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Confronting BDS in the Classroom: Jewish High School Students Build Community by Watching BDS Demonstrations on University Campuses

Abstract

A practitioner research study was carried out with 31 students who were enrolled in a course on contemporary Israeli society at a Zionist Jewish high school. As part of a unit designed to introduce students to criticisms against Israel, students watched 3 videos produced by the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and by university student newspapers. The study assessed whether watching videos of BDS behaviours negatively affected the ways that pro-Israel students learned and thought about Israel. Reflective exercises and interviews revealed that the videos did not harm students' relationships with the country. Instead, while some students reported feeling intimidated and scared by BDS' tactics, all 31 students reported that watching the videos was crucial for helping them prepare for life after high school and for understanding the criticisms made against Israel. A surprising finding of the study was that many students shared that having the opportunity to discuss BDS together as a group not only helped them better understand BDS but, more importantly, allowed them to feel less alone by forming a community that banded together through the learning of difficult and upsetting content.

Abstract

Une étude par un praticien en éducation a été menée auprès de 31 étudiants inscrits à un cours sur la société israélienne contemporaine dans une école secondaire juive sioniste. Dans le cadre d'un module conçu pour initier les étudiants aux critiques d'Israël, les étudiants ont regardé 3 vidéos produites par le mouvement Boycott, Désinvestissement et Sanctions (BDS) et par des journaux étudiants universitaires. L'étude a évalué si le visionnement de vidéos qui mettaient en scène des manifestations BDS affectait négativement la manière dont les étudiants pro-israéliens apprenaient et pensaient à propos d'Israël. Des exercices de réflexion et des entretiens ont révélé que les vidéos n'avaient pas nui aux relations des élèves avec le pays. Plutôt, alors que certains étudiants ont déclaré se sentir intimidés et effrayés par les tactiques de BDS, les 31 étudiants ont tous déclaré que regarder les vidéos était crucial pour les aider à se préparer à la vie après le lycée et pour comprendre les critiques dirigées à l'endroit d'Israël. Une découverte surprenante de l'étude est que de nombreux étudiants ont partagé que le fait d'avoir l'opportunité de discuter du mouvement BDS en tant que groupe les a non seulement aidés à mieux comprendre le BDS mais, plus important encore, leur a permis de se sentir moins seuls en formant une communauté qui s'est regroupée tout au long de l'apprentissage de contenu difficile et bouleversant.

Tucked into the back pages of newspaper headlines in a summer spent in quarantine, a Toronto restaurant called Foodbenders made both local and international news for its support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. Kimberly Hawkins, Foodbenders' owner, primarily communicated her anti-Israel and pro-BDS positions through the restaurant's Instagram page. In a series of posts, she claimed that Israel is a terrorist state that kills babies, that Zionists are greedy, and that Zionists are not welcome as patrons in her establishment.[1] In response to Hawkins' anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiments, the Toronto Zionist community organized a number of responses to Foodbenders' policies. These responses included staging rallies and protests outside of her restaurant, posting online responses, and lobbying food delivery services like UberEATS to suspend her account.[2] Additionally, local and provincial members of government—including Ontario Premier Rob Ford and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau—supported the community's concerns that Hawkins was discriminating against them for their national identity, a practice that is illegal in Canada.[3] Some members of the community even began legal proceedings and retained lawyers in order to sue Hawkins for discrimination.[4]

When the 2020–2021 academic school year began and my grade 12 courses on contemporary Israeli society had their first meetings, I was not surprised to learn that most of the 31 16–17 year-olds from the two classes were familiar with the Foodbenders story. As a private Jewish high school located in Toronto, the student body is strongly committed to Zionism and is outspoken against anti-Israel sentiments. Coupled with a summer spent in quarantine and not away at summer camp, Foodbenders was a topic that many were eager to discuss and analyze together in the classroom because it was one that many already had ideas about.

In a course that primarily focuses on Israeli culture and society, Foodbenders might not seem like an obvious topic for discussion. However, the course includes one unit on Israel Advocacy, where students learn about different international perspectives on Israel and consider how these perspectives affect internal Israeli dynamics. Within this unit, students are introduced to the BDS movement and have the opportunity to read texts and watch videos produced by the BDS movement alongside videos that show university and college pro-BDS demonstrations. Included in the course texts are three videos produced by BDS campus groups that capture events from a pro-BDS perspective. Students watch a scene from a rally at York University, a mock checkpoint at Essex University, and a disruption of a classroom at the University of Texas.[5] The school is transparent in its bias as a pro-Zionist school that opposes the BDS movement. Therefore, the pedagogical rationale for screening the videos is not to present the BDS movement as a legitimate expression of Israeli critique. Rather, it is to expose students to the types of anti-Zionist activities that can be found on Canadian and American college and university campuses and to prepare them for post-secondary Israel experiences by considering anti-Israel discourse even before

they are on campus. While the Israeli society course does provide a forum for the critique of Israeli policies and laws, when analyzing the BDS movement, the course teachers emphasize that the BDS movements' goals are incompatible with Israel remaining a Zionist and Jewish state and that the movement must therefore be understood as an anti-Zionist movement.[6]

