Client Project

(Apr 3, 2024 - 12:00pm)

(00:00:01 - 00:00:47)

**Deb:** For being here. This focus group is being facilitated by College Pulse, which is, as I think you know, a research firm that specializes in studying the opinions of college students across the United States. And I'm gonna my name is doctor Deb Mashek. I'll be your your facilitator. So my job is to ask questions and try to get the discussion going, and I'll, be keeping an eye on time too. So if I move us along to to move on to the next question, that's what I'm up to there. The purpose of this conversation today is to learn more about how college students think about the conflict in Israel and Gaza. And this focus group is being conducted in collaboration with a research, group that focuses on education. So that's what we're up to.

(00:00:49 - 00:01:13)

**Deb:** There let's see what else do I wanna add here. Oh, I'm gonna propose three ground rules for us. I'm gonna go through these, and if you feel good about them, I'll I'll ask for everybody to to give me a thumbs up at the end. The first one is that there are no wrong answers to any of the questions. So obviously, share as openly as you're comfortable sharing about your experiences and opinions.

(00:01:15 - 00:01:44)

**Deb:** Second, what is said here stays here. So it's critical that we honor each other's privacy by holding in confidence everything that is said. And finally, keep in mind that your perspectives, your experiences likely differ from those of others. So we're asking that everyone to speak one at a time, be curious about those differences, and, of course, be respectful. So if that sounds good, can I see a thumbs up that everyone's game for this? Rocking. Okay.

(00:01:46 - 00:02:08)

**Deb:** So before we get started, I just wanna remind everyone that this group session is being recorded and that we're gonna use these recordings for research purposes only while totally maintaining your confidentiality at all times. So if you choose for any reason, that you're would prefer not to be here, you can exit the the focus group at any time.

(00:02:09 - 00:02:15)

**Deb:** And I believe let me just double check here. Are there any questions before we get started?

(00:02:18 - 00:02:18)

**Deb:** Thank.

(00:02:18 - 00:02:18)

**Participant 1:** Yeah.

(00:02:18 - 00:02:19)

**Deb:** You, Participant 1.

(00:02:18 - 00:02:19)

**Participant 1:** Can we.

(00:02:19 - 00:02:20)

**Deb:** Yeah.

(00:02:19 - 00:02:24)

**Participant 1:** Can we, like I just need to run to the bathroom really quickly. Is it okay, like, if.

(00:02:24 - 00:02:24)

**Deb:** Let.

(00:02:24 - 00:02:26)

**Participant 1:** Y'all start and then I can join back in? Like,

(00:02:26 - 00:02:27)

**Deb:** Yeah.

(00:02:26 - 00:02:27)

**Participant 1:** I'll just.

(00:02:27 - 00:02:27)

**Deb:** So,

(00:02:27 - 00:02:28)

**Participant 1:** Turn my stuff off.

(00:02:28 - 00:02:32)

**Deb:** Listen in to the first question, and then I'll have you go last on it if that feels okay.

(00:02:32 - 00:02:33)

**Participant 1:** Yeah. That's perfect. Thank.

(00:02:33 - 00:02:34)

**Deb:** Okay.

(00:02:33 - 00:02:34)

**Participant 1:** You so much.

(00:02:34 - 00:02:37)

**Deb:** Okay. Thank you for checking. So are there any other questions?

(00:02:40 - 00:02:50)

**Deb:** Okay. So this first one I'm gonna ask everybody to answer, which is how do you obtain information about Israel and the conflict in Israel and Gaza?

(00:02:51 - 00:03:00)

**Deb:** Do you find yourself actively seeking out information or passively receiving it? Kinda how would you you characterize your your information experience?

(00:03:04 - 00:03:05)

**Deb:** Thank you, Participant 2.

(00:03:07 - 00:03:17)

**Participant 2:** For me, I don't really believe a lot of what I see on social media, so I try to, like, seek out information from, like, actual news sources.

(00:03:19 - 00:03:29)

**Participant 2:** I read mostly, like, The Wall Street Journal and Feet, both on Israel News and, like, just in general.

(00:03:30 - 00:03:34)

**Deb:** And when you're turning to Wall Street Journal NFT, is it.

(00:03:35 - 00:03:42)

**Deb:** Active, or are you, like, receiving emails from them? Or kinda what's how much effort does it take for you to to get those perspectives?

(00:03:44 - 00:03:55)

**Participant 2:** I get, like, newsletters from them, like, a lot. And then also sometimes, I'll just scroll through the website and click on articles that seem interesting to me.

(00:03:55 - 00:04:03)

**Deb:** Yeah. And what is it about those sources that feel, better than what you're seeing on social?

(00:04:06 - 00:04:11)

**Participant 2:** It's like a an actual firm with a reputation and a lot.

**[Q1] How do you obtain information about Israel and the conflict in Israel and Gaza? To what extent do you actively seek out information vs. passively receive information? Are there particular sources you turn to? What sources do you find most trustworthy?** (00:04:11 - 00:10:10)

**Participant 2:** More resources and, like, journalists on payroll as opposed to someone who has an Instagram account and, like, strong opinions.

**Deb:** That makes sense. Thank you.

**Deb:** Participant 3?

**Participant 3:** So I I I I think I agree also. I do follow a few certain accounts that I know are impartial and non biased. Like, Jewish breaking news, I find, on Instagram is one of the only news accounts I follow just because I find that with public news, most newspapers, they can tend to be very antisemitic, and they a lot of times, they all get their articles from the Associated Press, which is known to be anti Israel and will never say anything with in Israel's favor even and, like, twist the lies a bit. So I think I have to, like, I do have to go and and search out for non bias, news from Israel. So, again, on Instagram, Jewish breaking news, and I guess website would be Jerusalem Post. They're also pretty good. But, yeah, there's a lot of, I guess, like, websites and news articles I find myself having to actively avoid now because, again, they all seem to get their information from the same place and it's just always or ninety eight percent of the time negative and I don't wanna only see that.

