Chapter 13
Negotiating gendered identities and access to social networks during study abroad in Egypt

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Research on gendered experiences during study abroad typically reveals the disadvantages reported by primarily American female students in gaining access to local social networks compared to their male counterparts (Anderson, 2003; Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth, 2005; Kinginger, 2008; Kuntz & Belnap, 2001; Polyani, 1995; Twombly, 1995). Although this research has been crucial to raising awareness of gendered experiences abroad, there is a need for research that takes a more nuanced approach to the ways students, especially women, negotiate gendered experiences abroad. This paper draws upon poststructuralist theories of identity (i.e. Norton & McKinney, 2011) to analyze the experiences of American female study abroad students in Egypt. This analysis reveals that female students negotiated gendered identities that both facilitated and hindered their access to local social networks. Thus, while study abroad can reproduce negative gendered experiences, there are also transformative possibilities for resisting this narrative.

1. Introduction: Poststructuralist theories of identity

Poststructuralist theories of identity reject the notion of fixed identity categories that are biologically or socially determined from birth or early childhood, asserting instead that these identities are multiple and performed in particular contexts (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Block, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Butler, 1999; Cameron, 1996; Davies & Harré, 1990; Morgan, 2007; Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Omoniyi & White, 2006). For example, Butler (1999) argues that gender is not the source of particular acts, but rather created by the acts themselves:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and,

hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (Butler, 1999, p. 214)

By focusing on the performative, socially and temporally constructed nature of identity, researchers in applied linguistics have explored the possibility for individuals to actively (re)negotiate their identities in ways that are advantageous for their language learning goals (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2001). As Norton and McKinney (2011) state:

> The construct of identity as multiple is particularly powerful because learners who struggle to speak from one identity position can reframe their relationship with their interlocutors and reclaim alternative, more powerful identities from which to speak. This has profound implications for SLA. (p. 73)

At the same time, these researchers recognize that individuals are not free to negotiate any identity they desire. Indeed, there are often tensions between individual agency and the socio-historical context stemming from inequitable power structures (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Butler, 1999; Cameron, 1996; Davies & Harré, 1990; Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Omoniyi, 2006; Pennycook, 2001). Thus, the performative nature of identity does not mean there are no real life constraints. Concerning gender, Cameron (1996) explains:

> It is important to stress here that deconstructing gender into its constitutive acts is not a denial of its existence or of its social salience. Most people do experience gender as an inalienable part of who they are. It is because gender is so salient that so much work goes into its production and reproduction. (p. 47)

In research on language learning in other contexts, poststructuralist theories of identity have proven useful as they allow for both the recognition of identity-related constraints learners face due to their particular socio-historical circumstances as well as learners' abilities to negotiate their identities to some degree (Kamada, 2010; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Takahashi, 2013). As discussed below, study abroad is a particularly salient context for identity negotiation (Block, 2007b), so these theories may be able to provide insight in these contexts as well.

2. Gender and study abroad

Previous research on study abroad in various locations throughout the world reports strikingly similar findings concerning American female research participants' accounts of how their gender limited their access to local social networks (in this chapter the term *American* means a United States citizen). Many of these gendered experiences are related to catcalls, sexual harassment, and being generally uncertain of the attention of local men. As a result of both real and perceived threats to their security from local men, American female students have reported feeling alienated from their environment and experiencing difficulties gaining access to local social networks in Russia (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Polyani, 1995), Costa Rica (Anderson, 2003; Twombly, 1995)**,** Argentina (Isabelli-García, 2006), the Arab world (Bown, Dewey, Belnap, & Shelley, 2012; Ishmael, 2010; Kuntz & Belnap, 2001), France (Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth, 2005; Kinginger, 2008), and Spain (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). At the same time, some participants in these studies sometimes refuse to behave in ways that might lessen their exposure to catcalls and sexual harassment, such as not wearing shorts or going out late alone, because they feel these practices conflict with their individual rights (Anderson, 2003; Kinginger, 2009).

