**Participant DDS06**

Listener: Do we have your permission to record this session?

DDS06: Yes

Listener: Thank you so much for taking the time today. We’ll take as long as it needs to. What I’m super interested in is what went through your mind the last time that you decided to go out to a restaurant during this particular, historic period?

DDS06: Oh sorry, was that a question?

Listener: Yes, basically.

DDS06: I’m sorry, could you repeat that. I just blanked out.

Listener: That’s okay. No problem. So, you have made a decision about going to a restaurant during this pandemic. I’d love to know, as you were making that decision, what was running through your mind?

DDS06: Okay. So, I guess usually whenever I decide to want to eat at a restaurant, for me, first things first, I think the most important thing for me is, is this something that I could make at home? Because to me, I've noticed something with a lot of different restaurants where they have good food, but again, a lot of it is stuff that like I can make at home, or that I usually make anyways. So, there's not much of an incentive for me to go out and try something. So, like if a food is from a specific geographical area that I don't normally cook with, or maybe a place is known for their cocktails or just something that's different from my everyday diet, then I'm more likely to go to a place.

Listener: Yeah. And boy, speaking of everyday diet, now that we’re all cooped up …

DDS06: And like besides, I guess, the food type, also I try to make sure that there’s outdoor seating. I wouldn’t also mind indoor seating, but like the tables have to be like fairly spaced out. Also, to make sure that the groups, like whatever group I hang out with is like in a really small group. So, there’s that too. Even though it’s less of a concern for me, but I still look into it is the pricing. So, how much would I expect to pay for food? I've noticed that a lot of restaurants add additional fees, or they just add the tip onto the receipt, which is fine, but I think, you know – I feel like I always have to read my receipts and make sure that I’m being charged the appropriate amount because sometimes I get bills for things that it’s way more expensive than I would have imagined.

Listener: Oh, my gosh.

DDS06: Yeah. I always like to look into that as well. I mean maybe there's always this thought where I'm trying to balance between like okay, how much can I spend for myself, and am I really being cheap? Like maybe tipping only the regular 15 instead of 18%.

Listener: Yeah. So, what was the last restaurant that you went to?

DDS06: I think the last restaurant I went to was this place called – I’m trying to think. I think it was this place called Texas Roadhouse. It’s kind of like Outback Steakhouse, but I guess local. It wasn’t my choice. It was like someone else’s choice in our group, but we – I mean, it was like a small group that went. You know four people, so we were just like okay.

Listener: How did you communicate with the group about deciding to go out? How did it come up?

DDS06: So, it was actually because I had a friend come over and like visit me at my place. So, I live alone which means that if I ever get sick or anything I can actually quarantine if I need to, which is pretty much a good thing. So, you know I was like okay, well I’m kind of feeling like isolated because I live by myself. So, I had a friend come over and then like she has like her friends, which eventually they became my friends through association. I guess throughout a five day period she stayed, probably with her and the group, maybe we went out to two restaurants and I think like that Texas Roadhouse place was like the last restaurant we went to before my friend left.

Listener: Okay. I get it. So, your friend showed up because you were feeling isolated.

DDS06: Well she showed up because of some other event that she was going to in the D.C. area, but I offered my place to stay if she didn’t want to like stay at a hotel.

Listener: Yeah. What was the thinking that went into that offering? I’m just curious.

DDS06: I did tell her – well, from pre-pandemic days I did tell her beforehand that if she like wanted to stay over, just like let me know when you’re coming, and she just took me up on it. I was like you know, I don’t really mind. Like I cleaned and sanitize my place before and after anyways and, you know, she got tested, so we’re all good.

Listener: Oh, okay. So, you know whether the germs are coming in, or the virus itself is around.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: So, she stayed for 5 days, and obviously you probably cooked for some of that and wanted to go out for some of that. What was the thinking around that?

DDS06: There were some days where we hung out together, but then some days she did her own thing. So, then on those days I just cooked for myself. One time like she made dinner as a way to repay me and like we hung out and talked. Yeah.

Listener: With respect to being able to hang out and being able to talk, and doing the dinner as a way to repay, what was running through your mind there? How was your reaction and that type of thing?

DDS06: I guess if you could say overall, in terms of like COVID safety and stuff?

Listener: Yeah.

DDS06: Honestly, I know there is like – you know, they always say there is some risk in having, you know, I guess the most risky thing to do would be like to eat inside somewhere enclosed, right. But honestly, you know, before my friend came, I had just been at my apartment, no visitors for like two weeks. Not on purpose, but just because I was there. So, it was kind of like I honestly needed social interaction at this point. And yes while technically having a home-cooked dinner could pose the same risks as being in a restaurant, I would say it’s better – at least in my opinion, I would say it’s better for both social interaction, and honestly for the price because, you know, I think anytime you make something it’s almost always going to be cheaper than buying it at a restaurant, pandemic or otherwise.

Listener: So true. If you know how to cook.

DDS06: Yes. That is also important.

Listener: You had mentioned like, “I usually make, or I can make most of the kinds of foods.” Can you think back in the before-times to a memory of a restaurant that you picked that you wanted to go to and how you made that choice? Like a particular restaurant on a particular night? Any time of day really, but a particular meal?