Since the BDS movement's founding in 2005, it has received significant scholarly and non-scholarly attention from pro-Zionist groups and institutions. Quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted assessing the impact of BDS on Jewish and pro-Israel students on campus and numerous papers have been written that chronicle the ways that BDS has impacted university life.[7] Furthermore, Israel advocacy groups like Stand with Us and JStreet regularly offer training to college students for how they can combat and respond to pro-BDS events on campuses. Both of these groups have recently developed high school programs in order to prepare students for campus even before they arrive. This essay operates in conversation with studies that have tried to understand the impact of BDS on Zionist students but is the first to focus on the high school learner. As a researcher who is interested in Israel education amongst secondary students, I wanted to understand how watching upsetting and triggering films that highlight on-campus anti-Israel activists affects the way students learn and think about Israel. Furthermore, while a number of recent studies in Israel education emphasize the importance of introducing students to a full and nuanced portrait of Israel, I wondered whether films that demonized Israel were too critical and negative, and led students to prefer not to watch the films at all. Would this in turn lead them to become afraid to participate in future on-campus Israel programming or decide that they no longer identify as pro-Israel? As a researcher interested in complex Israel education and a teacher at a pro-Israel school, I wanted to better understand the ways that learning about BDS activities on campus shaped the ways that students connected to Israel and whether pro-BDS videos influenced students' decision making about Israel.

Literature Review

Israel Education

This research study is positioned to operate in dialogue with a number of recent studies that explore how students synthesize complex narratives about Israel into their Israel schema. Responding to Shlomit Attias' and Sivan Zakai's separate calls for teachers to introduce a more nuanced and expansive Israel education, the last decade has seen a shift amongst scholars with regards to how Israel is taught in Jewish schools.[8] Quantitative and qualitative studies have buttressed and refined the rationales for presenting students with a complex Israel education. These studies include my year-long mixed methods study at a Canadian Jewish high school which determined that a temporary destabilization through the introduction of painful events

in Israel's history ultimately resulted in a stronger relationship with the country because students came to see Israel as a "real" place.[9] More recently, I have published the results of an inquiry into whether arts-based learning in Israel education provided Canadian Jewish students with an opportunity to explore and produce creative solutions to problems in Israeli society.[10] Zakai and Jonah Hassenfeld independently demonstrated that high school students are able to simultaneously balance contrasting perspectives towards Israel, and through the introduction of these disparate narratives, are able to arrive at their own understanding of Israeli history and culture and form personal relationships with the country.[11]

It is important to underscore the nature of the difference between the studies mentioned in the preceding paragraph and the one featured in this essay. The nature of the texts and topics that students learned in my, Zakai's, and Hassenfeld's research were produced primarily by Jewish writers about Jewish-Israeli history. While the curricular content was controversial and upsetting for students, the *tone* of the texts was one that positioned the author as an insider who felt an imperative to share painful truths of Israel's past so as to facilitate the creation of an alternative Israel in the future. The same cannot be said about the videos that students watched as part of this study. Two of the videos were prepared by non-Jewish campus newspapers and one was produced by a pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel student group. Furthermore, with the exception of the first video which includes interviews with pro-Israel student groups, pro-Israel voices are entirely absent in the second video and were intentionally digitally manipulated in the third video in order to make the pro-Israel supporters look bad. These videos highlight anti-Israel attitudes and introduce students to anti-Israel voices where the speakers' intentions are to cast Israel in a negative light. They are, therefore, entirely different in nature and purpose from the texts that are used in the classrooms in the studies mentioned above because they were used to prepare students for campus life and not to be appreciated for their position on Israel. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the videos were carefully selected and curated for the students within a space that openly identifies as pro-Zionist and students are not being asked to search for pro-BDS videos outside of class time. Therefore, despite the overt anti-Israel content in the texts, the students are participating in an educational experience that is directly linked to pro-Israel education and which actively creates time to debrief and discuss the content of the videos.

