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Access, Gender, and Agency on Study Abroad: Four Case Studies of Female Students in Jordan

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Access, Gender, and Agency on Study Abroad:

Four Case Studies of Female Students

in Jordan

Jordan Wilson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Access, Gender, and Agency on Study Abroad: Four Case Studies of Female Students in Jordan

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This qualitative study follows the experiences of four female students as they sought to gain access to native speakers and the L2, engage with the culture, and fulfill program speaking requirements (two hours of speaking the second language outside of class per weekday) in Amman, Jordan. The research explores the following questions: what challenges did female participants on BYU's intensive Arabic study abroad (SA) program face as they accessed native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom, how were participants able to persevere through and overcome these challenges, and how were program interventions set up to help participants persevere and overcome these challenges? Data include a pre-study abroad questionnaire, daily/weekly reports, semi-structured interviews, and an exit survey. Through the lens of the Ecological Approach to Language Learning, findings reveal how students worked alongside the study abroad program to access native speakers and the L2 within the sociocultural environment.

Keywords: Access, gender, agency, self-regulation, study abroad

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Introduction

Gaining access to native speakers and the second language (L2) is often seen as an essential aspect of study abroad (SA). However, despite the often immersive nature of SA, research shows varying results in success with students gaining access to native speakers and the L2 (Freed 1998; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Kinginger, 2009). Research also demonstrates that gaining this access is not merely about linguistic abilities and/or aptitude. Rather, it also requires students to learn about and work within the country's sociocultural environment (i.e. the country's social and cultural norms and expectations), which may greatly differ from their own (Brecht & Robinson, 1993; Dewey, Belnap, Gardner, & Ring, 2013; Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, and Eggett, 2014; Hillstrom, 2011).

One important component of fitting into a new sociocultural context is understanding how gender mediates behavior and interaction. In Middle East cultures, for example, women generally spend time in the private sphere (home, school, work) while men tend to dominate the public sphere (street, cafes, markets) (Hillstrom, 2011). As a result, foreign female students studying abroad in the Middle East might feel disadvantaged while accessing to native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom (Ishmael, 2010; Kuntz & Belnap, 2001; Trentman, 2013). Thus in the Middle East it is equally, if not more essential, that female students and study abroad programs learn to work within the sociocultural environment to access the L2 and native speakers in successful and socioculturally appropriate ways.

This qualitative study of four female learners of Arabic in Amman, Jordan investigates the factors that mediated their access to native speakers and the L2. With an Ecological

Approach, this research more specifically explores the relationships between the sociocultural environment of Amman, Jordan, the learner-based factors of agency and self-regulation, and the program-based factor of intervention.

Literature Review

The Ecological Theory

The overarching theoretical framework for this study is based on Van Lier's ecological approach to language learning (2004; 2010). The word ecology generally refers to the branch of science that deals with relationships between organisms and the environment in which they reside (Merriam-Webster). Successful ecological systems are said to function well when all individual entities maintain mutually beneficial relationships. For example, an ecological view of a pond would consider how the animals (frogs, turtles, fish, flies), plants (algae, surrounding brush and trees), and environmental features (rocks, water) interact to create a mutually harmonious environment and flourish. These same concepts can also be applied to the interaction of individuals in systems from other contexts, such as language learning.

An ecological approach to language learning similarly views every interaction within a learning environment as a relationship. Like the previous pond example, these relationships can cooperatively flourish. However, in an unsuccessful system these relationships can clash in discord. Thus, students, teachers, course materials, and the classroom environment can work together to facilitate learning or conflict to stunt progress. In the context of study abroad (SA), the program, students, teachers, interlocutors, and sociocultural environment can either harmoniously benefit from one another or constrain advancement as well. In this study, and from an ecological viewpoint, the sociocultural context of Amman, Jordan is treated as the ecological habitat. Consequently, the female students and native interlocutors are viewed as organisms interacting within this larger ecological system. Lastly, program interventions are seen as

elements that can help the female students flourish within the new environment (gain access to native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom). This Ecological approach serves as a lens through which to view and connect together the supporting principles of this study: access, agency, and self-regulation.

Access

Access in this paper refers to accessing native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom. However, this definition of access has similarly been explored in previous literature using related terms such as social networking and language contact. Because of its immersive nature, study abroad is often seen as the optimal experience with the local people and language. However, research shows that the extent of students' access to native speakers and the L2 on study abroad can vary (Freed 1998; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Kinginger, 2009; Trentman, 2013).

Furthermore, simply gaining access to native speakers does not always guarantee quality use of the L2 outside of the classroom. Trentman (2013) found that in some cases, even when students had access to native Arabic speakers outside of the classroom, they would still revert to English for reasons such as ease of communication and forming friendships. As a result, students reported "considerable individual variation in Arabic use" while on study abroad in Egypt (Trentman, 2013, p. 462). Kuntz and Belnap (2001) also recorded that students studying Arabic abroad in Yemen and Morocco used more English than Arabic outside of the classroom. Potential reasons for this result included hesitancy to use the language based on fears of failure, as well as the absence of a program language pledge or hourly language requirement.

Factors influencing access. The varying experiences in access to native speakers and the L2 among SA students can be mediated by multiple factors. However, most factors tend to fall into one of three categories: environmental, program-based, and/or learner-based factors. In congruence with the Ecological approach to language learning, understanding the interplay between these three categories and how they influence student access to the L2 and native speakers is essential to the findings of this study.

Environmental factors. Environmental factors that mediate access might include societal expectations and perceptions of outward appearances such as gender and ethnicity, in addition to more situational factors such as geographic location and living situation. Trentman (2013), for example, found that factors such as where students lived (host families, dorms, sharing an apartment with native speakers) and university classes (environment, ratio of SA students to enrolled natives) affected students' access to native Egyptians. While some students were able to live with host families, others lived in dorms or private apartments. Students in the dorms, for example, reported gaining access to native speakers, but often spoke English since many of their roommates and neighbors were highly proficient. Students living in private apartments, either alone or with other foreigners, often reported feeling isolated and having to exert greater effort in order to simply access native speakers (Trentman, 2013).

Program-based Factors. Program-based factors can also involve living situation, courses of study, and interventions to facilitate access to native speakers and the L2. Dewey, Ring, Gardner, and Belnap (2013) found that two main factors influenced social network formation between students and native speakers: program intervention (i.e. requiring students to speak two

hours every day) and location (i.e. where students lived), both of which were set up by the program. Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, and Eggett (2014) concluded in a similar study that the type and nature of SA program was a main determinant of language use outside of the classroom. Hillstrom (2011) concluded in her study that it is incumbent upon programs to prepare their students for the sociocultural context, since evidences indicated that sociocultural competence can also be an influential factor in social network building.

Learner-based Factors. Furthermore, learner-based factors such as personality, language proficiency, and abilities to exercise agency and self-regulate through challenges have also been noted to influence access. In addition to the important roles of program intervention, Dewey, Ring, Gardner, and Belnap (2013) also found that personality, as well as time spent with native speakers, was a factor in forming strong social relationships with native interlocutors. Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, and Eggett (2014) discovered that the learner-based factors of age, initial L2 proficiency, gender, and personality all contributed to language use outside of the classroom as well. In terms of specific personality traits, Ożańska-Ponikwia and Dewaele (2012) found that learner personality traits of openness and self-esteem were significant predictors of frequent English L2 use among Polish immigrants living in Ireland and the UK.

Gender. Gender is an important factor that often mediates students' access to the L2 and native speakers while abroad. While “[s]ex refers to the biological differences between men and women. For example, women can have babies; men cannot. Gender refers to the socially defined differences between men and women. For example, women are socialized to be what the society considers feminine—submissive, sentimental, nurturing, etc.—whereas men are socialized to be

what the society considers to be masculine—strong, stoic, protective, etc.” (Hudson, Ballif-Spanvill, Caprioli, Emmett, 2012, p. 6). Thus, gender is not simply sex: female or male. Gender is also not simply what an individual decides it to be. Rather, gender encompasses the roles, attributes, and expectations as ascribed by the sociocultural environment in which we reside. As a result, gender certainly mediates our interactions, behaviors, and expectations of one another. This sociocultural view of gender holds true for study abroad context as well.

Shelley (2012) found that gender essentially mediated all aspects of a student’s SA experience, including L2 access outside of the classroom. Similarly, Siegal (1995) explored individual differences amongst foreign women learning Japanese in Japan, whose interactions were greatly influenced not only by their Japanese abilities, but also by their knowledge of gender-appropriate politeness and language. In their research of American language learners studying abroad in Russia, Brecht and Robinson (1993) discovered that men and women had qualitatively different speaking opportunities, even when they did access native speakers and the L2. For example, men were more likely to engage in intellectual conversations while women were not. One particular female participant described how she was excluded from a conversation with a male colleague and a male native Russian speaker. Although she and her male counterpart had similar linguistic abilities and were contributing equally to the conversation, as soon as the topic became intellectual “he [her male colleague] was very obviously considered more worthy of attention” (Brecht, 1993, p. 17). Thus, even when female participants were able to find opportunities to speak with native Russians, the quality of their discussions and contributions did not always measure up to those of their male counterparts. Talburt and Stewart (1999)

investigated the experience of an African-American girl whose gender and ethnicity caused less than ideal reactions from the local Spanish population, which in turn greatly hindered her cultural and linguistic experiences on SA. Trentman (2013) discovered that the only female student on study abroad in Egypt who reported using equal amounts of English and Arabic was, in fact, a middle-aged married woman who dressed more conservatively and was not subject to the same level of harassment or societal assumptions as the other younger female students. In fact, younger female students reported harassment “no matter how conservatively they were dressed” as well as frustration that their male counterparts could simply walk through the streets and speak to Arab men (Trentman, 2013, p. 467).

In terms of gender differences and SA locations, foreign female SA students in the Middle East often face unique challenges to their gender, both in everyday life and in trying to speak Arabic outside of class (Ishmael, 2010; Kuntz & Belnap, 2001). Shelley (2012) found that harassment, such as catcalling, hissing, and whistling were frequent experiences for female study abroad students in Cairo, Egypt. Hillstrom (2011) noticed in her study of social network building that sociocultural gender expectations mediated the development of students’ social networks. She found that the inability to form strong inter-gender relationships was one reason why relationships with native speakers failed to develop. Furthermore, Hillstrom (2011) makes an important point in regards to the advantage of both genders: males have the advantage in the public sphere (spending time on the streets, in café, “hanging out” in the open, etc...), women have the advantage of the private sphere (becoming close with Arab families, getting invited over to houses, “hanging out” indoors while gaining unique insider perspectives to the female

experience in the Middle East), and both spheres can be beneficial for gaining access (Hillstrom, 2011, p. 81). However, the private sphere can be more difficult to access as it can require more effort and personal invitations from native speakers.

So while the potential for gaining access to native speakers and the L2 exists for female students, it often proves to be more difficult as students adjust to sociocultural gender norms and expectations. However, through a focus on agency, self-regulation, and program interventions, female students can find meaningful opportunities with the L2 and native speakers outside of the classroom.

Agency. Despite environmental, program-based, and student-based factors, students' experiences still largely depend on how they interact with and react to the opportunities that present themselves within a given sociocultural environment. Thus, a major factor related to accessing native speakers and the L2 on SA is learner agency. Agency can be defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act”, meaning that learners are agents working within their environments, by which they are also influenced (Ahearn, 2001, p. 145). Due to this dynamic definition that examines the relationship between individuals and the context, agency is a key element of the Ecological approach to language learning.