**Deb:** Right. Right. Thank you. No.

**Participant 4:** Yeah. So at the beginning of, like, this conflict, I was mostly, like, on the CNN feed, which is interesting. It definitely it it had a lot. They're posting every, like, thirty minutes with another story.

**Participant 4:** And so I I got a lot of, like, news from that, and I felt like it was mostly reliable at least in terms of, like, facts, even if I might have disagreed with some of the interpretation of facts that got thrown in there sometimes, or, like, wording that they might have used. But I felt like it was a pretty reliable source, at least for just understanding the situation that was going on. And then at some point, I decided that I couldn't be spending two hours reading that feed every day. So I started kind of just checking, times of Israel, like, once a day, which.

**Participant 4:** Yeah. I mean, being that it's like a a newspaper that's, you know, or a website that's produced in in Israel, I definitely understood that there could be bias there, but, the articles that I was reading seemed mostly it was mostly about, like, the facts of what was going on. And and I was seeing, some things from from both sides, reports about things that weren't necessarily in Israel's favor all the time. And then, nowadays, I've gotten off that too. I'm not on Instagram or, TikTok or anything, so I don't, like, deal with that kind of news so much. But I do watch, Stay Tuned on Snapchat every day, which is NBC's, like, short news, video thing. I found that to be terrible for Israel news. It's just, like, incredibly biased and unfair, I think. But the main source of news that I'm getting is very passive. Just the the Jewish breaking news also, WhatsApp group, basically. I'm in the second one. There's, like, forty now, so I feel very cool. And I I happen to know the kid that runs it. So I do have some, like, personal trust there.

**Participant 4:** I also recognize that the the kid who runs it leans, more right politically than I do. So sometimes the wording that he uses, isn't necessarily in line with wording that I would use. Just for, like, example, he calls all pro Palestine, protesters pro Hamas protesters. And so I don't love that. But that doesn't necessarily, like, mean that I I don't take the news that he reports as true because it's usually, cited from a news source, or I just know like, I know the kid. I know he gets his news. So I, I mostly trust him to be giving pretty accurate news at most times.

**Deb:** Great. Thank you. And, Participant 1, how about you?

**Participant 1:** Yeah.

**Participant 1:** I don't know. I get a lot, from, like, the New York Times. They've, like, they've been doing breaking news since, like, October.

**Participant 1:** So that's they have a really comprehensive, just basic facts about the war.

**Participant 1:** And I guess, like I don't know. I'm not so, like, dissuaded by bias because I feel like I can get a lot out of even a biased article. And so I, like, seek out a lot of different like, I don't know. I get a lot out of TikTok too. And, like, I love hearing people's opinions, and I think that's more interesting than actually hearing the facts. And so, like, I get, like, a lot of pro Palestine and also, like, a lot of really pro Israel and very anti like, some really bad takes on both sides, which is, I think, most interesting for me because, like, what I hear a lot from everyone is, like, there's no way to really trust what's going on. And so I'd just rather hear, like, the subjective take than.

**Participant 1:** The the whatever someone thinks is the truth. I don't know.

**Deb:** Yeah. I was gonna ask you to to say more about that the opinions are more interesting than the facts, but I feel you you said at the end because it's giving you kind of this rounded perspective.

**Participant 1:** Yeah. Sure. I mean, like, Jewish studies is my major. And so, like, I'm constantly, like, being given readings and, like, books and everything. Like, some it's, like, a very active part of my.

**Participant 1:** Life.

**[Q2] How has the conflict in Israel and Gaza affected your experience on campus, if at all?** (00:10:11 - 00:25:33)

**Participant 1:** To do that. Yeah.

**Deb:** So that's actually a fantastic segue. And maybe you could go first on this one, Participant 1, to the next question, which is, how has the conflict in Israel and Gaza affected your experience on campus, if at all? So I'm sure there's a connection right away with your major, but even more generally, what are you experiencing on campus?

**Participant 1:** Well, like, no one wants to take Hebrew anymore. Everyone wants to take Yiddish, like, which is I don't really have to elaborate on that.

**Deb:** But Yiddish is a draw?

**Participant 1:** Yeah. Yiddish is more of a drop for political reasons.

**Deb:** Say more.

**Participant 1:** And, well, well, people associate Hebrew with Israel and then specifically modern Israeli Hebrew. And so, like, when you think of Yiddish, it's a diasporic language, and it's, like, devalued throughout history. And, like, it's also, you know, fits very well within, like, queer theory and gender theory. And, it's it's very attractive at a liberal arts school to study Yiddish. But Hebrew, you know, appears, you know, to be, politically right, although I would not agree with that at all. But it's like everyone's kind of perception, I think. What I'm trying to say is just like everyone's.

**Deb:** Yeah.

**Participant 1:** Perception of Israel has turned towards, like, a very right stance that I think isn't very well rounded on campus.

**Deb:** So how is that affecting your experience on.

**Participant 1:** Oh,

**Deb:** Campus?

**Participant 1:** I mean, I don't really it's not bugging me. It's not really getting me down, but, I don't know. I mean, like, it's become a more important part of my classes where we talk about what's going on, through the lens of whatever the class is. And, like, it's come up in services very frequently. And, like, it's become a, you know, big lens for people, and it's been good for me. I don't know. You know, it's it's important to think about it politically in in that realm of the world. So.

**Deb:** So services do you mean religious services?

**Participant 1:** Yes.

**Deb:** Just so I'm clear. Okay.

**Participant 1:** Yes.

**Deb:** And and then you just said it's been good for you. I'm wondering if you can dig into that a little bit more.

**Participant 1:** Well, it's like you should always be looking at yourself and, and, like, reflecting and, like, you know, asking yourself why do I think this thing and, like, why do my you know, why do my parents or why are my parents really pro Israel and why are they donating to the IDF? But I don't see an attraction to that at all. Like, it it's just good for reflecting on the self, I guess.

**Deb:** Yeah. Thank you. How about for others? How has your campus experience been touched, Participant 3?

**Participant 3:** So I'm in a Jewish school, so everyone it's very the whole school is very, like, pro Israel, Zionistic, which I love and I've always related to. So I think when we came back from the.