BDS Movement

In its own words, the BDS movement is a "Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality".[12] It argues that "Israel maintains a regime of settler colonialism, apartheid and occupation" over the Palestinian population.[13] By isolating Israel on the international stage through economic and cultural boycotts, economic divestments from Israel and companies associated with Israel, and the levying of sanctions in in-

ternational forums, BDS aspires to impact Israeli society and compel the Israeli government to change its policies towards the Palestinian people. The BDS movement likens itself to other protest movements that have employed boycotting as a technique to effect societal change. In its promotional literature, it frames its struggle as part of a historical community of protesters and compares itself to South Africans who successfully overturned the country's Apartheid system.[14] The movement has three primary aims. Israel is to: 1. leave the West Bank and take down the security wall that it has erected around the West Bank, 2. grant full social and political equality to its existing Arab citizens, and 3. grant citizenship to the more than 7.25 million Palestinian refugees who were displaced due to conflict in the early years of Israel's existence. An outgrowth of these goals, suggest sociologists Abigail Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, is an end to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, a peaceful resolution over a contested plot of land, and "an important step in forging global solidarity against racism, colonialism and oppression".[15]

The successes of the BDS movement can be counted in a number of ways. Bakan and Abu-Laban identify that the movement's ability to unite Palestinian supporters around a common set of strategies and goals is a testament to the movement's ability to succeed in ways that the United Nations has thus far failed to do for the Palestinian people in over 70 years.[16] Sina Arnold has noted that the movement has had success amongst churches, financial investment portfolios, and even food co-ops.[17] The BDS movement self-identifies that it has been successful in placing pressure on Israel. This includes gaining the support of international figures like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Roger Waters. It also takes credit for Veolia's decision to halt contracts with Israel and for international governments refusing to invest in pension funds associated with Israeli companies.[18] Lauryn Hill cancelled a scheduled concert due to BDS pressure and while a call to cancel the 2013 European under-21 soccer championships was unsuccessful, the Argentinian soccer federation cancelled a match that was going to be played against Israel's national team in 2018.[19] In some European countries, the BDS movement has seen success at the municipal level, with cities in Spain, Wales, Scotland, England, and Northern Ireland passing laws that endorsed boycott resolutions against Israel, with some passing these laws despite national opposition.[20]

The movement has had its greatest successes on university and college campuses where it has found support amongst student groups who have sought to have BDS resolutions adopted by student governments and by university administrations. Arnold writes that successes on campus range from "boycotting Israeli humus in the dining hall to student governments approving resolutions calling for the divestment of university funds from Israel".[21] The movement has also gained traction amongst academics, as over 1300 university and college faculty members have signed a pledge calling for a boycott of Israel.[22]

Despite these gains, Israel has not acknowledged any financial impact due to BDS pressure nor has it expressed any willingness to comply with the movement's demands. Additionally, no international government has adopted the BDS movement's mandate as national policy, and under Barack Obama, the United States passed a law that opposed BDS measures being taken against Israel.[23] By 2019, over 25 US states had introduced laws that forbade companies from doing business with anti-Israel corporations.[24] Furthermore, amongst the 133 student-government votes on adopting BDS resolutions, the movement was successful in only 42 cases, failing to pass a resolution of support in 68% of the votes.[25] Even amongst the 42 successful votes, no university administration has adopted its student government's position, rendering the practical impact of the student vote virtually irrelevant.[26] David Newman has argued that academic boycotts of Israel have had no impact on Israeli institutions and are counterproductive because they eliminate opportunities for scholars to exchange meaningful dialogue and make transformational changes since Israelis are prevented from participating in the conversation.[27] Ronnie Olesker aptly sums it up: "since becoming operational. . . BDS has been ineffective in isolating Israel economically or politically".[28]

Jewish Responses to BDS

It would be incorrect to say that BDS is opposed by all North American Jews. Instead, a more accurate statement would be that a great many North American Jews oppose the BDS movement. Notable Jewish and pro-Israel supporters of BDS include Naomi Klein and Judith Butler, both of whom believe that the movement's goals are compatible with their vision of Israel. Butler has suggested that the movement is designed to "achieve basic political rights for Palestinians" and Klein has argued that it can be only through a boycott that Israel will change its policies and lead to "justice . . . for Palestine".[29] As well, the group Jewish Voices for Peace advocates for the adoption of BDS resolutions and is gaining influence amongst Jewish students on North American campuses.[30]

The prospect of campuses adopting pro-BDS resolutions and the presence of pro-BDS groups on campus is concerning to pro-Israel students irrespective of the minimal practical gains the movement has had on campuses. In opposition to the minority Jewish position which frames the BDS movement as primarily a pro-Palestinian rights organization, the dominant position amongst North American Jews is opposition to BDS.[31] Arnold cites anti-Semitism as the prime factor contributing to anti-BDS stances, with pro-Israel supporters arguing that Israel is being targeted because of its identity as a *Jewish* state irrespective of its treatment of the Palestinian people.[32] Karen Culcasi writes that for some, the movement is "a discriminatory act of hostility" against Israel.[33] This stance has been adopted to varying degrees by organizations like Stand With Us, AIPAC, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center. In a publication issued by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, BDS is described as a "thin-