Van Lier (2010) defines agency as “movement, a change of state or direction, or even a lack of movement where movement is expected” (p. 4). In this context, students can be seen as organisms “moving in order to live and grow” within the larger environment—whether it be a local classroom or distant study abroad (Van Lier, 2010, p. 4). Van Lier's (2010) description of a learner who exercises his/her agency (a “compliant” learner) and one who does not (a

“completely passive” learner) demonstrates the strong influence that agency can have on learners’ experiences:

A completely passive learner will not learn. A compliant (obedient, dutiful, etc.) learner will learn, because he or she employs agency, if only at the behest of others. In this way learners who study a foreign language in school because it is required, will be able to have some success and pass tests. However, in order to make significant progress, and to make enduring strides in terms of setting objectives, pursuing goals and moving towards lifelong learning, learners need to make choices and employ agency in more self-directed ways. (p.5)

According to Van Lier, agency is also “closely connected to identity” as identity also occurs within the larger social environment (p. 5). Agency is what we choose, but it is also constrained by what the environment allows us to choose. Similarly, identity is who we are, even who we choose to be, but it is also who we are according to society. Thus, as learners can progress forward only to the extent that the environment might allow, learners’ identities are also formed not solely based on who they claim to be, but also in accordance with what the surrounding society ascribes to them and allows them to be (Van Lier, 2010).

In this context Van Lier (2010) makes the suggestion of creating environments that foster agency: “There must be room in a learning environment for a variety of expressions of agency to flourish. The creation of such an environment is a major task of pedagogy” (p. 5). On study

abroad (SA), however, the environment might feel less malleable due to the influence of less controllable factors such as the sociocultural context. Nevertheless, programs and students can work together to create opportunities that foster agency and facilitate access to native speakers and the L2. In the face of challenges, providing opportunities for students to exercise their agency to self-regulate is another essential task for study abroad programs.

Self-Regulation. Another factor that could influence students' access to native speakers and the L2, especially in the face of difficulties, is students' self-regulatory abilities. Pintrich defined self-regulation as "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Boekaerts, Pintrich, and Zeidner, 2000, p. 453). Zimmerman (2002) eloquently described the self-regulated learner when he stated:

These learners are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally set goals and task-related strategies. These learners monitor their behavior in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning. Because of their superior motivation and adaptive learning methods, self-regulated students are not only more likely to succeed academically but to view their futures optimistically. Self-regulation is important because a major function of education is the development of life-long learning skills. (pp. 65-66)

In other terms, self-regulation might be seen as one's ability to problem-solve, persevere through challenges, and/or practice resilience. Self-regulated learners are also said to be more autonomous and responsible over their own learning. In relation to language learning, self-regulation thus plays a vital role.

The process of self-regulation can be further conceptualized into three cyclical phases: the forethought phase (pre-action), the performance phase (action), and the self-reflection phase (post-action) (Zimmerman, 1998, 2002, 2003). The forethought phase includes both task-analysis and self-motivation processes (Zimmerman, 2002). Task analysis involves goal setting and strategic planning, while self-motivation refers to learners' beliefs regarding learning (i.e. self-efficacy) and their expectations regarding personal learning consequences (Zimmerman, 2002). The performance phase can also be further categorized into two processes: self-control and self-observation/self-experiment. Self-control involves executing certain strategies that were developed in the forethought phase, while self-observation refers to self-recording personal experiences with the purpose of testing certain causes and effects (Zimmerman, 2002). The self-reflection phase includes self-judgment/self-evaluation and self-reaction. This phase can involve (constructively) evaluating one's performance against a certain standard. The self-reflection phase can also entail positive emotions felt post-action, such as self-satisfaction (Zimmerman, 2002).

In the context of SA, students' self-regulatory abilities certainly play a role in their overall learning experiences. In Isabelli-García's (2006) study of a study abroad program in Buenos Aires, Argentina found that students' beliefs and attitudes influenced the way they built

and maintained their social networks. The most influential factors that mediated their ability to social network included learner motivation to learn the second language as well as the attitude toward the host culture.

Allen (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of self-regulatory strategies of good language learners of French that looked at the classroom, study abroad, and beyond. Allen (2013) concluded that foreign language curriculum at all levels should place emphasis on developing self-regulation skills, as even good language learners might struggle to self-regulate. As a result, she specifically suggests writing, blogging, and giving out specific assignments to help students maintain motivation and to facilitate the goal-setting aspect of self-regulation. Ping and Siraj (2012) came to similar conclusions. In their study of Chinese EFL learners studying at the University of Malaysia, they found that learners' inability to self-regulate was greatly influenced by their lack of knowledge regarding the process and relevant strategies (Ping and Siraj, 2012). Thus, as educators, whether in the traditional classroom, an online course, or on SA, understanding students' self-regulatory abilities is crucial in facilitating them and training them to progress in the language. Exploring how students to self-regulate will help researchers and teachers to better prepare future students, especially in context of SA where students are often faced with challenges unique to the sociocultural environment.

During SA, several factors can influence access. However, while some of these influences are environmental (i.e. location, housing, and courses) others are learner-based, such as learner agency and self-regulation. Although learner agency and self-regulation are internal concepts, they are in constant interaction with these external influences. Thus, how a learner is

able exercise agency and self-regulate within a certain sociocultural context becomes essential for L2 access and contact.

Based on previous research, it is clear that gender, particularly in the Middle East, can mediate students' access to L2 speaking opportunities on SA. In the case of female students, gender tends to inhibit women's access to native speakers and the L2 on SA in the public sphere. In the context of the unique challenges that female students studying abroad in the Middle East face, agency and self-regulatory abilities become essential to understand.

By focusing on agency and self-regulatory abilities as a means of problem solving in the greater context of the external socio-cultural environment, programs and students alike may experience more success in situations that might initially seem disadvantageous or difficult.

Research Questions

In conclusion, taking an Ecological approach to language learning allows us to understand the complex interplay between the environment, program-based factors, and student based-factors in the context of study abroad. Particularly in the Middle East, gender mediates students' access to native speakers and the L2. Learning to navigate the sociocultural environment, by way of exercising agency to self-regulate through challenges, might be especially essential for female students studying abroad in Middle Eastern countries. As a result, this research seeks to bring all these factors together in light of an Ecological System: A view that acknowledges the complex interplay between the environment (Amman, Jordan), the learners (the female students), and the program (program interventions), and how these entities

can either work in harmony or disaccord. More specifically, this study seeks to investigate the following research questions:

1. What challenges did female participants on BYU's intensive Arabic study abroad program face as they accessed native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom
2. How were participants able to persevere through and overcome these challenges?
3. How were program interventions set up to help participants persevere and overcome these challenges?

Methodology

Project Perseverance

BYU's Arabic intensive study abroad program began in 1989 and has been progressing and developing ever since. In recent years, program interventions designed to help students make the most of their semester-long sojourn have been closely tied with a project called Project Perseverance. Project Perseverance is supported by an experienced, diverse group of Second Language experts and clinical psychologists, including: Jennifer Bown, Andrew Cohen, Dan Dewey, Madeline Ehrman, Richard Schmidt, Patrick Steffan, and Ema Ushioda. Project Perseverance focuses on research and resources aimed at helping students studying a foreign language to persevere and progress forward in their proficiency-levels (Project Perseverance). Since BYU has been heavily involved in overseeing the project, Project Perseverance data has greatly influenced the development of program interventions on BYU's Intensive Arabic study abroad program. Additionally, Project Perseverance also influenced the focus and interests of this research. As a result, this study should be seen in the greater context of Project Perseverance.

The Setting

BYU's Intensive Arabic language study abroad (SA) is required of all BYU Arabic students who want to take third-year Arabic courses. Generally offered in the fall, this semester-long program focuses on helping students progress from the Intermediate to the Advanced level of language proficiency on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale. Consequently, students spend most of their time during the program intensively studying the language with formal, in-class Arabic instruction and homework as well as

informal, outside exposure to the Jordanian language and culture. The participants of this particular study were part of a larger group of 29 learners (22 male; seven female) on BYU's study abroad. These students were housed together in apartments near the language institute (Qasid) at which they studied Arabic. Qasid is a Jordanian language institute that has instructed students from all over the world: from college SA programs to consulate officers to Fulbright participants. BYU professors work closely with the institute and its instructors to plan the in-class curriculum for the semester. In order to maintain smaller class sizes at the institute, participants were divided into four classes with an average of seven students per class (the smallest being six and largest being eight).

The curriculum. Students are admitted into the program only upon successful completion of two years of college-level Arabic study. Prior to departure, students complete a 7-week preparation course in English that covers program rules, cultural expectations, language learning strategies, and practical tips for living in Amman.

In Amman, students complete a total of 16 credits in Arabic. The courses are divided up as follows:

Course:	Credit Hours:	Description:
Arabic 211R	2 credits	2nd-Year Conversation
Arabic 311R	2 credits	3rd-Year Conversation
Arabic 300	4 credits	Advanced Modern Standard Arabic
Arabic 302	4 credits	Newspaper Arabic

Arabic 331	4 credits	Advanced Spoken Arabic – Jordanian
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Assessment on the Study Abroad is extensive. Students’ speaking progress is assessed at the beginning and end of the program with an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) administered through the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Progress in reading, writing, and listening are also assessed using BYU-developed aptitude tests.

Daily life abroad. While weekends and a few holidays are reserved for free time and program-led excursions, students’ schedules while abroad are structured to facilitate the development of their linguistic skills. Every school day, students are required to attend three hours of class: two hours of “issues” class in Arabic, in which students discuss and debate a variety of topics ranging from women’s rights to environmental issues, and one hour of a grammar/news translation class in English. The issues class is generally conducted in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) eight hours a week and Jordanian Arabic (JA) for two hours per week. Teaching both MSA and JA allows students to develop more formal language that is often useful for most academic and professional goals as well as the spoken variety of Amman, Jordan so they can comfortably function while abroad in the streets.

Additionally, students have three hours of speaking appointments (semi-structured speaking sessions with a Qasid teacher), three half-hour presentation appointments, and two half-hour writing appointments per week. Furthermore, students are required to speak Arabic outside of class for two hours a day in addition to two hours of daily Arabic newspaper reading

assignments. Students are held accountable for both the speaking and reading homework by turning in translations, comprehension questions, and daily and weekly reports.

In order to keep track of students' overall progress and wellness, students meet one-on-one with program leaders on a rotating basis once a week. These brief, required appointments provide students an opportunity to receive personalized coaching and to voice any concerns or struggles related to SA. In turn, these appointments also help program leaders to better understand and meet a wide range of student needs.

Program interventions. In country, the program implements several interventions to maximize students' SA experiences. These interventions have been developed over the years and greatly influenced by Project Perseverance research. Program interventions include but are not limited to:

- Daily progress reports on homework (completed by students)
- Weekly progress reports on homework (completed by students)
- Weekly one-on-one interviews with one of the program leaders
- Three hours a week of semi-structured speaking one-on-one with a Qasid instructor (accounts for three hours of the total ten hours of speaking required outside of class)
- Connecting students with local NGO's and weekly volunteering opportunities
- Daily coaching sessions on language learning strategies
- Survey questions (in Arabic) related to in-class discussions. These qualitative surveys, which are provided by Qasid Teachers, are voluntarily conducted by students

outside of class. Ideally, this intervention helps students form background knowledge on topic relevant to in-class discussions while facilitating access to the L2 and native speakers outside of class.

Role as Researcher

During the study abroad program, I served as a teaching assistant, helping the program in administration and planning. I also assisted BYU professors in collecting data relevant to their research interests. My most consistent duties included helping the program leadership conduct weekly check-up appointments with students and daily observations of their various classes. However, I also conducted personalized mentoring and interventions for the female students.

As a former student of the same program and the only female in the SA leadership, my main responsibility was overseeing the female students' experiences. As a result, I spoke with each female participant at least once a week, kept track of their daily and weekly reports, homework, observed their progress inside and outside of class, and offered any additional support needed to maximize their SA experiences. I even lived in the same apartment with two of the four participants of this study. Similar to the interventions provided by the program, I conducted personalized interventions for the female students as well. These interventions included:

- A group excursion to the University of Jordan to help the female students become familiar with the campus layout and offer advice on where to find native speakers with which to engage

- A personalized excursion for one of the female students (Lauren) to the University of Jordan, during which we practiced approaching and talking to other students
- Taking the female students with me to spend time with my own Jordanian friends (ex: Samantha accompanied me to hang out at the local women's salon)
- Spending time with and shadowing the female participants as they went out to find speaking opportunities and hang out with friends to provide support and suggestions for later excursions.