In addition to feeling threatened by local men, American female study abroad participants also report difficulties making friends with local women in Costa Rica (Anderson, 2003; Twombly, 1995), France (Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth, 2005; Kinginger, 2008), Spain (Bataller, 2008), and the Arab world (Ishmael, 2010; Kuntz & Belnap, 2001). Reasons the students give for these difficulties include competition for local men, stark differences between the lives of local and American women, and negative or uninterested attitudes towards study abroad students.

As a result of fears and uncertainties concerning interactions with local males, and difficulties forming friendships with local females, female study abroad students often turn to their compatriots, other international students, or home-based virtual social networks for comfort, effectively further isolating themselves from local social networks (Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger, 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995).

However, this common narrative of the gendered experiences and sexual harassment of female students studying abroad, their difficulties making female friends, their subsequent refuge in their compatriots, and the problems this poses for gaining access to local social networks and language use has been critiqued for focusing on the experiences of primarily American learners and prioritizing their perspectives over local ones, particularly since definitions of sexual harassment can vary cross-culturally (Block, 2007a; Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger, 2009).

Nevertheless, previous research on the experiences of American women has made important contributions to the study abroad literature by demonstrating the salience of gendered identities abroad and their impact on the study abroad experience. Using post-structuralist theories of identity to reveal the nuances of gendered performances abroad is one way of expanding upon this previous research. For example, Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth (2005) found that in contrast to a student who blamed French gender norms for her isolation, another developed coping strategies and began to question her own gendered assumptions. Siegal (1995, 1996) describes the tension felt by western female learners of Japanese between performing Japanese gender norms to resist a positioning as the foreign female other, and rejecting the performance of these norms because they found them "too humble" or "too silly".

The study reported in this chapter uses poststructuralist theories of identity to examine multiple female gendered identities negotiated by American study abroad students in Egypt, and ways in which these negotiations impacted access to Egyptian social networks. The findings show that negotiating female gendered identities can both confirm the dominant narrative of negative experiences abroad as well as provide avenues of resistance.

3. The current study

The current study focuses on the experiences of 54 primarily American learners of Arabic (32 female, 22 male) studying abroad in Egypt. Egypt is an Arabic speaking country, and the diglossic nature of the Arabic language means that the language used by Egyptians ranges from Egyptian Arabic (EA) to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or Classical Arabic depending on the particular context. However, most university programmes outside of the Arab world teach only MSA, and this is what the participants had predominantly studied prior to arriving in Egypt. The use of English and English-Arabic code-switching is common among the younger generations of the middle and upper classes in Egypt, particularly in urban areas, where they often attend English medium language schools.

The students were enrolled at two universities in Egypt, the American University in Cairo (AUC) and Alexandria University. AUC is a prestigious, private, English-medium university. Students were enrolled in either the study abroad programme or the intensive Arabic programme, and had the option of studying both EA and MSA. In the former, students directly enrolled in English medium classes and also took 1-2 Arabic classes. In the latter, students enrolled in approximately 20 hours of Arabic classes a week. Alexandria University is Egypt's second largest public university. Although it is Arabic medium, there are a number of specialized programmes with English medium tracks. Students

took approximately 20 hours of Arabic (EA and MSA) a week through a private programme housed within the Center for Teaching Arabic to Foreigners and administered by a small liberal arts college in the United States. This programme plays an extensive role in students' lives outside of the classroom, arranging extracurricular activities as well as Egyptian roommates, host families and language partners. Students sign a language pledge to use only Arabic during the programme.

Between September 2009 and April 2011, the student participants were interviewed by either myself or a research assistant in Arabic at the beginning and end of their experience, and in either Arabic or English midway through. The Arabic interviews, which were also designed to look at fluency measures, covered themes in participants' daily life in Egypt and backgrounds. The other interview focused on students' lives abroad and their perceptions of their experiences. The role of gender was a specific interview topic, but I rarely had to ask about it, as students typically brought up this topic themselves. They also filled out a questionnaire including a modified version of the Language Contact Profile (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, & Halter, 2004). A subset of 25 students (those who agreed to participate) participated in social media observations, allowing me to follow them on Facebook and/or read their blogs (if they had one). I made general observations of the university settings and, in fall 2010, engaged in participant observation with six female students. I also interviewed 10 Arabic teachers and 13 Egyptian associates of the students. More information about the participants' backgrounds and the data collection can be found in Trentman (2012). To analyze this data, I used MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, to code passages related to gender-related incidents in a recursive process and develop the themes discussed below.