DDS06: I think pre-pandemic it was more or less like what are the surrounding activities we would do beforehand? For example, if I were to go out and see a show at the Kennedy Center or something, with a significant other, you try to like look at restaurants that are around there and then eat, and then do the activity, or like vice versa.

Listener: Can you tell me about one of those events in particular so that we can maybe touch on the thinking that was unique to that?

DDS06: Sure. Actually, the moment that I was thinking about, we were going to go see a ballet at the – I forget what it was called – at some theater in D.C. And we were just looking at restaurants in the nearby area to eat at first, before going to the show.

Listener: Uh-huh

DDS06: So, I mean that's what we did. And in terms of picking out the restaurant, it was like in Penn Quarter, so it's not as much of a variety in terms of the food type as it is other areas of D.C. I mean I would say Penn Quarter is more like a fancy type of area. It's like more high-end restaurants and high-end new American, Europeanish style restaurants. Honestly, to me it almost all tastes the same, so there's not much variety, but we picked one place that wasn't as pricey as the others, and ate there, and then went to our show.

Listener: So you were looking at prices before you even chose the restaurant?

DDS06: Yes

Listener: How did you come to this conclusion that they all kind of taste the same? Where did that come from? Did you have an experience, or something?

DDS06: I’ve been to about let’s say maybe 2 or 3 different restaurants in that same area and I can’t think of anything that differentiates the 2 or 3 experiences that I’ve had in terms of like taste.

Listener: Right. As opposed to some other experience where something did differentiate? Can you tell me an example from those in the pre-pandemic days?

DDS06: Well, this would be in another area of D.C. which is probably maybe half a mile, or a mile, away. Usually, more towards, I would say, like the Columbia Heights area of D.C., like that green and yellow line part, near where Georgia Avenue is, is where you start to see more ethnic food. So, food from different ethnic groups. I guess you said one experience, so one experience that I had with food that was different was Filipino food in D.C. actually. I’m Filipino, so I’m really picky about this stuff.

Listener: Awesome

DDS06: Well, okay. Sorry, I might talk about two different experiences if that’s okay with you.

Listener: That’s totally fine.

DDS06: I remember in D.C., pre-pandemic days, of course, there was this really hyped restaurant. I think it’s overhyped, but it was this really hyped restaurant called Bad Saint, which is somewhere in between Columbia Heights and Georgia Avenue. It was this restaurant where it was only open for dinner. People would wait two hours.

Listener: We have one of those kind.

DDS06: Like limited seating space and stuff. You know, since we showed up like 2 hours beforehand, yes, we literally waited 2 hours because I wanted to see what the hype was.

Listener: Right

DDS06: We were one of the very first groups in line, so we were able to get a table by the time it opened. We went there, we ate the food and I remember feeling like angry? I know that's kind of like an out there reaction, but to me, like I grew up on food where for like $7 or $8 a plate is like a really huge plate of rice and meat and vegetables and all this other stuff. But here I am paying $16 for like four dumplings and a plate of this fried pork dish where the pork wasn't even cooked correctly, and like some other stuff to it. The worst thing of it all is they try to advertise this whole experience as like family-style, and I'm kind of like – like a family of four can't eat like four dumplings. Who are you trying to sell this to? Like really, really, really poor families in the Philippines? Like no.

Listener: Well they couldn’t afford $16.

DDS06: Yeah, exactly. And you know I have a friend who is like a really picky eater, but even she said she was like hungry after having a meal there. I mean I think I was just kind of irritated because the food wasn’t – I mean the food was good, but it was just like very small and it was like at very extraordinary prices. I felt like I was paying more for the vibe, and for the brand, rather than the actual food. I get nowadays that’s how restaurants stand out, but like your first point of business as a restaurant is the food.

Listener: Is the food. Hello!

DDS06: Like please focus on that first before all this other stuff. I don’t mind eating in a hut if the food is good.

Listener: Right

DDS06: That was like my first disappointing Filipino food experience in D.C. And then my second one was at another place, also in the same area, but a little different and less pretentious, I think. It was a place called Purple Patch. While the food there was still expensive, at least it was enough to fill me up. Like I had an appetizer and a meal and then like some dessert. Honestly, it was like about the same price as whatever food I paid at the other restaurant, but I got more food.

Listener: And it was better?

DDS06: I think taste-wise it's still the same. It was just more.

Listener: And the purple, is that the yam that is common in Filipino cooking?

DDS06: The ube? Yeah. It’s common in Filipino food. I would say, I guess another bonus, now that I think about it, with Purple Patch is that they don’t try to stray away too differently from how food was made traditionally in the Philippines, which is really good.

Listener: Yeah. So, they’re not messing with grandma’s recipe kind of deal.

DDS06: Right. I hate to use this word, but it doesn’t feel as gentrified.

Listener: Ha-ha, but you totally used that word!! Right.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: So that's kind of pre-pandemic. Those were some memorable ones and that's really good examples. You had mentioned, when you're picking these, that you're aware of what you can make at home. So, how is it that you picked to go to a Filipino restaurant, especially Purple Patch, if you'd had that other experience and it's not something super different from what you make at home?