After working closely with the female participants, I noticed that many female students faced challenges as they sought opportunities to speak the L2 with native Arabic speakers, challenges that I had similarly faced as a former student of the same program. These observations served as the impetus for the current investigation.

Participants

Participants of this study included four female SA students, ages ranging from 19 to 23, who participated in BYU's Intensive Arabic Study Abroad during fall 2013. Although these women came from different majors and backgrounds, all four were BYU students who had successfully completed four semesters of Arabic coursework. One of the participants was a Middle Eastern/Arabic Studies Major, two were studying International Relations, and one was majoring in Fine Arts. Thus, participants differed in their future career goals and in their motivations to study Arabic. Two of the female students expressed more interest in the Arab

culture and language, while the other two hoped the experience would contribute to more concrete academic and career goals.

Similarly, all of the participants had had varying experiences living abroad and studying foreign languages. One had grown up in the Middle East, one had lived in Asia for a year and a half, and the remaining two had never previously left the United States.

While participants all came from different backgrounds with a variety of goals, career orientations, linguistic objectives, and personalities, all were part of a very motivated, self-selected group. Additionally, all four participants of this study were fairly diligent in completing program speaking requirements of two hours per weekday, even though the extent of their relationships and nature of language contact varied. Similarly, while all participants faced initial struggles to adjust to gender roles in the Middle East, the extent and nature of their struggles differed.

This small, diverse sample size allowed for an in-depth qualitative study. Limiting the study to this small sample of female participants enabled me to perform detailed analyses regarding access to native speakers and the L2 in each girl's unique experience. So while the study is not meant to be representative of or generalizable to a larger population, it is meant to holistically capture and explore the female participants' experiences as they accessed to native speakers and the L2.

Data Sources and Procedures

Data sources for this study include a pre-SA questionnaire, participants' daily and weekly qualitative reports, six semi-structured interviews conducted with participants throughout the

semester, as well as an optional exit survey. These data sources were chosen because of their qualitative and student-completed natures that offer a comprehensive look into how participants viewed their own experiences. Although this study largely focuses on data collected from the semi-structured interviews, all data sources contributed to the findings and discussion sections. Additionally, while data originally included participants actual names, for the purposes of this research all four students were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Pre-study abroad questionnaire. The pre-study abroad questionnaire focused on demographic and background information of the participants—such as major, personal interests, motivations for studying Arabic and participating in BYU’s SA program—as well as expectations for the SA experience. With the exception of one participant who completed the questionnaire the first week of the SA, all other participants submitted this preliminary questionnaire during the two weeks leading up to the SA. The original purposes of this questionnaire included getting to know the participants individually, as well as providing potential questions and topics for discussion for their first interviews in Jordan. For the purposes of this study, these questionnaires were the data sources for demographic information and pre-sojourn expectations and goals of the study abroad.

Daily and weekly reports. Additionally, this study makes use of open-ended, qualitative questions pulled from students’ in-country daily and weekly reports that were submitted electronically through the program’s online interface. These reports are required by BYU’s Study abroad program as they help track student progress and provide students opportunities to constantly reflect on their experiences.

In their daily reports, students reported on reading and speaking homework for the day. Regarding reading, students recorded the time spent on reading assignments, how much of the reading assignment they completed, and their level of frustration with the reading assignments. In relation to the speaking homework (two hours of speaking Arabic with native interlocutors per weekday), students quantitatively reported time spent overall on speaking activities. More specifically, they offered the percentage devoted to finding opportunities to speak as well as the percentage of time spent speaking with no other native English speakers. They also rate satisfaction regarding their speaking performance, the engagement level of their speaking experiences, and the extent to which conversations moved beyond pleasantries. The daily reports also included opportunities for students to qualitatively describe: overall experiences finding and speaking with interlocutors outside of the classroom, any opportunities to engage in advanced-level language, and how successful these encounters felt.

Weekly reports followed a similar format. However, the weekly reports focused solely on speaking experiences and emphasized student reflection as well as goal setting. The two qualitative questions on the report gathered information regarding overall planning of and reflection on speaking experiences, in addition to the extent to which students engaged in advanced-level language (i.e. narration, description, and comparison). Quantitative items on the weekly report required students to self-rate their overall experiences with finding interlocutors outside of the classroom, general comprehension, ability to communicate, verb accuracy, general grammatical accuracy, and spoken fluency.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted periodically throughout the entire SA for the dual purpose of gathering data on the female students' overall SA experiences and providing personalized mentoring for them over the course of the semester. For the first half of the semester, the interviews were conducted weekly. However for the second half of the SA, interviews were only conducted as scheduled by the program and/or individual students in order to allow for more time for homework and final exam preparation.

Due to this structure, a total of seven interviews per participant should have been conducted throughout the course of the semester. However, not all seven interviews were completed by each participant due to health reasons. One participant (Christina) completed all seven interviews, two others (Christina and Samantha) completed six interviews, and the fourth student (Lauren) participated in five of the seven interviews.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the diverse needs of students, topics of the interviews varied. However, the basic structure of the interviews was as follows:

- Reviewing successful aspects of the SA with students
 - Reviewing unsuccessful aspects of the SA with students
 - A discussion of why certain aspects of their experiences went well while others did not
 - Processing through how students might overcome the challenges they were facing
- Understanding the structure of these interviews and the metacognitive processing that often occurred as a result helps to later make sense of self-regulatory patterns that emerged from the data.

Interviews generally focused on participants' overall speaking experiences outside of the classroom. However, in terms of specific content, the following were common recurring topics:

- Adjusting to life in Amman
- How to find interlocutors/access native speakers
- Challenges the students faced and how they might overcome those challenges (particularly in relation to gaining access to native speakers and the L2)
- Most successful speaking experiences and least successful experiences (and reasons for)
- Reviewing and setting goals
- Motivation maintenance

Questions were determined before the interviews based on student needs as observed by the leadership or as expressed by the students. However, they were also influenced by curious trends or knowledge gaps noted in researcher observations (ex: decline in motivation) and/or daily and weekly log entries (ex: "I had a really difficult time speaking this week because of X").

Exit survey. The exit survey was administered to female participants in a word document via email. The email was sent after students completed their in-country final examinations, and students were given a three-week completion period. Questions on this optional exit survey focused on participants' retrospective views on their experiences as women in the program. Half of the participants (two out of four) completed the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of data for this study came from semi-structured interviews with participants, which were analyzed before the rest of the data points. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions were then uploaded to Saturate (an online qualitative data analysis application). After reviewing the interview transcriptions several times, trends related to accessing native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom were noted. The transcriptions were then coded inductively into relevant categories. Longer themes and phenomena were recorded using memos. Once complete, the codes were downloaded as a CSV file and the most common, frequent themes were defined. From that point, the overarching theory of the data emerged. However, the analysis was progressive and recursive throughout much of the early stages of writing. Lastly, relevant quotes for each theme were pulled from the data and used to describe the students' individual experiences as well as to answer the study's original research questions.

After the interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed, the weekly and daily reports were reviewed through a similar process. The qualitative questions on the weekly and daily reports were printed off, reviewed, coded by hand, and used as secondary data points to triangulate the codes and themes that had also emerged from the interview data. Lastly, the pre-study abroad questionnaires and the post-study abroad exit survey were reviewed to gather demographic info and any retrospective insights of the participants.

Data and quotes included in participants' stories were heavily drawn from the semi-structured interviews. Unless indicated otherwise, any quotes included in the discussion section

were pulled from participant interviews. This strategy was due to the fact that the interview questions were originally formulated based on information gathered from the pre-SA questionnaire and participants' daily and weekly reports. As a result, the data found in the semi-structured interviews closely mirror on the data found from the weekly and daily reports. The different instruments simply presented different angles regarding the data to provide triangulation.

In order to fully triangulate the data and ensure accuracy, each participant was sent a semi-final draft of their own story in Google Document form. This member check allowed participants to verify the accounts of their experiences and/or note any necessary changes. None of the participants noted any changes to their narratives.

Findings

This chapter will describe the key findings that emerged from the data as guided by the following three research questions:

1. What challenges did female participants on BYU's intensive Arabic study abroad program face as they accessed native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom
2. How were participants able to persevere through and overcome these challenges?
3. How were program interventions set up to help participants persevere and overcome these challenges?

Findings demonstrate an Ecological interplay between the sociocultural environment, the learners, and program interventions. Common challenges that female participants faced included adjustment to sociocultural differences regarding gender, concern over outside perceptions—regarding both identity and linguistic abilities—finding interlocutors, and gaining access to native speakers and the L2. While none of the participants in this study were exempt from L2 access challenges, findings demonstrate the different affordances available to each participant in the new sociocultural environment and how these students used their agency to self-regulate. At times in which a student struggled to exercise agency, self-regulate, and access the L2 within the new environment, program interventions—such as coaching sessions with students, daily and weekly reflective reports, weekly speaking appointments with a native interlocutor, and volunteer opportunities—were essential to helping female students progress. Below are stories that portray four notable female students' experiences, the challenges they faced while gaining access to native speakers and the L2 in the new sociocultural context, and how they overcame

these challenges by exercising their agency, self-regulating, and participating in program interventions.

Rachel, the Altruistic Humanitarian

Rachel had been deeply interested in the Middle East and had felt a strong pull to study Arabic since high school. While the study abroad in Amman, Jordan was her first experience in the Middle East, she had also previously traveled throughout Europe and Asia. One such trip included learning a foreign language while volunteering for her church. Thus—as expressed early on in her pre-study abroad questionnaire—Rachel viewed language as “more of a means to a mutual understanding and respect” as opposed to the end goal, even in the context of a language-intensive study abroad. She was very motivated by the prospect of meaningful relationships and interactions with Arabs, and had strong desires to get involved in the community through service while in Amman. Rachel had strong goals to recreate the motivation she felt while serving others in the community in Asia for her church, which she believed had enabled her to learn the L2 in a very rewarding way since it was rooted in a genuine concern for the people. Other interests Rachel hoped to explore included religion and music.

Upon arriving in Jordan, Rachel found it difficult to adjust to cultural differences related to gender. She found that a different set of rules regarding gender roles and expectations governed interactions in public spaces. As a result, as expressed in her week one report, Rachel found herself unsure of how to approach native Arabs:

Finding is the issue right now. I guess it's still hard to figure out when and where I am allowed to be outgoing and approach people and when it's not okay.

Moreover, Rachel found that the behavior of native Jordanian women differed from that of women in the United States, Europe, and even other countries in Asia. In our first interview in Amman, Jordan, our discussion greatly focused on this topic:

I expected that the women would be more friendly. Umm... but, yeah, I guess, like, just like coming from Asia [laughs], where like, everyone just like called you out. Like, the men did, and whatever. But so did the women, you know? Like anyone you saw like just wanted to talk to you immediately. And here, it just seems like, I don't know. It just feels like a little more isolated I guess.

As a result, Rachel initially struggled to find meaningful experiences “on the street,” especially with women. During the first half of the study abroad, especially towards the beginning, interactions felt “shallow” and unsatisfying to Rachel. These conversations were also limited to everyday tasks such as grocery shopping and taking taxis, which we also discussed in her first interview:

So far the [speaking experiences] we've had have been super shallow... And, yeah, they've been mostly with men. So I don't feel like I can go deep, you know what I mean? And they've just been,

like, on the street kind of stuff. So... I mean, obviously not what I want for the rest of it [the study abroad].

Rachel also felt unmotivated by the simple, daily interactions she was having. While Rachel was able to fulfill program requirements, these experiences were not what she had expected or wanted in her long-term goals of the study abroad. As Rachel continually sought access to the L2, she regularly felt unmotivated by the results of her efforts.