4. Results

Gender-related incidents were a constant theme throughout the data, in response both to questions specifically asking about gender as well as to those that did not (e.g. What is the most challenging part of your experience? Who do you hang out with?). While the general consensus supported the narrative of sexual harassment and fear of interactions with local males, difficulty making female friends, and subsequent refuge in the study abroad peer group, there were also gendered experiences that resisted this pattern. I discuss six gendered identities negotiated by female participants that emerged from the data: *traditional good girls, loose foreign women, targets of sexual harassment, female interlocutors, guests of the family,* and *romantic partners.*

4.1. Traditional good girls

Female students in this study described their frequently unsuccessful attempts to resolve a tension between their desire to respect Egyptian culture by negotiating a role as a *traditional good girl* who did not stay out late or interact with random men, and the unwelcome restrictions on their movement and language practice they faced as a result of this negotiation. The students at Alexandria University complained about their dormitory curfew (although their curfew was several hours later than that of the Egyptian women), particularly as there was no curfew in the male dormitory. Although the AUC students did not have a curfew, they commented that the curfews of Egyptian women limited their ability to hang out with them. Furthermore, female students felt that performing this identity limited their opportunities to engage in many of the informal interactions their male colleagues relied on for practice, such as encounters in the streets, shops, and traditional coffee shops of Egypt. Tasha explained:

> I feel like I can't have a conversation, like I can't just like shoot the breeze with an Egyptian man that I meet or talk to because it might come across as something, even if it doesn't, it's just like everything, I've been warned so many times, like oh, you can't just like strike up conversations with men, because they're going to take it the wrong way, um, whereas, the guys I know, the American guys I know, especially, there are a few of them that do have very good language skills, like Arabic language skills, they can, and they've had just like, random conversations with people on the street corners and stuff, so they've had more of an opportunity, or it's more acceptable for them to like go up to a random Egyptian man and like talk to them.

The women also felt that performing the identity of a *traditional good girl* limited the types of conversations they could have. While many of them were interested in politics, they felt that this was not a topic women were expected to discuss, a view confirmed by several of the Egyptian roommates. Kala explained that if she were male:

> I think just the length and like the subjects maybe of the conversation would be different, because I found that they, like cab drivers ask a lot of my male friends about like the economics in America, and politics, and um, were they to know that I also know about it, I'm a poli sci major, like you know what I mean, so it's just kind of a different subject, they kind of filter based on me being a girl.

Thus, while negotiating an identity as a *traditional good girl* could give students a greater sense of security, it limited their access to informal encounters and political conversations.

4.2. Loose foreign women

Frustrated by these restrictions, the female students sometimes chose to ignore them, generally by drawing upon their positioning as *foreign women* to engage in activities that *traditional good girls* would not do, including returning home late at night, traveling overnight unchaperoned and away from their families, and having male friends.

While drawing upon the intersection of their gendered and foreign identities offered more opportunities to engage in informal encounters, it could also index them as overly sexually liberal, or primarily interested in sex, a common stereotype of western women in Egypt. Ayman, an Egyptian associate, blamed this assumption on the movies:

الناس هنا بيتفرجوا على الأفلام الأجنبي واللي أنا اكتشفت بعد كده إن دي أزبل أفلام بالنسبة للسينما الأمريكي اللي هي تتعمل عندنا يعني الأفلام مش كويسة فمعظم الأفلام دي بتدي صورة نمطية عن البنت الأمريكية أو البنت الغربية إنها بتفكر في حاجة واحدة الجنس