ly-veiled, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic 'poison pill' whose goal is the demonization, delegitimization, and ultimate demise of the Jewish state".[34] Davina Cooper and Didi Herman have identified concerns amongst UK Jews who see the BDS movement as inadvertently targeting local Jewish communities through their association with Israel as a Jewish state.[35] An additional concern about the BDS movement is that its goals—specifically the one about granting Israeli citizenship to all Palestinian refugees—are really calls for the cessation of Israel as a Jewish state. Joel Fishman outlines this orientation as an understanding that BDS' "adherents make no pretence of supporting Palestinian reconciliation with the Jewish state but openly call for the politicide of Israel, which they seek to destroy and replace with a single Palestinian state ruled by a Muslim majority".[36]

Within Israel, the Israeli government is fundamentally opposed to the BDS movement and, with the exception of the Joint Arab List which serves the country's Arab population, no mainstream political party that has crossed the country's electoral threshold to gain seats in Knesset has supported adopting BDS resolutions. Furthermore, a recent study of Jewish-Israeli attitudes towards BDS demonstrated significant opposition to the movement.[37] The left-wing party Meretz is supportive of increasing rights to Arab citizens of Israel and for the country to cease building communities in the West Bank, but it makes its stance clear in Knesset that they do not endorse BDS' policies. Olesker argues that it is incumbent upon the Israeli government to find ways to work with parties like Meretz which disagree with specific government policies but who are pro-Israel and who do not question Israel's right to exist.[38] Doing so will facilitate opportunities for dialogue between different pro-Israel groups and create a stronger partnership against the BDS movement. In response to BDS, the Israeli government has allocated financial resources to combat the movement and it has also passed laws banning pro-BDS individuals from entering the country.[39] Even though the Israeli Supreme Court eventually overturned the law, it was implemented when the government denied entry to Lara Alqasem because of her involvement in the BDS movement.[40]

Study Design

The research study is informed by participatory action research (PAR) in education. As a methodological framework, PAR in education is interested in the "improvement of teaching practice, rather than the production of knowledge".[41] This type of teacher research allows for educators to become better teachers and learners by developing a stronger awareness of the phenomenon occurring in their classrooms and by thinking more broadly about the conclusions that can be derived from their research.[42] Understanding the ways that students navigate online spaces and derive meaning from their lessons allows for better lesson planning, curricular design, and implementation of pedagogical strategies in the classroom. As a research methodol-

ogy, PAR studies help focus on improvement in education and it is useful in the study presented in this paper because of the study's emphasis on not only understanding student learning but in being able to better shape and guide curriculum development and teaching.

The 31 students who participated in the study were all students in one of two Israeli Society courses that were taught in fall 2020. At the beginning of the semester, I provided them with an overview of the research study and the meta-goal of wanting to develop a better understanding of how students learn about Israel and the types of data that would be collected. In order to not skew the data, I did not reveal the specific research questions, my hypotheses, or my desired results. I also explained the types of data that would be collected and informed the students that they have the right to opt out and not participate in the study. As well, because the students are all minors, parental consent was sought in order to use student work and to interview students. The research study and the consent documents were all reviewed and accepted by the school's administration prior to their distribution.

Despite the school's clear bias against the BDS movement, efforts are made to explore the BDS movement's claims and methods in a way that does not automatically dismiss them out of hand. This will allow students to form their own opinions of the movement. To accomplish this, the movement's website is reviewed, and its promotional literature is read together. As well, the classroom teacher teaches students about pro-Israel groups like JStreet and the ideas of Jewish-Israeli Members of Knesset who agree with some of the concerns of the BDS movement even if they do not support the movement's methods or stance on Israel. In particular, students read and discuss texts written by Arab citizens of Israel and by Jewish-Israelis who decry the ways that inequalities remain entrenched within Israeli society for the Arab minority. A lesson was also taught about Israel's Nation-State Law and why many amongst Israel's Arab, Druze, and left-leaning Jewish citizens objected to its passing. These are done in order to ensure that students learn that critiquing Israel is permissible, and that Israel is not a perfect country. In the discussions about these topics, students were encouraged to form their own opinions and to actively participate in a process wherein they are forced to consider what it means to simultaneously love Israel and to also object to some of its policies. In order to model this approach, one of the course's assignments requires students to select a recent event where the BDS movement spoke out against Israel and to find and read at least three newspaper articles from different political leanings that covered the event. Students then wrote a letter to a newspaper wherein they respond to the BDS claims, draw a distinction between the claims and the methods of opposing Israel, and investigate the legitimacy of the critiques levelled against Israel. The curriculum is also structured in a way that avoids introducing pro-Israel pamphlets that employ bombastic language, hyperbole to magnify the extent of on-campus dangers for pro-Israel

students, or lack nuance or subtlety towards either the Israel–Palestinian conflict or the BDS movement's goals in general.[43] Instead, an analysis of maps, quantitative and qualitative data, primary sources (print + video) from BDS supporters and opponents, allows for students to develop a more sophisticated and nuanced response to BDS than the outright opposition that many entered the class with due to their own pro–Israel biases.