DDS06: Filipino food isn’t – I mean yes there are Filipinos in this area, but it’s not – I think there aren’t as many Filipino people as let’s say in Los Angeles or in Las Vegas. That’s where we see more Filipino people in the U.S. As a result, I feel as if there aren’t as many places where I can get authentic Filipino food. I think the reason why, specifically, I went to Purple Patch, despite having bad experiences at Bad Saint, is because honestly I can’t really – as easy as it is to generalize a certain type of cuisine in a certain area, I really wanted to give a place another shot and I really wanted to try other places before saying okay, well, this is just going to be a fact for me.

Listener: Right. Okay.

DDS06: And, I mean, I did make like Filipino food at home, like you know, before the pandemic, but I mean I think, you know, once in a while it’s okay to try somebody else’s interpretations of something you can make on your own.

Listener: Yeah. Definitely.

DDS06: I mean there were things that I had that honestly, I tried on my own and they just take forever to make at home, which is why I don’t do them as often.

Listener: Exactly

DDS06: Like lumpia, for example, which is like an egg roll, that takes forever to make. And also, like cassava cake, like where am I going to find the ingredients in an American grocery store for cassava cake?

Listener: Yeah, yeah. You have to go find a specialized ingredients store.

DDS06: Yeah. I think, you know – I mean there are some foods I can make and then some foods I’m just like nope, I better go to a restaurant so that I don’t waste my time.

Listener: Right. Yeah. Exactly. So, with the pandemic coming around how did you – I want to sort of ask how did you start? Because all the restaurants were shut at first, what was it like being home with this kind of background that you have with respect to loving to go out and eat and try other people’s versions of things? What was it like in the beginning of the pandemic, before the restaurants were open? And then I want to find out, like that first time you decided to go out to a restaurant?

DDS06: So, you said the first time I decided to go out to a restaurant, as they were opening?

Listener: Yeah, yeah.

DDS06: Okay. I have to think about when that first time was. Actually, I think the first time I did go to – and like a restaurant, as in like you're eating at the place?

Listener: Right

DDS06: Okay. I think the first time I did that was actually for a friend’s birthday. My friend wanted to do something, so we decided to – I actually picked out the place because she wasn’t picky. It’s this Balkan place that I like to go to, and it has like a really good deal on food. It was like $35 for unlimited tapas and then like really cheap drinks. It was close to where I live, so we all just went there.

Listener: Had you been there before the pandemic?

DDS06: Yes

Listener: So, you kind of knew what to expect.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: What was it like when you got there with your friends? Rather than explaining what happened, kind of what went through your head when you got there?

DDS06: Originally, we were supposed to do outdoor seating, but because it was supposed to rain, I kind of asked if they were okay with doing inside and they said, “yes.” We looked at the inside and I mean it was like really – I think the first thing that came to my mind was like it was really empty. I think the only thing that kind of changed my mindset from pre-pandemic versus now is that I myself try to keep my mask on when I’m at the table, if I’m not eating or drinking anything. So, I guess that’s the main difference. Then also the fact that there was just less people there in general.

Listener: Right. How did you come up with that idea of leaving the mask on except when you’re actually eating or drinking?

DDS06: I guess comfort. Like, you know, the whole notion of, you know, the virus spreads most easily through how you breathe. Like I just put it on just because. Honestly, unless I’m wearing it for like several hours at a time, it doesn’t really bother me to do that. I just do that as like – I do that as a courtesy and like I also tell people like hey, you know, if you can, you should wear your mask at the table, just ‘cuz.

Listener: Yeah, yeah. I know, I feel naked without one now.

DDS06: Yeah. I feel the same.

Listener: Did people at the table, like the birthday girl and everybody, were they also wearing their masks?

DDS06: I think we did at first, but it’s like as people start to like to eat and talk and relax, people were more lenient about that. But, you know, I think in some restaurants it varies, but like most of the time when people try to leave to go to the bathroom, or something, and they try to leave without a mask, I just remind them like hey, make sure you put on your mask.

Listener: Right. And did people give you a look? Or was it all fine?

DDS06: It was all fine.

Listener: You must have been there long enough to start to relax. What else did you think, or notice, or feel while you were there?

DDS06: Besides the emptiness, I would just say, I mean it just felt like a normal conversation with friends, honestly. There wasn’t anything that was like too different.

Listener: And probably kind of a relief after being isolated so long.

DDS06: Yeah, pretty much.

Listener: You mentioned the emptiness a couple of times. Did that cause any emotional reaction? Or did that cause any thinking or anything?

DDS06: Um, I would say for me the feelings are more bittersweet. Maybe not for myself, but more towards the restaurant itself because the owner is really nice. When I went there before – I mean they’re still nice now, but you know like especially before the pandemic, when I went there, they were like very friendly and would always like stop at the table and ask about experiences and stuff. It’s kind of difficult – well, I guess it would be more difficult for restaurant owners now to see that they have to limit capacity just to meet like standard health guidelines and also to give customers like safety reassurances too. And they want to keep going, but it’s a struggle to see that their business isn’t as thriving as it was before. I feel like it’s kind of unfair how something completely out of their control could like ruin their livelihood so much like this.