**Participant 3:** Holidays hour in October, there was this I I would say, like, emotional.

**Participant 3:** Sadness or emotional I don't know. There was a lot of emotions really just running around. Everyone felt it. Everyone wanted to do something for Israel with Israel. But as students in America, we didn't know what we didn't know, like, again, how much we should be looking at the news, how much we should be avoiding the news, how to discuss it together in a healthy manner. And it it did, I think, like, intercept almost every class I had. That was all we wanted to talk about. And I think it kind of continued that feeling into November and December. I think, like, towards end of December when it was final season, I got, you know, a little bit better. People focusing more on on struggling to study for tests than only on Israel, but I think, again, being in this Zionist, like, loving environment, I don't think the thoughts of October seven ever really went away.

**Participant 3:** And similar to, before it also, in the synagogues that I go to and in my school, there's always messages about Israel and how we should be feeling and what we can do. So it's it's been everywhere, and I constantly feel connected to it. And I also funny enough, I find myself wanting to learn more Hebrew.

**Participant 3:** I I would say intermediate level. I wanna know more. I can read. I can understand more than I can actually speak it, and I've been wanting to learn to speak it more. So lots of Duolingo courses.

**Deb:** And you said something there, but the the sound cut out just a little bit for me, so I wanna make sure I caught it. But you're you're going, it sounds like maybe did the synagogues and services and hearing how I think you said should be feeling, and I just wanted to check-in to see if that was right.

**Participant 3:** Yeah. Like, because I know a lot of people, again, living in America as American Jews, they kind of feel bad that they're on this side, that they're not part of a war right now, and that they're not technically, not directly involved. But as, again, Jewish people, we feel we wanna feel connected to our family and friends in Israel, and it's a lot of emotions of how we should feel like, deal with that, what we can do from America. And I've heard a lot of people discuss that. So that's a lot of what I've a lot of what people talk about in this in the services.

**Deb:** Great. Thank you for clarifying that. And I'm gonna start with you on the next question because it totally connects to that. But before that, let's hear from Participant 2 Participant 4 about your campus experience.

**Deb:** Participant 2?

**Participant 2:** Yeah. I mean, honestly, I don't think it's affected my campus experience that much. I have, I guess, like, a a pretty secular campus, but also, like, pretty politically active.

**Participant 2:** So there have been some protest activities, but I've just been, like, staying away from that because I don't really have a a reason to, to be there. It would kind of just be, like, looking for conflict, and I don't wanna do that. But, I'm on the board of one of the Jewish organizations here. So we've been doing, like, like, more work in terms of, like, putting on events to support the Jewish community and, like, talk about things that are going on. So in that regard, it's been a little bit more work for that, project of mine, but, otherwise, it hasn't really affected the campus life.

**Deb:** K. Thank you. And I'm gonna ask about some of those events later too. I wanna.

**Participant 2:** Okay.

**Deb:** Hear. I'm curious.

**Participant 2:** Yeah.

**Deb:** Yeah. And, Participant 4?

**Participant 4:** Yeah. So, I think that I've, like, felt the kind of difference, was, like, thrown in my face in in for three different ways. One is the protests. So, closed at October seventh, you're getting already, I think, the Friday after October seventh, there was a protest.

**Participant 4:** Unclear what they're protesting against then, but they're protesting. And so that's definitely been, like and so that was happening maybe weekly or biweekly, for a while. And then over winter break, I think people got.

**Participant 4:** Bored maybe. They stopped protesting as much.

**Participant 4:** I I don't know why they stopped protesting as much, but they did. So now we've been having, way fewer protests. There's or maybe there are cold, actually. But, there's been way fewer protests second semester. So it's been, like, a little bit less in my face. But something that's still been happening is the student newspaper, gets opinion articles basically weekly about, Israel either Israel or, pro Palestine things. And so.

**Participant 4:** That's been they get sent right to your inbox, and it's always the first article in the paper because they know it's gonna grab everyone's attention. And so we've had some professors, saying some wild stuff, and then also some some students, from from either side expressing their opinions.

**Participant 4:** I've written a few articles too. And so then I got then got to ex experience the backlash, from students when you express your opinions with your name.

**Participant 4:** I definitely got doxed on, social media with my name, and, just like people basically told me to staff social media for a few days, because people are going a little crazy.

**Participant 4:** And then also just in the comments on the article, people say some crazy stuff.

**Participant 4:** But and then the third way that, it kind of impacted us, was they recently did, like, a student government resolution, to divest from Boeing because they felt that Boeing was supplying arms to Israel.

**Participant 4:** And so the student government has no control over any of the finances of the school, but they wanted to the people who proposed the resolution wanted to make a statement, that they think that the school should divest.

**Participant 4:** And so that was a meeting that had, like, two hundred different kids from the school come to it. And people gave, like I think they said fifty people spoke, giving their opinions on it.

**Participant 4:** So that was definitely a big event that happened, about two weeks ago, unfortunately passed.

**Participant 4:** But, obviously, it doesn't impact the school. It just impacts kind of the way that Jewish students felt on campus.

**Participant 4:** And then I think, like, as a more general thing, the way I've been impacted is I just feel a little bit more different, than, like, the rest of the students at the school. My campus happens to be twenty five percent Jewish, which is comforting in a way, But I definitely feel, a little bit more disconnected from some of the other people in the school. I think first, like, politically, just we obviously disagree. Like, I was raised somewhat blindly to support Israel, and that's kind of, like, worked very much into my brain. So, I, like, just kind of on on almost any issue that involves Israel, I tend to far. I tend to fall way more pro Israel than the rest of the campus does. And then also that's then, like, kind of from that, I've kind of, become a little bit less left leaning because of, like, some of the arguments I've heard from people who very much associate with the left. And I've just felt like the rhetoric, doesn't always represent the way that my brain works and the way I think.

**Participant 4:** And then, I I think also that that also touches on, like, the cultural aspect of just, like, how it how it is to be raised as a Jew, an an Orthodox Jew specifically.