After learning about the history and origins of the BDS movement and discussing what the movement's goals and methods are, students watched three videos of different types of BDS events on university campuses. The purpose of watching the videos is to show students examples of pro–BDS rallies and rhetoric that have happened on university campuses. While the videos are all "triggering", the varying actions taken by the pro–BDS activists in the videos are not outliers on campuses. The opportunity to watch videos of BDS demonstrations builds on the theoretical foundations of the movement that students had previously learned and to see examples of pro–BDS students discussing their ideologies. Having already read and studied the movement's philosophy, the videos were an opportunity to see the behaviours of the movement. The first video was of a BDS rally held at Toronto's York University in February 2009. The video is curated by Denoja Kankesan, a reporter at the student newspaper. The video shows scenes from the rally where pro–BDS and pro–Israel students chanted and yelled at each other, waved flags, and busily moved around a large, tiered room. Kankesan interviews supporters from both of the groups. Included amongst the supporters was the student president of Hillel, a Jewish student group, who explained that Hillel wanted to counter the palpable hatred in the atmosphere. Kankesan also interviewed a member of the university's student government who explained that the purpose of the rally was to make clear the government's opposition to Zionism as a political movement. In the second video, students watched a re–enactment of a West Bank checkpoint. Staged as part of Essex University's 2012 Israel Apartheid Week, university students wore military fatigues, waved plastic rifles, and arrested and blindfolded fellow students in order to demonstrate Israeli aggression. Lastly, the third video was filmed at a lecture hosted by University of Texas' Institute for Israel Studies in 2015 and featured a group of uninvited pro–Palestinian students disrupting a guest speaker. Throughout the video, the protestors chant for violence against Israelis through a new Intifada and for a return to geographic borders that predate the creation of the state of Israel. This video is the only one that involves actual physical confrontation as a minor scuffle broke out between the protestors and the event's attendees.

In between each of the videos, instructional time was dedicated for allowing students to ask questions about what they have seen and to process their reactions together. Following the approximately 20–minutes of video, students were then divided into groups where they had an opportunity to discuss the videos with peers. Guided

questions that asked how students would respond if they were in attendance and what they were thinking about as they watched were provided, but many of the groups chose to instead have unstructured conversations about the videos and the BDS movement. The lesson concluded with students completing a reflection about the videos using guided questions.

The reflections asked students to identify new understandings about the BDS movement and to consider whether they were surprised by what they saw in the videos. Students were also asked to hypothesize about why the course directors chose to include them in the curriculum and to assess whether they would have preferred to have not watched the videos. Following the collection of the individual reflections, eight students (four from each class) were randomly selected to participate in individual interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, with students being asked questions about whether the videos increased or decreased their interest in joining pro-Israel groups on campus and whether they think that these videos should be shown in class. Students were also asked to comment on the classroom dynamic during the lesson, whether it differed from previous lessons, and to assess whether they found the learning meaningful. Each student was also asked 1–2 questions based on their written reflections. Following the collection of both sets of data, the students' reflections were coded in order to identify trends in their responses.

Results & Discussion

Student knowledge of BDS

Almost all of the students reported that the 3 videos that were shown in class were not their first exposure to BDS practices. 29 of 31 students identified that they have watched BDS videos either at home on their own or in previous Jewish Studies courses at the school and 26 reported that they were not in the least bit surprised by what they saw on the screen. While BDS is not a component of any other course at the school, some teachers choose to teach about it in the Grade 11 Jewish History course during the units on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite having previous knowledge of the BDS movement, when asked to identify new understandings of the BDS movement based on the videos shown in class, student responses indicated 4 new takeaways about the movement and the ways that it operates on university and college campuses.

