say something but she was saying no. As we came out, they were shouting down the road at us and that was it really. Most times I just get stares. I don't really get anything directed at me. Maybe because the way I look that people think twice about... Because people say my face is quite serious when I'm not smiling so maybe when I'm the way I look, I haven't really experienced it and apart from that one time when I thought well maybe I need to pick something up and defend myself, you know. Because they were following us down to the car.

V: Wow.

A: And I was looking around for something to defend but in the end, nothing I think because maybe because I didn't bite back. They just left it there in that was it.

V: Okay, okay.

A: Yeah but apart from that, no I haven't. Really trying to think. Nah. I don't think I have directly no. Which I've been quite like... I must say, that's been lucky, that's being really lucky yeah and I do think it's down to the way. I look when I don't smile. I do look quite meanie so people ain't sure whether or not to bother with me or not.

V: They're scared.

A: [unintelligible] oh maybe not, Hackney girl. Yeah but no, I haven't no, just the one time and that weren't even... You could see that the only reason why they were going on like that was because their pride was hurt.

V: Yes.

A: And that's the only reason why I think if they weren't trying to chat up my girlfriend and they didn't get blanked then they would have just left us alone basically.

V: And how long ago was this?

A: I would say this was about four years ago.

V: Okay. Not that long ago really.

A: No and that that was the first time I really experienced it, you know, I mean other people have been quite cool. I can remember being in a shoe shop job and the girl I was with at the time, she was sitting down trying on a pair of shoes and this guy sat next to her trying to chat her up. And when I came over, he looked at me, looked at her and he said sorry.

V: Oh okay.

A: He said respect and walked away. I said cool cool and that was it. Like I said, it must've been my face. I'm not even tall. So no, like I said, that was the only real time that I experienced it.

V: So what would you say if you just had a message to your younger self?

A: A message to my younger self would have been I should have came out a lot earlier. I wish I followed my instincts and came out a lot earlier and not... I don't think I was trying to hide it but as I had no one to talk to about it at the time, I kept playing the straight life for a very long time, so for my younger self, I would've said come out a lot earlier and rave a lot more.