**Participant 4:** And, kind of that's also made me feel even more separate from the rest of the school.

**Participant 4:** And then the last thing I wanna talk about is just, I think it's made me reconsider my ideas of, like, my race a little bit. Growing up, I always felt like, especially throughout, like, the George Floyd times, I started learning a little bit more about race, and just kinda felt like I had enjoyed all the white privilege, that, you know, anyone could ever ask for going to a private school in Boston, and and growing up with wealthy parents and going to a nice college. So I I very much felt like I was enjoying my privilege. But then since October seventh, the fact that, you know, I've had to stay up until four AM multiple nights writing articles to try to, condemn antisemitism on my campus or, you know, that I have to hear people say things that sound like they don't really care about Jewish lives or see the me too account at my school post that they they, don't really support the Jewish women who are raped. Like, these are you know, those are kind of moments that made me reconsider how I view myself and that, kind of I now see more that I enjoyed white privilege because I'm white passing, but that I also because I'm Jewish, I'm subject to the same kind of, problems that any Jew around the world, no matter what color they are, is subject to. So that's definitely been, like, a a new thing that I'm kind of learning about myself.

**Deb:** Great. And I'll say, Participant 2, I saw your hand, so I'm gonna come back to you. But first, Om, if I can ask some follow-up questions. So there are a lot of, pieces there about, like, experiencing backlash, reconsidering identity, feeling socially separate from groups. What does that bring up for you emotionally?

**Participant 4:** So thank god we have a really strong Orthodox community here, and Jewish community in general. I mean, we've also been a lot of the people who supported Israel, but weren't necessary weren't necessarily weren't necessarily religious have now become a little bit more involved in, like, Jewish happenings, whether they're religious or cultural. So it's been nice to kinda meet more of the community. But in the same way, you know, like, I think I've become even more inclined to be insular, within the the Orthodox community or at least the Jewish community in general just because I feel like, we I associate, on a more similar level with them politically, culturally, and and just in terms of, like, the experience that we're living. It's it's definitely made me feel more comfortable. I definitely feel most comfortable in in that community, whereas I might feel slightly less comfortable, around people who I've heard express, you know, their views that that, you know, Israel should be annihilated or something like that.

**Deb:** K. Thank you. And, Participant 2, what was your ad?

**Participant 2:** Oh, it was a while back, but Participant 3 mentioned that the, like, frequency of protests is kind of dialed down, and that I would say that is the the case here as well.

**Deb:** Okay. Yeah. That notion of what's changing over time,

**Participant 2:** Yeah.

**Deb:** Is fascinating. So a couple of you and, Participant 3, I'm gonna start with you on this one because you're the first one to bring it up, touched on changes in the community. So think for a moment about your relationship with Jewish communities broadly construed.

**Deb:** How has your relationship with Jewish communities changed, if at all, since October seventh? What do you think that why do you think that change has occurred? What do you think caused the change? And, Participant 3, do you wanna jump in?

**Participant 3:** Sure. So I live in,

**[Q3] Think for a moment about your relationship with Jewish communities, broadly construed. How has your relationship with Jewish communities changed, if at all, since October 7? Why do you think that change has occurred? What do you think caused that change?** (00:25:33 - 00:38:04)

**Participant 3:** I would say, like, a modern Orthodox Jewish community. And also, obviously, it's brought on by war and sadness. I feel like these past few months have maybe even brought my community closer. Like, in my area, there are lots of different synagogues and maybe some are more religious and some are a little bit more modern. But I think all of the shuls all around my community, and all the different neighborhoods, I feel like everyone.

**Participant 3:** Is living, in the sense that there's war going on in Israel, and we wanna feel more connected. And there's been fundraisers.

**Participant 3:** There's been, I know a lot of, groups went to DC when there was a big, protest, for Israel by the capital. And I I feel like it's just honestly brought people closer, and people have this common ground that we love Israel. We support Israel, and we will continue to believe in Israel. We wanna share that belief.

**Deb:** And I remember you said that one of the specific things you've done is started to learn more Hebrew. Are there other things that you're doing, that have changed in terms of your connection to the Jewish communities?

**Participant 3:** Honestly, just trying to find out more about I mean, I've been to Israel a lot of times. Every time has been different. I've learned more, but it's more just finding out what currently is going on in Israel, what, could I do from here, what could we do to help. I know, my my mom helped pack some bags for soldiers and drive all the way to JFK to the terminal just to get the bags so they could go on the plane. It's more just finding out, again, as I'm here in United States, and I'm seeing all this stuff happen from my TV screen, from WhatsApp chats. What really could I do to help?

**Participant 3:** Who can I I have lots of friends and family in Israel, so really just, like, trying to stay as connected as possible? I feel like yeah. I I it's more just trying to find a way to.

**Participant 3:** For it to feel more personal and not just as something happening on the other side of the world.

**Deb:** Yeah. Something over there. How about for others? How has your relationship to Jewish communities changed, if.

**Deb:** At all?

**Participant 2:** I think it's brought us closer together.

**Participant 2:** I mean, like, when we.

**Participant 2:** Are facing adversity and.

**Participant 2:** It feels like there's a lot of pressure from the outside, we wanna come together and support each other.

**Deb:** So what has that looked like for you?

**Participant 2:** I mean, in the, like, immediate aftermath, like, the couple days after, we hosted just, like, open house. Anyone could come into the.

**Participant 2:** Shared space that we had together and, like, talk about how they were feeling or just, like, have a cup of coffee or tea and, like, sit together and, I don't know, just, like, process it, I guess. And then since then, there have been, other things. We had a speaker on campus recently who was a survivor from the attack. And then, like, every time we have Shabbat dinner, we, like, we have a prayer and a moment of silence before. And it it's, like, it's on everybody's minds, and I feel like it's brought everybody closer together.