The most common observation made by students was that they noticed the disinterest by pro-BDS activists to participate in dialogue with any of the pro-Israel groups shown in the video. Given that two of the videos were produced by campus newspapers and one was shared by a pro-BDS group, the students' felt confident in their observations that that the general unwillingness to actually engage in conversation with pro-Israel students is reflective of genuine campus experiences. Ten students

noticed that in the videos at York University and at University of Texas, the pro-BDS students actively resisted having conversations with people who disagreed with them, preferring to either yell over them or openly state that they are unwilling to discuss the issue with pro-Israel students. Kaya explained: "They expect their voices to be heard but refuse to talk and listen to the pro-Israeli side", while Quinn wrote: "I now understand that their real goal is not to engage in conversation, rather it is solely to amplify their own viewpoints".[44]

To varying degrees, students observed that the BDS movement employs various strategies in order to convey its message on campus. Nine students identified the use of digital video editing, social media strategies, and catchy slogans in order to appeal to supporters. Yael noted that she now "better understands how [BDS] uses social media to fragment videos and photos and spread misinformation across different platforms in order to spread their agenda". In a similar vein, six students noted how surprised they were with the ways that the BDS movement is purposeful and strategic with how it has built its brand in order to advocate for its positions. Maximilien explained that the videos "taught [him] how planned out the BDS movement is, and how it uses any method it can to villainize the global Zionist community". A final common understanding that emerged was an observation that BDS makes use of aggressive tactics in order to gain support for the movement and to dismiss pro-Israel students. Nathan explained that he observed that "the members of the movement are not friendly when it comes to their ideas and desires. The demonstrations they put on are very loud and very in your face as a way to intimidate".

Preparing for Life After High School

In some capacity, all 31 students identified that the videos provided an opportunity to become better prepared for life after high school. Whether they reported this in their response to the question about why they think the videos are shown in class or whether they would have preferred to have not watched the videos at all, a consistent refrain throughout the students' work is a belief that it was imperative that they watched the videos. Furthermore, not a single student expressed a preference not to have seen the videos, with all recognizing that the screening was important to their learning and development.

Students identified two interrelated justifications for how the videos help ready them for post-secondary life. The first is a belief that being able to see examples of what to expect on campus will allow them to be better psychologically and emotionally prepared for BDS rallies and events. Alongside this recognition is a self-awareness that many have been raised in exclusively Jewish environments and that they have been relatively sheltered from anti-Israel criticism. Therefore, being able to watch the videos will ease their transition into "the real world" where they will more regularly be forced to confront anti-Israel sentiments. Chloe observed that "growing

up, [many] have primarily been surrounded by Jewish teens. Without seeing videos like this, we may be naïve and not recognize the anti-Israel activities that will arise in our next stages of education". The second rationale is that watching BDS programs facilitates an opportunity to practice how to respond to BDS and to begin articulating the ways that they want to serve as Israel advocates in the future. Isaiah explained that "it is inevitable that [he] will run into these situations so [the videos are useful] in order to prepare [him] to calmly respond to these situations and to not fall for their propaganda". Claire noted that having seen the tactics used by the BDS movement, she now knows what she "needs to do to prepare for these kinds of things . . . to be able to stand up for [her] country". What both Claire and Isaiah's reflections offer is an understanding that attending BDS rallies with the intention of defending Israel can be both disorienting and overwhelming; wanting to effectively advocate for Israel requires being able to remain calm and, while simulations cannot replicate the in-person experience, watching videos of common types of BDS events allows them to become aware of both what to expect and what types of skills they will need to develop in order to be an effective Israel advocate.

Coinciding with the claim that watching the videos was essential to preparing for life after high school was a recognition by a small segment of the students that watching the videos was an uncomfortable experience. Alice wrote that she was "horrified" by what she saw, and Chloe found the videos "disturbing and infuriating". At the same time, however, both Chloe and Quinn recognized that their personal feelings of discomfort did not negate the pedagogical value of watching and discussing the videos. Quinn wrote: "I did not particularly enjoy watching these videos as they made me feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed, but I do think it is necessary to see these videos". As a student who learned remotely on Zoom throughout the course, Adrian developed a novel approach to managing his feelings of discomfort. He explained that "during the videos it was hard for [him] to watch [even] through the Zoom call" but he realized that he "could lower the volume on [his] laptop or look out [his] window during the especially offensive parts". It is important to recognize that even though he needed to find ways to minimize the visual and audio stimuli from the BDS videos, Adrian also refused to concede that the videos should not be shown in class. Immediately following his statement about turning down the volume and looking outside he writes: "that being said, it was very necessary to understand this anti-Semitic movement, so these videos should for sure be shown in the course".

In the interviews, I asked each student how they would respond to a fictional Jewish community member who is worried about the videos having a negative impact on Jewish students' relationships with Israel. The genesis of this question did not emerge from an actual documented concern; rather, Zakai has identified that while many academics and researchers in Israel education advocate for a complex Israel education, teachers of Israel education shy away from this complexity. They instead

favour a narrative that avoids criticism of Israel in order to foster feelings of love towards the state and worry that counternarratives will lead students away from loving Israel.[45] By asking this question, I wanted to assess whether a direct suggestion that these videos could lead to confusion and alienation from Israel would result in students preferring not to watch them.

