“LIFE IN A YEAR”:
INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EXCHANGE STUDENTS AND VOLUNTEER HOST FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

Youth exchanges have been an important part of the international education landscape in the United States (US). The US government invests in exchanges as a public diplomacy tool to support its foreign policy objectives. This case study examined two government-funded youth exchange programs, Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) programs that were created to promote mutual understanding between Americans and international youth. Through educational and cultural exchange, youth aged 15–19 from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, live with volunteer host families, attend high school, learn about American values, leadership, and civic education, and share about their countries with Americans. Drawing upon soft power, geopolitics, biopolitics, cosmopolitanism, and culture learning theory as theoretical perspectives, I examine various layers of the intercultural exchange: (1) geopolitical dynamics and official government rhetoric on a national level, (2) the ways these programs attempt to instill the norms and values on an organizational/programmatic level, and (3) the experiences of exchange participants on an individual level. To this end, my dissertation aims to answer the following research questions: (1) In what ways do the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program? (2) How do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives? (3) How do participants experience intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences? This qualitative study is informed by the data collected from 2017–2020 through semi-structured interviews with 23 FLEX and YES exchange students from 19 countries, 19 host families, and two local coordinators across four Hawai‘i islands, participant observations, and document review. The findings illustrate the two programs’ explicit efforts to

instill the norms and values of American society through well-structured and well-supported programming that allows for the vertical dynamics that shape the enactment of the program objectives. However, there are tensions surrounding the public diplomacy role for both students and host families. The findings also offer a nuanced understanding of the exchange participants' experiences of culture sharing, relationship building, and personal growth within a homestay, and highlight the tensions that emerged related to hosting in Hawai'i. While this study demonstrated several positive outcomes of the exchange programs recognized by program participants, it also identified gaps that call for programmatic changes in policy and practice.

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List of Abbreviations

ACIE	American Councils for International Education
CEW	Civic Education Week
DOE	United States Department of Education
DOS	United States Department of State
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State
FLEX	Future Leaders Exchange Program
IEW	International Education Week
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
RDW	Religious Diversity Workshop
US	United States
YES	Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the end of World War II, globalization had provided opportunities for people to connect across national borders. The second half of the 20th century saw a rapid rise in international educational exchanges around the world. Recognizing the many benefits that exchanges bring to individuals, educational institutions, and society, governments have invested in exchanges for a variety of reasons. Exchanges can cultivate positive cross-cultural dialogue, establish long-lasting ties, foster mutual understanding, build global competitiveness, promote political ideologies, and strengthen national security (Bu, 2003; Smyth, 2001; Snow, 2008; Ward et al., 2005).

Government-funded exchange programs operate within the field of international relations, as they typically take place between states that foster diplomatic relationships with one another (Scott-Smith, 2008). This dissertation examines international educational exchanges within the purview of the United States (US) public diplomacy efforts at the secondary school level. Each year, approximately 1,900 international youth come to the US from countries of strategic interest through programs such as the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Abroad (YES). The FLEX and YES programs are important instruments of US soft power to promote mutual understanding between Americans and international youth. These merit-based scholarships bring to the US a selective group of high-school-aged students for an academic year of educational and cultural exchange (Farrugia, 2014). Exchange students attend American high school, live with a volunteer host family, and are expected to gain knowledge about American culture, democratic institutions, and civic rights (Marklein, 2014). In the last decade, the government budget and the number of FLEX and YES

participants have grown steadily (US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2022), which speaks to the popularity and benefits of these youth exchanges.

In recent years, however, there has been a counterforce of deglobalization characterized by national protectionist policies, a retreat from global integration, and a global pandemic (Balsa-Barreiro et. al 2020; Irwin, 2020). These events have impeded international human mobility with nations tightening their borders to foreign nationals, including international educational exchanges. Even though the United States (US) temporarily suspended its international exchange programs due to the worldwide pandemic in 2020, the Biden administration asserted its support in Secretary Antony Blinken's first remarks to the Department of State (DOS) employees, stating that "people-to-people exchanges bring our world closer together and convey the best of America to the world, especially to its young people" (DOS, 2021).

Employing an interdisciplinary approach, weaving literature from international education, international relations, cultural studies, and philosophy, and through a case study, this dissertation offers a nuanced understanding of the multi-level dynamics shaping government-funded exchange programs. Gaining valuable insight into the experiences of multiple program stakeholders will inform our understanding of how government-funded youth exchange programs foster public diplomacy on a societal level, and as such, may have positive implications on our global understanding and peace-building through people-to-people exchanges. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to add value to how these programs are understood in theory, as being part of a larger state apparatus, and in practice, by the program participants. While it may be expected that people-to-people exchanges may have certain effects for individual students and families involved that are perceived as positive, it is important to

acknowledge that government-funded exchanges operate within a larger state apparatus that can be perceived critically through theoretical perspectives that consider power dynamics shaping these programs. This study is an attempt in this direction.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is first to understand multiple program stakeholders' experiences on an individual (micro) level, and second, to employ a multi-level approach to account for various dynamics that shape these programs on a national (macro) and organizational (meso) level of analysis. This study aims to contribute to a scholarly understanding of the dynamics surrounding government-funded exchange programs at a secondary school level in addition to offering insights that might be useful for future program design.

Significance

Since the year 2000, the number of international students worldwide has more than doubled. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019) reported that approximately 5.3 million international students studied abroad in 2017 compared to 2 million in 2000. While the number of internationally mobile students is increasing, international student mobility primarily flows from low-income to high-income western countries, with the US as the top host destination. In 2017 21,005 international secondary school students were studying in the US (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2018), which includes the DOS-funded exchange programs such as the FLEX and the YES that are participants of this study.

In the last decade, the US government budget allocated to the FLEX and YES programs has grown steadily (US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2022). This speaks to the importance that these youth exchanges have for US public diplomacy. FLEX and YES remain

important tools of the country's soft diplomacy to promote mutual understanding between Americans and international students who learn about American culture, democratic institutions, and civic rights when in the US. These programs operate within the purview of US soft power and public diplomacy with the perceived outcomes to include lasting relationships, increased mutual understanding between nations, a reduction of conflict, and peace among nations (Nye, 2008). The unique feature of exchanges lies in their human factor that brings benefits not only to exchange participants but also to host and sending countries (Scott-Smith, 2008). Riordan (2004) predicts that public diplomacy will be the main kind of diplomacy in the 21st Century in tackling global issues such as terrorism, environmental degradation, and the spread of epidemic diseases. To achieve these ends, collaboration through public diplomacy among governments and individuals is of utmost importance.

Extant literature focuses exclusively on international students in postsecondary education. Despite the increasing presence of international secondary school students in high schools across the US, limited research has been performed on this population. There exists a vast body of literature addressing everything from the cross-cultural adjustment of international students (e.g. Lyttle et al., 2011; Nasir, 2012; Zhou et al., 2008) to academic stress (e.g. Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Wan et al., 1992) and success (e.g. Ward et al., 2001; Waters & Brooks, 2010), but these studies focus exclusively on the postsecondary education sector. Thus far, very few studies have been conducted among the FLEX and YES exchange students (e.g. Grove & Hansel, 1983; Hansel, 2008a; Hansel, 2008b), which were mainly program evaluations.

In addition, there is a gap in acknowledging the experiences of students from economically less developed countries. Most existing research has centered on students from Western countries, such as Germany (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Carlson, 2013; Weichbrodt,

2014), the US (Rodriguez & Chornet-Roses, 2014; Uehara, 1986), and Switzerland (Rohmann et al., 2014), among others. Therefore, this study's diverse sample stemming from low-income countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia is expected to add knowledge to the existing literature. Much ink has been spilled about obtaining western-based education as a way of maintaining or reinforcing international sojourners' class advantage in society (see Cheng et al., 2017; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Tran, 2016). However, Mathews-Aydinli (2017) notes that international exchange programs have become increasingly accessible to students of diverse countries of origin and various socioeconomic backgrounds thanks to merit-based exchange programs.

Another contribution of this study is its focus on the homestay component of exchange which is an understudied topic in the present literature. There is a need to shed light on the experiences of host families who welcome international/exchange students into their homes without remuneration. Research shows that homestay may be one of the most influential components of the study abroad experience, especially when international students actively participate in a host family life (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004). To the best of my knowledge, only one qualitative study was conducted among seven host families on the YES program that explored the experiences of hosting Muslim YES students (Radomski, 2008). Furnham and Bochner (1986) argue that it is imperative to look at both sides because all personal contact has two-way mutual consequences. Only when we consider both students and host nationals can we see the real impact of intercultural exchange.

Furthermore, I set out to explore the experiences of a diverse group of American host families whose hosting contributes significantly to the infrastructure of US public diplomacy. I not only analyze host families' experiences, but also their motives and expectations about

hosting, which can provide important insights for government officials, program staff, and future exchange participants. In today's interconnected world, the newly acquired knowledge and skills, and new attitudes and perspectives gained as a result of the exchange may contribute positively to peaceful coexistence and understanding among different nations, cultures, and religions.

A unique feature of this study is the inclusion of local coordinators' perspectives and experiences. The local coordinator's role is to recruit host families, support and counsel program participants, and serve as a liaison between students and local high schools. Importantly, the local coordinator organizes enhancement activities to fulfill the program requirements in line with the US public diplomacy's goals, ensuring students' experiences in the US are enriching. No studies to date have incorporated the perspectives of local coordinators who play a critical role in program implementation on a grassroots level.

Lastly, the literature on exchange programs has not tended to look at these programs through the theoretical lenses that I will bring to bear. It is common for government agencies to conduct program evaluations that focus on program outputs (i.e., program activities designed to produce desired outcomes). These outputs measured at the end of the program tend to show positive results that satisfy the immediate exchange goals on a youth participant level of analysis (Banks, 2011). This study holds that it is not only imperative to understand multiple program stakeholders' experiences on an individual (micro) level but also to employ a multi-level approach to account for various dynamics that shape these programs on a national (macro) level of analysis which intersects with global geopolitics, national agendas, organizational logics, and local dynamics. FLEX and YES are embedded in larger, geopolitical dimensions of power structures that form the basis of these exchange programs. The FLEX and YES youth are vested in learning about the other for larger purposes of national security and can be seen as an

ideological battle to define biopolitical goals and practices. These philosophical perspectives will help to unpack the purposes of government-funded exchange programs, and more specifically, to explore the forms of embodiment and subjectivity being promoted by them.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program?
2. How do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives?
3. How do participants experience intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences?

In setting the stage for this study, the remaining chapters of this dissertation will present:

- Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives
- Chapter 3: Review of Empirical Literature
- Chapter 4: History and Context
- Chapter 5: Methodology
- Chapter 6: Findings I – Program Norms and Values
- Chapter 7: Findings II – Program Experiences
- Chapter 8: Findings III – Intercultural Exchange Experiences
- Chapter 9: Discussion
- Chapter 10: Implications
- Chapter 11: Conclusion

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

In line with this study's multi-level inquiry into the phenomenon, which intersects with geopolitics, national agendas, and local dynamics, the theoretical perspectives discussed here reflect three main parts: macro, meso, and micro-level of analysis. Acknowledging that the FLEX and YES exchange programs are embedded in larger geopolitics of power structures, the first section will engage international relations literature to discuss the geopolitical dynamics and the role of US soft power that form the basis of these exchange programs.

Moreover, FLEX and YES are vested in learning about the Americans and American values for larger purposes of national security and can be seen as an ideological battle to define biopolitical goals and practices. One of the biopolitical goals of the US government is to bring exchange participants closer to the norms of the US (Erbsen, 2018). Thus, the second part will examine the exchange programs through the lens of biopolitics, engaging philosophical concepts such as Foucauldian governmentality and cosmopolitanism. These philosophical perspectives will help to unpack the work and purposes of international exchange programs, and more specifically, to explore the forms of embodiment and subjectivity being promoted by the programs on a meso level of analysis.

The third section will look at the grassroots (micro) level of individual participant experiences, employing the culture learning theory introduced by Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2005). The culture learning model has been used to describe various international sojourners' experiences abroad, which will serve as a tool to analyze the experiences of this study's participants. The culture learning theory also is relevant for the data analysis as intercultural contact occurs within a homestay component of an exchange program. Applying this theory to a framework rooted in international relations makes a unique contribution to the field since

international relations scholars typically do not delve into micro-level dynamics.

Soft Power and Geopolitics

International exchange programs are intertwined with the process of globalization as well as changing political, economic, social, and cultural relationships (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Campbell, 2005; Rizvi, 2004). Wilson (1985) referred to international exchanges as building "bridges" (i.e., connections) between people and cultures. Although it is generally assumed that the ultimate goal of these programs is to contribute to peaceful relations among nations, the social, political, and economic motives of exchange sponsors need to be considered to unpack the underlying objectives. Governments, universities, and private sector organizations have all invested in international educational exchange for a variety of reasons ranging from fostering mutual understanding and building global competitiveness to promoting political ideologies and strengthening national security (e.g. Bu, 2003; Smyth, 2001; Snow, 2008; Ward et al., 2005). As per the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA, 2018), the goal of the international educational exchange is part of the US soft diplomacy's efforts to bridge gaps among nations.

While government policies can facilitate international exchanges, this act also can be hindered by the current state of affairs and geopolitical dynamics. Campbell (2005) argues that the government's influence "was particularly influential at times during the Cold War, and even more so in the years since the 11 September terrorist attacks" (p. 129). With the recognition that the state-sponsored exchange programs, such as the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) are positioned in the arena of US foreign policy, the purpose of this section is to explore the influence of power-relations and geopolitical dynamics that have shaped the two exchange programs. The first part will provide an overview of US soft diplomacy as one of the vital components of government-funded exchanges. The

second part will discuss the geopolitical dynamics at the end of the Cold War and in the aftermath of the 9/11 events that influenced the development of the FLEX and YES exchange programs.

Soft power. The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's speech in January 2009 addressed the role of American foreign policy. Clinton compared it to a stool with three legs: defense, diplomacy, and development. She stressed that robust diplomacy and effective development are the long-term tools for securing America's future (in Yu, 2015).

Diplomacy can be defined in various terms. A common definition proposed by Alger (1999) defines diplomacy as a dialogue and negotiation between representatives of states to facilitate peaceful relations between nations. Diplomacy is part of the country's soft power, coined in 1990 by Joseph Nye, Jr. (2008) as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (p. 94). Soft power is not just about exerting influence, but it is the ability to entice and attract others with new ideas, resulting in desired behavioral outcomes. In other words, soft power is a type of attraction that enables governments to skillfully exercise their influence abroad.

Further, Nye (2008) explains that soft power rests on its resources of culture, political values, and foreign policy. Soft power is a way to influence others and is not to be confused with mere propaganda. Nye (2008) draws a clear distinction between soft power and propaganda. Only when soft power is not properly employed, or when it fails to target an appropriate audience, it may be seen as propaganda (Nye, 2008; Yu, 2015). In such cases, propaganda may undercut soft power because it "lacks credibility and thus is counterproductive as public diplomacy" (Nye, 2008, p. 101). Melissen (2005) adds that no diplomacy, "however skillfully

deployed, can win back world opinion in the face of policies that are resented and despised" (p. 163). Hence, a country's soft power needs to extend well beyond propaganda.

The purpose of soft diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges differ based on the goals of the exchange program. The way international exchanges promote the discourse depends on the power objective of the sender (Erbsen, 2018), which may be different from how participants feel they have experienced them. Governments fund exchange programs because they expect that such funding will yield direct or indirect benefits in the long term and achieve the country's strategic objectives. While the mission statements of most exchange programs focus on the goals of contributing to global understanding and peace, they seem to cover up the underlying objectives of the DOS that evolve around national security and economic competitiveness (Snow, 2008). With soft diplomacy being closely tied with a country's security and economy, Campbell (2005) points out three key rationales that have driven the US policy on international exchanges: peace and mutual understanding, national security, and global competitiveness. Regarding the economy, Sowa (2002) argues that "state governments see student exchange programs as a vital way of competing in the global marketplace and maintaining US economic strength" (p. 64).

The exchange programs sponsored by ECA are a result of the Mutual Education and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, also called the Fulbright-Hays Act. According to Congress, the purpose of the exchange is:

> To enable the Government of the US to increase mutual understanding between the people of the US and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the

US and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the US and the other countries of the world (Office of Law Revision Council, 2007).

During the Cold War era (1947-1991), recognizing the many similarities that they had in common, including the shared desire to end the nuclear arms race, in 1961 the US and the former Soviet Union started academic exchanges in hopes of debunking stereotypes they had for one another. Having had the opportunity to interact with hundreds of thousands of Soviet visitors, Foglesong (2020) argued that the Cold War "ended in the hearts and minds of many Americans long before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union" (p. 419), stressing the particular value of the people-to-people exchanges.

