

As a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, I went abroad with both hopes of better understanding this part of myself, and with apprehensions as to what extent this part of my identity would be tolerated. In my study abroad program, I went to Nepal, Jordan, and Chile. My program also required participants to complete an independent project, so my topic focused on people who identify as LGBTQ in each of these places.

During my program, I navigated how “out” I could be across borders; however, I was always true to myself. Even though I could not consistently rely on my host families for acceptance, I knew my study abroad peers and faculty provided a safe space in which I could voice my concerns. One of my most powerful memories abroad remains coming out to my Nepali host mom, and being accepted with open arms.

In the myriad conversations I had with LGBTQ people fighting for their legal, educational, and professional rights in different cultural landscapes, I was overwhelmed by the sense of collective empowerment and support I witnessed despite their personal and political struggles, and more than anything, I was inspired to enhance the plight of LGBTQ individuals in the U.S.

I went abroad searching for answers, and I returned to the U.S. with more questions. How do LGBTQ identities translate across borders? How do we create safe spaces for gender and sexual minorities without imposing mainstream, hetero-normative attitudes? What I did discover: the personal is political; my voice and my experience matter. I am not afraid of taking up space in the world as an LGBTQ person. We survive and thrive *everywhere* and I hope LGBTQ students go abroad because it breaks barriers within, unlocking potential and igniting passion.