Like when I went to the university with you it was only for a second, and then, like, I went to the grocery store and realized I had to speak more that day and so I just asked people questions about buying stuff... you know, like, which is fine, I don't know, I got my hour in, or whatever, but... again it didn't feel that motivating.

A self-proclaimed “goal girl,” Rachel was naturally self-reflective, evaluative; and she set goals, both short-term and long-term, accordingly. From the beginning, Rachel was very aware of her motivations and goals for the study abroad, even when she was unable to see progress. In weekly meetings, either with myself or another member of the program leadership, Rachel was quick to reflect and come up with ideas of how she could better gain access to native speakers and the L2 based on her personal interests and desires. Examples of these plans included researching orphanages to volunteer at and music schools to potentially join at The University of Jordan (JU). However, at times, Rachel still struggled to move forward with her goals as she ran

into contextual obstacles (ex: finding opportunities to volunteer online or a music school were not as accessible as she had hoped).

Right, um... I... well, I tried... I mean, I can do more, but I kind of looked into volunteering stuff... and it's like, I don't know, it's not as easy as I thought people would just want people to volunteer. But it's been kind of hard to find or figure out. But that's still something in the long run if I could work it out would be good. Or... kind of how I talked to you a little bit about, um... like maybe each day choosing a topic to just go and talk to people about. And if it needs to be in kind of a "Oh I'm doing a survey" format... just to, so that you don't have to do all of the shallow stuff first and just get to it- maybe that will work, but I need to sit down and plan that out, and I like, need to choose things that will be motivating for me, you know? I've thought about just political things going on or, um, I was going to try and find some way to like... talk to people about about music here, just because that's something I'm interested in... um, so I don't know if I just need to go up there and find the music schools or... and I looked up some music schools online, to maybe try and go find. So stuff like that...

While her own efforts seemed to fall short of her goals during the first half of the study abroad, program interventions created opportunities that helped realize her passions and bring

about very meaningful and beneficial experiences. The program connected Rachel with an Arabic speaking church, of which she became an active participant. Due to Rachel's interest in religion, she was also paired with a girl from her church to discuss religious subjects two to three times a week in addition to the weekly speaking appointments provided for all program participants. While in Amman, These opportunities provided many satisfying experiences for Rachel. One Friday, for example, one of the Arab teachers who was supposed to teach a Sunday school lesson did not show up, and Rachel was asked to be a last minute replacement. Here is an excerpt of Rachel's reflection on the experience as expressed in our week 3 interview:

...I just feel so much, like, very motivated there. Like I love the people, and they're super encouraging too so it's not scary. And so, like... I just like try really hard... just like loving them, and really wanting to know what they're saying to me, and really wanting them to understand what I want to say, like, I was just like surprised at some of the things that came out of my mouth. That I was like "Oh, I didn't know I knew how to say that." You know what I mean? It was very satisfying. I'm sure it was not perfect Arabic. But I feel like we... like they understood what I was saying and they understood me, which matters to me more. I know I should be more picky about my grammar or whatever but... I mostly just want to understand and for them to understand me.

Along with several other students, the program also arranged for Rachel to volunteer with a local NGO a few times a week. Volunteering facilitated meaningful speaking opportunities that Rachel later cited as some of her best experiences overall while studying abroad. Through volunteering, for example, Rachel was able to combine several of her interests (ex: music and service) to help teach an after school music class for Arab youth once a week. Helping her to make connections between her interests, goals, and the language, allowed Rachel to more easily fulfill program requirements while meaningfully interacting and building relationships with native speakers. When asked in an exit survey to describe her top three experiences from the study abroad, all resulted from the program interventions mentioned above: volunteering, religion lessons, and serving in the Arabic-speaking church.

Despite Rachel's self-awareness and clear goals throughout the study abroad, she often struggled to realize her plans. In this way Rachel's agency became limited. While she was able to exercise her agency and self-regulate to the extent of goal setting and planning, acting on her goals was difficult as contextual and situational factors constrained Rachel's efforts. For example, finding volunteer opportunities was not as easy as Rachel had hoped, and finding deeper, meaningful relationships and conversation in the public sphere felt equally challenging.

As a result, program interventions—standard and personalized—were essential in helping Rachel create contexts that matched her goals and allowed her to engage with native speakers in the L2. For instance, while Rachel initially felt unsure of what society afforded her as a woman and how she might access native speakers and the L2 in appropriate situations, program interventions were able to provide that socioculturally appropriate access. In fact, her church

participation, volunteering, and weekly religious discussions were all contexts in which Rachel's gender did not hinder access to the L2 or native speakers. At her church, for example, an hour was dedicated to an all-women's class and the rest of the time the genders were mixed—with men and women both participating in the administration and conducting of meetings. As a result, the environment was inclusive of Rachel regardless of her gender as her involvement was beneficial to running the worship service. In her volunteer work, Rachel worked in an environment open to the active participation of women since she taught children. Last but not least, her weekly religious discussions with Noor provided a context for her to get to know Noor *and* her family within their home—part of the private sphere mentioned by Hillstrom (2011) that is a very common and comfortable place for women to spend time.

From Rachel's story we learn that while some female students might have strong goals and desires, they may require help in implementing their forethought into action and creating contexts that allow them to exercise agency. Particularly in unfamiliar sociocultural contexts, program interventions are essential in creating those agentic opportunities.

Lauren, the “Ah-ha” Artist

Lauren's interest in Middle Eastern cultures and languages stemmed from her upbringing. At a young age, Lauren's family moved from the US and lived extensively in the Arabian Gulf for her father's job. However, her passion for drawing led her to major in Fine Arts as opposed to area studies. While she did not feel like she had a “deep purpose” for studying Arabic, she knew that the region and culture interested her enough to continue her Arabic studies all the way to the study abroad.

Lauren's husband was also a student of Arabic participating in the program. As a result, their first week abroad they strived to use their marital status and gender to their advantage, especially as they navigated potential perceptions of their identities in a new environment.

Lauren recounted their tactics in her first weekly report:

Since I have Kyle [her husband] with me when I speak, we've been having him start the conversation and then introduce me into the conversation so that I can speak to the same people while still following social norms as best as I can. This has been working and we have been cautious to see how people perceive us before we start to engage in a full conversation with them.

In spite of these initial successes, Lauren struggled to find access to the L2 and native speakers throughout the first half of the study abroad—a challenge she later attributed to culture shock. Lauren even cited finding people to talk to as the “hardest thing in the program” for her in a reflective Week 6 interview. As a result, she was initially often stressed, fearful, and worried about finding people to talk to and befriend, as most of her contacts never led to anything more than brief conversations. Finding opportunities for both Lauren and her husband also proved to be more difficult than expected despite initial successes and encounters.

And like when we go out, like there was this one day where we went out and no one wanted to talk to us. Like every time we like said hi to someone they like did not answer. Like, it was just the worst day. And so we didn't get to speak to anyone...

These feelings of stress, fear, and worry caused by poor finding/speaking experiences often made it more difficult for her to be motivated to pursue L2 access, creating a vicious cycle. Lauren expressed frustration that she did not understand what she was doing wrong or why people seemed to avoid talking to her.

Um, that's the hard part though is that I have no idea... like, I don't know what to talk about. I don't know if they'll be interested in us. I don't know, like, I don't know. I just can't figure out like what needs to be different about us trying to find people to talk to.

Despite having lived in the Arabian Gulf, Lauren noted the struggle of adapting to the new Arab culture and determining how to fit in.

Um... it's hard to know how to be, you know? Um... because, like, the Emirates isn't really like an Arab country. It is, but it's not. And, um, like, when I was with people there, like, I did some Arab-ish things but I was still American and it was all normal, you know? But like here I don't even know how they are. Like, I don't know, it's hard because... especially for you to know how to, like, change yourself so that you can like be friends with somebody else. And like, I mean, you don't have to change yourself, but like... especially if you want people to talk to you, like, you have to be normal to them.

Lauren also expressed her concern that she did not feel people were interested in her and what she would have to say. Despite having lived in an Arab Gulf country, Lauren also expressed further frustration that she was unsure of how to be or act in the new context of Amman, Jordan in a way that would encourage others to speak with her. Lauren's concern echoes the complex concept of identity: we are not only who we say we are, but also who society perceives us to be. What we can notice in Lauren's story, as well as in the later stories of Samantha and Rachel, is the process of identity negotiation in the new sociocultural context. These female students find themselves unsure of how their identities (i.e. female, married, western, etc...) are being perceived and how that might influence access to native speakers and the L2.

I, um, actually kind of like, when I used to live in the Gulf, like, did have kind of like an Arab personality. Um, I don't necessarily want to slip back into that. When I was with people there, like, I did some Arab-ish things but I was still American and it was all normal, you know? But like here I don't even know how they are.

Another area of challenge for Lauren seemed to come from feeling self-conscious in situations that felt forced or contrived, in addition to how people were perceiving her as she sought to approach native speakers and gain L2 access.

And it's just weird because it's like "Hi! I've never met you before, I'm an American, I want to talk to you because I just want to." I

don't know. I can't get over the fact that the other person is going to think that that's really strange.

Later on in the semester, Lauren retrospectively attributed a lot of her stress and fear to culture shock. While the possibility and effects of culture shock were discussed in the study abroad program's prep class before departure, Lauren said that she did not think she had to worry about such a challenge since she had grown up in the Gulf.

L: And, the one thing that I failed to recognize that it was, was culture shock. I thought that it was impossible for me to have culture shock. You know, because, whatever, I don't know why [laughs], because I've been to so many places or something. Yeah, um. But yeah, I didn't get this place, I mean obviously, I still don't get this place. But, it doesn't scare me anymore. And every, like going anywhere scared me. Looking anyone in the eye, like, scared me, you know? So, it wasn't, just, it wasn't really about Arabic as much, as it was about, just like, anxiety about, like, being here and everything being different. And I wasn't recognizing what the problem was... so I was, like, finding other things...

J: To, like, blame it on maybe?

L: But then that made it worse. And, then I just chose to... like, it was easier to just be mad and, like, upset than to, like work really hard to be happier. So I stayed that way for way too long. And

there are still, like, a few days in the second semester where I just lost it, you know? But, the thing is, the next day I was okay. I wasn't, like, stuck in a month long period of, whatever [laughs]... you know. The second part was much better in that way [laughs].

Though her efforts may initially have been tainted by culture shock, Lauren never gave up: she was constantly reflecting on what was not working and what she could do better. Lauren would then proactively press forward to the best of her ability. In one instance, Lauren even contacted a friend and former study abroad participant for contacts in the area.

Um, we actually messaged Tanner like a couple days ago like "Do you know anyone who would like talk to us both?," you know? And he like gave us a bunch of people's names and whatever. So maybe that'll work. Like, if like people- he said that there's a mother who has a couple kids. So, if we can find them then like maybe they'll be friends with us.

In another instance, Lauren discussed with her Qasid speaking partner the struggles she was facing with accessing native speakers and the L2 outside of class:

I haven't been able to strike up like a good conversation. And... um, my speaking partner at Qasid has given me some pointers about how to better approach people [laughs]. Um, like at the university, for example, she told me that I should just go up and say like "Oh, I'm a like university student from America" because

American is my selling point, apparently [laughs]. "And if I could just have like 2 minutes of your time because I'm learning Arabic, to speak Arabic to you." And she said that 2 minutes will probably turn into an hour.

This perseverance in problem-solving, coupled with program interventions and a personal perspective change, ultimately led to a more successful second-half of the study abroad. As a result, the rest of the study abroad was much more enjoyable overall and more successful—especially in terms of accessing native speakers and the L2, which had previously caused her so much anxiety. As the semester continued, Lauren also expressed greater perspective and a happier, more optimistic attitude regarding finding access to native speakers and the L2 outside of class: “And yeah, so we [she and her husband] just try our best every day and if it doesn't work out as well as we want it to, the next day will be better.” This positive outlook may have been the result or reason for an increase in meaningful experiences with the L2 and native speakers. At the very least, this quote captures the more enjoyable nature of the second half of the study abroad for Lauren.