Public diplomacy. In 1965, Edmund Gullion, an American diplomat, coined the term public diplomacy, which is defined as dealing with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policy (de Lima, 2007; Mueller, 2008). Even though the underlying goals of the exchange may be political (Cull, 2008), the public diplomacy tools, such as the exchange of peoples and ideas, are non-political (Mulcahy, 1999) since the purpose is developing "lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels" (Nye, 2008, p. 102). Public diplomacy offers a space for dialogue and culture-sharing among diverse voices despite potentially contradictory interests (Castells, 2008). All these definitions embrace non-state actors, like ordinary citizens, as the agents of public diplomacy (Gilboa, 2008). Riordan (2004) predicted that public diplomacy would be the primary diplomacy in the 21st Century capable of

tackling global issues such as terrorism, environmental degradation, and the spread of epidemic diseases. To achieve these results, collaboration among governments, NGOs, and individuals is of utmost importance.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the one-sided goals of public diplomacy seem to overlook that both host nationals and foreign visitors may learn and benefit from the exchange experience. This micro-level focus is the domain of citizen diplomacy. Mueller (2008) argued that public diplomacy and citizen diplomacy often intertwine and overlap, and that citizen diplomacy is a vital component of US public diplomacy (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2008; Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). According to the DOS, citizen diplomacy is a concept that gives the right and responsibility to an individual to help shape US foreign relations one handshake at a time (Mueller, 2008). Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is usually carried out by foreign policy officers, citizen diplomacy follows a bottom-up approach where international relations are in the hands of individual citizens, who engage in meaningful dialogues with other nationals (Melissen, 2005). These interactions build person-to-person connections that may “later serve as the context for official dialogue and negotiations” (Mueller, 2008, p. 102). Citizen diplomats, such as exchange students assuming roles of unofficial ambassadors, share with foreign citizens informally about their country and culture (Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Mueller, 2008).

Citizen diplomacy offers selected participants with opportunities to live the culture and experience things from a different perspective. Atkinson (2010) argued that scholarship exchange programs provide students with extensive interactions with the host community members and are thus “more likely to engender positive attitudes toward American people and life in the US” (p. 5). Moreover, when exchange students live with their host families, they are expected to interact with the broader host community. Anecdotally, person-to-person exchanges

may affect tens of millions of people in various ways (Bellamy & Weinberg, 2008) as the alumni become professionals, which may allow them to influence their societies upon their return. This multiplier effect describes the alumni's potential "not only to affect the individuals and institutions involved but also their communities and societies at large" (Spangler, 2018, p. 1).

On the other hand, citizen diplomats also are ordinary Americans who open their homes to international visitors. Serving as volunteers, they dedicate their time and financial resources, thus contributing significantly to the infrastructure of US citizen diplomacy (Mueller, 2008). Former Secretary of State, General Colin Powell noted that American citizen diplomats "bring world issues home to the American people in the most direct way possible" (DOS, 2002). As such, citizen diplomacy is carried out reciprocally by individuals from the host and foreign societies who can develop enduring networks and lifelong friendships that transcend national borders.

Geopolitical dynamics. The geopolitical dynamics have shaped government decisions in framing the regulations for the movement of students, scholars, and exchange visitors during the Cold War and post-9/11. Campbell (2005) maintains that "during the Cold War the inflow of foreign students to the US grew steadily. However, the post-11 September environment has been uniquely challenging for the international education community" (p. 145). Indeed, the end of the Cold War and post-9/11 events presented a rather unique historical, ideological, and political environment that shaped the field of international educational exchange. This section attempts to explain the geopolitical dynamics in the context of FLEX and YES programs that emerged as a result of these events.

Behind the iron curtain, the Soviet people lived isolated from the rest of the world, unfamiliar with the way of life in capitalist Western societies (Richmond, 1987). The US public

diplomacy expanded during the Cold War, particularly through cultural diplomacy that promoted the transmission of books, art, and exchanges between the two nations (Nye, 2008). The initial cultural agreement between the US and the Soviet Union was signed in 1958 as the result of former President Eisenhower's interest in exchanges. As Eisenhower (1965) described it, people-to-people exchanges are "one fine, progressive step toward peace in the world" (p. 410). In September of 1956, Eisenhower initiated a People-to-People program to stimulate private citizen exchanges in the fields of education, athletics, arts, law, medicine, and business. Richmond (1987) describes the main objectives of this program as listed in a National Security Council directive (NSC 5607):

(1) To broaden and deepen relations with the Soviet Union by expanding contacts between people and institutions;

(2) To involve the Soviets in joint activities and develop habits of cooperation with the US;

(3) To end Soviet isolation and inward orientation by giving the Soviet Union a broader view of the world and of itself;

(4) To improve US understanding of the Soviet Union through access to its institutions and people; and

(5) To obtain the benefits of long-range cooperation in culture, education, and science and technology (p. 2).

On the other side, the Soviets did not state their objectives in the exchanges very clearly. Richmond (2010) argues that the objectives can be predicted from a study of how the Soviets conducted these exchanges:

(1) To obtain access to US science and technology;

(2) To learn more about the US;

(3) To support the view that the Soviet Union was equal to the US by engaging Americans in bilateral activities;

(4) To promote the view that the Soviet Union was a peaceful power seeking cooperation with the US;

(5) To demonstrate the achievements of the Soviet people;

(6) To give vent to the pent-up demand of Soviet scholars, scientists, performing artists, and intellectuals for foreign travel and contacts; and

(7) To earn foreign currency through performances abroad of Soviet artists (pp. 62–63).

Security and learning more about the other country's ideological and political practices were at the heart of these early exchanges.

During the Reagan administration, international education and exchange were given "the unexpected impetus" (Campbell, 2005, p. 131) to support national security objectives. The exchanges, supported by Congress, were used as a tool to combat communism. Nye (2008) points out that the US soft power indeed became associated with fighting the Cold War. As part of the US soft diplomacy, the number of exchange programs steadily increased through the 1980s (Campbell, 2005). The lessons learned during the Cold War exchanges were in support of the US efforts to expose Soviet participants to democracy and the free-market system. Several authors (Atkinson, 2010; Nye, 2004; Richmond, 2003) hold that exchanges increased American influence within the Russian intelligentsia whose interactions in western political, scientific, and academic circles helped foster gradual liberalization in the Soviet Union. For instance, some of the returnees felt strongly about democratic ideas, such as advocating for human rights and liberalization upon returning home. Atkinson (2010) argues that the Soviet case "provides an

excellent example of the conditions under which liberal ideas learned during US-hosted educational exchange programs influenced authoritarian political ideas and institutions" (p. 7). In his writeup of the cultural exchanges and the Cold War, Richmond (2010) gives praise to these exchanges that contributed to three major outcomes: increased knowledge and understanding between the two countries, a framework for increased bilateral cooperation, and increased pressure for reform at the end of Cold War, which "cost the US next to nothing compared with our expenditures for defense and intelligence over the same period of time" (p. 75).

At the end of the Cold War, the US foreign policy faced new political and economic challenges. International educational exchanges were at risk due to the expected isolationist policy under former President Clinton's administration focused on budget saving (Campbell, 2005; Nye, 2008). While indeed, the domestic economy and national security became a top priority, exchanges remained a significant part of the US foreign policy (Campbell, 2005). Clinton remarked in 1993 at a press conference with former Russian President Yeltsin: "No one who has lived through the second half of the 20th century could possibly be blind to the enormous impact of exchange programs on the future of the countries" (Clinton, 1993). By the mid-1990s, Campbell (2005) notes that proponents for exchanges shared a belief that "educational exchanges had worked and had contributed to the end of the Cold War" (p. 132). Even though many people saw student exchanges as a means to prevent another war, Bu (2003) cautions that other goals did not simply disappear. The underlying objective of student exchanges became to export American culture, values, and American know-how packaged in a slogan of mutual understanding. Exporting the values of democracy and leadership development particularly targeted former Soviet Union countries (Campbell, 2005).

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, fifteen new countries emerged. The American foreign policy decision was to support these countries with assistance programs under the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992. The real objectives behind the assistance were the promotion of democratic values and a free market economy (Epstein, 2005). The FREEDOM act also provided scholarships to students and scholars from the former Soviet states to come to the US for study or research purposes. The FLEX program at a secondary school level was one of the first programs under the FREEDOM Act (ECA, 2007). International student exchanges continued to focus largely on national security goals, with the idea that building bridges with other countries would prevent the spread of communism (Campbell, 2005).

FLEX, a youth exchange program, was initiated in 1993. The program initially aimed at exchanges with the former Soviet Union countries, enabling youth to learn first-hand about the US. FLEX has since expanded to include a total of 21 countries (ACIE, 2019a), including several countries that were never part of the Soviet bloc (e.g. Montenegro and Serbia). The ECA spelled out its public diplomacy mission as follows:

> The underlying purpose of the program is to further US diplomatic and foreign policy goals by encouraging positive academic and social experiences. Upon return to their homelands, experience has shown that these students will share the knowledge and goodwill derived from this experience with their countrymen. As part of this public diplomacy initiative, *sponsors have both the obligation and the opportunity to influence positively these students' attitudes and perceptions about the US and its people* [emphasis added] (ECA, 2007).

This official statement reinforces the fact that educational exchange programs are situated within the US soft power to explicitly influence participants' attitudes and perceptions about the US.

With the catchy phrase "not better, not worse, just different", FLEX is trying to prepare participants' minds to blend their own culture with the American culture (Erbsen, 2018). The goals of the FLEX program as stated on the American Councils website, one of the FLEX placement organizations do not directly mirror the government rhetoric:

(1) Gain an understanding of American society, people, values, culture, diversity, and respect for others with differing views,
(2) Interact with Americans and generate enduring ties,
(3) Teach Americans about your home country and culture,
(4) Explore and acquire an understanding of the key elements of US Civil Society; and
(5) Share and apply experiences and knowledge in your home country as alumni (ACIE, 2015).

The US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (2022) presents a publicly available annual budget allocated for the exchange programs. As shown in Table 1, the budget and the number of FLEX participants have both grown steadily from 2014 to 2019, from 18.47 million and 768 participants in 2014 to 23.69 million and 977 participants in 2019. Given a large amount of investment, it can be assumed that the US government believes in both value and benefit from investment in international exchange programs.

Table 1. Public diplomacy budget for the FLEX program between fiscal years 2014 and 2020.

	FY 2014	**FY 2015**	**FY 2016**	**FY 2017**	**FY 2018**	**FY 2019**	**FY 2020**
Budget	$18.47 million	$18.12 million [1]	$19.62 million	$21.15 million	$22.36 million	$23.69 million	$23.69 million[2]
Number of Participants	768	779	883	922	977	977	-

[1] A slight drop in the fiscal year 2015 funding can be attributed to Russia's withdrawal from the FLEX program.
[2] The FY 2020 data for the number of participants and cost per participant were not available.

Cost per participant	$24,049	$23,257	$22,220	$22,939	$22,892	$24,257	-

Source: US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2022.

Despite its popularity which had caused high competitiveness among foreign youth to take part in the program, the US soft diplomacy efforts failed when the Russian government decided to withdraw from FLEX in 2014. This speaks to the influence of geopolitical dynamics that shape international educational exchanges. The reason behind this drastic move was diplomatic. Russia opposed a FLEX alumnus' decision to seek asylum in the US. The teenager who got acquainted with a gay couple in the US claimed that upon his return home after the exchange, he faced persecution as a homosexual in Russia (Erbsen, 2018; MacFarquhar & Gordon, 2014). Erbsen (2018) points to the ideological gap between Russia and the US that has become even wider in today's globalized world. The official statement by the top Foreign Ministry official for human rights in Russia stated that this case contradicted the "moral and ethical principles of Russian society" (MacFarquhar & Gordon, 2014).

More broadly, the US-Russia diplomatic tension occurred six months after Russia's annexation of Crimea as another act of the Russian government to show its power by cutting ties with the West. Erbsen (2018) sees this ideological tension between Russia and the US as a biopolitical threat to Russia. The discourse of biological normativity promoted to achieve tolerance and mutual understanding conflicts with the Russian discourse. The FLEX funding that was supposed to go to Russia in 2015 got redistributed to Russia's neighboring countries, namely Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. All three countries are members of the European Union and NATO, thus, the decision to expand funding to them may only reinforce the geopolitical dynamics and ideological differences in the region.

In the years before September 11, 2001, the US Congress downplayed the importance of funding public diplomacy activities and redistributing the funding to other government and military activities (Epstein, 2005). Academic and cultural exchanges dropped from 45,000 in 1995 to only 29,000 in 2001 (Nye, 2008). The postcolonial debates before the tragic terrorist attacks of the twin towers in New York incorporated global events and processes when examining educational policies. In the 1990s cultural globalization impacted educational policy and practice with asymmetric cultural flows from developing to developed nations (Hall, 1996; Waters, 1995). Waters (1995) refers to globalization as a cultural phenomenon that extends well beyond the borders of the nation-state. The forces of globalization that have resulted in technological advancements, increased capital flow, and mobility, were closely linked to the spread of capitalist ideology around the world. People became increasingly mobile to obtain an education abroad (Cohen, 1997). The rationale behind the exchange programs centered around global competitiveness (Campbell, 2005). Rizvi (2004) maintains that "the processes of globalization do not only affect educational policy and practice through education's links to economic and political realities but extend also to issues of governance" (p. 158). Indeed, pre-9/11 discourse that was, in academic circles, dominated by the issues of global integration and global competitiveness has shifted to re-thinking globalization in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 events (Rizvi, 2004).

While the decade preceding these events was in light of globalization, the emerging knowledge economy, the declining authority of the nation-state, and the spread of neo-liberal economic regimes, the post-9/11 period has restored the power of the nation-state (Rizvi, 2004). Similar to the period when the Soviet Union collapsed, Campbell (2005) notes that the 9/11 events "created a uniquely challenging and paradoxical environment" (p. 127). These events

provoked the US to strengthen its national security regime. In an already globalized world, sustaining global security became of utmost importance to the US. The war on terrorism was unlike any other war in the past because it was undefined by the national boundaries (Rizvi, 2004). From a postcolonial perspective that favors relations between different cultures by refuting western hegemony, Rizvi (2004) discusses globalization and education after 9/11. He explains the rationale behind the new narrative of national security: “One of the consequences of the ‘war on terrorism’ has been to render issues of welfare, social, and cultural policy, including education policy, increasingly subservient to the umbrella narrative of security” (p. 163). Ultimately, the dominant narrative of the US government to protect national security has helped the US reassert “its global authority and pre-eminence in international relations” (p. 162), and further, “has contributed to the framing of transnational agendas” (p. 163).

As a result of 9/11, pro- and anti-Islamic sentiments found a place in daily news around the world (Rizvi, 2004). Demands to fight terrorism invoked patriotic sentiments among Americans, clashing with the calls for tolerance and understanding. There seems to be a common misunderstanding that the war was not against Islam as a religion, which caused anti-Muslim sentiments to spur against Muslim communities worldwide. In light of growing nationalism, Franz (2002) states that mixed messages confused the American society that “reverted to a nativist interpretation of the events, which was soon to be buttressed by a moral righteous and infallible nationalism, in the country’s retaliation efforts” (p. 3). The culture of antagonism against Muslims created a further divide, as part of the society saw Muslims as a threat to the American way of life (Rizvi, 2004). Nonetheless, Rizvi maintains that “the future for both the West and Islam are inextricably intertwined and interdependent” (p. 169), highlighting the importance of mutual understanding.

The 9/11 events affected education in several ways. In terms of international education, the homeland security structures restricted the mobility of students, scholars, and researchers coming from the Muslim world (Campbell, 2005; Rizvi, 2004). The USA PATRIOT Act was passed in October 2001. Similar anti-terrorist legislation followed, thus, making it even more difficult for Muslim migrants to come to the US. Similarly, international students of the Muslim faith faced difficulties in obtaining a student visa (Campbell, 2005; Rizvi, 2004). Open Doors (2002) reported that “the number of international students from Muslim countries who are either denied visas or have simply decided not to apply, has increased significantly”.

A new climate of fear that spurred in the US and around the world put interfaith dialogue at the heart of peacebuilding initiatives. Fritzsche (2006) notes that due to prevailing fear in society directed towards Muslims and Arabs, educators found it rather challenging to teach on the topics of tolerance, cultural understanding, and human rights. The survey among high school students by Christian and Lapinski (2003) that was conducted in an American high school six months following 9/11 highlighted the importance of interpersonal contact. The findings revealed that students who interacted personally with Muslims were significantly less likely to hold negative stereotypes of Muslims. In other words, the more knowledge the students had about Islam and Muslims, the more positive their attitudes were about Muslims. While peace education in schools is a way of formal learning about issues such as terrorism and Islam, exchange programs such as YES bring Muslim students and Americans in personal contact with each other. This is when intercultural exchange becomes a valuable tool that extends beyond the classroom into a wider host community.