Listener: Definitely bittersweet.

DDS06: I know you didn’t really ask this, but another thing that I notice about myself, as a result of this realization, is that sometimes I end up like buying more than I normally would pre-pandemic at a restaurant. Like before at a restaurant I would do maybe a meal, and then either a drink or a dessert, but then now it’s like sometimes I order like a full three-course, or a meal and a drink. I don’t know, I just feel like I would spend a lot more as a result for maybe two reasons. So, like one reason is I’m never going to want to make this at home, so I might as well like try something just because. Another reason is I want to help support small businesses.

Listener: Right. Try to keep them, for the empty space, give them more dollars.

DDS06: Right

Listener: Yeah, yeah. That’s awesome. So, did you do that that first time, or have you sort of done that since then?

DDS06: I think it was more for the other restaurants, although with this one I did. I would say I think it’s more for the other restaurants just ‘cuz at the other restaurants it’s easier to spend a lot more. When I’ve spent a lot more that’s also when I noticed the pandemic surcharges, and included tip, and everything that I mentioned earlier.

Listener: Let’s jump to one of those. What went through your mind when you first – walk me through the scenario of one of those places where that ended up happening and kind of what went through your mind?

DDS06: So, the first time that happened it was at another friend’s birthday and I saw on my receipt COVID pandemic surcharge – I think it was COVID surcharge, that’s what it was billed. And it was probably like $2 or $3, for maybe like $50 worth of items. So, it wasn’t too bad, but that’s when I was kind of like huh? I have a friend who ordered more than me, but she had like $1.50 surcharge and I’m like what is this about?

Listener: Yeah

DDS06: Like is it because maybe my ingredients are like rarer to get, or something? I didn’t really question it all that much because it’s like I’m not going to dispute a bill over $3. For me, my financial rule of thumb is if it’s less than $5 I don’t worry about it.

Listener: Where did that rule come from, just out of curiosity? Total side trip.

DDS06: Oh, no worries. It’s mostly something to do with friends. Like whenever I buy friends non-alcoholic drinks, maybe like a soda or something when we go out. Or like maybe we take turns like paying each other’s bills at restaurants, but like they order food that’s maybe like $2 or $3 more because of the different ingredients. For me, I’m comfortable enough in my salary to where if I’m missing a few dollars it’s not that big of a deal. Especially since people in my generation are less likely to carry cash nowadays anyways. It’s just kind of like I don’t – it’s $3, like I don’t really care all that much. You don’t have to go to a bank. I had a friend try to write me a check for like $4 once and I was like, “that’s ridiculous, don’t do that. Don’t waste your check.”

Listener: Exactly. How much does that check cost you to write.

DDS06: Right.

Listener: Okay. That makes sense, and this idea of – we’re furthering our way down the rabbit hole here though – you order each other food, or each other drinks, or something. Where did that come from?

DDS06: Oh no, it’s not that we order each other. It’s just more like okay, I’ll pay this meal, you pay the next meal.

Listener: I see. Okay. Got it. And that came from?

DDS06: Just the fact that no one really likes to do math and figuring out who owes what and what gets calculated. I think sometimes it’s a lot easier if one person just pays. Honestly, I have this credit card where I get three times the amount of travel points for every restaurant dollar that I spend. So, I usually am the one to offer myself to pay for everyone’s meals and then everyone just pays me back so that I can get points.

Listener: And when they pay you back, do you have to do math there?

DDS06: Um, I mean I keep a copy. So, what happens usually is like I keep a copy of the receipt, and then it's like okay, I know this person ordered this. Like I do some math as to like what each person ordered and then I split the tax and tip evenly because I don't feel like getting into the intricacies of the tax. So, I just assume tax and tip are split evenly amongst all patrons and then from there, okay, like this person owes me this much, plus their share of tax and tip and then multiply that, or I guess add that with the amount of people there.

Listener: About how many people are in these birthday groups in general?

DDS06: Oh, like why are birthday groups a thing?

Listener: Well – yeah, sure.

DDS06: Okay, I just wanted to understand your question. That’s all.

Listener: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was actually – like how many people are you doing this with and did this change with the pandemic?

DDS06: Oh. So, before I think, pre-pandemic, like I would more often spend time with groups of like larger people. Maybe like 6 people, or 8 people, at some point, but then, you know, I think at this time I’ve only ever been in groups of 4 people, at most.

Listener: Is that something you chose? Or is that something that just happened?

DDS06: It’s just something that happens. When I eventually plan to celebrate my birthday myself, it will just be 4 people also. I mean for me that’s like a good amount of people to socialize with, and also less likely run a risk of COVID from.

Listener: Tell me about one of the other restaurants, when you saw the $3 COVID fee, and you saw your friend’s was only $1.50, how did you look at your friend’s, or catch your friend’s amount?

DDS06: Oh, like what was my reaction when I saw their COVID fee?