In terms of program interventions, speaking appointments and volunteering were most beneficial for Lauren. Twice a week Lauren would volunteer with an after school program for youth. Both she and her husband were able to team-teach a class together, which provided her with the opportunity to couple Arabic with her Art skills and simultaneously work alongside her husband. Speaking appointments set up by the program provided Lauren with personalized one-on-one time in a very safe, comfortable environment—a context that afforded her the ability to

progress. As a result, Lauren constantly referred to speaking appointments as her best speaking experiences in both our one-on-one interviews and her weekly/daily reports. Because the program provided her with this safe situation, Lauren was also afforded the opportunity to exercise her agency in a way that might not have been possible in other contexts. For example, her speaking appointments afforded Lauren the opportunity to work on overcoming her fears of outside perceptions. The following excerpt from Lauren's week 13 report captures these sentiments:

As I'm reflecting on this last week of real speaking experiences, I'm really grateful for the speaking appointments I had at Qasid. They were the best speaking experiences I had here and I learned a lot from my partners. I'm also glad that I got to have a lot of different ones [Qasid speaking partners] because I've learned how to better control myself and my ability to no matter how happy my partner was or interested in me they were.

During speaking appointments, Lauren was also afforded the opportunity to work on specific aspects of the language she felt she needed to improve. Especially in the early stages of the study abroad, speaking appointments aided students to progress and become more confident in their linguistic abilities. Early on, Lauren also praised her speaking appointments and the role they played in creating an agentic environment.

Um, the speaking appointments are really good. They help a lot.
Um, sometimes, well, things that I want to work on I just bring up

at the beginning of like each of my, uh, appointments. Like yesterday I just told her like "I have a hard time with "Haka, yaHki" (verb: to speak), and the verb like 'bid,' like 'I want.'" And she was like "Okay, well let's just use it like a ton." And then I kind of got the hang of it, at least better than before. So I just tell her what I want out of my appointment and then she makes it happen, I guess, so, that's good.... The things that I find the most difficult I practice with her.

Lauren traced her success during the second half of the study abroad to a specific “ah-ha” moment. Such a definable breakthrough was not expressed by any of the other female participants. According to Lauren, this breakthrough occurred one day after realizing that she only had half of the semester left and that she was not completely proud of the effort she had put in thus far.

I'm not here on the earth to just float around and observe everything that goes by me and try once in a while, you know? I have work that I'm supposed to do. And not all, like a lot of people, I haven't gotten some huge confirmation that I need to do Arabic, but I do feel like it's something that, um, well, it's obviously something that I chose to do and that I should be trying hard in. And, um, I really do love to do it at the end of the day, you know?

At this time, Lauren decided that she no longer wanted to feel fear or anxiety, especially while accessing the L2 and native speakers outside of the classroom. After a very engaging session with her speaking partner, she wrote down exactly what made it successful and why she left the appointment feeling happy. From that point on, Lauren strived to replicate the same situation and feelings as much as possible. Lauren exercised her agency both in the decision to change as well as the plans to recreate that positive speaking experience. In the following excerpt, Lauren reads off her notes from that day in our Exit Interview:

I write everything down, I can't figure out anything without writing it down (gets notebook). Okay... where are you? There you are. Okay, let's see. It says: "what made me do well today?" [laughs] that's the question. Knowing someone was interested in what I had to say. Saying my real opinions. That's a big one, because I can't make things up off the top of my head. Sometimes people are like: "just lie about everything" and I just can't do that, so... I just say the truth [laughs], then I'll be okay. Um, deciding to evaluate myself, um, on my mistakes and like what I can do instead of getting upset with myself. Um, and allowing myself to be nervous, cuz I'm always nervous whenever I'm speaking Arabic, but usually I'm like "Stop! Like, you're ridiculous. Why are you being nervous?" but I just, like, let my hands shake and I didn't care. Um, and then also, trying to control my verb tense even though I make

mistakes and then when I make mistakes, I corrected them. Um, and then the next question is what can I do to, like, keep this up kind of thing. Um, and then I said have the attitude that the test giver is actually interested in my opinions [laughs]. Um, practicing speaking my opinions in English, first, and Arabic. Um, and then I wrote, recognizing that my, um, like, lack of confidence and fear are my enemies and not my Arabic ability. Um, and, let's see, and then I kind of went off on a tangent and I, like, wrote a huge list [laughs] about the things I know and what I want to learn and stuff [laughter].

While Lauren struggled to exercise her agency, self-regulate, and gain access to native speakers and the L2 in the first half of the program, the second half was markedly better. As a result, Lauren is a great example of the importance of agency and constructive perseverance in learning. She also teaches us the possibilities of change and progress.

Despite having previously lived abroad in an Arabian Gulf country, Lauren struggled the most of the girls in terms of culture shock. Culture shock largely influenced Lauren's initial experience, and seemed to inhibit—to a certain extent—her overall ability to agentially self-regulate. Goal setting and planning were difficult as Lauren did not have specific goals with Arabic and was not sure of how Arabic would fit into her longer term life goals. Taking action was, in turn, a struggle as her unclear goals caused little motivation. Additionally, culture shock,

fear, and shyness in certain contexts also held her back initially from finding access to native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom.

After Lauren's personal breakthrough, her abilities to exercise her agency, self-reflect, and take action improved. However, at the beginning of the study abroad she would note struggling to understand why people would not talk to her or what she could do differently. Lauren also attributed much of her stress and fear during that time to an inability to recognize the culture shock she was experiencing. Similar to Rachel's experience, program interventions were essential in helping Lauren to have successful and meaningful experiences with native speakers in the L2. Even though Lauren expressed more unsure goals when compared to the other female students, program interventions gave Lauren the positive experiences she needed to increase her motivation to press forward. Weekly volunteering and speaking appointments offered Lauren the consistency and comfort she desired.

From Lauren's story, above all, we see the transforming power of agency. After Lauren's "ah-ha" moment, she explicitly describes the *decision* to change. As a result of her decision, Lauren recognized what she could change and took the necessary actions to do so. This agentic breakthrough coincided with program interventions and the subsiding of culture shock, and as Lauren she became more comfortable with her surrounding environment and how she fit in, she was able to gain access to native speakers and the L2.

Samantha, the Neighborhood Citizen

In contrast to Lauren, Samantha had never left the United States. Nevertheless, Samantha inserted herself into the Jordanian environment very naturally. Outgoing, charismatic, lover of

sewing, journal writing, reading, running, singing, and working with children, Samantha rarely struggled to gain access to the L2 and engage in meaningful experiences with the language. With a strong understanding of her interests and personal motivations, Samantha was also able to build real relationships in contexts that were gender appropriate.

Nevertheless, similar to many of the other girls, Samantha faced a period of adjustment upon arriving in Amman as she described in her first interview:

Um, it has its ups and downs. So it's like... I don't know, it's kind of like being on a rollercoaster. Like I'll get going really good and be like "Oh I love Jordan, I love everything about it," hit the bottom like "Oh, I'm so ready to be home," And then it just goes back up. You just kind of have to ride it and hope it evens out.

More specifically, a major area of adjustment for Samantha included adapting to new cultural perceptions and expectations of gender. She initially struggled to find the balance between being herself, fitting into appropriate cultural expectations, and how she was seen in the new sociocultural context as she went out and began to seek L2 access.

It's really hard not to smile at everyone. I'm just, I don't know, I'm a pretty happy person and so I just want to, I just want to, smile at everyone, and just be friends with everyone. And, so, it's really difficult not to do that... to just... you know you have to, I just have to just constantly remind myself that the way I see myself is a lot different than how I would be seen. So even though I think I'm just

being friendly or I'm just making friends, then they're going to think it's something a little bit more risqué than that...

This concern over outside perceptions was one experienced by many of the female students, as they desired not only to fit into the community and find opportunities to use the language, but also to avoid harassment as much as possible.

Samantha shared the same concerns regarding harassment, particularly after an encounter that left her feeling nervous. One day, while walking to exchange money at a bank, Samantha explored a shorter, more unfamiliar route. During the excursion, Samantha came across a group of boys who briefly followed her yelling, “You American! Are you American?” in broken English. Samantha later reported on her feelings about the incident, expressing concern over how outside perceptions mediated interactions with native speakers:

It's very much in your face. Um... Yeah. It doesn't bother me in that I like obsess over it or I think about it all the time. But at that moment it's really hard not to be like “I am an intelligent, respectable young lady. I don't need that from you. And just because I'm white, or just because I'm American, doesn't mean that you need to yell at me.” And it's frustrating because, um, I'm sure they're actually nice people. I'm sure that they have families, that they have jobs, or whatever, but I'm, I'm never going to get to know them like that. There's just going to be this group of men that

my only interaction with is them yelling dumb things at me from a car.

Similar to Rachel and Lauren, Samantha's experience demonstrates an identity struggle. Samantha grapples with how she is being perceived and the identity being imposed on her by the boys, one that she does not fit her own view of herself. The adjustment to a new sociocultural environment for these three female students and consequent identity struggles reaffirms the importance of focusing on the identity and agency of language learners. "Conditions under which language learners speak are often highly challenging, engaging their identities in complex and often contradictory ways." (Norton and Toohey, 2001, p. 312). Study abroad is no exception. How students exercise their agency to self-regulate, and how programs intervene in such situations are key to facilitating students' adjustment into any new ecology.

Along with social concerns over how she was perceived as a person and participant in this new environment, Samantha also expressed some initial insecurities about the language.

Most of it's being afraid to say it wrong. But, yeah. A lot of it is just forcing myself to do it. It's the same... But I also have that same problem just talking on the streets. Like, I think that's why it's easier for me to talk to kids. I don't know, it's because their Arabic is closer to my level of Arabic. But like when I'm talking to adults I'm like "this is their language, and I'm butchering it..." So I feel... I don't know... just bad talking to them in Arabic.

Especially if they know English. Because I think, “Well, I can just speak in English”.

Later on in the semester (Week 4) Samantha also expressed insecurities using the questionnaires from issues class, a program intervention to facilitate access to native speakers and the L2. While Samantha felt the language included in these surveys was sometimes above her abilities, other students often incorporated the questions into speaking appointments and outside speaking as well.

Umm... I just feel weird. Because the questions aren't like natural for me. And sometimes they're a little above what I understand. So I'm not going to go up to an Arab and be like “here's this question that makes me sound super fluent and smart but I actually don't quite know what I just said so...”

Nevertheless, her insecurities and fluctuations in motivation never came at the expense of awareness of her feelings, optimism, and coming up with theories to help her find interlocutors and gain L2 access in alternative ways.

Like, that's the part I was most excited for was just to wander the streets and talk to people. But now that I'm here I would just rather do my readings.... Some of it's frustration. You know, I feel like I've been doing this for, you know, at least four semesters. I feel like I should be at a better level. I should just be able to talk to someone on the street in Arabic. It's kind of a double-edged sword, because you can only get better by doing it, but you don't want to

do it until you're better. So it's like... I think you just have to do it.

*And so I think you know with a little more time and really, like,
putting myself out there that it'll just come... Just more practice.*

Like Rachel, Samantha demonstrated great self-awareness regarding how she learned best and what motivated her. Additionally, with any challenge she faced, she was also quick to work towards a solution and/or re-approach a situation to achieve her goals. For example, in our first interview she mentioned feeling unmotivated to go speaking because it was difficult to find opportunities due to restrictions caused by gender and linguistic abilities. When I asked her what she planned on doing to overcome those challenges, she responded with the following remarks.