Following the 9/11 events, “there appears to be a move towards a policy consensus that international education is an element of security, one of the soft power tools available to

government" (Campbell, 2005, p. 153). The Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange continuously emphasized the importance of exchanges with the Islamic world to be framed in the same way as the programs following the Cold War. Kenton Keith, the chair of the Alliance stated that a far-reaching goal to fight terrorism was needed by building a broader network of contacts to strengthen mutual understanding between the US and the Islamic world (Campbell, 2005). In May 2002, the legislation for the exchange program was initiated by the former Senators, Ted Kennedy and Richard Lugar who emphasized the value of cultural exchanges for the US and foreign participants alike.

The Cultural Bridges Act of 2002 would need to allocate $95 million a year for the years 2003-2007 for new international educational or cultural exchange programs. However, the rhetoric did not translate into actions just yet. The Alliance put more pressure by placing a full-page advertisement in New York Times in June 2003 with the title: "International exchange programs – An investment in national security", publicly stressing the need for exchanges. By joining forces with the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), Alliance issued a joint policy document that called for a renewal of former President's Clinton memorandum on international education in 2000. The document laid out their rationale:

> *To be an educated citizen today is to be able to see the world through others' eye and to understand the international dimensions of the problems we confront as nation-skills that are enhanced by international experience* [emphasis added]. The programs we put in place today to make international experience integral to higher education will determine if our society will have a globally literate citizenry prepared to respond to the demands of the twenty-first century and an age of global terrorism (Campbell, 2005, p. 147).

Nye (2008) notes that “only after September 2001 did Americans begin to rediscover the importance of investing in the instruments of soft power” (p. 99). The US government’s rhetoric recognized some value of soft diplomacy, which enhanced the importance of cultural exchanges at the time when the US was fighting terrorism (Campbell, 2005).

The YES program evolved in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which provided the incentive for the program. As public diplomacy efforts were deemed insufficient at the time, the DOS recognized the need for the YES program to promote understanding and respect between the US and the Muslim world (DOS, 2005). The YES program was initiated in 2002 under the Cultural Bridges Act of 2002 (S. 2505) which states: “Educating international students is an important way to impart cross-cultural understanding and create goodwill for the US throughout the world” (in Kennedy, 2003, p. 2). The purpose of the Cultural Bridges Act is to uphold the national security of the US through educational and cultural exchange programs between the US and the Islamic world. This was the first program of its kind to bring Muslim youth to live with American host families and attend American high schools (Epstein, 2005). Specific provisions include:

> (1) Afford additional opportunities for eligible participants from the Islamic world to study in the US;
>
> (2) Foster mutual respect for American and Islamic values and culture through people-to-people contacts; and
>
> (3) Build bridges to a more peaceful world through programs aimed at enhancing mutual understanding (Cultural Bridges Act, 2002, Sec. 4, p. 4 in Kennedy, 2003).

The government rhetoric underlying the purpose of the YES program is to enhance national security through the promotion of people-to-people exchanges with the Muslim world.

In 2003, when the first cohort of YES students arrived in the US, Senator Kennedy spoke to the importance of the YES program to target anti-American rhetoric in the Muslim world, saying: “Many Muslims believe our country is at war with Islam, not terrorism. With nearly 1.5 billion people living in the Islamic world today, we ignore these pervasive anti-American sentiments at our peril” (Kennedy, 2003, p. S10258). Besides improving the American image abroad, Senator Kennedy emphasized that the exchange program offers a unique, first-hand opportunity to foreign high school youth to learn about the US, the American lifestyle, and the American people (Kennedy, 2003, p. S10258).

Despite the underlying goal that frames the program under its national security objectives, Senator Kennedy and Senator Lugar’s rhetoric was widely grasped and used on the DOS websites to promote the YES program, listing mutual understanding and respect as the primary goals of the program. Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to expand public diplomacy activities in Muslim countries (Epstein, 2005). As per the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (2022) annual budget on public diplomacy (see Table 2), the budget and the number of YES participants have shown a slight growth from 2014 to 2019, from 23.00 million allocated for 904 participants in 2014 to 24.11 million allocated for 919 participants in 2019. There was a slight drop in funding in 2020, possibly due to the pandemic.

Table 2. Public diplomacy budget for the YES program between fiscal years 2014 and 2020.

	FY 2014	**FY 2015**	**FY 2016**	**FY 2017**	**FY 2018**	**FY 2019**	**FY 2020**
Budget	$23.00 million	$22.48 million	$21.60 million	$23.25 million	$24.47 million	$24.11 million	$22.34 million
Number of Participants	904	897	803	885	925	919	-
Cost per participant	$24,223	$25,065	$26,901	$26,268	$26,454	$26,230	-

Source: US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2022.

The report also notes that the YES budget is higher than the one of the FLEX due to the higher cost of recruitment and security concerns in some of the YES countries.

In 2012 Senator Lugar remarked on the importance of exchanges at a secondary school level: “High school students are quick learners, they are well able to adapt to new conditions, and they are our future leaders. We are most hopeful that this [exchange] experience [in the US] will be a part of this leadership background” (ECA, 2012). Besides possible investment in future leaders, immersion in the American lifestyle at an adolescent age may result in a lifelong attachment to the US (Pisarska, 2016). Atkinson (2010) argues that government-sponsored exchanges enable students from non-democratic countries and/or little exposure to democratic values to experience life in a democratic country. Nye (2004) maintains that such experiences are not trivial (p. 13), but they are rather essential in building soft power through sharing the experience with others. While most alumni’s influence may be rather limited, shared with family and friends only post-exchange, some of them may one day assume leadership roles in their countries. The political power would allow them to influence political behavior at home.

Foldi (2019) notes that Senator Lugar realized the need for greater engagement with Muslim nations, particularly among the youth. Until his passing in 2019, Lugar demonstrated a uniform stance for American leadership through engagement, meeting personally with YES students when these students attended workshops in Washington D.C. Demonstrating his passion for the program, Senator Lugar was known to spend ample time chatting with YES students (Foldi, 2019). At the program’s 10th anniversary, Senator Lugar reflected on the beginnings:

> In 2002, former Senator Ted Kennedy, of Massachusetts, and I felt it was very important, in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy in the US, to get to know students in Muslim

countries and for them to know us, so we worked with the State Department and others to institute this program (ECA, 2012).

As discussed in this section, governments invest in international educational exchanges for a variety of reasons ranging from fostering mutual understanding and building global competitiveness to promoting political ideologies and strengthening national security. Soft diplomacy has been used as a tool of the US government's efforts to promote and spread positive images about the US, its culture, and values around the world. The purposes for projecting soft diplomacy through people-to-people exchanges have emerged in response to important historical, ideological, and geopolitical dynamics. While FLEX was founded as a result of the US-Soviet ideological battle, religious extremism contributed to the emergence of the YES program. In recent years following Russia's withdrawal, the US has strategically expanded the FLEX program to include other countries in the region as a result of changing geopolitical dynamics that continue to shape global, national, and local discourses. Finally, governments fund exchange programs with a desire that such funding will achieve the country's strategic objectives.

Biopolitics

Government-funded exchange programs can be seen as an ideological battle to define biopolitical goals (Banta, 2012; Erbsen, 2018). There is no geopolitics "that does not imply a correlate biopolitics, and no biopolitics without its corresponding geopolitics" (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero 2008, p. 276). The nexus of biopolitics and geopolitics produces "objects, and especially subjects" (Banta, 2012, p. 382). Biopolitics in particular can "better grasp reasons for actions aimed at consolidating power and contesting it, and therefore can be seen as a research approach to study policy strategies with practical implications" (Makarychev, 2017, p. 2). Thus,

this section utilizes the lens of biopolitics, engaging philosophical concepts such as Foucauldian governmentality and cosmopolitanism, to unpack the works and purposes of international exchange programs. Moreover, I aim to explore the forms of embodiment and subjectivity being promoted by these programs on a meso level of analysis. I will conclude this section by arguing that the discussed biopolitical tools produce subjectivities by (in)directly affecting the ways of being and living of exchange students.

It is important to note that my inquiry mainly draws upon Foucauldian biopolitics, a post-structuralist theory that focuses on the body, however, it also engages with other theorists such as Gramsci that focus on the mind and belong to the Marxist school of thought. Foucauldian biopolitics is concerned with the micro-politics of power, while Gramscian hegemony is more interested in the macro-politics of power. Despite the tensions in the way power is conceptualized, in this dissertation, the Foucauldian biopolitics and Gramscian hegemony can be seen as complementary theories as they offer different perspectives on power that can be used to understand and resist power relations.

In The History of Sexuality (1990), Michel Foucault introduces the concept of the bio-politics of the population. As per Foucault (2003), the population is a "datum, a field of intervention, and an objective of governmental techniques" (p. 243). The genealogy of the discourse about the body as a holder of qualities has shifted attention to biological life that, as Foucault argues, has become included within the modalities of state power. He captures the inclusion of biological life in its transition from politics to bio-politics – i.e., it is the life itself that provides the norms that constitute the subjectivity essential for the survival of a capitalist economy. Biopolitics functions as the art of government to surveil, control, manage and administer the population (Foucault, 2003). Moreover, Foucault holds that modern regimes of

power operate to produce individuals as subjects who are both the objects and vehicles of power. In other words, people become self-instituting agents of power.

Biopolitics and governmentality. Foucault (1991) coined the term governmentality, referring to the issues of ruling, steering, and governing in modern societies. Foucault discussed the relationship between governmentality and biopolitics in his Course entitled Security, Territory, Population (in Senellart et al., 2009). The three terms in the title refer to the meaning of an ancient concept of *nomos* – how a population of living beings is gathered by another group through a territorial division, to provide security to the population. Biopolitics is illustrated by *nomos*, which is neither “law” nor “order” but rather “normative order” that brings together the religious and economic dimensions of social order.

Foucault’s focus lies in the liberal and neo-liberal forms of governmentality in a modern nation-state. Peters (2007) notes that at the core of governmentality are western society’s principles of liberty and the rule of law that legitimize political philosophies and decisions. Foucault was interested in the genealogy, i.e. history of the present, of the modern state particularly looking at its governance techniques. This is important because state action is a result of strategies developed from competing governance practices (Amos, 2010). Yet, Peters (2007) argues that the power employed by western society is based on biopolitical techniques that often ignore the rule of law and the principles of liberty.

Governmentality pertains to both societal (e.g., economy) as well as individual (e.g., family) layers of society. In other words, Foucauldian governmentality connects the political and the subjective realms, assuming that political interventions target populations within national boundaries. In his governmentality studies, Foucault studied knowledge that is being produced through the relations of power. Foucault maintained that power is exercised only over free

subjects. The concept of governmentality is similar to what we today understand as political economy, stressing more importance on the role of discourse analysis than on the role of actors and their interests (Amos, 2010).

Amos (2010) links the concept of governmentality to the field of international education. Although governmentality shares many characteristics with governance, it is not to be used interchangeably. While governance is concerned with the “how” of current transformations, governmentality is about the nation of rationality. Amos (2010) claims that international governance in education is about issues and strategies related to the modes of power and control, which develop collectivities and subjects. Power relations in educational governance establish international models to meet particular needs within national contexts. Also, governance formulates educational policy as the guiding force that constitutes educational processes, actions, and institutional arrangements. The issue with the term governance is that it excludes the notion of power. Thus, international governance in education needs to question who is shaping the dominant discourse in educational practice, and importantly, who and what is excluded from it (Amos, 2010).

As per Foucault, power is much more a productive force than a means of coercion, and is applied everywhere, including in education. Foucauldian governmentality stresses the importance of the power-knowledge nexus with knowledge being the instrument of power in modern societies. Education needs to be legitimized by authoritative knowledge, such as government-funded educational programs (Amos, 2010). In such a case, a new relationship is established between the individual and the state, where “the individual becomes pertinent for the state insofar as he can do something for the strength of the state” (Foucault, 2001, p. 409).

In his discussions on biopolitics, Foucault maintained that biopolitics is a product of

modernity, in which “the state is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race” (Foucault & Ewald, 2003, p. 81). The transfer of human bodies into or from specific countries is part of an economic process and part of a discourse-building process because “power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power” (Foucault & Ewald, 2003, p. 24). One of the most important biopolitical goals of the US government is to bring exchange participants closer to the norms of the US and to bolster their identity (Erbsen, 2018). Another goal is to develop a transnational human capital (economic, social, and cultural) that enables individuals to function beyond the nation-state (Gerhards & Hans, 2013).

Political legitimacy is based on mobile human bodies that can cross national borders. Erbsen (2018) argues that “the US interest in funding and promoting international education exchanges in Russia and other post-soviet states is vested in instilling and maintaining its version of norms” (p. 78). The biopolitics used in international educational exchanges signals how difficult it is to use power in the modern world. Langton (1969) talks about political socialization which is a process of learning about politically relevant attitudes and behavioral patterns from socialization agents in society. These agents, such as host families, function as mechanisms through which they transmit political attitudes to exchange participants. International education “can solidify ideological divides between nations or groups of nations by allowing only those who prescribe to a specific ideology to participate” (Erbsen, 2018, p. 87). Gerhards and Hans (2013) maintain that redistribution of funds from a country that does not agree with the ideology to countries that do can deepen ideological divides between societies.

The Foucauldian concept of governmentality is not a traditional act of politics that concerns itself with territorial gains. Instead, governmentality is part of biopolitics that Foucault

sees as an epistemological frame for governing populations at every level of life. In Foucault, power is a relation that has a double function; it can be repressive or productive. Repression manifested by the state is internalized into the subject through a system of knowledge that is derived from observation, classification, and normalization. The biopolitics of governmentality's main function lies in its power to not only control and supervise but more importantly, to normalize human bodies through the deployment of biopolitical apparatuses of security. This is the sovereign power's productive function. Makarychev (2017) holds that biopolitics operates precisely on a non-political basis, appealing to security needs that it makes apparent and deemed necessary to its citizens.

Biopolitical governmentality has become increasingly geopolitical and globalized – what Dillon and Reid (2001) call "global biopolitics," and Kelly (2010) "global governmentality". As opposed to the nation-state's sovereign power, global biopolitics produces a new form of transcendent sovereign power on a global scale. As per Reid (2005), humanity is defined "in accordance with internationalised laws, reducing it to another imperial injunction" where "biopolitical modernity plays into the hands of modern sovereignty" (p. 249). In line with this, Reid (2005) argues that the US power in the 21st Century, and especially in post-9/11 American foreign policy, should be examined in the context of global biopolitics.

Government-funded exchanges operate through modes of governmentality that produce enabled subjects in ways that mask the operations of power and thus, make those subjects more easily governed. Understanding how governmentality works helps uncover not only how power mechanisms operate but also, how the exchange participants experience them in everyday life (Foucault, 2008). For instance, governmentality allows a closer look at how individuals involved in exchanges are guided to perform themselves as ideal subjects and how their identities perform

at specific times (Walters, 2012). Ahmed (2014) claims that exchange subjects are willingly subject to the relational and affective dimension stemming from cosmopolitanism that feeds into these power structures. As an instrument of biopolitics, educational exchanges (re)produce geopolitical composition and by doing so, shape cosmopolitan/global identities. Arguably, becoming part of a highly selective exchange program may position oneself as part of a global or enterprising elite. Starting with the selection process, governmentality plays a crucial role in shaping exchange participants' subjectivity which will be discussed in the next parts.

Potentiality and risk. Education is a means of politics and power. In the US, internationalism in education became a proxy for spreading American values around the world. Educational exchanges in particular promote the development of desired bodies through a transaction of economic and social capital for greater social and political outcomes (Brooks, 2015; Foucault, 2008).

In Foucault, the body is the instrument of biopower and an object of investment for the power to fuel itself. Biopolitical production refers to processes of economic, social, and cultural production and reproduction of life. Hardt and Negri (2000) see the body and subjectivity as the outcomes of biopolitical production. Consequently, living, being, and even learning might become objects of biopower that (re)produces life. Here, Murphy's (2017) biopolitical equation is relevant as the author argues that "some children must be invested in so that future others might not be born, so that rates of return increase, so that future adults are worth more, so others live more prosperously" (p. 114).

Grosz (1994) explains the role of embodiment in Foucault: "The body is that materiality, almost a medium, on which power operates and through which it functions (p. 146). In western tradition, intellect and rationality are privileged over embodiment, whereas subjectivities are

produced through power relations (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012). As such, the usefulness of an individual is at stake, and as a whole, the value of the population (Amos, 2010). As per the human capital theory, the resources such as knowledge, competencies, and values that people embody make them economically productive (Murphy, 2017; Simons, 2006). In biopolitical terms, life is a venue for capital accumulation.

Anagnost (2004) holds that a biopolitical body is "a body to which value has been added through educational investment rather than one from which surplus value has been extracted" (p. 191). Governments and institutions invest in certain bodies through scholarships. The purpose is to boost these embodied subjects with transnational human capital that, in return, would yield high economic returns in the future, and that may benefit one's community, nation, or even the world (Becker, 1993; Erbsen, 2018). A neoliberal body as a site of investment "operates in the production of economic, social, political, and affective value" (Anagnost, 2004, p. 192). In sum, investment in education can be seen as the added value in the form of competencies that one embodies – what Agamben (1998) calls "qualified life" – and that may be achieved through educational pursuits and training (Anagnost, 2004; Murphy, 2017).