The interviewees unequivocally rejected the fictitious claim and strongly supported the inclusion of BDS videos as essential texts that help inform their future choices. Four of the interviewees reiterated their earlier contentions that in order to be best prepared for post-secondary education, watching the videos is very important. Three additional insights were provided that added layers and nuance to the previously mentioned explanations. Leon noted that it is crucial to actually see and know what the other side says; otherwise, crafting hypothetical responses to imaginary BDS events is too abstract or amorphous and inhibits opportunities for actually trying to engage with pro-BDS students. Two students referenced their status as high school seniors and of therefore no longer being children in need of sheltering from "the real world". Jess observed that if Jewish schools can teach her about the Holocaust, it should equally be able to teach her about BDS. Jess's answer gives no credibility to the concern that she might be persuaded by BDS rhetoric; instead, by connecting the Holocaust to the BDS movement, her answer shows a clear understanding of BDS as an anti-Semitic movement and a contention that she is old enough to see anti-Semitism. Ben worried that if teachers withhold content like what is in the videos, students will come to resent their previous teachers once they realize what actually happens at BDS rallies and events.[46]

It should perhaps come as no surprise that when the eight interviewees were asked whether watching the videos of BDS activities on university and college campuses negatively affected their interest levels in joining pro-Israel groups on campus, all disagreed. Instead, four expressed that the videos strengthened their resolve to join Israel advocacy groups, two shared that they want to support Israel but are worried about the anger and hostility at events, one said the videos had no impact on his already strong pro-Israel identity, and one shared that he plans on living in Israel so BDS campus politics are a non-issue for him.

Like the rest of the data presented in this article, the question of whether to support Israel or to subscribe to the BDS narrative was not the issue. For while the students remained resolute in their support of Israel and their opposition to BDS, their answers reveal a complex portrait of how students navigate learning about the BDS movement and specifically how watching three different types of BDS events can be synthesized into their Israel schema. This new narrative is one that is now more aware of how BDS operates on campus and genuinely appreciates gaining this exposure. Concurrent with this awareness is a concern with how to actually effectively

engage in pro–Israel advocacy when they feel that advocacy is not always an option.

Community Building

The research revealed one very surprising finding which revolved around how the students identified a value to the videos that was not directly related to the content of the videos themselves or to the Israel Advocacy unit. While preparing for life after high school was the answer that was most prevalent in the students' written responses, twelve students wrote about the value of watching and discussing the videos together as a community. These students identified that the chance to learn about BDS as a collective provided two significant benefits in their exploration of the BDS movement. Seven students shared that the opportunity to *learn* and to *listen* to their classmates' perspectives helped inform their own understanding of the BDS movement and to think about Israel advocacy in new ways. In Aleeza's words, "it's good to watch the videos in a class environment so we can talk about them together and learn from everyone's perspectives. It is important to see these things in a learning space so we can analyze them together". The second benefit to watching the videos in the classroom was an opportunity to *experience* the content together because the shared learning provided psycho–social emotional benefits. Five students wrote about how they benefited from having a space to share their own feelings, to hear others reflect on the learning, and to feel less alone in their thoughts. Lily explained that even though "it sounds weird, [she] felt a sense of support when watching the videos . . . and the class is a support system". In a lengthy note, Zöe explained: "seeing the reactions of my classmates made me feel like I wasn't alone. . . If I had watched the videos alone, I wouldn't have had anyone to talk to. . . I could see the looks of shock and confusion on my classmates' faces. . . It was just nice knowing that I wasn't the only one thinking and feeling 100 different things at once".

The notion that watching the videos together provided an opportunity for shared experiencing of a difficult topic was also reflected in statements made by the interviewees about the learning experience. In order to better understand the written statements about the classroom environment, I asked the interviewees whether they felt that the classroom dynamic on the day when the videos were screened was similar or different to previous lessons. All eight of the interviewees identified that classroom learning was different that day. With the exception of one student who felt that the group was louder and more participatory because of passionate feelings in opposition to the BDS movement, the remaining seven students felt that the atmosphere was significantly more subdued than usual. These students explained the silence as a reaction to being overwhelmed by the content of the videos and by feelings of introspection over how to make sense of them. Leon explained the silence as a component of recognizing how different university will be from his Jewish high school; he wrote: "It's hard to imagine such a drastic difference to the environment we're living in right now . . . so it takes a couple minutes to set in and then accept and

then be able to talk about it". It is important to recognize that none of the eight students said that the atmosphere was negative or bad; rather, they identified a difference in the way that the collective student body navigated upsetting content. In fact, when asked whether they found the learning to be meaningful, the eight students unanimously replied in the affirmative, with Maddy explaining "When I left [class] I was like 'wow' and I went back over it last night and it's still on my mind. . . I can't stop thinking about it".