**Deb:** And just so I'm clear, when you say we there, that's the organization that you're on the board of.

**Participant 2:** Yes.

**Deb:** Hosting those? Okay.

**Participant 2:** Yes.

**Deb:** Thank you.

**Participant 1:** I don't know. For me, like, I'm involved in, like, a lot of really different spaces. Like, my mother is really reform, and my father lives in, like, a very. It's like he lives in five towns. So, like, I have two very different, like, whatever is going on. And then, like, my school is incredibly liberal and secular, but it has a really, large Jewish population. So I'm like, it's a lot of really, like, different things going on for me. But, like, for, like, back home in, like, my very reformed community, like, sort of maybe ironically, like, they're actually very in support of Israel, But also, like, that is some I don't know. It doesn't really attract me, too much to that space, anymore.

**Participant 1:** But, I mean, like, also my rabbi kinda plays both fields. I feel like, his, like, he, I think, tries to.

**Participant 1:** Appeal to everyone's you know, certain people just kinda try to appeal to everyone's point of view. But then in, like, service, it doesn't really, like, show up that he really cares about, the loss of Palestinian life. So, like, that's not really been attracting me to go. And, like, in my father's community, I mean, like, you can I mean, it's just, like, they're very pro supporting Israeli life, and it doesn't I mean, it's.

**Participant 1:** It actually is less of, like, a deterrent for me because, like, the I feel like a bit of separation from the perspective of.

**Participant 1:** My father's community? And, like, it is more of an invitation for me to just, like, care for someone despite our difference. And so, like, it doesn't, you know, frustrate me as much really to hear someone who's, like you know, as Participant 4 said, like, he's grown up, like, with a certain inculcation and you know what? Like, that's your perspective. And, like, you have to care about how someone is despite their difference. So, you know, I still respect that in the community.

**Participant 1:** And then, like, at school, like, I've definitely felt closer with some of my Jewish friends who are, like, willing to have hard conversations. And then some peep some Jewish friends who are, like, totally adverse to hearing someone else's perspective, that's I can't tolerate that. And, like, that has driven me away.

**Participant 1:** And then I honestly feel really close with some of my non Jewish friends who are willing to take, like, a critical stance towards Jewish life and who are willing to, like, watch it grow and, like, actually improve, like, Zion, whatever that could be, you know, instead of just clinging to, like, a really, you know, blind acceptance. You know, I find a much more openness to change in my non Jewish friends. So.

**Deb:** So at the the top of the conversation, you had said something about, feeling that your sorry. I just hit my mic. That feeling your perspective was.

**Deb:** Didn't resonate with your parents, and so I gather the the details you've just shared speak to that that disconnect.

**Participant 1:** Yeah. My mother's kinda, like, changed her opinion, but my father is, like, not he's very staunch.

**Deb:** And it sounds like in your communities, you're really valuing the the, the hard conversations and that discourse and discussion and understanding.

**Participant 1:** And honesty. I mean,

**Deb:** Yeah.

**Participant 1:** Genuine, like, honesty. Yeah.

**Deb:** Thank you.

**Deb:** Participant 4, how about for you?

**Participant 4:** Yeah. So, few things. I think first of all, the community, like Participant 3 and Participant 2 had said, or is definitely more united. I wouldn't say that it's disunited before, but I think there's more of a feeling that, we're like a team.

**Participant 4:** And for better or for worse, when they're I mean, this is, like, a general thing. I think that when there's, like, a perceived enemy, people come together.

**Participant 4:** And so definitely on campus, there's, like, developed kind of a perceived enemy of people who do not care about Jewish life. And so that's a cause to the Jewish community to, I think, the Jewish community who is pro Israel to kind of team up, in, like, a communal way.

**Participant 4:** And that's kind of shown up in just, like, the way that people support each other. People are really showing up to events, and then also, you know, like, having each other's backs on social media and, comments on articles and stuff, and also just, you know, texting you individually, checking in, making sure everyone's doing well, and being supportive.

**Participant 4:** I think also I felt more because of that kind of shift, I've also felt.

**Participant 4:** That, that, like, I very much grew up feeling like Judaism was only a religion. And then this touches more on, I guess, my race comments earlier that now it's felt a little bit more like, an ethnicity, I guess, and kind of, the way that that's kind of developed into me seeing myself as not the same as the other people who look white on campus.

**Participant 4:** Has definitely also shifted the way that my community is feeling, as kind of, like, Jewish as separate than white.

**Participant 4:** The next thing, I think that, like, the spirituality in the community has also, kind of adopted, also an Israel lens to it. And that, I think that, like, before it was that, like, because we're Jewish, we want for Israel to exist and for us to be able to go back there someday. And nowadays, it felt like, ever since, like, the day of October seventh when we found out what had happened and, we all came together as a community and prayed together, we've had, prayers for Israel at the end of all three of our prayer services every day, since October seventh. So that's definitely been working in, to the community's, like, mindset, that Israel isn't only tied up in, like, our cultural.

**Participant 4:** What we want culturally for for Jews, but also kind of as, like, a religious aspiration. It's all, like, come together. So that's been interesting. And then the last thing, just like a funny tidbit, is that our Chabad and Hillel have been warring for years, and this has finally brought them together in some really awesome ways. On October tenth, they hosted a vigil together, which was one of the first events they've run together in, like, years. It got ten percent of the student body showed up to it, which is a huge deal.

**Participant 4:** It was very, very successful. So they've been, you know, working together on these things. So, you know, not only uniting students, but also uniting these organizations, which were previously competing, but are now feeling like, there's, you know, more important things than just, getting their numbers higher. And they really just wanna be there to support their Jewish students.

**Deb:** Thank you. And just so I'm clear, you described a lot of ways that in the community, their the social, space has changed, like supporting each other on social media with, you know, with positive comments and then also in the spiritual way. Are those all changes you personally have participated in also? Or is this more.

**Participant 4:** Yeah.

**Deb:** Like you observing others, or is it describing you?

**Participant 4:** Maybe both. Specifically, like, because I've written articles, I've been the subject of a lot of backlash. So my friends have been really great about, texting me after I write articles saying how much they appreciated it, and and that, you know, that I, you know, done something good and that I wasn't an evil person. So that was nice. And then also, on social media, they've been you know, when I haven't wanted to be on there because I was getting doxxed, you know, my friends are on there responding to the criticisms, and kind of supporting me. So that's been that's been really nice, and I've been trying to pay pay that back in in similar ways.