Well, like just being here for the past four days, um... I've found that talking to children is easier for me. And, so I think if I can find a place, you know, like the daycare or like the kindergarten, where, you know, maybe I'm working with children I can work with the women that are there, then go from there. Especially because I feel they're going to be talking about things I'm more interested in... [For example] I [also] like kids, and I like art. So my next plan was to go down to the university and... I don't know if they have like an art department, but if they did you know maybe I could talk to some of the art students about art.

Throughout the entire first half of the study abroad, Samantha consistently strived to gain access to the L2. While experiences were often trial and error, a combination of personal efforts

and taking advantage of program interventions allowed Samantha to have a myriad of speaking experiences and exchanges with native speakers throughout the entire study abroad. Essential to Samantha's story is that she knew what she loved, what she was interested in, and she used her personality and hobbies to her advantage, in culturally appropriate ways. Unlike Rachel, Samantha was able to realize many of these goals on her own. After realizing how much she enjoyed working with children and how she was less intimidated to speak to Arab children, for example, Samantha found and contacted a local children's school. From there she became an assistant for the school's English teacher. This experience allowed her to become acquainted with the children from her neighborhood, and one mom even had her over twice a week to tutor her children on a regular basis. The contexts of teaching at an elementary school and befriending neighboring families were situations in which Samantha's gender was an advantage: most of the teachers at her school were female and she was often invited over into homes to spend time with the women and children.

While Samantha was able to access native speakers and the L2 during the first half of the SA, it was not until the 6th week abroad when she felt she "finally got the hang of it". It was during this portion of the program in which relationships that she had been building since the beginning started to turn into reliable friendships.

I feel like... I like finally got the hang of it. Of like... people being comfortable with you and inviting you over and you being comfortable with them. Because like up until this point I don't really think I had places I could go or regular places I could go.

*There were a couple shops I could go in, but not like somewhere I
could go sit down and have a conversation*

The major reasons for Samantha's success in gaining and enhancing access seemed to come from patience, persistence, and flexibility in pursuing speaking opportunities. Even at times when her language lacked, or an experience with a regular interlocutor turned out poorly, Samantha maintained the attitude that "one bad experience isn't enough to discount a whole range of things [referring to all of the good experiences she would have]." This mentality allowed her to have many rich, meaningful experiences in socioculturally appropriate contexts (i.e. the school, neighbor's homes). In other words, Samantha exercised her agency in contexts that gave her access to do so. Even when some plans did not work for her as she had originally hoped (e.g., going to the university), Samantha found ways to either adjust her approach or create a new plan. She was the ultimate problem-solver, a characteristic sometimes associated with high self-regulatory abilities. When Samantha felt her gender inhibited her from befriending an elderly male tailor, for example, she took other male students with her to meet him for the first few times. From those initial reactions Samantha later met his family, daughters, and was even invited to a relative's wedding. Last but not least, Samantha's ability to make connections in Arabic—particularly between what she loved, her goals for the study abroad, and what contexts afforded her progress—made a huge difference in allowing her to build an effective social network.

*I think it... kind of had to do with, like, making more connections
in Arabic. Like I started with that family, and that was really*

motivating... to learn Arabic enough to like converse with them and do something in their lives. And then, like starting at JRF [Jordan River Foundation] was also really helpful. Then, I don't know, like, a lot of reflection on the first half for me was... like there were things that I knew I should be doing better. And that I needed to... um, to make those things happen so it would reflect that way."

Samantha's ability to proactively gain access to the L2 teaches important lessons. Her story demonstrates how the three phases of self-regulation work in harmony to facilitate change and progress. For example, Samantha demonstrated great self-awareness of her interests, set realistic, motivating goals, and took the necessary action to achieve her objectives. Just as necessary as self-reflection and planning was Samantha's ability to take action. Her proactivity allowed her to access native speakers and the L2 even without the help of program interventions (although program interventions did provide her with consistent speaking appointments and volunteering opportunities).

It is important to note that Samantha's efforts took place in contexts that were culturally appropriate for her gender, such as tutoring children English at home and volunteering at an elementary school. Thus, Samantha was able to meaningfully connect her interests, goals, and actions with the cultural environment. Through teaching, volunteering, tutoring a neighboring family, and befriending local shop employees, Samantha did not simply access natives and the L2 on a regular basis. Rather, she became a citizen of the environment.

Christina, the Diligent Student

From the beginning of the study abroad, Christina was one of the most diligent students. With a background in International Relations and desires to work for the US government, Christina hoped that Arabic would help her achieve those future goals. Despite Christina's strong work ethic and motivation to do well academically, she also faced challenges to accessing the L2 that included hesitations to use the language and approach native speakers.

Unlike the experiences of Rachel, Lauren, and Samantha, Christina reported that being a western woman in Jordan was not as bad as she had originally expected. More specifically, Christina noted preconceived expectations of "a lot more harassment and cat calls and things like that" during her first week in Amman. Though Christina did not experience undue amounts of harassment, she did find that her gender mediated her speaking experiences, especially in comparison with her male counterparts in the public sphere.

I've just noticed a main difference in terms of like when we're with the guys, like other guys will come up to them and speak to them just like really freely, and then other times it'll be like the girls, we have to go a lot more out of our way... Um, right now it's like of lot of like figuring out who I can and like can't talk- not can and can't I guess, but like who might be more receptive to me talking to them kind of thing.

However, while Christina was culturally aware of outside perceptions, she never saw this factor as an insurmountable challenge at the expense of personal agency. From the beginning, Christina accepted responsibility for limited speaking opportunities, noting that her own lack of effort was more to blame than her gender:

This may be a little bit biased because I- I probably like have to admit that I haven't tried as hard as I should so far. Um, but they [speaking experiences] have been a little bit more limited. Like, I haven't really spoken much at all. Except with either directions to the taxi driver, like a sentence here and there for that, or maybe a sentence asking for things with shopkeepers. That's kind of been the extent.

Christina also recognized that her own anxiety about speaking Arabic, especially in the early stages of the program, represented one of her greatest challenges to accessing the L2 and native speakers. Christina attributed this hesitancy to the fact that she initially lacked confidence in her Arabic abilities and was often fearful of speaking Arabic incorrectly:

But I think a lot of it has been limited by also, like, I have been a little hesitant to use my Arabic so far...I feel like I have to think about things before I say them, because I'm not really sure like of what I'm saying, or if I'm saying it right.

Recognizing that confidence in her Arabic abilities would present a challenge, Christina developed strategies. She planned for specific opportunities that would require her to use Arabic in order to fulfill particular tasks. Christina hoped that her plans would motivate her enough to overcome her hesitation:

I've thought a lot about it because like I recognize that's [being confident in speaking to people in Arabic] one of my weaker areas.

And so I've probably talked a lot about it but it's just- um, I've been trying to think of specific opportunities to go out and like actually use, um, my speaking skills. So, like, needs that I have that I can also say like going out and say, Ok I need to talk to this person about something, I need something so, like I can ask them about it and like I ask them follow up questions. And that sort of thing. So it's just like- I'd say my main thing is just actually doing it because I like hesitate and then I kind of lose my chance... Or I avoid it.

One specific task that Christina planned and implemented was finding a gym that she could join. As an avid runner and a proponent of exercise for stress relief, Christina knew that finding a gym, inquiring about services, and signing up, would require her to use her language skills. Additionally, Christina thought that joining a gym could provide an environment more conducive to finding women to befriend.

So one of the things I want to do is find a gym or something like that I can join. And so I thought about either, um, just joining the gym and using the finding opportunity as an experience, like talking to different people at different gyms about like different services and stuff. But also maybe joining a regular class or something, like a woman's class, like aerobics kind of thing where I can like get to know people through that class.

Christina's plans to create a structured environment with clear tasks that were socially and culturally appropriate to her gender (i.e. find a gym) turned into action. This tactic also helped her to become more and more comfortable with speaking Arabic and approaching people:

[F]inding-wise, if you really put in the time to find people, you'll be able to have experiences. So, just like going to the different shops, what helps me is having some kind of a structure, of like, like "ok I need this thing"—I've been talking about the gyms and things like that. "Like, I need to go talk to somebody about this" and so being able to talk to different people really helps in that way...

In addition to using Arabic to fulfill particular tasks, Christina also made use of surveys provided by the program to help facilitate conversations. Though these surveys were provided to all students, few availed themselves of this resource. Christina reported that these surveys were helpful, especially while searching for speaking opportunities at the University of Jordan.

Um, just being able to like ask people questions in general and um just kind of getting that going because usually people will stop and help you and things like that. But just having that in. Yeah that sort of thing. The kill two birds with one stone by asking questions for issues class, and then you get that preparation done and you're actually talking to people and usually those things are things people kind of are interested in or want to talk about... I prepare, I

try to prepare a lot when I go to the university. And I prepare things that we're talking about in issues class mostly... just making sure that I know that vocab. Just, um, having a few general to ask and then maybe, um, a little bit more of a narrower question too. Like, to keep things going, I guess.

Although Christina's strategies for gaining access to native speakers and the L2 were not always successful, she refused to allow setbacks to impede her progress. Additionally, Christina always took responsibility for factors within her control, such as personal effort, while still acknowledging the role played by environmental factors beyond her control:

So we did go to the university last week, and it was like ...we had the vocabulary and questions ready and everything we wanted to ask and um, but there just weren't a lot of people to talk to because classes haven't not started yet, and that was fine, um but getting the speaking is still a little bit tricky but it's doable, I guess. You just have to work harder.

As the semester progressed and Christina continued to search for ways to gain access, her hesitancy to speak in situations lessened as they became more familiar and comfortable. However, she often found herself "freezing up" in new contexts, even when the language required of her was simple.

...I notice myself freeze all the time, whenever I'm in there I'm like... like an unsure situation, like at a party or something like that

I just freeze and it's like I don't know any Arabic or something when I try to speak... it's like basic things for instance, like I totally know that word and I know the pleasantries and things like that. Um, but all the sudden it's like wait, the, the focus is on me, like I have to, I have to say it and then I just, I don't know, it doesn't quite come out the way that I'm thinking it... like when I was talking to Layla at the party and she would like ask me a question and the stuff that I totally knew, but it was just like wait a second, wait what do I say to that, you know, just something that—I wasn't at school, I wasn't like you know completely on the street...

Christina felt this hesitancy hindered the quality of her speaking experiences. So when we discussed how Christina might overcome and work on this particular challenge, practice and patience were key attributes that she recognized she needed to cultivate. However, I also offered her advice based on similar personal experiences. We discussed the idea of imagining a different personality as you speak Arabic—one that is not afraid of x, or is more y. In Christina's case, this strategy meant striving to approach more people, speaking up even in more uncomfortable situations, and channeling her "inner Emma:" her best friend whom she sees as very outgoing and approachable.

Yeah, what you said--having the different personality helps a lot, cause like when you're going out there and talking to people I'm like, I don't even talk to people in English. That's been like the

hardest thing I think for me so far... I feel like I have to be a different person a lot. Because I'm not normally like talking to people, I'm not normally, you know, trying to carry on a conversation, I'm normally like keeping to myself. So, that's helped me a lot, is like, kind of pretending to have a different Arabic personality...my best friend's like that [very outgoing and willing to approach people] and I'm like how do you do this? I kind of feel like she were here, I was thinking about this, like if she were here right in my shoes right now, like I feel like this would be so much easier for her because like that's her personality. But it's not so I'm like okay, I'll just have to deal with that... so I feel like I'm channeling my inner Emma or something [as a personality to reference while she strives to be less hesitant in conversation]

Christina's awareness of what was limiting her speaking experiences, her desire to overcome challenges, as well as her ability to implement plans and self-reflect on experiences were all essential to her progress. Program interventions were also essential in facilitating access to native speakers and the L2. By the end of the study abroad Christina had seen major improvements in her ability to jump into and initiate conversations, as well as "putting herself out there" to gain access to native speakers and the L2.