[People here watch foreign films and what I learned later is that this is worst of the American cinema, what plays here you know, is like films that aren't good, so most of these films provide stereotypes about the American girl or the Western girl, that she thinks about one thing, sex]

Since the female students did not necessarily want to be positioned as engaging in all of the behaviours indexed by the identity of *loose foreign woman*, this sometimes caused them to avoid interactions with strangers, especially men. Other students chose to risk negotiating an identity as a *loose foreign woman* if they felt it provided them with opportunities to use Arabic they could not gain otherwise. Anna explained how she was able to successfully gain opportunities for interaction and still resist an overly sexual positioning:

زمان لما كنت في التاكسي والسواق كان بيقول شيء وحش أو شيء مش مناسب خلاص أنا ماتكلمش معه بس دالوقتي افتكر حتى لو هو شخص وحش هأتكلم معه عشان يعني إذا بأحس إنه فعلا خطير أو فعلا فعلا غير مؤدب ممكن أخرج التاكسي أو أسكت بس حتى لو عنده أفكار غريب أتكلم معه مثلا كان عندي مناقشة مع واحد سواق تاكسي وهو قالي من الأول كنت أعمل في السياحة ويعني البنات والشربة كانت كويس قوي ويعني اه هو سألني انت لديك صاحب مصري بمعنى صاحب عاطفي وماكنتش فاكرة ما كنتش فاهمة إن السؤال كان يعني صاحب صاحب فكنت فاكر اه وهو كان طبعا انت (عندك) وازي المصريين يعني ازي العلاقات مع المصريين ويعني هو فعلا سألني يعني basically هل هو جيد بالسرير في إنجليزي فكنت يا راجل يا سلام وقلت يعني دا سؤال مش مناسب بعدين كلمنا عن التعليم ورأيه عن أشياء مختلفة وكان ظريف بس كان لازم يعني بأقول خلاص

[In the past when I was in a taxi and the driver was saying something bad or something inappropriate, enough, I didn't talk with him, but now I think even if he's a bad person I'll speak with him because like if I feel that it's really dangerous or really, really not appropriate I can get out of the taxi or be quiet, but even if he has strange ideas I'll speak with him, for example, I had

a discussion with a taxi driver and he said to me from the beginning I used to work in tourism and the girls and the drinking were very good, ah, he asked me if I had an Egyptian friend, meaning romantic friend, and I didn't think, I didn't understand that the questions was like a boyfriend friend so I thought yes, and he was, of course [you have] one, and how are the Egyptians, like how are the relations with Egyptians, and like he really asked me like basically, is he good in bed in English, so I was like, hey man, wow, and I said like that's an inappropriate question and afterwards we talked about education and his opinion on different things, and it was fun, but I had to say like enough]

In general, the students reported a great deal of difficulty negotiating the tensions between the *traditional good girl* and *loose foreign women* identities. They were often uncertain which identity they were expected to perform, or even which one they wanted to perform, if they felt that there was a conflict between this performance and their own sense of identity or their interactional goals.

4.3. Targets of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was a dominant issue in the data, as evidenced by the feelings of discomfort and danger the female students experienced as a result of sexual harassment, the male students' happiness that they did not have to deal with sexual harassment, and the participants' general impression that the female study abroad students received more sexual harassment as a result of their foreign appearance, less conservative dress, and perceptions of foreign women as sexually liberal.

A study prepared by the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR; Hassan, Shoukry, & Abul Komsan, 2009) reported that sexual harassment is a major problem in Egypt, with 83% of Egyptian women and 98% of foreign women reporting exposure to sexual harassment, and 46.1% of Egyptian women and 52.3% of foreign women reporting harassment on a daily basis. Of the Egyptian men surveyed, 62.4% admitted harassing women, and 88% said they had seen women harassed. The types of harassment reported included: "touching, noises (including whistling, hissing noises, kissing sounds etc.), ogling of women's bodies, verbal harassment of a sexually explicit nature, stalking or following, phone harassment, and indecent exposure" (p. 15). The female participants in this study reported exposure to all of these types of harassment, sometimes on a daily basis, and felt that this was a major challenge for them. Jane explained:

The thing that annoys me the most honestly is just the street harassment, like, I've, it was one thing, like when I first got here, it was just like this is so, this is such a novel, like this is a novelty, this is so new, I've never encountered this

before, and now it's getting to the point where it's just, it just kind of annoys me, because especially, it's like when I'm like walking around Tahrir, I'm like okay, I'm just trying to go to this class … so it's like, I just want to go to class, I want to like go back, I don't want to have to like deal with, getting like hissed at and stuff like that.