**Deb:** K. Thank you.

**Deb:** Any more thoughts on this question about relationship with community?

**Deb:** Okay. So this next question.

**[Q4] Data from our research suggests that nearly one-third of non-Jewish students say they would not want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Why do you think they might believe this? To what extent do you think the opinion is a function of this specific issue vs. a general challenge with being friends with people who see the world differently?** (00:38:05 - 00:48:47)

**Deb:** Is, data from our research suggests that nearly one third of non Jewish students say they would not want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Why do you think they might believe this?

**Deb:** Participant 3?

**Participant 3:** So I think probably because of social media, I it's so funny because during pandemic and lockdown, I used TikTok so much. I would make videos. I loved being on it. It was so much fun seeing different people, like, what they did from their houses or or cooking videos. But now, I stopped using it because it's like every other video I I scrolled through, something came up with that Palestine or how it's terrible. Or even if it wasn't direct, it was in the comments. You could not click on any video to look at comments without someone in someone mentioning Palestine or doing some sort of comment that was against, Israel and Judaism.

**Participant 3:** And so I honestly I stopped using it because it was just a constant thing. And even on Instagram, which I still do use.

**Participant 3:** To follow friends or whatever, There's so many accounts that I've blocked because I just don't wanna see it anymore. It's it's constant. I literally clicked on a cooking video, and someone slid in a comment about, like, free Palestine. And I'm like, oh, god. No. So I had a block I blocked them because all the comments were it's just a constant thing. Even if you're not trying to find it, it people see it as, like, a trend. It's like, let's go hate on Israel. Let's go hate on Jewish people. It's not very hard to see that, and I think that's where the statistics are coming from.

**Deb:** So so the the constant presence of that perspective, how do you how do you think that connects then to people saying I I I wouldn't wanna be friends with someone who supports? So how does that exposure to those viewpoints connect to the, like, I wouldn't be comfortable being friends with them?

**Participant 3:** Because I think they're seeing, oh, the constant, stuff about Palestine, and they're finding all the wrong sources that only show the negativity, that only show the, falseness of of this of Gaza is just trying to beat the Israelis and Israel is the bad people. They're just constantly seeing this one-sided thing that's not even showing any light to Israel no matter what. And then it's all they're seeing it's how the algorithm, I think, works on TikTok or Instagram. You see one thing about, Palestine. You see one thing about us, creator, posting, like, the watermelon emoji, which is somehow turned Palestine. And then you like one photo, and then you're shown all this other stuff. And then suddenly you kind of fall down a rabbit hole. And I think if that's what's on someone's entire feed every time they open an app, of course, it's gonna change their perspective. And then.

**Deb:** Yeah. It.

**Participant 3:** They're.

**Deb:** Gets.

**Participant 3:** Gonna.

**Deb:** In.

**Participant 3:** Just.

**Deb:** There.

**Participant 3:** Be, yeah, and then they're just gonna view anyone who has any other opinion, specifically Jewish people who are linked to Israel. They're gonna view us, Jewish people, as inherently bad, and I think that's where the ideas are coming from.

**Deb:** Thank you. Participant 1.

**Participant 1:** I really like I completely agree that it's, like, an insane overextension on the part of people that want to be critical of Israel until, like, everything else that just does not involve what's going on with the war. Like, I I find so many people, like, just critiquing basic facts about Israel's, like, geography or, like, basic cultural things that apply to Jewish people beyond just what's going on in the war. And it's just like it's it's an overextension of, like, a collective blaming of, like, all Israelis and, like I mean, it's a hard thing. It's I really see why people I can understand the, like, if there's a Jewish person that disagrees with me, then then I don't wanna be friends because it's like there's free speech in America, but it's like if there are harmful things like yelling there's a fire in a movie theater, like, perhaps supporting you know, some people's view supporting Israel as, like, a harmful negative thing, you know, there's a line to be drawn. And so I understand people's, like I sort of understand the overextension into, like, this is a harmful view. So I'm just gonna.

**Participant 1:** Put it out of my sight so I don't have to deal with it, and I'm just gonna be, like, mean and not care because then it doesn't really, like.

**Participant 1:** Then I can just continue being self righteous and, like, not having an honest conversation.

**Participant 1:** It's just.

**Deb:** Yeah.

**Participant 1:** So much easier to hate than to, like, want to talk about it.

**Deb:** Yeah. So I'm hearing there both the the slippery slope idea that this, therefore, that, but then also the that sense of it's easier if I just make it a black and white situation and put people over there as bad.

**Participant 1:** Yeah.

**Deb:** Thank you.

**Participant 4:** Yeah. I.

**Deb:** Our.

**Participant 4:** Would.

**Deb:** Gnome. Yeah.

**Participant 4:** I would definitely emphasize that black and white, problem. I I recently, responded to someone's comment in a, in an article about I mean, they basically they basically said that Jews are white, and therefore, this is white settler colonialism.

**Participant 4:** Like, Israel as a state is white settler colonialism. Like, it can't be anything else. And so seeing a comment like that, is just, like, very frustrating to me because, obviously, there's, like, a lot of years of history and a lot more to say about that. There can be are there are arguments that can be made about certain European people coming into Israel. Like, okay. Yeah. I'm welcome to hear that argument, but, like, I need more than one sentence. Right? And so when someone just presents a sentence like that, every single student that now reads that article is now seeing that Jews are white settler colonialists. And, you know, whether or not they believe that or not the first time that they see it, if they see it another ten times, then I think that, kind of, like, no most people who aren't connected to this don't really care at all about doing any research or learning more. So they basically only have, like, the rhetoric that they see and which is basically Jews saying very often that anti anti Zionism is anti Semitism, and then non and then people who don't support the state of Israel saying that Zionism is terrorism or that Zionism is white settler colonialism or that Zionism is genocide. Zionism is apartheid. Zionism is the belief in sorry. In my opinion, Zionism is the belief that Jews have a right to self determination in their ancestral homeland, which is the state of Israel.