I'd say that, um, finding and speaking has actually been a lot easier. Um, and part of that has to do with the fact that I finally

kind of got over the, um, I don't know how to put it- basically before I was a lot more hesitant to go out and actually speak but once I actually got myself out there and just said "Okay, I'm going to choose this place and go." It was a lot easier. So, for example, I chose to go to the university, and that was, um, a lot easier. And also we had Waqe3 [NGO at which she volunteered] kind of given to us so that took care of like two days a week. Um, I can't think of anything super specific, but, you know some days were always better than others. I did notice that my overall willingness to, um, how do I put this, but willingness to like jump into the conversation, so I'd initiate conversations, was probably like a more specific improvement.

When asked how she remained motivated to go out and seek access, even when she felt hesitant, shy, or experienced a difficult day, Christina expressed the desire to persevere as an essential motivator:

I think it goes back to that same day that I just talked about where I went out to the university by myself and then I was just like "I'm just going home." Cuz that day I had already, like I had left kind of with the feeling like "I really don't want to do this, but I know I should," so I just went anyways but I wasn't really 100% like "I'm going to get the most out of this that I can." It was like "Okay, I'm

just going to do this and call it good." Um, so, that was, um, more of a challenge. And then, in terms of just overcoming that, I've been, I don't know, I've been thinking about this and where my motivation has been coming from, and I don't have anything to specifically, um, you know, pin it on. But honestly just going out and then getting what I can done for the day and then just honestly starting a new day and just saying like "Okay, I'll just do it again" has worked well enough for me I guess. Not dwelling on, you know, the last day.

Christina also often expressed exercising agency and deciding “it doesn’t have to stay that way” during an unsuccessful or intimidating speaking encounter. Recognizing the power of decision, possibility of change, and the value of positive talk were also essential in helping Christina overcome her hesitancy to use the L2.

C: Um, but just even half way through the speaking appointment, like "No, it doesn't have to stay that way." And just saying like it can change or like telling myself I'm doing well or telling myself that, like, basically it doesn't have to be that way.

J: So kind of a lot of positive self-talk.

C: (Yeah).

Similar to Samantha, Christina seemed to proactively self-regulate and independently work through all three phases. As a diligent student, Christina was very motivated to do well on

the study abroad. In relation to long-term goals, Christina hoped that Arabic would have a place in her future career, which seemed to further motivate her proactivity. Especially in new or uncomfortable situations, Christina constantly mentioned the importance of “just going for it.” This agentic mantra was essential to Christina’s overall experience with gaining and enhancing access to native speakers and the L2. Christina’s ability to critically self-reflect and recognize what she could do better without seeing her weaknesses as debilitating were also keys to her success.

Christina’s ability to prevent her more reserved, shy personality from hindering her experiences is notable aspect of her narrative, especially in comparison with Laurent’s experience. Like Lauren, Christina noted that one of her biggest challenges to accessing native speakers and the L2 was related to her more reserved personality. As a result, Christina often hesitated to begin and contribute to conversations. However, unlike Lauren, Christina was quicker to realize what could be improved and that she was the one ultimately responsible for any improvements. Whereas Lauren was initially unable to recognize that culture shock seemed to impede her ability to self-reflect.

Another notable aspect of Christina’s story is that she did not seem as affected by the adjustment to the new culture as the other female participants. This relatively easy transition may have been the result of her abilities to exercise agency and recognize the value of personal effort early on. While Christina certainly recognized that gender mediated her experiences, she also recognized the role of her efforts and the influence of the context:

I'd say, with certain taxi drivers or something, um, it may be more based on being a woman [having limited interactions]. Um, whereas, or, just, hmm... how do I make the distinction? So, depending on the environment, like I can tell, it'd be a lot easier to approach shopkeepers... But I think a lot of it has been limited by also, like, I have been a little hesitant to use my Arabic so far. So it's, I'm still trying to distinguish between what exactly is limiting and like how far it can go.

Christina's story also teaches us the importance of diligence in exercising agency and self-regulating. Christina's strong desire to perform well on the SA led her to take full advantage of program interventions and gain access to native speakers and the L2, even when she felt shy or hesitant. Similar to Samantha, who was able to make connections between her interests and the L2, Christina was able to make connections between her classes, homework, program interventions, and daily interactions. As a result, even the simplest of interactions could be meaningful and beneficial.

Conclusions

While the extent and nature of challenges faced by female participants on BYU's intensive Arabic study abroad program varied, all were presented with obstacles as they accessed native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom within the new ecology of Amman, Jordan. All four students initially struggled to adjust to sociocultural expectations regarding gender and overcoming concerns over outside perceptions. Unique challenges to accessing native speakers and the L2 involved culture shock, shyness/hesitancy to use the language, difficulties with accessing native speakers, building lasting relationships with interlocutors, and immersing themselves into the environment.

The details regarding how participants overcome the above challenges varied as well. However, exercising agency played a role for all the students as they accessed native speakers and the L2. When presented with an obstacle, exercising agency to self-regulate seemed key to problem-solving perseverance. In weekly interviews, as well as the weekly and daily reports, when obstacles were noted, the self-regulatory phases of planning, acting, and reflecting were key elements. Those students who were able to work through the cycles were able to better able to work towards solutions better. Students who were became stagnant in any one of the cycles struggled to problem-solve, persevere, and overcome challenges.

At times in which obstacles impeded participants' access to native speakers and the L2, program interventions were integral to creating opportunities to facilitate access through program intervention. While many program interventions were integrated into the curriculum, not all students took advantage of these opportunities. Both standardized and personalized interventions

created opportunities for students to exercise their agency and self-regulate. More specifically, program interventions provided opportunities to engage in all three self-regulatory phases. Weekly interviews and weekly and daily reports provided students with opportunities to self-reflect and goal-set. Weekly speaking appointments with a trained, native interlocutor, volunteering opportunities, and personalized interventions gave students the ability to act on their goals and gain real experience with the L2 and native speakers. Thus, program interventions were helped female students access the L2 and native speakers in mutually beneficial ways that were both culturally appropriate and in line with student interests and goals.

Limitations

The qualitative approach used in this study presents both benefits and limitations. While a qualitative look at the students' experiences provides rich details and insights, the results are not quantitatively generalizable to the greater population. Additionally, all of the data was learner-completed, and thus represents how the learners viewed their experiences. While the learner perspective is unique and important to understand, it does not take into account the perspectives of other program leaders, teachers, or even interlocutors. While the necessary steps were taken to triangulate the data, findings, and results, the possibility of researcher bias in such a study must also be acknowledged.

Suggestions for Programs and Students

Nevertheless, based on the findings of this study some suggestions might be made. Training students on the significance of agency and self-regulation is certainly key. As previously mentioned, agency and self-regulation are not static attributes, rather they can be

improved or even taught. Thus, providing students with opportunities to learn and practice agency and self-regulation—even pre-study abroad—might give students the tools necessary to meet challenges related to gaining and enhancing access to the L2. In this study, students completed a pre-study abroad prep class that often presented case studies of previous students who exercised their agency and self-regulated in the face of challenges. These success stories are meant to provide students with role models and vicarious experiences to emulate, as well as provide hope of success, even in the face of setbacks. Explicit instruction on the self-regulatory cycle might also benefit learners, as they could more easily pinpoint how they could agentially realize change. Training students on the significance and benefits of planning, action, and self-reflection in problem solving will help give students meaningful tools while on SA and beyond. Additionally, programs should require and integrate assignments to facilitate students' implementation and practice of all three cycles. Student journals, one-on-one interviews and training, as well as provided opportunities for students to connect the language in meaningful, authentic ways with their interests (pre- and post-SA) are a few examples of how programs might strengthen students' agentic and self-regulatory abilities.

Additionally, programs might incorporate instruction regarding the ecological approach to learning in order to reinforce students' understanding of their agentic roles, as well as the roles of the sociocultural environment and program interventions. Instructing learners that they are agents interacting within an environment should, in turn, help them focus on what they *can* control, change, and improve.

Suggestions for Future Research

In terms of future research, exploring the effects of explicitly instructing students regarding an ecological approach, learner agency, and the self-regulatory cycle is of great interest. Additionally—echoing Trentman’s (2013) suggestions—training students ethnographically to improve their understanding of, and abilities to, assimilate to the host culture could be extremely beneficial in providing students with the necessary skills to understand and assimilate into the new sociocultural context.

Trentman (2013) also noted the lack of the perspective of the interlocutor in research. Thus, gaining the perspectives of students’ interlocutors regarding how they are being perceived and what really facilitates/hinders access would fill this gap. During this study abroad, for example, I had the opportunity to conduct preliminary interviews with students’ Qasid speaking partners regarding access to native speakers and the L2 outside of the classroom. While the data has not been formally included in this study, preliminary findings indicated that how students are perceived can negatively influence access in unintentional ways. For example, one speaking partner noted that her student was shy and hesitant, which could potentially be perceived and snobby and unapproachable. Another speaking partner noted the bright colors worn by another student, which goes against general norms of women wearing more conservative colors. Exploring the perspectives of native speakers and interlocutors regarding foreign students studying abroad would be a monumental contribution to study abroad research. Additionally, gaining this unique perspective would greatly improve program interventions and pre-study

abroad preparation related to adjusting to a new sociocultural context and accessing native speakers and the L2.

Another understudied area of language learning, particularly in the study abroad context, is that of the 21st century skills developed by the American Council for Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (ACTFL, 2011) . In relation to language learning specifically, 21st Century skills include communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, and social and cross-cultural skills (ACTFL, 2011; McKeeman and Oviedo, 2013). While these skills were not the main phenomena of this study hints of the benefits of these skills appeared in the data. For example, the female students, such as Samantha, who tended to more easily access native speakers and the L2 more often demonstrated these 21st Century skills. As a result, researching the prevalence of these skills in the success stories of study abroad learners, as well as the benefits of cultivating these skills should be a major area of interest for future research.

In conclusion, all of the female students were able to gain access to the L2 in culturally appropriate ways, either through their own agentic efforts, with the help of program interventions, or both. No single entity—the program, students, or sociocultural environment—was responsible for poor access to native speakers or the L2. Rather, these variables can work together in harmony or disaccord. As a result, study abroad programs must focus on what opportunities can be afforded to students and facilitated through interventions. Students must understand their agentic roles and self-regulatory abilities, and be willing to take advantage of

program interventions. As a result, program interventions should also aim to help students understand the power of agency and self-regulation, in addition to providing them with access to the L2 and native speakers on study abroad. Even instructing students on the self-regulatory phases and how they might work through each one could be beneficial.

While research demonstrates the mediating power of gender and the difficulties it may present for female students, female participants should not be considered inherently disadvantaged. Any viewpoint that portrays the female experience in certain sociocultural contexts as simply negative and difficult is shallow and inconsiderate. As evidenced by the tales of these four female students, harmony between a new sociocultural environment, study abroad program, and learners is possible and well within our reach. If female students and study abroad programs work together in harmony to navigate the ecology, facilitate mutually beneficial relationships, and engage with the language in meaningful ways, access to native speakers and the L2 will abound.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Questions with Participants

Semi-Structured Interview Week 1

- 1) How are you adjusting?
 - a. Sleep?
 - b. Living situation?
 - c. Roommates?
 - d. Environment in general?
 - e. Alone time?
- 2) How has being a western woman in Jordan been so far?
 - a. Did it live up to your expectations (refer to answers on sheet)
- 3) How has being in the program here been?
 - a. In classes, etc. (“some people don’t get to speak up as much”)
 - b. How have you coped or dealt with it?
- 4) How have your speaking opportunities been since your stay?
 - a. Outside of class
 - b. In-class
 - c. What have you found works best for you [as a woman]?
 - d. What do you plan on trying out?
- 5) What could the program do to better help you adjust?

Semi-Structured Interview Week 2

- 1) Being a woman in Jordan
 - a. Specifically emotionally and mentally
- 2) Language
 - a. Finding Strategies
- 3) In-class strategies
 - a. Comparison to other students, speaking-wise specifically boys who get more attention
- 4) How have you been working with the stress of the program and learning a foreign language?
- 5) How do you keep yourself motivated?
- 6) Goals
 - a. Goals last time—how have they turned out?