Both risk and potentiality accompany such a biopolitical investment. In Agamben (1998), potentiality is a possibility that has not yet been actualized. The body's capacity defines a potentiality that can, only if realized, result in an expression of value in a knowledge-based economy. In line with this logic, the government-funded exchange participants can be seen as neoliberal subjects who migrate to obtain educational experience abroad as an investment in their potentiality. While this can lead to endless possibilities, Anagnost (2004) recognizes the risk of "opening the body [of value] to a regime of exploitation" that has enabled the potentiality.

How do governments select bodies that will be "deserving" of such investment? It is only

the subjects who meet specific criteria of identity that can appropriate neoliberal discourses. As argued by Indelicato (2016), in the context of international students in Australia, foreign objects need to prove their love for the host nation otherwise they are not deserving of an investment. Thus, selection and screening processes are critical components of exchange programs. They allow governments to select bodies that are welcome to the US, and further, bodies that are willing to accept the social norms and values of the dominant nation. However, merit-based exchange programs can be seen as a way of pervasive governmentality that selects a limited number of “successful” candidates who are deemed deserving of the investment (Anagnost, 2004). In her research on the FLEX program, Erbsen (2018) argues that FLEX has “reinforced ideological divides through their selection of participants who already subscribe to the norms promoted” (p. 70). Similarly, Tsvetkova’s (2008) historic analysis of the US-Soviet exchange programs implies that Soviet participants were selected based on “exhibiting pro-US sentiments” (p. 211) and who came from a higher socioeconomic class. These participants were deemed worthy of the investment as it was believed they would one day rise in positions of influence and exhibit support for American values.

What if the investable body does not live up to the expected potentiality? Neoliberal governmentality has become constituted by the notion of risk (Butler, 2006). Investing in human capital by itself is insufficient. Simons (2006) stresses the importance of social capital, i.e. norms, relations, and networks, that together with human capital “enlarge the productivity of someone’s knowledge and skills” (p. 532). Here, social networks are not rigid but rather, they inhabit time and space as a lived experience (Sidhu & Dall’Alba, 2012). It is a place where an individual’s attitudes toward life and learning are affected. Simons (2006) argues, “[w]ithout this attitude of investment towards oneself and without a productive and pro-active use of one own

learning force the existence of an entrepreneurial self is at stake" (p. 537). Exchange students may acquire a common identity through social interactions and learning through exchanges (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Over time, they may adopt the host society's values and social norms (Zürn & Checkel, 2005). Social networks are key in the production of a value that is no longer economic but is inseparable from social values (Terranova, 2009).

Biopolitical subjectivation. Foucauldian governmentality refers to the way governments produce citizens as a result of educational policies and organized practices through which subjects are governed (Peters, 2019). The power-knowledge relations have shaped the constitution of subjectivity (Peters, 2007). Biopolitics affects the processes of subjectivation that tap into the production of identities desired by the government who invests in exchange programs. Ideologies transmitted through learning may support the hegemony of a dominant group (Gramsci, 1971), and in the context of exchanges, biopolitics may reinforce the self-regulation of foreign bodies to the dominant power mechanisms.

In the 20th Century, policymakers recognized youth's geopolitical significance (Tsvetkova, 2008), and their biopolitical worth. As Makarychev and Yatsyk (2017) reiterate, "neither biopolitical nor geopolitical strategy is conceptually self-sufficient, and each tends to overlap with the other to create zones of bio-/geopolitical regulation and control" (p. 26). During the Cold War, the US-Soviet exchanges demonstrated the value of investing in youth who, at least anecdotally, played an influential role in affecting political events (Scribner, 2017).

As per Agamben's "inclusion and exclusion" (1998), biopolitics divides bodies based on instilling ideologies of biological normativity (Erbsen, 2018). Some scholars argue that exchange programs foster the internalization of dominant norms through individual bodies (Erbsen, 2018; Tran & Vu, 2018; Tsvetkova, 2008). In line with this, exchange programs set the stage for a

discourse-building process based on the power objectives of the hosting nation. Mills (2020) claims that the exchange subjects are "produced as political subjects and their performances of particular identities partake in a global imaginary manifested in US exchange programs" (p. 765). Biopolitical mechanisms "enable and constrain, energize and regulate participants through their production of subjectivities" (Mills, 2020, p. 765).

Exchange participants are youth ambassadors who not only receive American culture but are also willing to share their own culture with host nationals. Thus, the desired subject's identity is two-fold and the characteristics one should exhibit can be seen in binary terms: an exchange participant should show love for the home nation and culture that will be shared with the host community on one side, but should also be open to receiving the host nation's culture on the other side. An example of this can be seen in the program's catchy phrase promoted before and during the exchange, "not better, not worse, just different," which aims to prepare participants' minds to blend into American culture (Erbsen, 2018). In Tsvetkova's (2008) discussion of the Cold War exchanges, the exchange programs constituted a strategy to win the "minds" of participants to American ideology. Exchange participants not only attended American schools but also took part in extracurricular activities where they learned about the American values of capitalism and democracy at the grassroots level.

Recently, Mills' (2020) analysis of the YES program documents uncovered the underside of cosmopolitan, global, and neoliberal subjectivities that the program promotes and enforces before, during, and after the exchange. The program handbooks depict the ideal YES subjectivity denoting youth ambassadors as "tolerant cosmopolitan citizens, and as globally competent possessors of a neoliberal skill set" (Mills, 2020, p. 780). For example, the handbooks offer advice to host families and students on boundaries of appropriate behavior that make the ideal

YES subject. During the exchange, a successful exchange student must remain open-minded, flexible, and positive. Mills (2020) describes this desired subjectivity as "the willing-to-share cosmopolitan global citizen, and the flexible, adaptable neoliberal citizen" (p. 776). An embodiment of this subjectivity would seemingly erase the border between "America" and the "Muslim world", and in broader terms, tap into American foreign policy objectives. Mills (2020) also touches upon the role of American host families whose duty is to guide foreign youth toward desired subjectivity. Hosts embody cosmopolitan values, such as hospitality, a loving family, and tolerant Americans. Guided by ethnocentric handbooks that portray exchange students as "others", hosts may correct "inappropriate" behaviors that do not conform to American values.

This section provided a discussion on biopolitics and biopolitical tools in the context of educational exchanges that may produce desired subjectivities. Foreign bodies may willingly surrender to biopolitical measures already during the selection process, and further, they may self-regulate to comply with the desired subjectivity constituted by the exchange program. As argued by Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012), this disembodied form of capitalism should be replaced by an embodied, grounded cosmopolitanism that prepares individuals to face today's global challenges with the exchange aiding them with empathy and social responsibility.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism was first invoked in 1614 from the Greek word *kosmopolites* (*kosmos, meaning* 'world', *polites*, meaning 'citizen', and *polis* meaning 'city') which translates to "citizen of the world" (Molz, 2006). The concept of cosmopolitanism received more attention during the late 18th century, primarily in the French declaration of human rights in 1789. Cosmopolitanism was first used in 1828 as an idea of a single moral community based on

freedom. Kant, a big advocate of this concept, imagined a moral community where all human beings live in freedom, equality, and autonomy. Moral cosmopolitanism, as per Kant, highlights that all people hold moral relations with each other.

Nowadays, the concept of cosmopolitanism in its various forms shares three main ideas: individualism (the human being is the unit of concern), universality (the unit of concern pertains to every human being equally), and generality (cosmopolitan status as a global force) (Peters, 2014). The concept of perpetual peace led to the emergence of cosmopolitanism and global governance as we know it today under international law (Peters, 2019). Benhabib (2004) argues that "the cosmopolitan right of hospitality gives one the right of peaceful temporary sojourn, but it does not entitle one to plunder and exploit, conquer and overwhelm by superior force those among whom one is seeking sojourn" (p. 40). Nonetheless, cosmopolitan rights are based on the common humanity and freedom that allows one to move beyond their own culture and religion. Baker (2011) notes that the notion of such fluid mobility is a characteristic of global civil society. Besley (2011) elaborates on this idea that resembles global citizenship, saying that moral cosmopolitanism (*ius cosmopoliticum* - cosmopolitan law or right) is part of human rights discourse. Each human being is part of the same world, and thus, has equal moral value regardless of ethnicity or nationality (Besley, 2011).

While Kant's universal hospitality set the stage for a foundation of cosmopolitan global order (Peters, 2019), Foucault encouraged a critical awareness of cosmopolitanism within the complexity of the global world system (Peters, 2014). Scholars argue that cosmopolitanism is an ideology that unites the world into a universal notion of democracy. Himmelfarb (1996) holds that cosmopolitan values originate in Western tradition on the notion of individual autonomy. Also, a cosmopolitan is a cultural figure who holds a cultural disposition toward difference, "a

sense of tolerance, flexibility and openness toward otherness that characterizes an ethics of social relations in an interconnected world" (Molz, 2008, p. 2), and is detached from any particular culture, history, or geography. Kant envisioned cosmopolitanism as the transcendence of culture and human rationality free from nature (Cheah, 1998). As can be seen, there are multiple types of cosmopolitanism discussed by different scholars, and those most pertinent to my study will be further explained.

Peters (2014) talks about liberal cosmopolitanism that "functions to support the system of American hegemony that controls the global world system" (p. 14). The economic, moral, and legal forms of cosmopolitanism are all part of the same reality, operating in this complex world system. Liberal cosmopolitanism has sustained the hegemonic global dominance of the US in support of its strategic, economic, and military interests. The hegemonic dominance has been established through the expansion of liberal democracy to other nations through the so-called neoliberal cosmopolitan governmentality, which includes soft power (Peters, 2014).

Other scholars argue for a form of cosmopolitanism called negative cosmopolitanism that is concerned with power and biopolitics. Negative cosmopolitanism stands firmly against the liberal kind that celebrates superficial diversity under the mask of oppression and imperialism (Peters, 2014). Moreover, Nederveen Pieterse (2006) points to the emancipatory expressions of cosmopolitanism that engage alternative, multicultural perspectives. Emancipatory cosmopolitanism is the kind that can make a difference in the world as "it offers an emancipatory perspective, in which emancipation refers to what is relevant and of benefit to the world majority" (p. 1248). Similarly, Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012) call for an embodied, grounded cosmopolitanism that is "attuned to addressing the challenges of our contemporary world, while drawing on the resources of multiple cultures to develop an ethics of care and hospitality" (p.

428). This kind of cosmopolitanism could be the driving force of international exchange programs.

International mobilities are the result of different ideologies that determine what kinds of movements will take place (Peters, 2014). As a result, new subjectivities and new forms of belonging are created (Molz, 2008). Peters (2014) points to the inequalities among these forms of mobility. Thus, the "cosmopolitan theory in education needs to be rethought against the background of the emerging spatial politics of late-capitalist globalization if it is to avoid the accusation of Western neo-imperialist moral universalism" (Peters, 2014, p. 19). Nederveen Pieterse (2006) maintains that "cosmopolitanism from above is empty without cosmopolitanism from below, without the actual experience of world citizenship" (p. 1255). Peters (2014) calls for a critical approach to educational programs that promote cosmopolitanism to question its moral and legal forms. In particular, the author refers to the underlying objectives of a country's soft power. Cosmopolitanism from above pertains to the US strategic interests guiding the exchange programs while cosmopolitanism from below relates to exchange participant experiences on an individual level.

While the global and the local are not explicitly defined by the exchange programs or the government, the rhetoric used by the FLEX and YES programs indicates that the global or "international" is grounded in the ideals of Western modernity. The modern nation-state was founded on the ideals of the American and French revolutions that centered around liberty, equality, and fraternity. These historic and colonial forces constitute a matrix of power that supports the system of global governance and the dominant discourse in education (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Morgensen, 2011). Thus, it is important to acknowledge the onto-epistemic ideology rooted in Western modernity that fails to acknowledge and recognize non-Western

worldviews (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). By doing so, foreign youth should be subsumed not only under cosmopolitan but also under the Christian-positivist-liberal-capitalist worldview that forms the basis of modern American society (Grosfoguel, 2013; Siedentrop, 2014). The implications this ideology may have on government-funded exchange programs is that the exchange – when used as a foreign policy tool – can divert attention away from other ways of knowing, being, and acting (Dussel, 2000; Federici, 2004; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). A recent study of high school teachers in Hawaiʻi who used Western onto-epistemological frameworks to teach global citizenship education found that their perspectives and practices were rooted in the Western matrix of coloniality (Saito et al., forthcoming). Such teaching practices by teachers who were not Native Hawaiians – even when conducted in a multicultural context of Hawaiʻi – fundamentally do not recognize other ways of being, acting, and knowing.

If the "global" does not recognize other onto-epistemic perspectives, the government-funded exchanges may reproduce Eurocentric knowledge and power structures. These exchange programs assume both liberal and neoliberal views. Through the former ones, the US government promotes learning about democracy, equality, and individual liberty, while the latter assumes that foreign youth will learn about American culture, and acquire competencies such as English skills that will advance their position in the global economy. However, the programs are uncritical of the ideology guiding these principles.

Swanson (2015) argues that in the binary global-local dynamics, the local is the "site of struggle of competing discourses in the social domain" (p. 30). The global is not representative of the world, but rather, it reflects the dominant voices of the globalized local from the Global North. These voices do not engage with the multiple epistemological realities of global and local issues (Davies, 2006), which reproduces the present North-South power dynamics (Andreotti et

al., 2006). In a cosmopolitan worldview, people are members of the same cosmos, and in this universe, the global is superior to the local. Contrary to this belief, people would perceive different ways of being and knowing as equal, and instead of learning *about* the "other", people would engage and learn *with* each other (Komatsu et al., 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Culture Learning Theory

Acculturation is "the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact" (Berry et al., 2006, p. 305). Zhou and colleagues (2008) maintain that "shock" in culture shock is "understood as the stimulus for the acquisition of culture-specific skills that are required to engage in new social interactions" (p. 65). In other words, cross-cultural sojourners need to acquire culturally relevant social skills to survive and thrive in a foreign environment. Factors affecting cross-cultural adjustment include knowledge about a new culture, language or communication competence, and cultural distance (Zhou et al., 2008).

Acculturation can affect an individual's affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) responses to a new environment (Ward, et al., 2001). Since the 1980s, Furnham and Bochner (1986) advocated for the social skills/culture learning model that offers important theoretical as well as practical implications. Social skills and culture learning became the foundation of the culture learning theory, which is a contemporary model that addresses the ABCs of cross-cultural transition and adaptation. With its origin in social psychology, Ward and colleagues' (2001) culture learning theory has been used to describe various international travelers' experiences abroad. Zhou et al. (2008) describe the ABC model as comprehensive, longitudinal, dynamic, systemic, and pragmatic:

> First, it is more comprehensive than previous models. Second, it considers acculturation as a process that occurs over time, rather than at one time. Third, it proposes an active

> process, rather than passive reactions to a noxious event. Fourth, it addresses the characteristics of the person and the situation, rather than only those within the individual, taking culture shock from the medical/clinical field into education and learning, with implications for intervention (including self-help) that do not necessitate scarce and costly professional expertise (p. 68).