**Participant 4:** Unfortunately, Zionism to other people is a curse word. I've seen all over social media people putting, asterisks within Zionism as if it's a curse word. And so suddenly when you turn Zionists and you call them Zionist pigs with a curse with cursing letters in it, suddenly, we're no longer human. And then suddenly, we start having, like, these really big issues where people aren't even willing to acknowledge that, like, there is so much more here. Right? When you think of humans, you think of, like, complex individuals with, like, really deep and, like, interesting different sides of conflict. When you hear about, like, pigs and a curse word, you just think bad. Right? Simply bad and gross. And so I think that, like, the way that this has been simplified and like Participant 3 was saying, especially because of social media, the way that, you know, people only have a minute on a TikTok video to make their point, or they only have two sentences in their comment to write Israel's a genocide state. And so you miss the whole all of the rest of the conversation there. And it's really sad. Like, I I mean, when you read an article from a newspaper, at least you're getting, like, you know, two hundred sentences, and that's gonna give you way more, way more understanding of anything that's going on than when you see a two sentence line on a on a comment on a TikTok video that says that Israel is committing genocide. And then automatically, right, your black and white view of Israel then is that Israel is basically doing the same kind of Nazi genocide that they just had happened to them eighty years ago. And suddenly, Israel is evil, and we need to destroy them. So I think that definitely that that black and white view that has kind of come about, is really what's, like, limiting people from having real conversations about this and also what's having people label people as, like, non friends. Right? Like, I I wouldn't be friends with a Nazi. That's for sure. But that's because I have, like, Nazis, like, a label, which means I want to murder Jews. Unfortunately, Zionism, I think, to some people, has come up as a label, which means I wanna commit genocide against Palestinians. And so, obviously, that's then gonna.

**Participant 4:** I understand why someone who thinks that Zionism equals genocide against Palestinians totally understand why they wouldn't wanna be friends with me. But it's it's just unfortunate because, obviously, there's, like, Zionism, in my opinion, does not mean that. And and I I would hope that that idea would be able to be expressed to others. But, obviously, that's just not the rhetoric that's coming across on social media.

**Deb:** Yeah. I mean, one of my follow-up questions is around to what extent is this I won't be friends with them a function of this particular issue versus differences of worldview more generally. And not some of Participant 4's comments suggested it's, there's something specific about this issue, and I'm curious if others how others think about that. But, Participant 2, I wanna make sure you have a chance to come in on this one too.

**Participant 2:** I mean, I would say that, like, most of my thoughts in this have already been touched on, but, like, as others have said, I think it comes from, like, a lack of understanding to begin with. And then, like, when you have kind of a blank slate on what's going on and you're bombarded with, like, very strong opinions on social media and you see them over and over again, you can't help but take them into your own worldview.

**Deb:** That's a great summation.

**Deb:** I think for the sake of time, maybe I should move us on to the next question. But if people have thoughts, later about is this.

**Deb:** This othering unique to this, topic, or does it happen for other worldview differences? I'd be curious to hear it. This next question.

**[Q5] How do your views about Israel or the conflict in Israel and Gaza compare to those of your friends? How closely aligned are your and your friends' views about Israel or the conflict? How has the conflict affected your relationships with your friends, if at all?**  (00:48:47 - 00:57:20)

**Deb:** Is, and you've touched on this a little bit, how do your views about Israel or the conflict in Israel and Gaza compare to those of your friends?

**Deb:** How closely aligned are your and your friends' views? And how has the conflict affected your relationships with your friends, if at all? And, Participant 1, do you mind if I start with you on this one because you had touched on that that viewpoint variability in your friend group.

**Participant 1:** Yeah. Sure. So, like, a lot of my friends are, like, I'd say we align that we take, like, a critical but, like, compassionate stance. That's, like, a very relative and, like, mix. Like, we wanna speak critically. And so I wouldn't I'd be hard pressed to find a label. But, I mean, like, I was in, like, a relationship, like, a couple months ago and, like, I told my partner, like, I would like, I'm planning to go to rabbinical school after undergrad. And, like, I told my partner that, like, I would really love to go to Israel and be a rabbi there and, like, make some kind of political change and, like, improve the state of Israel. And, like, that to him just appeared like I'm just trying to support, like, a a genocide state. And it was just, like, a very it actually really upset me, but I still, like, I, you know, I that's an example to prove that I still have, like, like, a lot of people in my life that don't, you know, agree with me, and I still care for them. But, yeah, I don't know. Some people are online. Some people are not.

**Deb:** Yeah. Thank you.

**Deb:** How about others? What are you noticing about variability in your friend groups, if any?

**Deb:** Participant 2?

**Participant 2:** I think similar to Participant 1, I have a group of people around me who are able to kind of have nuanced opinions and think about things critically and have compassion for people that are from different groups than them.

**Participant 2:** And I think most people that I'm friends with have relatively similar.

**Participant 2:** Perspectives on the conflict as I do, but there are some that definitely don't. And we're able to talk about it respectfully and still be friends after.

**Deb:** So not necessarily.

**Deb:** Strain.

**Participant 2:** I mean, I I guess there is some strain, but it's nothing that we cannot overcome.

**Deb:** Yeah.

**Deb:** Thank you.

**Participant 4:** Yeah. I felt so like I said, I'm pretty insular in the Jewish community here, specifically in the modern orthodox community. And so I I think probably, like, eighty to ninety percent of us went on gap years in Israel. And after spending a year in Israel on a like, most of us also were on very, like, Zionist programs, whether they're, you know, owned by B'nai Akiva.

**Participant 4:** I don't I don't know if people know what that organization is, but, they're very pro Israel or or, you know, just other organizations that are very pro Israel, especially, you know, being in Israel. I think that, like, a lot of us left those programs with very strong, views that Israel should continue to exist. And then I think the variability then just comes in, a little bit within the Jewish community in terms of your, often your political standing. That'll then, you know, kind of dictate, where people feel about how people feel about, like, war and stuff, and and, you know, the loss of Palestinian lives. I mean, I would say that, like, all of my friends are deeply upset by the loss of Palestinian life. But the question is what you do from there, which is where it differs. But, you know, just because because of the kind of.