These frustrations were compounded by cross-cultural variation in what counted as sexual harassment. While the ECWR report and many of the American women felt that harassment included verbal remarks, many Egyptians do not, distinguishing between *al-muʕa:kasa:t* (catcalls) and *at-taħarruʃ al-ginsi* (sexual harassment), where the former could sometimes be considered closer to flirtation. For example, Leila, an Arabic teacher, explained:

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لو مثلا قلنا إن طالبة مصرية سافرت امريكا وفيه شخص في الشارع قالها كلمتين شكلك حلو أو شكلك وحش هي مش هتعتبر إن دا تحرش هي هتعتبر إن دا معاكسة وهي عندها فرق في ثقافتها بين التحرش والمعاكسة

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[If for example we said an Egyptian student travelled to America and there was someone in the street who said two words, you look good or you look bad, she wouldn't consider it *at-taħarruʃ* [harassment], she would consider it *muʕa:kasa* [a catcall], and she has a difference in her culture between *at-taħarruʃ* and *al-muʕa:kasa*]

While some study abroad participants were not bothered by catcalls, particularly if they were from a place in the U.S. where this was common, they still emphasized their difficulties with harassment such as being grabbed or followed. Adding to the students' frustration was their inability to do anything about the harassment they received. Although in contrast to the women in Anderson's (2003) study, the female students in this study did modify their dress, this had little effect on the harassment they received. Indeed, the ECWR survey notes that although it was a common belief among Egyptians that women who dressed less modestly received more sexual harassment, 72.5% of the women who reported being harassed were veiled.

The standard advice offered by Egyptians for dealing with unwanted catcalls was to pretend not to hear, or to go places with a male companion, something that the study abroad students found difficult to accept. Anne explained: "It's been a new experience, a hard experience for me to have to rely on other people, specifically other males, to feel safe, so that's something that was very hard for me to get used to". As a result of their inability or unwillingness to ignore catcalls, the female study abroad students also developed their own coping techniques, some of which they recognized were culturally inappropriate or limited their ability to engage in other interactions, such as raising their middle finger to their catcallers, wearing

headphones, or putting on an angry "street face". A few of the female students also tried to appreciate the verbal comments as compliments.

In general, the participants in this study felt that the fear and frustration with the catcalls and sexual harassment the female students experienced limited their opportunities for informal interactions and Arabic language use. While the reservations of some of the Egyptian participants concerning the study abroad students' reactions to catcalls demonstrate the necessity of taking cross-cultural variation in perceptions of sexual harassment into consideration, it is crucial to note that the discomfort these American women experienced abroad did cause many of them to avoid interactions with locals, limiting their access to local social networks.

When female study abroad students felt that their study abroad context limited them to performing the identities of *traditional good girls, loose foreign women*, or *targets of sexual harassment*, they often felt that their gender negatively impacted their abilities to gain access to Egyptians compared to their male colleagues. However, there were some female participants were able to perform other gendered identities available within this context that indeed promoted their access to local social networks, including those of *female interlocutor*, *guest of the family*, and *romantic partner*.