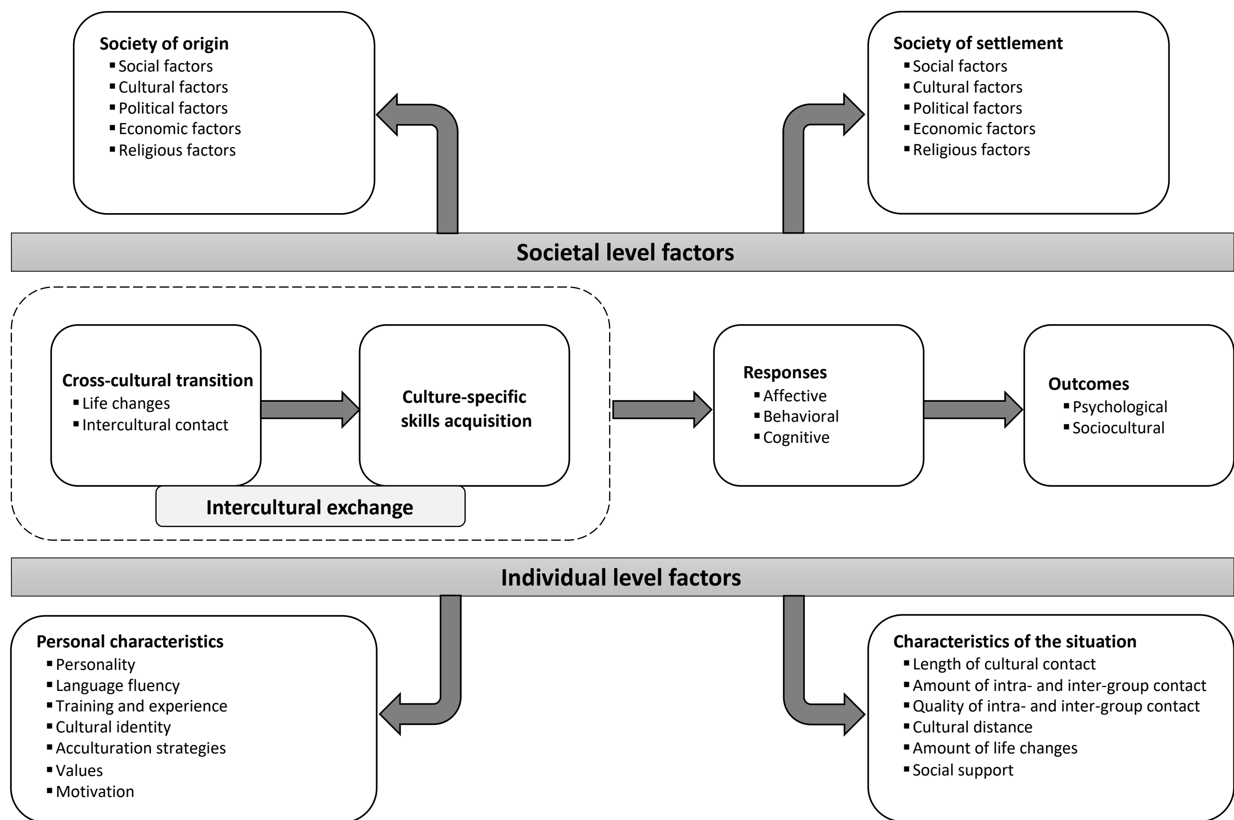
This study finds the culture learning theory most relevant to apply to intercultural contact as it occurs within a homestay component of an exchange program. As noted by Zhou et al. (2008): “Social interaction is a mutually organized and skilled performance” (p. 66). Furthermore, the impact of intercultural contact can also be studied within sedentary communities (Ward et al., 2001) such as host families. As such, both exchange students and host families are agents of intercultural exchange.

In the ABC model, cross-cultural adjustment is seen as a significant life event that requires adaptive change on behalf of an international sojourner. The responses in affect, behavior, and cognition lead to stress management and social skill acquisition, resulting in psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (Zhou et al., 2008). The ABC model emphasizes the behavioral aspect of intercultural contact (Kim, 2001; Zhou et al., 2008) that falls within the purview of intercultural exchange. More specifically, the behavioral component looks at intercultural interaction, such as contact with host nationals. The affective aspect focuses on the psychological and emotional well-being of a sojourner. Finally, debunking stereotypes and prejudice fall within the cognitive facet that evolves around the sojourner’s changed perceptions (Ward et al., 2001).

The intercultural exchange model presented in Figure 1 links the cross-cultural transition with the culture-specific skills acquisition as they occur in the process of intercultural exchange.

When crossing cultures, students and host families alike may benefit from learning culturally relevant social skills. As per the culture learning theory, the responses of the intercultural exchange process include the three ABCs that are interrelated. Intercultural exchange experience requires a great amount of sojourner's and host family's adaption. The outcomes are divided into psychological outcomes that result from affective responses, and sociocultural outcomes as a result of behavioral and cognitive responses.

Figure 1. Factors that affect the intercultural exchange, responses, and outcomes.



Source: Adapted from Zhou et al., 2008

The study by Zhou et al. (2008) suggests that there is no clear relationship between psychological and sociocultural adaptation as they may be interdependent and intertwined. The micro-level variables include individual-level factors, such as personality, values, and language

fluency, that can play a major role in an individual's experience abroad. The macro-level variables contain the societal-level factors, such as the society of origin and the society of settlement.

The ABC model of culture learning is likely to provide practical guidelines for intervention in preparation, orientation, and behavioral social skills training (Zhou et al., 2008). One limitation of this model lies in its complexity. Zhou and colleagues (2008) argue that it is difficult to separate the effects of each component. The second limitation is that it does not consider different groups of people who get in touch with foreign cultures (Zhou et al., 2008). For example, host families who are not sojourners in every sense of the word may be possible beneficiaries of intercultural contact by hosting an exchange student in their homes.

Chapter 3: Review of Empirical Literature

Due to the qualitative nature of my study that centers around exchange program participants' experiences, I have reviewed empirical literature in international education and study abroad. The review of the extant literature can offer an understanding of what has been explored, what is known, and what yet needs to be studied to better capture the experiences of international sojourners and host families.

The empirical literature on study abroad has flourished in recent years due to a rapid increase of international students worldwide as scholars delve deeper into understanding the experiences of international students. I collected the literature included in this review through a systematic search of databases for articles, books, book chapters, and reports. I identified relevant sources via EBSCO Host, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases, using the search terms such as international students, exchange program, exchange students, secondary school students, high school students, host family, and homestay. I then reviewed bibliographies from the retrieved literature to identify other relevant sources that did not show up in the initial searches.

I analyzed the literature thematically to assess how they fit in the broader review of the literature. Although the vast body of literature focuses on university students, many of these studies were deemed relevant for review, offering important insights into international student experiences in general. Several of them employed quantitative design to assess the impact of international sojourns. Still, little remains known about secondary school students and host family experiences. This study is an attempt in this direction.

This chapter is divided into two main sections: cross-cultural adjustment, and the impacts of international sojourn experience. I begin reviewing the literature on international students'

cross-cultural adjustment which is divided into three subcomponents: personal growth, school, and homestay experience. In the second section, I review the literature on the impacts of international student mobility which is divided into three subcomponents: cultural identity, worldview changes, and future international mobility.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Culture is not a static phenomenon, but a forum shaped continuously by its members (Wilson, 1993). Upon entering an unfamiliar cultural environment, international students have to face several cross-cultural adjustments, such as crossing language and communication barriers, adjusting to new food and a different climate, and building new friendships and relationships, among others. The concept of culture shock which was described as a sojourner's loss of all familiar signs of social interaction first appeared in the literature in the 1950s. Oberg (1960) proposed four stages of this phenomenon: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. The honeymoon phase is described as a fascination with the new environment; the crisis stage indicates hostility and aggression towards the host culture; the recovery stage is when an individual gets used to the new culture; and finally, with the adjustment stage, the cultural adjustment is complete. In the 1960s Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) defined culture shock in a W-curve, where the second U accounts for the readjustment upon reentry. Since then, culture shock has become a commonly used term to describe international sojourner's cross-cultural adjustment.

International exchange students as relatively short-term visitors to a new culture are likely to experience culture shock. When these students try to adjust to a new culture, the differences in social norms and values may result in some challenges. Cultural adjustment is "the emotional response of international students to these difficulties and adaptation to cultural

changes" (Nasir, 2012, p. 96). Culture shock can reduce any benefit of the exchange experience as it can lead to feelings of stress, dislike, and anger. Severe symptoms include emotional and physiological disorders, such as feelings of anxiety, homesickness, loneliness, and poor academic performance. The level of these symptoms depends on the duration of the stay as well as on the individual's ability to adapt to a different cultural environment (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Dettweiler, 2015). Although each person deals with culture shock differently, and some may be able to cross cultures faster than others, studies show that cross-cultural contacts are innately stressful (Wan et al., 1992). Culture shock is commonly believed to be a normal process of adaptation that most people experience and overcome. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions on its varying impact as existing studies differ widely in methodologies and samples. Nonetheless, most scholars agree that the sooner one overcomes culture shock, the more likely one would have a positive experience of living abroad (Brown, 2008; Ward, et al., 2001; Weaver, 2000).

Personal growth. Study abroad experience may contribute in large to positive and lasting life changes. Several studies among international students show that ultimately rewards of intercultural contact may outweigh its challenges (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008). More specifically, the studies conducted among high school returnees (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Chang, 2010; Soeterik, 1998; Weichbrodt, 2014; Wilson, 1993) confirm immediate positive cognitive changes that students realize upon reentry, such as personal growth, increased feeling of independence, confidence, maturity, and cultural awareness. A large body of literature agrees that people who underwent cross-cultural adjustment in their childhood felt changed or different from their peers who have not experienced living abroad (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Hoersting &

Jenkins, 2011). 75% (Useem et al., 1993) and up to 90% (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011) of people who underwent cross-cultural adjustment in their childhood felt “changed” or “different” from others who have not experienced living abroad.

Personal growth and maturity are the most significant cognitive impacts on secondary school-aged individuals (Chang, 2010; Wilson, 1993). Given that the FLEX and YES students are between 15 and 18 years old, personal growth and development can be substantial even after a short-term exchange. The age of international sojourner may deem more important than the length of international exposure. Lyttle and colleagues (2011) argue that individuals between ages 12 and 18 undergo “a period of meta-development, which includes comprehension of social norms and subgroups as well as increased cognitive complexity” (p. 688). While adults have developed personal identity and a sense of cultural belonging, secondary school-aged students’ identity has not yet been stabilized (Enloe & Lewin, 1987; Moore & Barker, 2012; Szkudlarek, 2010). Arthur Howe, who was the president of the AFS student exchange during the 1960s, noted the following: “When a youngster, male or female, is sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, [they] are very open to new experiences, they want to explore, they are bold to try, and this leads to a capacity to get inside a foreign culture” (AFS Archives, 2000).

In Radomski’s study (2008) among host families, families came to realize that teenagers are the same all around the world. In the event of a problem, families would first view their students as a teenager before making assumptions based on presumed cultural or religious differences. As per one host family, assuming a parental role for these adolescent students was necessary for a successful homestay: “They have a lot of needs. They may not express them very

well, or at all, but like any adolescent, they have got hormones charging through them and they need some basic guidance" (p. 39–40).

Furthermore, studies attribute international students' changes in personality due to increased acceptance of cultural differences and appreciation of the host culture (Grove & Hansel, 1983; Wilson, 1986). Hoersting and Jenkins's study (2011) shows that becoming bicultural is a possible result of experiencing two different cultures. This may occur when "individuals reap the psychological benefits of having g better interpersonal adjustment and socio-cultural adaptation" (p. 18), and may also stem in large from a positive student-host relationship (Rohmann et al., 2014). Thus, the extant literature suggests that adolescent students may undergo profound personal growth and development during and after the international sojourn experience (Lyttle et al., 2011; Szkudlarek, 2010).

School experiences. Different ways of instruction and schoolwork performed abroad compared to a student's home country may affect a student's educational experience. Thus, to be successful, international students have to adapt both culturally and academically (Ward et al., 2001). For example, Fontana (2015) conducted a qualitative case study focusing on the experiences of seven high school students from China enrolled at a Catholic high school in the US. Fontana concluded that these students faced several challenges, including homesickness, classroom, and social interactions.

The existing literature show that there are tremendous discrepancies between international students' expectations and those of their American teachers that "can be most pronounced in connection with classroom participation and student-teacher relationships" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 157). Firstly, teachers may struggle to understand students' accents or pronunciation, and secondly, teachers may not be properly trained, if at all, to understand

students' cultural backgrounds (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Ward and colleagues (2001) argue that "student and teacher expectations, the patterns of classroom interaction, and even perceptions and definitions of intelligence, vary across cultures" (p. 166). A study conducted among Asian students in the US in 1994 indicates that international students often struggle with the informality of American classrooms, including a lack of teacher authority and respect for the teacher. On the other hand, students acknowledge the interactive learning environment and critical thinking as positive assets of the American education system (Ward et al., 2001).

School-related stress is negatively related to the cross-cultural adaptation of an international student (Presbitero, 2016; Wan et al., 1992; Wu et al., 2015). Academic shock includes the difficulties of transitioning from one education system into another. It can be combined with a social shock that consists of communication and socializing difficulties. Moreover, students may struggle to adapt to different school practices and social relationships. Language ability and unfamiliarity with the education and grading system can contribute remarkably to low academic performance. Several studies have found that successful cross-cultural adjustment plays a vital role in academic achievement (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Nasir, 2012; Wu et al., 2015). Nasir's (2012) study among international students revealed that "students with inadequate cultural adjustment may find the academic task more difficult and they show poor academic performance" (p. 101). The sooner students overcome culture shock and come to accept the cultural differences, the more likely they have a positive experience at school (Brown, 2008; Nasir, 2012; Ward et al., 2001; Weaver, 2000).

Homestay experiences. A large gap in the literature needs to be addressed in acknowledging the role and experiences of host families. Thus far, only a handful of small qualitative studies have explored the experiences of host families while the majority of studies

look at the homestay experience from the student's perspective. Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by giving voice to volunteer host families. Homestay may be one of the most influential and rewarding components of study abroad for students and host families alike, especially when students actively participate in a host's daily life and activities (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Radomski, 2008; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004).

Radomski's qualitative study was conducted among 7 host families in the YES program that explored the experiences of hosting Muslim students (Radomski, 2008). All of these families had children, mostly teenagers. In Radomski's study (2008), host families found cross-culture sharing as one of the biggest benefits, "both learning about a new culture and teaching about US culture" (p. 32). It was not only about learning new cultures but also getting to know their own culture better through a new lens. Another important theme was debunking stereotypes that both sides held about each other's cultures.

Student-host interaction is of vital importance for a successful homestay. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) found that student-host interaction was limited due to the students' busy schedules with outside activities. One of the factors that caused limited interaction may be the age of these university-level participants who possess a higher degree of independence to spend time outside of the host home compared to the adolescent students. Additionally, Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart study (2010) reveals that active communication between students and hosts may result in increased interaction, language learning, and cultural understanding. Again, the participants in this study were university students who may prioritize their schedules and activities before spending time with the host family. Thus, a conscious effort through task-based learning had to be made to improve the quantity and the quality of the interaction (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010). As noted by Ward and colleagues (2001), a greater amount of

interaction with host nationals improves intercultural competence and overall facilitates a more positive adaptation to life abroad.

Several studies look at the homestay experience from the student's perspective. Rodriguez and Chornet-Roses' study (2014) examined an eight-week summer program in Luxembourg. Over one-third of the participants felt like guests in their host families, while the idea of becoming a family member fell short of the student's expectations. The length of the homestay was too short to develop deep relationships. As a result, students failed to adjust fully to the host family's lifestyle. Additionally, the study by Rohmann and colleagues (2014) showed that host families served as informational and emotional support to Swiss secondary school exchange students who studied in the US and New Zealand for 10 months. Findings suggest that positive intercultural contact not only increases the chances of a positive experience for both students and hosts, but the study also found that due to such positive relationships, students are more likely to reach out to an unknown member of the host community. This indicates a certain degree of comfort in the host community that students develop when living with a host family.

Reay (in Ball, 2003) draws a connection between students' emotional well-being and educational success. The support and encouragement of a host family throughout the exchange may have an impact on the student's overall success in the host school and community. Castaneda and Zirger's study (2011) among Honduran host families demonstrates that "social capital in the family, the community, and the service school were of considerable value in contributing to student success" (p. 560). Students in this study (2011) stressed that by establishing trust, comfort, and a sense of belonging, they became more actively involved in the host family's life. As a result, they benefitted from improved language skills and cultural competence, capitalizing on the host family to gain access to already established social networks.

Coleman (in Ball, 2003) argues that "the success of children in school and society rests upon the parent's ability to build social capital within the family" (p. 108). Although the host family is not expected to take on the role of the student's natural family, it still carries a load of responsibilities to provide for a safe, stable, and supportive home environment.

In addition, a positive student-host relationship increases the chance for a student to connect with people in and outside of the host family's social network (Rohmann et al., 2014; Ward et al., 2001) as interacting through extra-familial and intra-familial social networks provides a great deal of social capital (Castaneda & Zirger, 2011; Portes, 1998). Rohmann and colleagues (2014) note that when a student-host relationship has a good quality, students are keener on getting acquainted with people from an unknown cultural group. The newly made contacts may not only enrich students' experiences abroad but might also offer access to new opportunities, information, knowledge, and valued resources for the future workforce (Ball, 2003; Prazeres et al., 2017; Waters, 2006). The newly extended host network could provide them with advice and support at the time of exchange as well as in the future. Through "the activation of social capital and participation in adult social networks" (Ball, 2003, p. 84), such as within the host family and host community, exchange students get exposure to adult life, relationships, and responsibilities.

The Impacts of International Student Mobility

Cultural identity. Cultural identity is a social construct that can be altered by a living abroad experience that may affect an individual's cultural worldview, sense of belonging, and even one's own cultural identity. This person may develop a new lens of looking at a host- as well as at home culture (Kartoshkina, 2015). Subsequently, the extent of social norms and value distinction between a host and home country can play a vital role in shaping an international

student's identity. Several studies acknowledge positive changes to higher acceptance of cultural differences and appreciation of the host culture (e.g., Grove & Hansel, 1983; Wilson, 1993).