Listener: Yeah, and how did you know to look? Did you talk to them about it?

DDS06: Oh, so I looked at mine and I saw there was a COVID fee and I said, “hey, so and so, does yours have a COVID fee?” And then they were like, “yeah, this is my COVID fee.” And I’m like, “why is your COVID fee less even though you ordered more, even though your items that you spent were like – your bill was more than mine?”

Listener: Right, yeah.

DDS06: And, I mean we could have asked, but, like I said, it didn’t occur to me to look into it that much because it was such a small amount.

Listener: What about some of the other things that you noticed. You said like you wanted – going not that first time with the first birthday, where the emphasis was more on lots of food, but cheap, and cheap drinks, but these other ones. Were you involved in picking one of them out and how did you pick it out?

DDS06: So, for the times that I have gone to restaurants, I was involved with picking almost every single one, except for one.

Listener: Are you known in your circles as the one to pick the restaurant?

DDS06: Yes. Begrudgingly, yes.

Listener: Awesome. How did you get that responsibility?

DDS06: Um, I feel like – well, I think this just goes back to years ago when we would have like larger group hangouts and stuff. You know everyone would have ideas for something, but I would be the one to make logistics and figure out timing with people and choose ideal and appropriate plans for everyone.

Listener: Right. Something that would work for everybody.

DDS06: Yeah, and I’ve seemingly just inherited that responsibility ever since.

Listener: Excellent. Excellent friend to have.

DDS06: I mean it would be nice if someone else – so, like I have this problem too where it’s like I would want someone else to do it, but then their level of planning things isn’t as great as my level of planning things. Like I could punt off the responsibility, but then they’re not going to do well in it as I would. So, what call do I want to make there?

Listener: Yeah, may as well. So, with respect to the other restaurants that you made the decisions about, can you tell me about one in particular? How you were going back and forth about it with respect to pandemic planning, or with respect to supporting small businesses, like you said?

DDS06: So, I think with one of the more recent restaurants I was supposed to meet up with a friend at a restaurant. I didn't know which one though. I knew I had wanted to do D.C. just because it was more convenient for my friend because she lives in D.C., and I also just wanted to get away from my immediate area, which is in Arlington. I literally went through maybe, I would say, five pages of like both Yelp and Open Table search results. And then I actually came across two, like my final two decisions. Restaurant A had like more food options, slightly cheaper food options, but it was just like a regular American style restaurant and it didn't have as many drink options. And my friend likes to drink whereas I'm kind of indifferent. Then the other place is like a little further out, but it does have drink specials, but then the food is pricier, but then it's in a nicer location. So, for these last two, I actually had my friend pick one because I was kind of like these are like two that I really like, help me pick out which one. At the end of the day, we decided to go with restaurant A because of the more vast amount of food options.

Listener: You said that that friend likes the drink specials.

DDS06: She likes the drink specials, but I think what had happened – well, on the day that I was asking her, she was also helping a friend move. So, maybe she was just more focused on like eating something.

Listener: Right. That makes sense. Might not be able to stay upright if you had a nice drink.

DDS06: Right.

Listener: Moving is not easy. Oh my gosh. Okay, cool. So, when you got to that restaurant and met your friend, do you remember anything that was running through your mind, or any emotional reactions you had?

DDS06: Well, my friend almost went into the restaurant thinking I was in and I was like, “wait, no, no.” Like she called me, and I was like, “I see you, turn around.” I was right at the table. I picked an outdoor table because the weather was still nice.

Listener: Oh yeah, okay. Yeah, what are we going to do for winter?

DDS06: Stay at home.

Listener: Exactly

DDS06: I don’t know. I think more restaurants should look into those patio outdoor heaters.

Listener: Yeah, right.

DDS06: I grew up in Las Vegas and it doesn’t ever get as cold as it does on the East Coast, but when it hits a nice 60 degrees the patio heaters come out. People still enjoy outdoor eating, even when it is like 50 or 60 degrees outside.

Listener: Yeah, absolutely. As long as it’s not like a rainstorm.

DDS06: Right, right.

Listener: Yeah, interesting. I wonder what will happen. That will be interesting. So, you were trying to keep her from going inside. Were you worried about her going in?

DDS06: Not – well, it was just more or less like hey try to find me. Not exactly from a safety perspective, even though that is important. But it’s kind of like we actually talked a little bit about our restaurant experiences, like later, like after having a meal, and she was just – she and I kind of both came to a conclusion that like if we do decide to go out to a restaurant, I guess, if the yes option is checked to go to a restaurant in the first place, we already accept the fact, or accept the consequence if we get COVID like right after that, because of the risk. So, it’s kind of like we both have this shared – I don’t know if responsibility is the right word, but we’re aware of the consequences when we do decide to pick a place to go out to eat.

Listener: Okay. Like the risk of it, or something.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: And it’s something you’re willing to agree on.

DDS06: Right

Listener: You’re on the same wavelength, I guess.

DDS06: Yeah, there we go. That’s what I would say.

Listener: When you were talking about it, like what was that conversation like?