The data strongly suggests that alongside an introduction to the BDS movement's positions towards Israel, Jewish schools should also introduce students to the BDS movement's on-campus advocacy strategies in order to better prepare future alumni for post-secondary experiences and to give students a forum to ask questions and to express their feelings. The research data in this study helped alleviate student worries and also allowed the students to feel part of a community. The classroom conversations thus became a site not only for watching videos that were scary for some, but through the discussion, students were able to establish a network of peers and a community environment that offered additional insight and support for how to respond to the anti-Israel behaviours that are manifested on campuses.

A key component that allowed students to be able to assess the merits and demerits of the BDS videos was that they had first studied the movement's positions and had an opportunity to critique Israel. Recognizing that Israel is not always perfect allowed students to be even more aware of their discomfort with the ways that BDS advocated on campus. Students benefited from having the opportunity to first formulate arguments wherein they disagreed with Israeli behaviours and then, after watching the videos, think through how they might be able to use those arguments in the contentious atmosphere that permeates many campuses.

As a practitioner, I am particularly interested in exploring the ways that community can be shaped through shared discourse and group learning. Since students were able to articulate psycho-social benefits to the group conversations that took place in response to the BDS texts, I believe that to more clearly take advantage of this finding, guided group discussions need to become a more active component of the BDS unit as a whole. I was surprised to discover that in addition to finding the videos scary, students also felt the videos to be alienating and isolating. Increasing time to address these needs and to provide a forum for debriefing the emotional impact will be better able to help students navigate understanding the strategies used by BDS supporters on campuses.

Echoing Zakai's call for greater complexity in Israel education, it is my contention that her position must be expanded to include the BDS movement.[47] Like the studies conducted by me, Hassenfeld and Zakai which showed that when taught in a sup-

portive environment, complex events did not lead to a rupture in a student's relationship with Israel, the data presented here similarly shows that students are able to effectively navigate videos that present Israel in a very negative light.[48] I therefore believe that in 21st century Israel education, it is incumbent upon Israel educators to find ways to facilitate opportunities where students can learn about the goals of BDS along with the methods of BDS in order to get students to formulate their own opinions about the BDS movement and whether they are willing to allow any aspects of the movement to permeate their Israel identity.

Failing to provide this type of experience leaves students woefully unprepared for what to expect on campus and unprepared for how to respond to the accusations levied against Israel. Following the screening of the BDS videos, students engaged in conversations about *how* to perform Israel advocacy and began to think through different models of telling a different Israel story. Furthermore, by not acknowledging and addressing the BDS movement in Israel education classes, students might come to think that BDS' criticisms are legitimate and that their teachers want to hide it from them. While the conversations can be painful, awkward, uncomfortable, and personal, high school Israel educators must take into consideration the reality of campus experiences and provide a framework for educating students about BDS in a way that allows students to arrive at their own understandings and feel that they, too, are part of the educational experience. The data collected in this study paints a picture of a group of highly motivated, inquisitive, and committed students for whom watching BDS videos did not lead them away from Israel. Instead, the classroom experience helped them process the videos, be able to discuss strategies employed by BDS activists, become more resolute in their support for Israel and feel connected to their classmates in a new way through a shared Israel experience.

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6
In the following section I introduce the idea that there are some who believe that BDS can be compatible with pro-Zionist ideology; this position is a small minority, and is not the position taken by the school.

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22
Ibid.

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Jim Zanotti, Martin A. Weiss, Kathleen Ann Ruane, & Jennifer K. Elsea, "Israel and the

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement," *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 8, no. 3 (2017).

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Cooper and Herman, 45.

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"Anti-Semitism: Campus Divestment Resolutions in the USA (2005-2020)," Jewish Virtual Library, last accessed September 25, 2020, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/campus-divestment-resolutions.

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Ronnie Olesker, "Delegitimization as a National Security Threat: Israel and BDS," *Israel Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (2019): 11.

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31
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32
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33
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43
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actions as "BDS Hall of Shame", it calls the BDS movement a "dead-end alternative" and a "magnet for the naive that would lead [the world] back into history's nightmares of irrational politics and obsessive hatreds".

44
All student names are pseudonyms in order to protect the student's identity.

45
Zakai, "My Heart is in the East," 306-310.

46
I have reported elsewhere about Holocaust parallels and mistrust of educators who, in their zealousness to protect Israel's image and to shield students from negative incidents in Israel's history, do not present the full story. Based on those findings, Ben's and Jess's concerns about being over-protected may eventually lead to resentment about not knowing the whole story and doubts about other content they have learned. See: Reingold, "Not the Israel of My Elementary School".

47
Zakai, "My Heart is in the East,".

48
Reingold, "Not the Israel of My Elementary School" and Reingold, "Broadening Perspectives on Immigrant Experiences". ; Hassenfeld. ; Zakai, "History that Matters".