On the other side, a short-term exchange can enhance understanding of home culture. The majority of alumni in existing studies reported gaining more pride, appreciation, and critical understanding of their home cultures. For example, all Ecuadorians (Wilson, 1993) and 99% of New Zealanders (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006) said that they felt more appreciative of the home culture. However, Wilson's cross-national study (1993) suggests that one does not need to be a part of only one culture. To develop an intercultural identity, returnees may come to realize that the two cultures can coexist with each other and can even "flourish in each cultural setting" (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011, p. 18). Intercultural identity, "a third culture inclusive perspective which transcends home and hosts cultures" (Kim, 1988, p. 145), is best attained through an affirmative or intercultural/global identity shift that makes the reentry process smoother (Chang, 2010; Szkudlarek, 2010). Intercultural identity shift is a positive outcome of reentry as it occurs when "individuals reap the psychological benefits of having a better interpersonal adjustment and socio-cultural adaptation" (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011, p. 18).

It is common for adolescents to find norms and values stemming from the host country in conflict with their home culture (Seiter & Waddell, 1989). As mentioned in Szkudlarek (2010), some studies find returnees' reluctance to give up the newly attained cultural identity. Many of them no longer fit in the mainstream of their own culture. For instance, half of the Norwegian students in Wilson's study (1993) faced an identity crisis of not belonging at home anymore. 80% of them wished to return to the US. Similarly, 84% of New Zealanders felt that part of them belongs home and part of them to the US (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006). Cultural identity confusion and the inability to merge the two cultures can cause lots of worry for returnees.

Moore and Barker's study (2012) shows that those who spend three years living abroad during childhood (six to eighteen years old) never lose their national cultural identity. They may, though, adopt a new identity or even switch between the two, all while being aware of doing so (Moore & Barker, 2012). Sussman (2002) suggests that the identity shift results from social adaptation, including social norms and values acquired in the host country.

Cultural distance between the two cultures has seldom been studied, yet this factor may significantly impact the sojourner's cultural identity shift. According to some studies, returning home to a tight culture with a socially imposed code of conduct can be more challenging than entering a loose culture where few rules and restraints apply (Szkudlarek, 2010; Ward et al., 2005). Sussman (2000) argues that home cultural identity may no longer match as "the sojourner is now a member of a new outgroup within the home country" (p. 365).

A notable cultural distance occurred in assessing the appreciation of home culture in Wilson's study (1993). Students from predominantly individualist cultures compared to collective cultures such as Ecuador reported substantially less appreciation. This is in line with Sussman's (2010) prediction that individualism or collectivism may influence one's attachment to home culture. Since most existing studies focus on Western, largely individualist culture, further empirical research among students from collectivist cultures would be essential to draw definite conclusions on the role of cultural distance. Exchange students sponsored by the DOS come from economically less developed countries. By immersing themselves in a foreign society at an adolescent age, as opposed to university students, secondary school students may be more prone to acquire the social capital and social skills of the dominant class in economically advanced societies (Xiang & Shen, 2009).

Commonly, students from less developed countries who study in developed countries acquire a distinct level of symbolic capital upon return home (Sin, 2013). Yet it is important to note that excess of social and cultural capital may not always be perceived as a good thing or as a competitive edge in a local context upon return home. Sin's study (2013) among Malaysian students in the U.K. stresses the importance of appropriation and moderation of the newly accumulated foreign capital. Although being different and unique may initially work to one's advantage, the excessive difference may clash with the local culture and could, hence, backfire. This study suggests that students need to find the right balance between foreign and local cultures to reap the benefits of studying abroad (Sin, 2013).

Worldview changes. The literature that explores the positive impacts of international sojourn highlights that the experience of living abroad may substantially influence a sojourner's global understanding, intercultural communication skills, cognitive differentiation, intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and perception (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Lyttle et al., 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012). One of the main goals of the US government-sponsored exchange programs is to promote mutual understanding between Americans and international students by learning about American culture, democratic institutions, and civic rights while in the US (ECA, 2009). According to the ECA's study (2009) among YES alumni, 94% of returnees embraced a positive image of American society. Nine out of ten reported that by sharing stories from their exchange year their family and friends got to understand Americans and the US better (ECA, 2009). Similarly, Bachner and Zeutschel's study (2009) found that most German returnees recognized the necessity of bridging gaps between the US and their home country. As stated by one YES alumnus: "I realized that my country is only one small part that builds the world; however, my country has to participate to create a better

world" (ECA, 2009).

Very few yet important studies (Hansel, 2008a; Hansel, 2008b; Thomas, 2005; Weichbrodt, 2014) conducted among alumni 10–20 years following the exchange confirm the lasting positive impact that the study abroad experience has had on the alumni's intercultural skills and cultural identity. Alumni stated that because of the exchange they feel more comfortable encountering different cultures. Weichbrodt's study (2014) revealed that 80% of German alumni agreed that their worldview has changed. With increased open-mindedness, they often care to debunk common stereotypes about the host country. Studies that explore the impact of intercultural contact suggest that positive contact with host nationals is likely to reduce prejudice (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Rohmann et al., 2014). Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analytic test of intergroup contact shows that 94% of the samples account for an opposite relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice. In other words, findings show that after being exposed to intergroup contacts people develop positive attitudes not only toward those directly involved in the contact but also toward the entire outgroup.

Further, Uehara's study (1986) showed that 84% of returnees described a long-lasting change in their perceptions of global issues. Yet global awareness must not apply to global issues far away from one's doorstep, but certainly pertains to domestic matters as well, such as immigrant and refugee issues. For example, Wilson's study (1993) proves that most returnees become more empathetic about the immigrant situation at home thanks to the exchange experience. Students reported becoming more open-minded and comfortable among different races. Also, many students developed a strong sense for the betterment of society (ECA, 2009; Wilson, 1993). According to a YES program alumnus, "We should have more community services in our country and give students more opportunities" (ECA, 2009, p. 31). The exchange

experience in the US made students not only more aware of their home culture but also made them think of ways to apply new intercultural skills to benefit society at home. 64% of alumni believe they can make a positive difference at home and in the world (ECA, 2009). However, some studies suggest that students during exchange develop a rather critical view of their own home culture, questioning norms and values they took for granted back home (Kartoshkina, 2015).

Future international mobility. Although J-1 exchange students do not come to the US to earn a high school diploma or to enter US higher educational institutions, it is important to understand how a year of exchange can pave the way for future international mobility. On one side, students may return home with an enhanced feeling of pride for their home culture, and decide to pursue higher education and career at home, while on the other side, others may wish to return abroad in search of better education or career prospects (Farrugia, 2014).

Research among alumni shows that an exchange year abroad often serves as a stepping-stone for future international endeavors, either in terms of future studies or working abroad. In Wilson's study (1993), the majority of Swedes and Norwegians expressed a wish for future travels and study abroad. Weichbrodt's study (2014) among German secondary school exchange students found that 80% out of 3,000 exchange students returned abroad for at least six weeks, showing that returnees are likely to seek future opportunities to either study or work abroad. Although it is difficult to confirm a causal relationship between secondary school exchange and future international mobility, nearly half of the participants mentioned high school exchange as one of the main reasons to return abroad. Similarly, the AFS's long-term impact study revealed returnees' tendencies for multicultural pursuits in a personal and professional setting (Hansel, 2008a; Hansel, 2008b). Such a high impact on multicultural pursuits and international mobility

can be partially attributed to the relatively high socioeconomic status and vast opportunities of European students who took part in these studies, as well as the impact of globalization in today's interconnected world. More longitudinal studies would need to be conducted, especially among students from the less privileged socioeconomic background, to confirm this mobility trend.

The increase in popularity of international education has expanded the opportunities for the accumulation of valuable social and cultural capital (Waters, 2006). Thus, international student mobility is likely to perpetuate existing social inequalities. Mobility capital, as proposed by Waters and Brooks (2010), enhances one's skills due to international pursuits. Carlson's study (2013) among German university students who studied abroad shows that previous mobility proves advantageous in students' desire to engage in future international experiences. However, Carlson warns: "Such a disposition alone is not sufficient to explain why educational mobility occurs" (p. 178). As a result of numerous factors, such as prior mobility and access to information, an individual may increase social and structural embeddedness that results in a greater chance of future mobility (Carlson, 2013). Mobility capital that is accumulated during the exchange can extend as a form of symbolic capital and a mark of distinction (Prazeres et al., 2017) in terms of an individual's uniqueness, difference, or distinction in social and institutional settings (Bourdieu, 1986). It is particularly common for students from low-income countries to acquire a distinct level of symbolic capital. Prazeres et al. (2017) note that educational desires for symbolic capital and mobility are "emergent and fluid in relation to previous experiences, future aspirations, and social relationships" (p. 115).

Compared to their immobile peers, students who return from study abroad may hold a more cosmopolitan view of the world (Waters & Brooks, 2010; Waters & Leung, 2013; Prazeres

et al., 2017). Moreover, new geographies of cultural capital, social reproduction, and exclusion in local and global contexts may emerge (Waters, 2006). Prazeres and colleagues (2017) note that symbolic capital is "generated from the internationally diverse constitution of the social network" (p. 119). Social capital may be further reproduced when students maintain the newly formed yet globally dispersed contacts. The ongoing social exchanges may contribute to the long-term value in terms of convertibility to economic capital that may help students in the job market (Ball, 2003; Beck, 2007; Weenink, 2014).

Kim (2011) uses the term "global cultural capital" to describe "the constant global or transnational transformations of cultural capital" (p. 111). Global cultural capital describes degree, knowledge, cosmopolitan attitude, and lifestyle as exclusive resources (Kim, 2011) that enhance an individual's symbolic capital. This type of capital can circulate globally and is thus a relevant concept to portray the relationship between exchange students and host families. In today's globalized world, the study abroad experience may have students acquire embodied transnational cultural capital that is likely to become valuable in the competitive global market of educational and work opportunities (Prazeres et al., 2017; Weenink, 2014). Not only can transnational capital be acquired through international mobility, but it can also be accumulated through exposure to international news or interaction with foreigners (Weenink, 2014). Upon reentry, students may transmit the newly acquired capital to others by forming weak or strong ties. The exchange experiences of classmates in the same home school (weak tie) or family members' experience (strong tie) may encourage exchange students' decision to apply for exchange. Global capital can also form formal (e. g. schools that actively promote exchange programs) or informal ties (e. g. friends who have done exchange) (Prazeres et al., 2017; Weenink, 2014).

In sum, the review of the empirical literature on international education and study abroad revealed several gaps. First, the vast body of literature focuses on the experiences of international students in postsecondary education who come from Western countries. To date, very few studies, mainly program evaluations, have been conducted among the FLEX and YES populations, and none of them in Hawaiʻi. Second, little is known about host families who provide homestay voluntarily. Understanding their motives, experiences, and perspectives is imperative to get a more nuanced picture of the reciprocal exchange, and the ways the exchange contributes to the host community. Third, to my knowledge, there have been no studies conducted on the experiences of local coordinators who play a key role on the grassroots level. The coordinators also are responsible for host family recruitment, which is an overlooked area in the present literature. Finally, the empirical literature on exchange programs have not employed theoretical lenses that engage the macro dynamics surrounding these programs. This dissertation aims to the gaps identified in the reviewed literature.

Chapter 4: History and Context

Historically, the exchange has had two main goals. First, the exchange has been used as a tool of foreign policy to extend the influence of the state. States and societies have often viewed exchange as a means to spread their influence abroad. A second objective of exchange has been to spread the values of the dominant culture, such as democracy. A part of this goal is related to leadership development for the national self-interest with the assumption that "overseas students, who would rise to positions of responsibility in industry or government on returning home, would develop and retain positive attitudes towards the host country which had provided them with an education" (Ward et al., 2005, p. 144). At a micro-level, building cross-cultural understanding has been an enduring objective of international student exchange organizations (Bachner, 1991; Stephenson, 2007) with "outcomes designed to benefit the individual participant and their reference groups rather than contributions to an accumulating, collective body of knowledge" (Bachner, 1991, p. 139).

This chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first section, I provide an overview of the historic development of international educational exchange programs in the US from the 19th Century until the present time. In the second part, I introduce the FLEX and YES exchange programs, including the selection process and requirements both for the exchange students and the host families. I conclude this chapter by discussing the multicultural and settler colonial context of Hawai‘i.

Historical Overview of International Educational Exchanges

In the 19th century, the idea of international educational exchanges in the US started with the missionaries, who spread Protestant values in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Besides building schools, training local people, and bringing progress, the missionaries sent selected

indigenous youth to the US to learn about Christian values and democratic ideas, which they were then expected to share when they returned home (Bu, 2003; Thomson, 1963).

The concept of international educational exchange as we know it today was developed in the 20th century. In the aftermath of the First World War, which brought massive destruction and mistrust on one hand, and a desire for peace on the other, exchanges became increasingly institutionalized with agencies developing programs to promote ideals of mutual understanding and peace among nations. The Institute of International Education (IIE), established in 1919, was one of the first agencies that advocated for international educational and cultural exchange (Kourova & Mikhanova, 2015). In the 1930s, the US included exchange as part of its foreign policy for the first time by signing the Convention for the Promotion of Inter-American Cultural Relations with Latin American countries in 1936 with the intent to promote a greater understanding among the American nations (de Lima, 2007). The goals of these early 20th-century exchanges were to counter the spread of Nazi cultural propaganda, strengthen academic and cultural relationships, deepen ties among nations, and improve the American image abroad (de Lima, 2007; Mulcahy, 1999).

The second half of the 20th century saw a rapid rise of international educational exchanges around the world, particularly after the Second World War, when the US and other world powers devoted resources to prevent a similar tragedy in the future. With the creation of the Fulbright Program in 1946, American policymakers recognized hosting exchange students in the US as a national importance (de Lima, 2007). As Senator James William Fulbright, the founder of the Fulbright program remarked in 1976:

> International educational exchange is the most significant project designed to continue the process of humanizing mankind to the point, we would hope, that men can learn to

> live in peace--eventually even to cooperate in constructive activities rather than compete in a mindless contest of mutual destruction. We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy, and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], n.d.).

Since its inception, the Fulbright program has built a large network of academic professionals around the world. The Franco-German high school exchanges were another post-war program that arguably contributed to the normalization of relations between these two countries (Cull, 2008).

In 1948, the Smith-Mundt Act enabled the US government to promote educational and cultural exchanges between Americans and foreigners (ECA, 2019). Then, in 1961 the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act) called for increased mutual understanding and peaceful relations between Americans and people of other countries through government-funded exchanges. In the same year, the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs (ECA, 2019), housed in the DOS, introduced the J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa Program that began a new era of government-funded people-to-people exchanges. The stated mission of this program is "[t]o increase mutual understanding between the people of the US and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations" (ECA, 2019). To date, over a million people have participated in the programs administered by ECA.

Nowadays, international student exchange programs seem to have become an established tradition in the US. Besides foreign language acquisition, exchange programs have started to highlight the importance of intercultural competence, global awareness, academic discipline, and professional skills. Reflecting this inclusiveness, the terminology has changed from "foreign

student" to "international student" and from "foreign study" to "international programs" (Walton, 2010). Walton calls this process cultural internationalism: "Study abroad increasingly became a process of dismantling stereotypes, accepting and appreciating national differences, reassessing one's national identity, and constructing a more cosmopolitan self" (p. 3).

Who are FLEX and YES students?

Youth exchange programs aim to foster international relations through positive academic and social experiences in the US (ECA, 2007). Different from adolescent international students who leave their homes to study abroad without their parents, and who are called "unaccompanied minors", "unaccompanied sojourners" or "parachute kids" (Popadiuk, 2009), students in the FLEX and YES programs stay in a safely provided living arrangement and are looked after throughout the year by a local coordinator (ACIE, 2019a; ACIE, 2019b). Being an exchange student means moving from one's home culture to an unfamiliar host culture. Since FLEX and YES students return home after a year of exchange, participants in this study may be considered adolescent sojourners or put simply, exchange students. In contrast to students whose main goal is to earn an American high school diploma, exchange students primarily come to the US for cultural exchange (Farrugia, 2014). Farrugia (2014) maintains that understanding the different demographics of international students "is necessary to strengthen all forms of secondary student mobility and to preserve the specific mission of exchange programs" (p. 6).

The FLEX program for secondary school exchange was established in 1992 from former Senator Bill Bradley's conviction for the US to promote people-to-people diplomacy with former Soviet Union countries, enabling youth from these countries to learn first-hand about the US.

FLEX has since expanded to include a total of 21 countries (ACIE, 2019a).[3] As of January 2021, over 29,000 students have participated in the FLEX program (Discover FLEX, n.d.). Annually, over 30,000 students apply for the FLEX program, and around 800 scholarships are awarded (Discover FLEX, 2020).

The YES program was initiated in 2002 by the DOS in response to the 9/11 event. YES aims to maintain good diplomatic ties with predominantly Muslim countries, and it currently includes 38 participating countries (ACIE, 2019b).[4] As of January 2021, the YES program has over 13,000 YES alumni (YES Programs, n.d.). It is important to note that most but not all YES students are Muslim. Students who wish to become finalists of these programs undergo a rigorous selection process to be among the nearly 2,000 scholarship recipients each year (ECA, 2018). According to the program application rules, the selection is based on “merit as evidenced in a comprehensive application, teacher reference, and demonstrated preparedness for a year-long exchange experience” (ACIE, 2019a).