DDS06: Um – so I think we had an earlier conversation. So, we were actually talking about something earlier where my sister was actually coming to visit me, but like she wanted me to, I guess, limit the amount of social interactions I’ve had, or I would have with people. Basically, limit my socialization to just like getting stuff at a grocery store or something. Like essentials, I guess. And I had a really hard time because my other friend was organizing a dinner and I wanted to go to that, but I also know that this friend like – I wouldn’t say she doesn’t give a damn, but I feel like she traveled a lot more than what I would expect from someone in a pandemic. Like she – this whole thing started in March. We’re not in October. So, that’s like 7 months, but in that 7 months, you know, she went to L.A., she went to Chicago, she took a road trip to Atlantic City with 8 people.

Listener: Wow

DDS06: I mean it’s way, way more traveling than – and those are just the instances that I know of, or that I only see because of like social media and stuff. So, I think she’s kind of like – you know as much as I would like to hang out with this person, I also don’t want to feel bad if I do hang out with them and then I hang out with my sister and then something happens to us. Because I feel like the mistake – the worst consequence of like going and then coming back and giving someone something, to me was a lot worse than like FOMO, than not going to something, but, you know, have that “n” minus one interaction and then I just, you know, stayed in my apartment.

Listener: Yeah, that makes sense. You and your sister were agreeing to a different level than like you and your friend going to that one restaurant when your sister wasn’t coming to town.

DDS06: Yeah. I mean my sister and I, we tried to like – we tried to come to an agreement on how much, or how less social interaction – I guess like the amount of appropriate social interactions we could have before we met up.

Listener: Got it. How far was she traveling to see you?

DDS06: I mean she was traveling from Las Vegas to see me.

Listener: So it’s a bit of an investment.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: That makes sense, totally. So, you skipped that one invite because it was too much risk and because your sister was coming. What about this one where your friend came and stayed 5 days with you? You did go out, you said, a couple of times?

DDS06: Um, oh, so my risk calculations behind that?

Listener: Yeah

DDS06: So, for myself I avoided anything – I mean my friend did go to like large gatherings, but she says they were all outside, and I saw pictures. So, I’m like okay, I trust you on that. And everyone looked like they were wearing their mask. So, it’s like fine, I trust you on that. For me personally though, like I could have gone out and met these other people too, but I was only comfortable socializing with her and like our other mutual friends. So, those are the only interactions that I actually participated in.

Listener: Okay, right, because you did say she went out and did some fun things.

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: Okay, that makes sense then. When you did choose to go, that was with a smaller group, or people that you knew?

DDS06: Yeah

Listener: You mentioned social media and they looked like they were outdoors, and you could see that most people were wearing masks. That comes from photos, right?

DDS06: Yeah, photos or videos.

Listener: Okay, cool. So that kind of is a way of verifying or validating what they told you.

DDS06: Yeah, exactly. I’m not going to lie. I feel like I was a little judgmental in the beginning on how much certain people would go out. Like what activities certain people would do when they go out, but at the end of the day, I think we’re at a point now where – this is just my personal belief. Please keep this in mind. I personally think we're way past the point of depending on any particular organization to help us out as a collective. So, it is up to each and every one of us to determine what are the acceptable risks in our lives and hopefully, that are close to us in our lives are understanding of those particular restrictions. I think that's all we can do at this point is figure out what's safe for us and then just sticking to those boundaries and letting everyone know where you stand with that.

Listener: Yeah

DDS06: Because at the end of the day people are going to do what they want. But then you also have the power to say, “hey, no way. You’ve been too risky.”

Listener: “All those trips that you took look wonderful. I’ll just look at the videos.”

DDS06: Yeah exactly.

Listener: That’s a really good philosophy to have. No one else is going to make the decisions except yourself. You can stick with them and have that choice. With respect to going out to restaurants, there was one other thing I wanted to ask you about. You mentioned, “I decided to start buying more, like a three-course meal, or dessert and a drink.” When you first did that, or when you most recently did that, can you tell me kind of how it occurred to you, or what was going through your mind? Was it at a restaurant that you’ve been to before? Like that first one, you were like the people were nice and they always asked us questions. So, how did it occur to you when you started doing that?

DDS06: I think I noticed it became a pattern. So, I’ll tell you one – I guess I’ll tell you the one instance where I think it became a pattern. I was out at a restaurant with friends, I think, last month. This place was like a place known for the cocktails and because I don’t normally make cocktails at home, I’m like okay, well you know, let me try some. So, I ended up maybe ordering like 3 or 4 drinks, which I know is a lot, but I didn’t drive. So, you know, being responsible in that aspect. But I had like about 3 or 4 different drinks and then on top of that, because I drank a lot, I also wanted to eat a lot. So, I ended up eating like a main dish and then I think I had like two smaller side dishes. I feel like for that specific instance it was probably because I drank so much that I ended up ordering so much food.

Listener: Okay, yeah. That’s kind of where it came.

DDS06: Yeah. But I think that was also the time when I started noticing, oh, I’m ordering more than just a meal now. I’m ordering like all these different things. After that particular experience, I think that’s when it started to hit me that maybe there’s this subconscious part of me that either wants to help out these businesses, or I’m just missing out on so many things that maybe I just want to try them all because who knows when I’ll try these things again.