4.4. Female interlocutors

While the Egyptians that the students encountered in the street, shops, and coffee shops were most likely to be male, there were opportunities for the female students to engage in informal encounters with women in the female-only cars on the tram and metro. Interacting with females in these gender-segregated locations could also help them maintain the *traditional good girl* identity described above while still interacting with women. More sustained interactions occurred in the dormitories at the Alexandria University, where female study abroad students were matched with Egyptian roommates and language partners who also participated in pro-gramme activities. Participants felt that this was crucial to their abilities to practise the language, particularly given their limited opportunities in the street. Rose explained:

أستطيع أن أتكلم مع البنات في المدينة وفعلا دا بس ويعني البنات في الترام أحيانا بس يعني ما عندي كل الفرصة زي الولاد لأروح لقهوة كل ليل وأتكلم مع أي شخص في مجموعة صغيرة التي يمكنني أن أتكلم معه بس أظن هذا مش مشكلة بالنسبة للغة عشان يمكنني ما زال نتكلم نفس الساعة مع العرب مع المصريين بس مش مع أشخاص مختلف تماما

[I can speak with the girls in the dorms and really, that's it, and like the girls in the tram sometimes, but like I don't have all the opportunities like the boys to go to a coffee shop every night and speak with anyone in a small group that

I can speak with, but I think this isn't a problem in terms of the language because we can still speak the same hours with Arabs, with Egyptians, but not with completely different people]

Furthermore, while the female students could risk feeling uncomfortable to engage in interactions with men, the male students complained that it was almost impossible for them to talk to women, a difficulty that hindered their attempts to understand Egyptian culture. In contrast, Isabelle felt that the cultural insights she gained from women were an advantage to being female:

أعتقد فيه حاجة كويسة إن أنا بأستطيع أن أبدأ كلام مع ستات وأعتقد فيه ناس كثير التي مش بيفهموا
الستات المصريين ام فذلك دائما كويس عشان أنا بأستطيع أن أشوف حاجات من وجهة نظرهم التي
أعتقد الرجالة مش بيستطيعوا أن يروا

[I think there is a good thing, that I can start talking with women and I think there are a lot of people that don't understand Egyptian women, um, so that's always good because I can see things from their point of view that I think the men can't see]

4.5. Guests of the family

In addition to being able to talk to women, it was also easier for the female students to enter Egyptian family life. For example, only female students were able to participate in a homestay at Alexandria University, female students reported more visits to their roommates' families, and some male students complained that this was an opportunity they were missing. Wendy, an Arabic teacher, also felt that this was an advantage of being female:

You can meet, go to families, especially for women, you can get almost adopted into families left right and centre and I know so many women who have done this and who have acquired another family or almost, and it's impossible to say what kind of things you discover when you eat with a family and I don't know, sit around and talk, and there's so much that you can't do unless, that you cannot do unless you're in a setting that allows for it, and yeah, Cairenes are, as I said before, really sociable, and really welcoming, and often you have access, if you really pursue it you have access to family life that is not going to happen elsewhere.

Female students often visited their roommates' and friends' families on weekends or attended engagement parties and other family events that the male students were not invited to. Inas, an Egyptian roommate, described her family's delight with the Arabic-speaking study abroad students and how communication between her roommates and her family continued between visits:

لما بيشوفوا وشهم إنهم (الطلاب) مبسوطين وبيتكلموا عربي دا أحسن حاجة بالنسبة لهم (الأسرة) هم
مبسوطين قوي قوي وأسرتي كل الوقت تتصل لازم تجيبي البنات مرة ثانية لازم تجيبي البنات هم
وحشونا وبتتكلم معهم ازيك يا حبيبتي وحشتيني هم أصدقاء دالوقتي مش نفس الحاجة من خمس سنين
لما كنا بنشوف الإعلانات في التلفزيون وبنشوف الأخبار مش نفس الحاجة خالص دالوقتي هم عندهم
أصدقاء امريكيين بيحبوهم جدا جدا

[When they see in their faces that they [the students] are happy and speak Arabic, that is the best thing for them [the family], they are very, very, very happy, and my family always calls and says you need to bring the girls again, you need to bring the girls, we miss them, and they talk with them, how are you sweetie, I miss you, they're friends now, it wasn't the same five years ago when we saw the announcements on TV, and we saw the news, it's not the same thing at all, now they have American friends they like very very much]

4.6. Romantic partners

It was also possible for female study abroad students to date Egyptian males, especially at AUC, while the reverse was highly unlikely, thus allowing them to negotiate identities as potential romantic partners. Nathalie emphasized the cultural insights she gained through her Egyptian boyfriend:

> It gave me really good insight into the culture because he would invite me to do things that you wouldn't just like invite your normal friends to do like I would go to his house quite often and like meet his parents and talk to his parents and like I got to go to weddings with him and stuff, and like engagement parties and all that type of thing, so it was a very nice experience, and we're still really good friends because we didn't really break up.