The DOS lists five main goals of the YES program:

(1) Promote better understanding by youth from selected countries about American society, people, institutions, values, and culture;

(2) Foster lasting personal ties;

(3) Enhance Americans’ understanding of foreign students’ countries and cultures;

[3] The FLEX program includes the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

[4] The YES program includes the following countries: Albania, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Egypt, Gaza, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Israel (Arab Communities), Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, West Bank and Yemen.

(4) Promote awareness of and involvement in civic and democratic processes among participants and their peers;

(5) Increase the capacity of organizations in participating countries to engage youth in activities that advance mutual understanding and civil society through alumni activities (DOS, 2005).

Students who are the recipients of the FLEX or YES scholarships are regarded as future leaders of their home countries. These prestigious, merit-based scholarships are believed to "empower the next generation of leaders and establish long-lasting ties between the US and other countries and allow students from diverse backgrounds and countries to come to the US, experience American culture, and share their own" (Council on International Educational Exchange [CIEE], 2019). Interested students must undergo a rigorous testing process to be among nearly 2,000 scholarship recipients each year (ECA, 2018). Following the DOS efforts to promote equality, FLEX and YES applications are now open to students with disabilities. The goal for these students is to learn about the accessibility and rights of people with disabilities in the US. With this experience, they may advocate for disability rights back home (Mobility International USA [MIUSA], 2018). Generally speaking, the application is open at no cost to students who meet the following criteria:

(1) Be enrolled in the first or second grade of secondary school;

(2) Have an academic standing of good or better;

(3) Demonstrate good English language ability at the time of application;

(4) Have not graduated from secondary school before the exchange program start date;

(5) Meet the US J-1 visa eligibility requirements;

(6) Be a citizen of participating countries; and

(7) Is able to receive an international passport in the country where they apply to the program.

Students who had previously traveled to the US for three or more months in the past five years, have a member(s) of their family in the US, or are in the process of emigrating to the US are automatically ineligible to apply. Furthermore, students who may need to take final exams in their home countries or join the military may be excluded (ACIE, 2019a; ACIE, 2019b).

Carlson (2013) stresses that the timing of applying is very important. Often, the initial process of planning to study abroad commences years before the actual exchange would take place. This is especially relevant to the FLEX and YES application process which requires students' attentiveness nearly a year ahead of the program start date (ACIE, 2019a; ACIE, 2019b). Some countries that participate in FLEX and YES programs offer only one or two testing locations, such as the capital and the second-largest city in the country. Testing and interview schedule are published on the program website in every participating country in September, nearly a year before the exchange (ACIE, 2019a; ACIE, 2019b). Normally there are only one or two dates for testing which might benefit students who reside within participating cities, yet may make it challenging for those who live further away and may need to make compromises, or rely on parents' help to participate in the application process. According to the testing instructions on the ACIE's website (2015):

> All applicants will take a short English test (round 1). Those who pass the first test will write a composition in English (round 2, which usually occurs on the day after round 1). There is no pre-registration for the testing, the registration and first test happen on the date and at a location listed for a certain city. Candidates must complete the first two rounds of the competition before they receive final application materials, take a longer

English language proficiency test, and are interviewed.

Thus, it is important to note that although the application process by way of instruction seems fair, free, and open to everyone who meets the basic requirements, “to acquire cultural capital, the student must have the capacity to receive and decode it” (Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990, p. 270). Likewise, Waters (2006) argues that the decision to participate in international educational exchange must be studied in terms of students’ perceptions, knowledge, and ability to navigate information related to the opportunity to study abroad.

Weenink (2014) links adolescent students’ courage to study abroad to the relatively high economic class and secure home that “allows them to see opportunities far away that other youth do not want to see or do not even know about what is there to be seen” (p. 124). Most FLEX and YES participants come from middle-class families. As noted on the ACIE (2014) website: “Some students may come from more modest families or wealthier families. Some students may bring a credit card or their laptop, though most students will probably bring only some extra cash from home”. Since participating countries are economically less developed compared to the US, it is crucial not to compare FLEX and YES students who come from middle-class families to middle-class families in the US or other high-income countries.

Although it is commonly argued in the literature that international students come from a privileged class, a study conducted among U.K. university students by Waters and Brooks (2010) demonstrates that students may hold privilege in several ways, including parental support, involvement and expectations about high academic achievement and the amount cultural capital invested by the family. Other studies suggest that parents’ educational and cultural backgrounds generate significant cultural resources that international students likely possess even before they decide to study abroad (Cheng et al., 2017; Green et al., 2014). With regards to the FLEX and

YES application process and students' adolescent age, the influence of the family's social and cultural capital may prove substantial.

Often, international education is perceived as a commodity subject to market forces, particularly when an international student's family covers high tuition fees and living expenses to participate in a short-term exchange program (Armstrong & Harbon, 2010), in the case of FLEX and YES programs, students are exempt from paying tuition fees. The scholarship which is funded by the US government and administered by the ECA covers students' round-trip flight to and from the US, placement with a screened, volunteer American host family, enrollment in a host community's high school, medical insurance, and finally, a modest monthly allowance to cover student's expenses (ACIE, 2019a; ACIE, 2019b). At the time of my research, students received 125 USD per month. Therefore, the FLEX and YES programs are more equitable because there is a minimal financial burden placed on the participant's family compared to private self-funded exchange programs (Cheng, 2019; Tran, 2016).

These scholarship programs are unique in the way that they seek to enrich the exchange student's experience. Once in the US, exchange students are required "to maintain a high level of academic performance, learn about American history and society, and participate in community service" (ECA, 2018). Students are placed in a host family's district school, where they "enrich the classroom experience for their US peers and the wider community as well" (IIE, 2017, p. 11). The local coordinator is responsible to organize enrichment events throughout the year, such as orientation, mid-year, and re-entry activities. In addition, students take part in International Education Week where they make presentations about their home countries. All of these activities aim to educate students about diversity, democracy, leadership, entrepreneurship, and volunteerism in the US. Each year few selected students may have an opportunity to travel to

Washington, D.C. to meet with American government leaders (CIEE, 2019).

The FLEX and YES students in this study are placed in their host communities by the American Councils for International Education (ACIE), one of the 15 implementing organizations. The ACIE receives the DOS agreement to host a portion of these students in communities where they have local coordinators (Discover FLEX, 2020).

Who are Volunteer Host Families?

Numerous exchange students' testimonials on the FLEX website testify that "host family is the most important part of this life-changing experience" (Discover FLEX, 2020). As per the DOS Exchange Visitor Program document (§ Sec. 62.25), host families in the FLEX and YES programs shall receive no monetary payment for hosting (USCIS, 2018). Families interested in hosting must invest a considerable amount of time and energy in the application process. Although all types of families are welcome to apply, families need to meet the basic requirements set by the DOS. The main role of a host family is to provide the student with a safe and comfortable home, three meals a day, and a bed of its own (not convertible or inflatable), but sharing a room with a sibling of the same gender is acceptable), and transportation to and from school activities (ECA, 2018; USCIS, 2018). What is more, student needs to have a desk/table available to study. A host family is expected to treat an exchange student as a member of the family and to include the student in the family's daily life and activities. Also, the primary language spoken in the home must be English (ACIE, 2019c).

Families that may qualify for hosting do not need to be a two-parent family with children (nuclear family). For example, a host family can be a single parent, a single adult, a retired person, a young family with children or without children, or "empty nesters" (Discover FLEX, 2020). Host families can reside in a major city or rural community. Each host family is different

and can offer an authentic American experience to these exchange students (ACIE, 2019c). Prospective host families need to complete a lengthy application form that requires references, photos of their home, and a background screening for anyone 18 or older in the home. The criminal background check is a vital part of the screening process required by the DOS that host family members must undergo before being matched with a student. A local coordinator visits the home for an in-home interview (ACIE, 2019c).

Depending on the implementing organization, families can sign up to host for several weeks, one semester, or an academic year (ACIE, 2019c; CIEE, 2019). Although most families decide to host one student, families can also host two students at a time. In case of double placements, students must speak different native languages and only English can be spoken in a host family's home. In addition, double placement must be approved by exchange students' parents (ACIE, 2019c).

Hosting an exchange student means much more than merely providing room and board. By welcoming an exchange student into your home, host families have an opportunity to establish an intimate relationship, and to teach the student about their family and their everyday lives, about the host community, and importantly, about the American culture and values. As noted on the CIEE website, host families may wear many hats: "You are part parent, part cultural ambassador, part mentor" (CIEE, 2019). In return, host families are expected to benefit from learning about their student's culture and home country, including cultural traditions, food, music, and language (ACIE, 2019c). Homestay can initiate important people-to-people exchanges that promote goodwill and mutual understanding across different countries and cultures and form long-lasting bonds (Discover FLEX, 2020).

Implementing organizations must orient each host family before the student arrives in their home to prepare the family for a positive start. An exchange student is expected to abide by the host family's house rules. Shared responsibilities among members of the host family may help build trust between students and host family members. Per program guidelines, students must respect their family's curfew, and are encouraged to help with chores that would make them feel like part of a family rather than a guest. If any issues arise between the host family and student in a homestay, the local coordinator serves as a mediator to counsel both sides. When a host family finds the homestay experience challenging, if issues arise, or if there is an unexpected change in the host family's life, the local coordinator's role is to counsel and arrange for another homestay placement for a student immediately (ACIE, 2019c).

Context of Hawai'i

Farrugia (2017) notes that international secondary school students can now be found in all 50 US states plus the District of Columbia. It is important to note that J-1 and F-1 enrollment patterns vary significantly across the country. The vast majority of F-1 students study in California and Northeast states such as New York and Massachusetts while large numbers of J-1 exchange students attend high schools in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Texas. While an overwhelming majority of F-1 students enroll in private high schools (Farrugia, 2017), the FLEX and YES students must enroll in public high schools in a host family's district. To my knowledge, each year there are only 10–15 exchange students in the FLEX and YES programs placed in the state of Hawai'i.

The state of Hawai'i consists of eight major islands: Oahu, Big Island, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai, Niihau, and Kahoolawe. Exchange students are largely placed each year on the most populated island, Oahu, however, their placements vary from big cities to rural areas. Very

few students are placed on the island of Big Island, the island of Kauai, the island of Maui, and the island of Molokai. The experiences of exchange students and their host families may vary depending on the location of a homestay (e.g., urban versus rural placement). For this study, it is crucial to consider Hawaiʻi's geographic location in the Asia-Pacific which affects its ethnic diversity and makes up for Hawaiʻi's unique cultural setting. Although Hawaiʻi accounts for only 0.5% of secondary school exchange students (IIE, 2017), it is one of the culturally richest and most diverse states in the US. As per the US Census data the population of Hawaiʻi in 2019 was 1,415,872 (US Census Bureau, 2019). The racial composition in Hawaiʻi is divided as follows: 47.4% White, 37.6% Asian, 24% two or more races, 10.7% Hispanic or Latino, 10.2% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 2.2% Black or African American, 1.08% other race, and 0.4% Native American and Alaska Native. Mirroring the data, it is expected that the host nationals with whom the youth will interact will be of various races and ethnic backgrounds.

It also is essential to acknowledge the settler colonial history of Hawaiʻi that has up to this day impacted the cultural identity of the islands. Since the Western discovery in 1778 by James Cook, the Native Hawaiian people, culture, and land have been subjected to Western colonization. The colonizers imposed private property and a capitalist economy, which came with several immigration waves, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Portuguese plantation workers. The power dynamics shifted in 1898 when the US annexed Hawaiʻi. In 1900, Hawaiʻi was incorporated into the US territory, and in 1959, Hawaiʻi became the 50th state of the US. The American education system played a big role in the "civilizing" mission of the native population, instilling the norms and values of Europeans and Anglo-Americans (Benham & Heck, 1998; Charlot, 2005; Miller-Davenport, 2019). The consequences of this colonizing history in Hawaiʻi are still evident today in the inferior role of the Native Hawaiian language at

all levels of society, and the composition of the population that reflects the intersection of Polynesian, Asian, and North American cultures (Charlot, 2005; Miller-Davenport, 2019).

In light of the above, it may be expected that the cross-cultural experiences of exchange students placed in the state of Hawai‘i differ from students who are placed on the mainland US, and even between the islands and host family placements. Being exposed to a relatively large ethnic diversity, students may not only learn about the American culture but also about Native Hawaiian, Polynesian, and Asian cultures that coexist in Hawai‘i. Thus, this study’s findings may apply to international students being placed in multicultural locations around the world.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This study sheds light on the experiences of international secondary school exchange students placed in Hawaiʻi as part of the two DOS scholarship programs, FLEX and YES, American volunteer host families, and local coordinators. The focus on the homestay component stems from the recognition that intercultural exchange occurs as a two-way process between exchange students and their matched host families in which both parties reap the benefits of intercultural exchange. Drawing upon my theoretical perspectives, I aim to explore multiple layers of the intercultural exchange: (1) geopolitical dynamics and official government rhetoric on a national level, (2) the ways these program attempt to instill the norms and values on an organizational/programmatic level, and finally, (3) the experiences of exchange participants on an individual level. To this end, my dissertation intends to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program?
2. How do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives?
3. How do participants experience intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences?

It is important to note that my research questions operate on two levels which are both empirical and theoretical in nature. On one hand, my questions are empirical, with an expectation that they can be answered by my study participants' experiences with the program. On the other hand, my questions have theoretical implications. For this, I aid my data analysis with the inclusion of local coordinators' perspectives and program documents, which will help me make

sense of the ways these programs operate in a broader context (i.e., vis-à-vis cosmopolitanism, biopolitics, geopolitics, and soft power).

In the first section of this chapter, I explain my positionality. I then discuss the choice of my research design, a case study, and my research methods. In the final section, I provide my strategy for the data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and credibility of my study.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher in a qualitative study, I am aware that my background shapes the way I view the world. Besides being involved in the context of the research, I have my personality and experiences. To recognize and address any biases, I need to reflect on my role and the assumptions I bring from my past experiences. I have always held a desire to experience living abroad. Studying abroad was largely encouraged by my International relations undergraduate program in Slovenia. In 2008 I got an opportunity to come to Hawaiʻi as an exchange student. This move changed my life in several ways. First of all, I came to realize that living abroad is not all milk and honey, but rather a bumpy road that comes with many shortcomings. I was not prepared to experience culture shock after the first few months of the honeymoon stage. I had suffered from homesickness, in particular during the holiday season. I have never imagined it would take so much time and effort to form new and lasting relationships. I felt like there was no proper cross-cultural training provided to international students to adjust smoothly to a different education system and way of living in the US. I hold that cross-cultural adjustment can take lots of time and personal effort for a young adult.

My interest in intercultural exchange grows out of my own experience, and from working at the local coordinator’s office in Hawaiʻi. I worked with international secondary school exchange students, including participants of the FLEX and YES programs from 2014–2015. I

worked closely with the local coordinator in providing cross-cultural orientation and counseling to FLEX and YES students as well as to volunteer host families. I saw the exchange students go through the difficulties of cross-cultural adjustment, yet more importantly, I observed their growth during the year. I have witnessed the issues and challenges that students and host families face during the exchange. Being familiar with the application process for exchange students and host families gives me a solid understanding of the expectations and requirements on both the programmatic and participants' sides. One of the things that struck me most was the high amount of responsibility and care that host families assume and invest in hosting an exchange student. The homestay experience expands well beyond merely providing food and board. I witnessed how many student-host relationships resemble the ones of a natural family. I could sense the love these families develop for their students just as if they took care of their children. My personal experience working closely with exchange students and less with host families made me want to hear host families' personal stories of hosting.

Since the beginning of my Ph.D. program in the Fall of 2017, I have actively volunteered with the local coordinator's organization, particularly at three annual events: student orientation in August, the mid-year program in January, and the re-entry program in May. Besides, I held an internship in the local coordinator's office in the summer of 2019. I think my ongoing involvement with the exchange programs is beneficial to my research in the following ways: first, I get to make personal contact with my research participants which makes them more comfortable to share their experiences with me; second, I build trust and rapport with my participants throughout the year; and finally, I bring my knowledge of the program up-to-date.

Due to my personal experience as an exchange student as well as my professional experience working with the FLEX and YES exchange programs in the local coordinator's

office, I consider myself an insider in this study. As such, it may be challenging not to approach research with an assumption that students perceive the exchange similarly to my own experiences. Given the adolescent age of the students in my study, and the fact that they come from countries different from my own should reduce the possibility of a biased perspective. Although I may share similar backgrounds with some of the participants (i.e., those from the Balkan/ex-Yugoslavia region), my main responsibility as a researcher is to make sense of data collected via interviews, participant observations, and document reviews. I need to be careful not to project my feelings and experiences onto theirs (Seidman, 2013).