Listener: Right. That’s an interesting thought.

DDS06: Yeah. And for that particular experience, that was actually when I noticed, that particular restaurant had a surcharge – sorry, not a surcharge, they included the tip. So, I had like a shocking element at first when I saw the numbers, but then when they said, “oh, tip was already included,” I’m like oh okay, this is fine. It saves me the trouble of not dealing with math.

Listener: Was it the bill for the whole group? Or was it just yours?

DDS06: My portion.

Listener: When you saw it, that little bit of shock, how did you resolve it?

DDS06: I mean, I just like read everything. I mean I just tried to re-read over and over again just to make sure the numbers looked correct. I didn’t really do any calculating, but at least just like glancing over the numbers to make sure everything looked fine.

Listener: Meaning like they hadn’t accidently put somebody else’s order on yours or something?

DDS06: Yes. Or like maybe what if I only wanted to do like 18 instead of 20%. I think I was able to like change the number a little bit to include the tip. To include like some tip, but maybe like not as much.

Listener: What was your thinking on making your change?

DDS06: I think it was just more like – okay, so like I understand that people, especially like in the restaurant and tourism industries, they’re not getting paid as much because no one is going out as much. But it’s also kind of like I want – I mean since we're already in this tipping culture of the U.S. where we decide what people should be tipped in the first place, I think it's a little jarring to all of a sudden say, "okay, well we're just going to charge this from now on." It's like – I mean after like so many years of like going out to restaurants where you had to do math, and you had to figure out like what's 15% of this, or what's 18%, now you're just like oh now you want to make it so that prices are added on top.

Listener: Right

DDS06: I get it, but it’s also like a mindset change that was probably could have been eased up to more.

Listener: Okay, got it. Rather than just like well here it is, we’re already taking that control away from you entirely. Like let me take back some of that decision making power.

DDS06: Right. And the waiter was like – he was like really nice and really sweet and all, but it was just like wait, what?

Listener: Yeah, it wasn’t him. Okay, cool. And is this something that you’ve encountered in some of the other events and restaurant visits that you’ve done?

DDS06: I think that was the only one where they purposefully added the tip to your bill. And you know, there's other restaurants that give tip suggestions, like they calculate the tip for you. Well, restaurants have done that before the pandemic, so I'm not too concerned about that. But I think that is something that I probably will be more aware of if I ever – well, when I ever go out to restaurants again in the future.

Listener: Yeah, with the heat lamps.

DDS06: Yeah, with heat lamps preferably.

Listener: Exactly. I wonder if they’re going to make like masks that are fleece or something for the cold.

DDS06: I don’t know how it is in the West Coast, but like in March it was still like in the 60s, when like everything started for the pandemic. And it was just so much easier to wear a mask when it’s like 60 degrees versus when it’s like 80 or 100 degrees.

Listener: Totally

DDS06: I don't think I've been out when it was 100-degree weather with a mask on, but I can only imagine it’s just like a pain because your face is getting hot and you can barely breathe.

Listener: Right, exactly. Especially if there’s no breeze.

DDS06: Oh yeah.

Listener: Okay, bring on winter. Oh my God. So, is there any other restaurant event, or choosing indoor or outdoor seating that you can think of that you want to tell me about?

DDS06: Oh, anything that I have plans for?

Listener: Yeah, if you’ve made decisions already, or done some thinking about it.

DDS06: So, I’m actually taking my first plane trip next week to meet like some friends. Well, to meet a friend, but going with a group of friends to hang out at her place in South Carolina. And so we might go to a restaurant, but I feel like because we’re there more for the comradery rather than like local tourism, I think we might just stick to like making stuff indoors, or like getting takeout, or getting delivery.

Listener: Do you get takeout now, when you’re living by yourself?

DDS06: Yeah, I do. But I probably only do it like every 2 or 3 weeks.

Listener: Because?

DDS06: Oh, because sometimes I get tired of cooking. Or if I want a craving of something specific – you know like pizza or maybe sushi. Why not get it?

Listener: Have you done takeout of sushi?

DDS06: Oh yeah, I have.

Listener: What went through your mind there? Just because it’s raw, I wonder is there any extra thinking?

DDS06: So, the times that I have gotten sushi, it’s like I picked it up myself. It’s less people, I guess, that the sushi is in front of. But the person I get it from, they’re behind a plexiglass. They both wear masks. They’ve always worn their gloves and hat. So, I don’t really particularly find a risk in sushi, other than just the fact that it’s raw fish. But that’s just what happens with sushi.

Listener: Yeah, exactly. I had a craving for sushi recently and it was like do I want to do this? I don’t know.

DDS06: If you know a place that does takeout, why not?

Listener: Yeah, exactly. Okay, cool. So, when you’re going to South Carolina then, this idea of just doing takeout for your meals, is that something you’re already talking about with your friends?

DDS06: Yeah, we talked a little bit about food options and what we’re going to do for food.

Listener: Were you the responsible person to make the decision again?