While Egyptian boyfriends often provided access to Egyptian social networks, these relationships tended to be in English, as the study abroad students felt that their Arabic did not match their boyfriends' English for the purposes of establishing a relationship.

Thus, within the context of their study abroad experiences, female students performed a variety of identities, including those of a *traditional good girl, loose foreign woman, target of sexual harassment, female interlocutor, guest of the family*, and *romantic partner*. As in previous research on study abroad, American females reported serious limitations on their ability to engage with some local social networks as a result of gendered experiences. Yet the multiple ways in which female gender could be performed in this context meant that some female students were also able to actively negotiate gendered identities that helped rather than hindered their access to Egyptian social networks.

5. Discussion

The results of this study are necessarily context specific, and may not be generalizable to other study abroad locations. Furthermore, I have focused exclusively on gender in this chapter, and this is certainly not the only identity these participants negotiated abroad. However, focusing on the multiple nature of identity in other locations abroad may also reveal a variety of gendered identities that students can negotiate, some of which may be more advantageous than others to their ability to gain access to social networks.

If gendered experiences can be negotiated in ways that both hinder and help access to local social networks, the logical question for those interested in improving the study abroad experience is: What can be done to promote the latter over the former? In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss programme-level recommendations for improving the study abroad experience, as change at this level may be easier than changing individuals or the socio-historical context. The detailed implementation of these recommendations will have to be worked out within the specific study abroad context, as it is not possible to use exactly the same solution in contexts that vary geographically, temporally, demographically, and in other ways.

A notable factor that made female students cognizant of their ability to peform the identities of *female interlocutors* and *guests of the family* was programme facilitation of access to Egyptian females via communities of practice, which facilitate learning through mutual engagement, a shared repertoire, and a joint enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). A prominent example was the Alexandria University dorms, where the Egyptian students were considered part of the programme, received free room and board for assisting the study abroad students with their linguistic and cultural development, and were expected to participate in programme trips and cultural events. In contrast to some of the AUC students, who barely interacted with their roommates despite their close physical proximity, the community of practice developed in the Alexandria University dorms often facilitated the negotiation of positive gendered identities and entrance into Egyptian families and social networks. Students who were able to negotiate positive gendered identities outside of the dormitories often relied on their participation in other communities of practice, such as sports teams or clubs, and they were most successful when they had skills to contribute to these communities, rather than simply a desire to participate. Since finding and joining these communities could take a considerable amount of time and the majority of students were only abroad for a semester, pairing students with organizations ahead of time, to allow them to start participating immediately upon arrival, is a way in which programmes could facilitate this method of gaining entrance into local social networks. While explicit programme facilitation of the *romantic partner* identity is

likely inappropriate, the female students who developed romantic relationships abroad often met their partners through the social networks they developed via participation in communities of practice.

Programme facilitation of interactions for female participants was crucial not only for the study abroad students, but also for the Egyptian females with whom they interacted. All of the Egyptian women interviewed in this study explained that they valued the opportunities for cultural and linguistic exchange they gained through their interactions with study abroad students. However, many of the students in the Alexandria dormitory explained that this would be difficult without participation in the programme. In contrast to the study abroad students, many of the Egyptian women did not have the financial resources to travel abroad, and Egyptian families often do not allow unmarried women to travel alone. Even if they were able to travel abroad, Egyptians face visa restrictions for entering a number of countries where Americans do not. Meeting foreigners in Egypt is a solution to these problems, and indeed one Egyptian roommate described the opportunity as "حلم أنا مش باحلمه [a dream I'm not dreaming]."