- b. Have you set more goals for the program?
- c. Short-term
- d. Long-term

Semi-Structured Interview Week 3

- 1) Tell me about a typical day in Amman
- 2) Tell me about a successful speaking experience this week
- 3) Tell me about a unsuccessful speaking experience this week

Semi-Structured Interview Week 4

- 1) Overall how would you describe your speaking experiences this week?
- 2) Tell me about your most successful speaking experience this past week?
 - a. What made it successful?
 - b. What, if anything would you have done differently?
- 3) Tell me about your most unsuccessful speaking experience this past week?
 - a. What made it unsuccessful?
 - b. In retrospect, what, if anything, could you have done to make it more successful?

Semi-Structured Interview Week 5

- 1) How do you prepare for and make speaking experiences productive?
 - a. Speaking appointments
 - b. Outside speaking
- 2) Tell me about a specific time when you did X
 - a. This past week or any other week!

Semi-Structured Interview Week 6 (Mid one)

- 1) Middle of the semester. Reflecting
 - a. Finding
 - i. What has worked?
 - 1. Example?
 - ii. What hasn't?
 - 1. Example?
 - b. At this point, based on what you have told me, what do you plan on trying?

- 2) Anything you would have done differently?

Semi-Structured Exit Interview

- 1) How would you describe your overall experience with finding and speaking during the second half of the study abroad (since we returned from the Petra trip)?
 - a. Were there any specific improvements or setbacks?
- 2) What was your most successful speaking experience?
 - a. What made it successful?
- 3) Tell me about your least successful speaking experience?
 - a. What made it unsuccessful?
- 4) What was the most challenging aspect for you during the second half of the study abroad?
 - a. How have you overcome/worked on overcoming this challenge?
- 5) “Motivation is the engine that makes language learning happen” – Richard Schmidt (University of Hawaii). Students during the second half of the study abroad often experience a drop in motivation.
 - a. Could you tell me about a time in which you struggled with motivation
 - b. What helped you regain motivation?
- 6) Anything specific you would like to ask about or mention that we didn’t cover in the previous questions?
 - a. Anything come to your mind while we were talking that you weren’t able to mention?
- 7) Ask about Exit “Survey”
 - a. Would you be willing to complete it?
 - b. Be able to have time to collect your thoughts.
 - i. Send it to you within a week or so, and then it would be due a few weeks later.

1. Any preferences here?
 - a. Before you go home, after Jerusalem, etc...
- ii. There might be questions that sound similar to this second-semester survey— but it focuses on the study abroad as a whole, not just the last half.

Appendix B

Pre- and Post-Study Abroad Questionnaires

Pre-Study Abroad Questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. What is your area of study?
3. What are some of your personal hobbies and/or interests?
 - a. This can be anything from cooking to painting to being alone. I just want to get to know more about you as a person!
4. What motivates you to study Arabic and participate on this study abroad?
 - a. Specific language goals? Career goals? Pure interest? Maybe you have had experience with the language in the past?
5. Based on your preconceived notions of the study abroad, what do you expect your experience to be like as a woman?
 - a. For example, I expected it to be harder to find speaking time. You can include anything as long as it is somewhat related to your gender. You can mention language access, harassment, etc.
6. What strategies do you plan on implementing to overcome some of the more challenging aspects of being a woman on the study abroad?
 - a. Ex: I plan on finding a salon to visit... get in with an Arab family... hang out with girls at the Jordanian University... write in a journal to help cope with stress... Skype with family and friends regularly
7. How did you come up with these strategies (i.e. were they discussed in the prep class? Did you talk with previous female participants on the study abroad? Did you come up with them on your own?)
 - a. Feel free to mention
8. Out of the following options, which interest you most in terms of language learning experiences?
 - a. INSERT HERE
9. If I required you to submit a log periodically with various questions, how likely would it be that you would complete it (be honest)?

Post-Study Abroad Questionnaire

- 1) Looking back on the study abroad overall:
 - a. How would you describe your experience?
 - b. How did it compare to your expectations?
 - c. What did you enjoy most about the study abroad?

- d. What was most difficult for you about the study abroad?
- 2) In as much detail as possible, please specifically describe your top 3 experiences you had in Jordan (ex: volunteering, hanging out with an Arab friend, a specific conversation with a speaking partner, attending and/or participating in a certain event, etc.)
 - a. If you want to include more than 3 then that is perfectly fine
- 3) What activities and/or strategies helped you the most in gaining successful and meaningful speaking experiences?
 - a. Where and how did you find meaningful speaking experiences?
 - b. Where and how did you make Arab friends?
- 4) How do you feel your gender:
 - a. Helped your study abroad experience
 - b. Hindered your study abroad experience
 - c. Helped your speaking experiences
 - d. Hindered your speaking experiences
- 5) If you could go back in time and redo the study abroad what, if anything, would you do differently?
 - a. In preparation for the study abroad
 - b. During the study abroad
- 6) If you could change or modify anything about the study abroad program, what would it be and why?
- 7) If you could change or modify anything about the prep class, what would it be and why?
- 8) What advice would you give future study abroad students 1) pre study abroad and 2) on the study abroad?
 - a. All students—both male and female
 - b. Female students specifically
- 9) Anything else?
 - a. This box is a free response for any comments, questions, or recommendations you would like to make. A free response about anything you would like, especially if it was not covered in any of the previous questions.

Appendix C

Weekly and Daily Reports

Weekly Report

*Evaluation

Write a few paragraphs about this last weeks speaking experiences, and plans for the next week. We are asking you to be honest, reflective and insightful. We want to know how you felt about this last week, but less in the emotional sense (I felt happy, I felt satisfied) and more in the analytical sense: how do you feel you performed, what did you do that went well, what could you have done better, in the areas of finding and getting through speaking situations.

Possible things to cover:

(for finding speaking partners) What worked and what did not work? What things did I do to encourage speaking, and what things did I do to shut off opportunities that may have presented themselves? How patient/antsy was I in these encounters? Did I make it easy or difficult to speak to these same partners again?

(for the speaking encounter itself) What did I do to encourage getting beyond pleasantries? Did I find ways to separate from my American colleagues and have one-on-one conversations with Jordanians? Did I find ways to elicit and deliver narration, description, comparisons, hypotheticals, opinion, etc. in past, present and future time? Was I able to express and ask for opinion without getting emotionally involved, and making my partner feel I was sincerely interested in what he had to say? Was I aware of tense? verb agreement? noun/adjective agreement? *idaafa t?* pronunciation? Did I notice words that go together? Did I

pay attention to how my partners said things with the goal of eventually incorporating some of it into my own performance? Did I find a way to be interested in my partners and their lives? Did I find a way to start liking them?

We are interested in your honest reflections on your successes and failures this week, some self-reflection on your own personality and style as it affects those successes and failures, and some reflection about what you might try to make things go a bit better next week.

Type your paragraphs here.

***Overall Experience**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate the overall success of this weeks speaking experiences.

(not successful) 1 7 (very successful)

***Finding**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your efforts to find partners and encourage high quality, one-on-one conversation.

(did not work very well) 1 7 (really paid off)

***Comprehension**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your understanding of what native speakers were saying to you.

(did not get much) 1 7 (understood everything)

***Communicating**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your success in getting what you were trying to say understood by others.

(constantly frustrated) 1 7 (no trouble getting message across)

***Verb Accuracy**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your use of the Arabic verbal system this week.

(major tense/agreement errors) 1 7 (verbs were perfect)

***Accuracy**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your improvement in adhering to the grammatical norms of Arabic (other than the verbal system).

(major grammatical problems) 1 7 (I made no errors)

***Fluency**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your performance in terms of fluency.

(very halting, long pauses) 1 7 (words just came pouring out of my mouth)

***OPI Skills**

Write a sentence or two in which you talk about your experiences with OPI advanced level skills, particularly narration, description, comparison.

Daily Report

Reading

Note: All daily reports refer to the assignment that is due the next day (from the point of view of the day being reported on). You are technically reporting on the period since the end of the last DILCLASS to the beginning of the next one. You should fill out the daily report for any particular day when you have completed studying for that period. For people who have no plans to study in the morning before class, this could be at night right before you go to bed. For those who get up early and study before class, it could be right before DILCLASS. If you have not filled out the report by the time DILCLASS starts, it should be the first thing you do after that class. On a normal week (after the first week) the report you fill out Saturday night/Sunday morning will be the report for day 5 of the previous week. Then Sunday night/Monday morning you will fill out the report for day 1 of the current week. And so forth.

Note also that you will not be able to submit your report unless you choose your name, the week, and the day. However, unfortunately, it IS possible for you to turn in your report for the wrong name, week, and/or day. Therefore it is imperative, once you submit the report, to look at the top of the window and see if the program has recorded your report under the proper name, week and day. If you make a mistake, please note exactly how the report was submitted and inform one of the leaders so we can change it to the correct name, week, and day.

*Time Spent on Reading Assignments (BE BRUTALLY HONEST)

0 hours

less than .5 hours

.5 - 1 hours

1 - 1.5 hours

1.5 - 2 hours

2 hours

more than 2 hours

***Extensive Reading Assignment**

I read _____ of the extensive reading assignment articles, completed the assigned activities related to them, and have turned in or will turn in the written sections.

all some none

***Article A Assignment**

I spent at least 15 minutes on the Article A assignment, and turned in or will turn in my partial translation.

yes partial no

***Article B&C Assignments**

I spent at least 15 minutes on each of Article B and Article C.

yes partial no

***Article D Assignment**

I spent at least 15 minutes on the Article D assignment, turned in the quiz, and feel that I have mastered Article D.

yes partial no

*Frustration Level

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your overall level of frustration with your various reading activities today.

(very frustrated) 1 7 (no problems at all)

Reading Specifics

Explain your frustration level score if you like, particularly if it is different from usual.

Every Thursday evening (at least) write a few lines about your general reading progress over the course of the last week.

*Tuning Assignment

I spent at least 10 minutes on the Tuning assignment or an a self-chosen tuning activity.

yes partial no

*Listening Assignment

I spent at least 10 minutes listening to an Arabic news broadcast.

yes partial no

Speaking

*Time Spent Overall On Speaking Activities

0 hours

less than .5 hours

.5 - 1 hours

1 - 1.5 hours

1.5 - 2 hours

2 hours

more than 2 hours

*Percent Spent in Finding Activities (not actually speaking)

Click the range that represents the percent of the above time you spent trying to find people to talk to and not actually speaking with someone.

Less than 10%

10% - 25%

25% - 50%

50% - 75%

over 75%

*Just You

Click the range that represents the percent of the above time you spent speaking to Jordanians when no other native speaker of English was involved in the conversation.

Less than 25%

25% - 50%

50% - 75%

over 75%

***Beyond Pleasantries**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate the extent to which these conversations moved beyond pleasantries or things you always say in the direction of actual discussions and real communication.

(just pleasantries, old subjects) 1 7 (high quality communication)

***Engagement Level**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate how engaged these conversations were on average.

(laid back, lots of pauses) 1 7 (intense, constant talking)

***Satisfaction**

On a scale of 1 to 7 rate your level of satisfaction with this day's speaking: your ranking should reflect your level of frustration or happiness with your own performance, and with your success in finding people to talk to.

(not very satisfying) 1 7 (very satisfying)

Speaking Details

Tell about one of more of your speaking sessions today, hopefully the most productive one. Who did you talk to, was it a new or old partner, what did you talk about, how did it get beyond pleasantries, were there things you wanted to say but couldn't, how was your comprehension of what the others said, what were sources of frustration, etc.

Narration & Description

List any opportunities you had to engage in advanced level activities like narration, description, comparison, etc.

Finding

List any creative or effective (or the opposite) finding activities or techniques you used.
What worked and what did not work?