DDS06: No. Thankfully, with this group of friends, I have someone who is thankfully, I think, on my level in terms of planning.

Listener: Good

DDS06: Not to sound condescending, but I’m very particular with how things are planned. But the fact that her and I kind of share the same, I guess you could say wavelength, or the same mentality when it comes to making plans, it’s like okay I can trust you on this. I mean I trust her judgment when it comes to the food and I think there will be times, like early in the morning, like breakfast or lunch, that we would just stay home and cook.

Listener: Yeah. A little bit easier logistically.

DDS06: Right.

Listener: Oh, cool. Oh my gosh, how exciting, you’re going to get to take your first trip in a while.

DDS06: I know. Actually, since you kind of mentioned like are you worried about this, or that? That’s probably the first thing I’m kind of like worried about out of everything is what are plane rides going to be like during this time?

Listener: Yeah. What went through your mind making that decision?

DDS06: Um, I think it’s more like – I think it’s only scary because I haven’t tried flying during a full pandemic before. And it’s kind of like the science is still very – I wouldn’t say new, but sometimes there are studies funded by airlines where they say, “oh, plane travel is not that bad.” But, wait, you’re an airline company. There’s some kind of bias behind this. I think my only initial trepidation was because of the seating. Like how empty are these planes going to be? Pre-pandemic, I’ve never been on a plane where there were empty seats, unless I got on a plane, but like half the people for this flight are from a previous flight that missed a connection.

Listener: It was meant to be full.

DDS06: Yeah, yeah, pretty much. More often than not my plane rides, pre-pandemic, have always like had airlines asking for volunteers to be bumped to the next flight. But then I’m like no, I have things to do.

Listener: Right. “I have this carefully planned. You don’t know me. I’m a planner.”

DDS06: Right. Exactly.

Listener: So this one will be interesting. How did that feel to make that decision to go?

DDS06: Honestly, I mean I love traveling. I usually travel maybe, if I could guess, maybe at least 3 or 5 times a year, with half of those being international trips.

Listener: Oh wow.

DDS06: Yeah. So, it feels a lot different. It’s kind of funny because I think from let’s say maybe September of last year to January of this year, I traveled a lot. That was where most of my flights took place last year was in that 5 month time period. And then after my last flight, at the end of January, I was like I want to take a break. And then this whole thing comes up and I’m like wait, that’s not the break I wanted.

Listener: Hahaha. “I wanted to choose.”

DDS06: Yeah. It’s like I don’t want a global pandemic to be the reason why I can’t fly out.

Listener: Oh God, yeah.

DDS06: So, you know, that happened, and I haven’t taken a flight since January. So, this will be my first time in a while. Like I said, I think as I mentioned earlier, at this point we’re just making whatever choices and accepting whatever risks come, that feel most comfortable to us, or that feel like - we make decisions to take on risks that make the most sense to take. I honestly think that when people make a lot of decisions to leave their house it’s a matter of COVID versus mental health. Like, do I worry about COVID, or do I worry about my mental health? And I think where we are now, I guess this would be month seven, a lot of people are like okay, maybe COVID isn’t as bad for me, but my mental health is struggling so I want to focus on that now.

Listener: Right, yeah.

DDS06: I think that’s where I’m at at this point is, I want to focus on my mental health. I mean yes, I am doing something that's not essential, like traveling to meet up with friends, but it's like this is for like my mental health, and for me what matters on this specific trip is spending time with friends. And even if I'm just sitting in their house, just like watching TV, or talking with them over like boxed wine or something – maybe not boxed wine because that's kind of – it's like a little classier, but anyway, my point is I want to make decisions that keep me and others safe, but also maximize gain on mental health. I think this trip, specifically with choices that we make when it comes to current activities, will be helpful for me.

Listener: Yeah, especially this time of year. Yeah, there’s all sorts of things happening. So, you’re still thinking about mental health. You’re still thinking about risks, just like all the other events you told me about. And in this case, there is something else that is weighing on this and pushing the balances toward being social with friends. That’s important.

DDS06: Yeah.

Listener: That makes sense. Okay. Believe it or not, we have chatted for a while and this is excellent to get to know you. Is there anything else that you thought we would be chatting about that you want to bring up?

DDS06: I had something, but I’m trying to figure out the words for that something. So, when I talked to <researcher>, he was telling me about how he wants to know how restaurants are affected by the pandemic and he also wanted to know how patrons are affected by the pandemic too, right?

Listener: Right. I think one of the things that he’s interested in doing is understanding how patrons are affected and what the thinking is so that restaurants can communicate more clearly. Like that shock that you had with the tip being added in already. It’s like if it was communicated then you wouldn’t have felt that necessarily. That kind of thing.

DDS06: Okay. No problem. This was like a – honestly, I guess I did most of the talking, but this was a very good conversation.

Listener: Yeah. Cool. It’s kind of fun to have a chance to sort of think about what your thinking is.

DDS06: Oh yeah, definitely.

Listener: I hope you have a good trip. I hope you have fun. I hope it really does help mental health.

DDS06: I hope so too. Thank you for that.