**Participant 4:** Similar backgrounds of most of my friends, I would say that most of them are maintaining pretty strong pro Israel views, similar to me. And then, kind of, like, more loosely in some of my classes, and, you know, friends from clubs and things like that. Like, for instance, I have a a Jewish friend who's not religious in in, one of my clubs, and I've been very close with him. But we don't really talk about the Israel conflict, because, we we know that we disagree a little bit on it. And it's not really a.

**Participant 4:** Conversation that I think we're so excited to have. It just doesn't it's, like, doesn't feel so relevant to, like, the club or, you know, like, things that we do. So that hasn't really, like, happened. I understand that some people really like talking about that stuff with people who disagree with them. Just hasn't really been something that we're interested in doing. And then, like, there has been, like, one or two cases here and there where there are, like, people at, like, a protest who, like, I used I was friends with, and then they said, like, from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free. And I'm, like, totally okay with people saying free Palestine, but from the river to the sea cross the line for me. And so I haven't been hanging out with those people as much.

**Participant 4:** And and that's definitely unfortunate, but I just don't really feel so comfortable, like, you know, hanging out with those people much, when they hold such different views about the value of of Jewish life and Jewish statehood.

**Deb:** Thank you. And, Participant 3, how about for you?

**Participant 3:** I think, similar to Participant 4, I.

**Participant 3:** Multiple times within the past years. We all wanna keep going back. I feel like we all feel directly impacted by what's happening in Israel on a daily basis.

**Participant 3:** At least for me, maybe my siblings who are in secular colleges have friends that, aren't Jewish or religious, but or my dad, he work he's a doctor, so he works in office, and most of his coworkers are secular. But thank God he hasn't had any, like, direct anti Semitism. He has coworkers that are Muslim and fully support Israel. I have told him this. And so I think I've been I I think I've been fortunate enough to not have to deal with that part of the trauma and the antisemitism that has been going on a lot on other college campuses, so I am kind of happy about that.

**Deb:** And highlighting there some of the, when you have when you're when you're surrounded by other people who have similar backgrounds, what what that might mean here. Okay. So I'm looking at the time, and I'm gonna go ahead and share that this concludes the the questions for the focus group that I have for you, but I'm curious if you have any questions for me before we wind down.

**Participant 4:** Where can I find research that's done by College Pulse?

**Deb:** I believe they have most of their research posted at college pulse dot com, including if I if my memory is I don't actually work there. I am engaged externally. Some really cool.

**Deb:** Places where you can play with data too.

**Deb:** Okay. Any other questions?

**Deb:** Okay. So the insights that you shared here are really gonna help this research team understand the experiences of college students, in particular, Jewish college students and what what they're going through, since October seventh. So thank you for sharing your perspectives, your honesty, engaging with each other a little bit, noticed and appreciated.

**Deb:** Within twenty four hours, you're gonna receive an email that's going to tell you how to access your incentive. It will also ask just a a couple quick follow-up questions if you're willing to engage, one more one more curiosity, and then contact information too if today's conversation kicked up any, thoughts or feelings that you would like to to bounce off of someone. So that is everything here, and I'm gonna stick around for a few minutes if anyone does have things they would like to ask outside of the group. So thank you all.

**Participant 3:** Thank.

**Participant 4:** Thank.

**Participant 2:** Thank.

**Participant 3:** You.

**Participant 4:** You.

**Participant 2:** You.

**Deb:** Participant 2,

**Participant 2:** Do I.

**Deb:** Are.

**Participant 2:** Just.

**Deb:** You trying.

**Participant 2:** Delete.

**Deb:** To exit?

**Participant 2:** The tab?

**Deb:** I I can end it. If you're ready to go, I can just end.

**Participant 2:** Yeah.

**Deb:** This.

**Participant 2:** Yeah.

**Deb:** For.

**Participant 2:** I'm.

**Deb:** Both of.

**Participant 2:** Ready.

**Deb:** Us.

**Participant 2:** To.

**Deb:** Okay.

**Participant 2:** Go.

**Deb:** A pleasure to meet you. Take care.

**Participant 2:** Yeah. Thank you so much.

**Hi everyone, welcome and thank you for participating today. This focus group is facilitated by College Pulse, a research firm that studies the opinions of college students across the United States. My name is Dr. Deb Mashek; I will be the primary moderator. I will be asking questions, facilitating discussion, and managing our time. The purpose of our conversation today is to learn more about how college students think about the conflict in Israel and Gaza. This focus group is part of a study being conducted by College Pulse in partnership with a research team that studies education. Our call today will last 60 minutes. Due to the time constraint I may need to move us along to the next question at various points, however there will be time for additional comments and questions at the end. We ask that during this focus group you abide by the following ground rules: First, there are no wrong answers to any of the questions, so please share openly about your opinions and experiences. Second, what is said here, stays here. It is critical that we all honor each other’s privacy by holding in confidence everything that is said here today.Finally, please keep in mind that your experiences and perspectives are likely different from those of others. Please be respectful, speak one at a time, and be curious about our differences. If you agree to these three ground rules, please give me a thumbs up. Excellent. Thank you all so much. Before we get started, we would like to remind you that we will be recording this focus group session. By participating, you are consenting to being recorded and for the recordings, including your responses, to be used for research purposes. Your identity will remain confidential, however, if at any time you wish to no longer be recorded, you may leave the focus group by exiting the call. Any questions before we get started? OK, let’s begin! If you’d like me to repeat a question at any point, just let me know.** (Not answered)

**[Q6] Best case scenario, how should the conflict in Gaza be resolved?**  (Not answered)

**OK, everyone. That concludes today’s focus group. What questions do you have for me? Thank you so much for your time today. The insights you shared here will really help us understand the views of students on campus. My colleagues and I appreciate your participation. In the next 24 hours, you will receive an email with follow up information, including instructions on how to receive your incentive, a quick followup questionnaire, and contact information if today’s conversation brought up any thoughts or feelings you would like to share with College Pulse. Again, thank you for your participation. You may now exit the call.**  (Not answered)