Furthermore, having this access facilitated by an educational programme could assuage their families and friends' fears that they would be influenced by *loose foreign women*. Halima explained that this was a common concern among her friends:

> حتى أي بنات ثانيين مصريات ممكن تقولك ازي أقعد مع بنات أمريكية ازي؟ انت هتكوني بعد كده مش كويسة وهتكوني مع أولاد دائما وهتكوني وهتكوني وهتكوني وحاجات كثير يعني ازي انت تقعدي مع بنت امريكية ازي وهم بيعتقدوا إن البنت الامريكية دي يعني هتخليكي يعني بجد هتخليكي يعني مش كويسة أو حاجة زي كده

> [Even any other Egyptian girls they might tell you how can I stay with American girls how? You won't be good after this, you'll be with boys all the time, and you will be, you will be, you will be, and many things, like how are you living with an American girl, how, and they think that this American girl, like she will make you, like really, she will make you like not good, or something like that]

Thus, programme facilitation provided a safe and secure environment for both Egyptian and foreign women to meet each other. Failing this, both Egyptian and study abroad students could miss out, as Nora, an Egyptian student and Arabic teacher explained:

> بأقولك فيه ناس كثير عايزة تصحب الناس اللي بيتكلموا عربي بس هو التوجيه يعني أنا كنت ماباكسفش لكن فيه جاية بيتكسف

> [I'm telling you, there's lots of people who want to be friends with those that speak Arabic, but it's the guidance, I wasn't shy, but there's ones who are shy]

Thus, while it was certainly possible for female study abroad students to negotiate the identities of *female interlocutor* and *guest of the family* without programme facilitation, this facilitation greatly expanded the opportunities not only for study abroad students but also for the Egyptian females with whom they interacted. The existence of these opportunities helped make students aware of the variety of ways in which they could perform gendered identities, and thus feel less frustrated when they were forced to perform ones they found disadvantageous. While the nature of programme-facilitated interaction will necessarily vary by context, ensuring that it takes into account the multiple gendered identities learners can negotiate in that context, whatever they might be, may help with gaining entrance to social networks and language acquisition.

Yet even when their programmes facilitated access to local women, the students were not always successful at negotiating the positive gendered identities needed to enter their social networks. Often, this was a result of the students' inability to negotiate cultural differences with their interlocutors, which typically led to complaints echoing those in Twombly's (1995) study that the perspectives and lives of Egyptian women were simply too different for them to relate to each other or develop friendships. A promising method for helping students develop less ethnocentric perspectives in this case is the completion of a small ethnographic project (i.e. Jackson, 2006; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001). In this model, students receive training in ethnographic research methods before going abroad, complete data collection for a small project while abroad, and write a reflective research paper when they return. This process can help students engage with their environment, develop a more nuanced awareness of cultural differences, and provide opportunities for critical reflection. Encouraging students to pursue joint research projects with Egyptian students could not only facilitate access (through the shared project) but could also help all participants develop greater skills for cross-cultural negotiation.

Finally, explicit training in viewing identities as performances negotiated within particular contexts, rather than static attributes, could be useful in making students aware of the options open to them in a given context. This might take the form of providing case study examples of students who were successful in negotiating advantageous gendered identities, and coaching students in developing their own techniques for successful identity negotiation before and throughout the study abroad experience. While the exact nature of this coaching will depend heavily on the specific study abroad context, I hope that making students aware of the choices they may have while negotiating these identities will help lessen the frustration of circumstances in which they feel that it is impossible to negotiate identities that assist with their language learning goals.

Further research is needed to show the extent to which study abroad programs can influence students' ability to negotiate identities advantageous to gaining entrance to social networks and language learning. Future research should also investigate other types of gendered and non-gendered identities absent from this paper, and particularly the intersections between them. By focusing on the nuances of identity negotiation in particular contexts, I hope that research can help positively transform these experiences for both study abroad students and locals, rather than reinforcing the negative and distressing experiences reported in much of the current study abroad literature.

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