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of students, host families, and local coordinators of the two government-sponsored exchange programs, FLEX and YES. The study is informed by the data collected and analyzed through qualitative inquiry methods such as interviews, observations, and document review. Merriam (2009) states that qualitative inquiry studies "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 14). Qualitative research may embark on an inductive path, which not only allows the researcher to critically engage with the existing ideas but also enables a new body of knowledge to emerge (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative data are collected in the participants' settings, and the analysis is inductive with a focus on individual meaning, reflecting the complexity of a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, qualitative inquiry is used in the social sciences to study organizations, groups, and individuals to uncover and understand the nature of a phenomenon about which little is yet known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Merriam (2009) stresses that the purpose of qualitative research is to achieve an understanding of how people interpret what they experience, and how

they make sense of their lives. To weave together multiple realities into one, taking a qualitative path is in line with the objectives of my study.

Case study. I have selected a case study as a methodology guiding this study. Qualitative studies typically focus in depth on small samples, even single cases, sampled purposefully (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (1998), case studies are well suited for use in educational processes and problems by evaluating programs and policies. In line with this, this case study looks at the FLEX and YES exchange programs in the state of Hawaiʻi. A case study may often provide a description and analysis of cases within a bounded system (particular context, time, and place) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). A case study is the preferred method to answer 'how' and 'why' questions and to focus on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2014).

The case can be a single person, a group, an organization, or a community but it can also be a program or a policy. The unit of analysis characterizes the case study (Merriam, 2009) while the context can provide a boundary with multiple elements being integrated within a system holistically working together (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, Yin (2014) has a two-fold description of case studies:

> (1) "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident" (p. 16); and
>
> (2) "a case study will have many more variables of interest than merely the number of data points, with results contingent upon on data collection and analysis from multiple sources, guided by prior development of theoretical propositions" (p. 17).

Case study approaches should be used when trying to understand in-depth complex phenomena in a naturalistic setting when the researcher has little control over events. Therefore, a case study is exploratory and explanatory in nature. The purpose of the case study method is to better understand complex social phenomena while retaining the holistic and meaningful particularities of specific circumstances (Yin, 2014).

In my case study, the unit of analysis is the program. This case is bounded by the two merit-based exchange programs, FLEX and YES, and the relationships between the FLEX and YES exchange students and volunteer host families. The collective context of the FLEX and YES programs makes it logical to choose a single case instead of separating the two programs as single cases. Both programs are sponsored by the DOS and are structured and administered in the same way, by the same placement organization and the same local coordinators in Hawaiʻi. Time-wise, this case is bounded by three academic years as it aims to gather data among three cohorts of exchange students and host families in Hawaiʻi, from Fall 2017 to Spring 2020.

Research Methods

Common instruments of qualitative inquiry such as case studies are participant observations, interviewing, questionnaires, and reviews of records and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the collected qualitative data need to be pertinent to the research, this study will use several research tools with interviews as the main source of data and will be supplemented by participant observations and document review. These various forms of data will help me gain a more comprehensive picture of the participants' experiences.

From Fall 2017 to Spring 2020, I interviewed and observed a total of three cohorts of FLEX and YES exchange participants in Hawaiʻi. I have conducted a total of 44 one-on-one interviews, including 23 exchange students (see Table 3), 19 host families (Table 4), and two

local coordinators (Table 5).[5] As shown in Table 3, the youth participants included 12 FLEX students from eight different countries and 11 YES students from 11 different countries. In terms of gender, there were 15 female and 11 male students. The youth's ages at the time of the interview ranged between 15 and 19 years old, with a mean of 16.5 years.

Table 3. Study participants: FLEX and YES exchange students.

No.	Exchange year	Exchange program	Gender	Age	Home country	Island Placement
S1	2017–2018	FLEX	F	17	Lithuania	Oahu
S2	2017–2018	FLEX	F	17	Georgia	Oahu
S3	2017–2018	FLEX	M	17	Kazakhstan	Oahu
S4	2017–2018	YES	F	17	Bangladesh	Big Island
S5	2017–2018	YES	M	16	Palestine	Big Island
S6	2017–2018	YES	F	16	Tanzania	Oahu
S7	2018–2019	FLEX	F	15	Moldova	Oahu
S8	2018–2019	FLEX	M	15	Ukraine	Oahu
S9	2018–2019	FLEX	F	15	Ukraine	Molokai
S10	2018–2019	FLEX	F	16	Kazakhstan	Oahu
S11	2018–2019	FLEX	M	17	Azerbaijan	Oahu
S12	2018–2019	FLEX	M	17	Lithuania	Oahu
S13	2018–2019	FLEX	F	18	Montenegro	Oahu
S14	2018–2019	YES	F	15	West Bank	Oahu
S15	2018–2019	YES	M	16	Cameroon	Oahu
S16	2018–2019	YES	M	17	Egypt	Big Island
S17	2019–2020	FLEX	M	17	Kyrgyzstan	Kauai
S18	2019–2020	FLEX	F	19	Azerbaijan	Big Island
S19	2019–2020	YES	F	16	Mozambique	Oahu
S20	2019–2020	YES	F	18	Albania	Big Island
S21	2019–2020	YES	F	17	Indonesia	Big Island
S22	2019–2020	YES	M	16	North Macedonia	Oahu
S23	2019–2020	YES	M	16	Kosovo	Molokai

[5] The number of host families does not match the number of exchange students because one host family hosted two years in a row, and three host families declined the interview.

After identifying the students, I contacted their host families to seek their consent to participate in the study. Except for two cases where both host parents took part in the interview, one host parent in each host family volunteered to conduct the interview. Table 4 depicts the characteristics of volunteer host families. Seven of these families were single hosts, six were nuclear families, four host families identified as multi-generational with host parents, children, and grandchildren residing in the same household or the immediate vicinity of the host, and two hosts were empty nesters. In terms of occupation, 13 hosts were working professionals, and six hosts were retired.

Table 4. Study participants: Host families.

No.	Exchange year	HF type	Occupation	Home Island
HF1	2017–2018	Single host mother	Retired	Big Island
HF2	2017–2018	Three-generational	Self-employed	Oahu
HF3	2017–2018	Three-generational	Retired	Big Island
HF4	2017–2018	Three-generational	Full-time professionals	Oahu
HF5	2017–2018	Single host mother	Retired	Oahu
HF6	2017–2018	Single host father	Retired	Oahu
HF7	2018–2019	Single host mother	Self-employed	Big Island
HF8	2018–2019	Single host father	Military	Oahu
HF9	2018–2019	Nuclear family	Homemaker/Full-time professional	Oahu
HF10	2018–2019	Empty nesters	Retired	Oahu
HF11	2018–2019	Empty nesters	Retired	Oahu
HF12	2018–2019	Three-generational	Full-time professionals	Oahu
HF13	2018–2019	Single host mother	School teacher	Molokai
HF14	2019–2020	Nuclear family	Full-time professionals	Big Island
HF15	2019–2020	Nuclear family	Full-time professionals	Big Island
HF16	2019–2020	Nuclear family	Self-employed	Kauai
HF17	2019–2020	Nuclear family	Military/School teacher	Oahu
HF18	2019–2020	Single host mother	Social worker	Molokai
HF19	2019–2020	Nuclear family	Homemaker/University professor	Big Island

As shown in Table 5, I interviewed two experienced local coordinators who agreed to participate in the study. A local coordinator on the island of Kauai did not respond to my invitation. The coordinator on the island of Oahu is the main contact person for the sponsoring organization due to her years-long experience and well-established recruitment and oversight efforts in Hawaiʻi. She has served as a FLEX and YES coordinator since the very beginning of the two programs, besides partnering with private exchange organizations all over the world for 33 years. The DOS awarded her with a public diplomacy service award for her long-term commitment to international educational exchanges. The Big Island coordinator has been involved for the past 12 years and has had extensive hosting experience. I interviewed the Oahu coordinator in person in the office of her organization, and the Big Island coordinator over the phone.

Table 5. Study participants: Local Coordinators.

No.	Exchange year	Exchange Programs Oversight	Years as a FLEX/YES Local Coordinator	Island
LC1	2017–2020	FLEX, YES, private school programs	33	Oahu[6]
LC2	2017–2020	FLEX and YES	12	Big Island

Interviews. According to Yin (2014), the researcher has two jobs in conducting interviews: (1) To follow the interview case study protocol, and (2) to ask the researcher actual (conversational) questions. Merriam (2009) argues that interview questions are geared toward the experiences, behaviors, and values of the participants, to elicit information and opinions. I utilized semi-structured interviews to get an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences. According to Patton (2002), the advantage of such an approach is that the data

[6] The Oahu local coordinator oversees neighbor island coordinators, organizes all orientations and enhancement activities for the entire Hawaiʻi cluster.

gathered are more comprehensive compared to unstructured interviews. In addition, semi-structured interviews are ideal for capturing rich information from the program participants that quantitative methods cannot. As a number of my research questions involve descriptions of experiences, qualitative methods are more appropriate.

I recorded all interviews using a digital recorder that saves digital format files. The interviews were guided by a pre-established set of questions. The interview questions were informed by my literature review and theoretical perspectives (i.e., culture learning theory, cosmopolitanism, biopolitics, soft power, and geopolitics). For the youth, my opening questions focused on the initial adjustment and cross-cultural challenges, such as, "Have you experienced culture shock?", and, "Have you encountered any challenges with your host family?" The bulk of my questions centered around intercultural interactions and experiences within a homestay. I asked questions such as, "How have you shared your culture with your host family?" In the final part of my interviews, I was curious about the effects of exchange on participants' cognition, attitudes, and behaviors. I asked questions such as, "Since you came to Hawaiʻi, how have you changed?" (see Appendix A for complete exchange student interview protocol).

For the host families, I started the interview with questions about the motives and expectations of hosting, such as "Why have you decided to serve as a volunteer host family for an international high school exchange student?" I then asked the hosts if they were familiar with the goal of the exchange program, and to describe them in their own words. The bulk of the questions focused on the homestay experiences, including culture-sharing, hosting highlights and challenges. For example, I asked, "In what ways have you shared your culture with your exchange student?" and "What have been some of the challenges of hosting an exchange student, and how did you overcome them?" I concluded the interview with questions on the value of

hosting for the family, such as “What do you think has been the most significant impact hosting an exchange student has had on your family?” (see Appendix B for complete host family interview protocol).

For the two local coordinators, I opened the interviews by asking to share about the duties and role of a local coordinator. I then asked about their understanding of the exchange program goals and the selection process, such as “To your knowledge, what is taken into account when students are selected during the application process?” and “How much choice do you have in what exchange students you get to place in your community?” The next questions centered around the coordinator’s role in overseeing the students, host family recruitment and characteristics, organization of required events, and enhancement activities. I concluded the interview with questions about the major highlights and challenges of the job, such as “What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of the local coordinator’s job?” (see Appendix C for the local coordinator interview protocol).

To encourage a detailed recount of experiences and perspectives, I probed my participants with the following questions: “Can you share more about this?”, or, “Can you give me an example?” As per Bryman’s (2015) recommendation, I made notes about each interview right away so that observations remained fresh in my mind.

Participant observation. A vital component of this study is participant observation which serves as a supplemental source of data. I conducted field observations of exchange students to gather additional contextual data and the voices of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Due to possible ethical issues, the intercultural exchange as it occurs privately within a homestay, i.e., in host families’ homes, cannot be fully observed in its natural setting. However, I

made efforts to observe interactions between students and host families at events throughout the year where both parties were in attendance.

I am aware that my researcher positionality can obfuscate the process of participant observation in which I may pay too close or too little attention to different phenomena just as my "observations [may] come to be translated into the different voices suitable for multiple audiences" (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, pp. 1308–1309). To counteract this, I observed the setting in which the participants are situated and engaged in activities so that their behaviors may be placed in the audience or the reader's objective context of meaning (Schutz, 1972). In addition, I followed a list of steps provided by Creswell and Creswell (2017) for collecting data while observing social environments. The steps include:

(1) Finding the key informants and gatekeepers for access into a fieldwork site;

(2) Recording notes in the field of both a descriptive and a reflective nature; and

(3) Recording details about individual behaviors, the physical setting, events, and activities, as well as one's reaction to these details (pp. 238–242).

I conducted observations of exchange students at different points in time to get a comprehensive understanding of how this study's participants interact with each other and with the host community. Given my contact with the Oahu local coordinator, and my ongoing volunteerism with the organization, I was able to attend three main events throughout three exchange years:

(1) Student orientation in August (Oahu);

(2) Mid-year evaluation in January (Oahu); and

(3) Re-entry workshop in May (Oahu).

All exchange students had to attend these events, no matter their placement location. I also joined, as an observer, the debriefing sessions of the following enhancement activities that all students attended:

(1) Legislative internship in January (Oahu);

(2) Religious diversity workshop in May (Oahu); and

(3) Leadership training in May (Oahu).

In addition, I volunteered as a chaperone at the following informal gatherings and events that students were encouraged to take part in, which allowed me to build trust with students and some of the host families who chose to attend these events:

(1) Children and Youth day in October (Oahu);

(2) A weekend trip in November (Big Island); and

(3) Pacific and Asian Affairs Council's (PAAC) high school conferences in November and in March (Oahu).

I had limited opportunities to observe host families as there were fewer organized events that included the hosts, and even then, not all families appeared. I attended the following events:

(1) Host family orientation in August (Oahu);

(2) Farewell party in May (Oahu);

(3) Host appreciation event in February 2021 (virtual event organized by the DOS).

Participant observation allows researchers to go beyond restraints inherent in an interview situation by becoming familiar with the events, feelings, rules, and norms in the field (O'Reilly, 2005). Observation opportunities allowed me to witness with my own eyes what the students and hosts were describing to me during the interviews. The essence of participant

observation is my involvement in the program events, and interactions with the people being studied to the extent that I come to understand the culture as an insider (Davies, 2008).

It is important to write up field notes as soon as possible, as they are more vivid and detailed the sooner they are recorded (Berg, 2004; Lofland & Lofland, 2006). Hence, I took field notes documenting my observations and kept a journal immediately after returning from the field to capture fresh thoughts on paper.

Document review. Documents can offer important insights for understanding the relationships between interview accounts and participant observations. For this reason, I reviewed documents relevant to the policies, expectations, and activities of the exchange programs published by the ACIE, the placement organization of exchange students and host families in Hawaiʻi:

(1) Exchange student handbook;

(2) Host family handbook; and

(3) Local coordinator handbook.

Additional materials reviewed included program websites and literature, such as the host family orientation handbook, provided by the local coordinator. Yin (2014) suggests for case studies “documents are useful even though they are not always accurate and may not be lacking in bias … the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 107).

Moreover, document review may help the researcher triangulate descriptions of events by using the documentation as multiple sources of information (Stake, 2000). I first categorized all the reviewed documents, and then coded and analyzed them as part of the collected data.

Timeline and Research Site

This qualitative study incorporates data collected from Fall 2017–Spring 2020, to include three cohorts of the FLEX and YES exchange students that have been placed in the state of Hawai‘i, their matched host families, and two local coordinators. All interviews were conducted in April, i.e., a month before the end of the exchange year. The timing is important since "sociocultural adaptation follows a learning curve with a steep increase over the first four to six months" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 66). With this assumption, the participants should have adjusted to their homestay, yet they would be able to recall the initial stages of the exchange and reflect on the overall experience as they approach the end of their homestay experience in Hawai‘i. As noted earlier, I conducted participant observations throughout the year at different points in time to complement the interview data.

This study took place in the state of Hawai‘i, mainly on the island of Oahu (except for a weekend trip to the Big Island). The participants were placed in homestays on the following four Hawaiian islands: Oahu, Big Island, Kauai, and Molokai, which allowed for diversity in host community experiences. This site was chosen because each year, not more than 10 FLEX and YES exchange students on average are placed in the state of Hawai‘i. The rationale was to include participants in the accessible geographical site to the researcher.

Participants, Sampling and Recruitment Procedures

I used a nomination process (Yin, 2014) that consisted of collecting relevant information about the exchange programs and their participants. The selection of participants involved contacting the local coordinator's office for the nomination of exchange students and their host families matching the selection protocol criteria. To qualify for participation, students must have met the following criteria:

(1) Be participants of the FLEX or YES programs placed in the state of Hawaiʻi;

(2) Must be between 15–19 years old; and

(3) Must live with a volunteer host family.

Host families must be unpaid, fully vetted, and approved for hosting by the placement organization.

I contacted exchange students, host families, and local coordinators via e-mail to invite them to participate in this study. Due to the limited number of FLEX and YES exchange students placed in Hawaiʻi, I used purposeful sampling to select a heterogeneous sample of students who may "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 308). Purposeful sampling provides the greatest ability to advance an in-depth understanding of the nature of the case under study, and the intercultural exchange experiences of exchange students and host families, and is based on the assumption that the investigator must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Hence, participants were purposefully sampled using maximum variation sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) allowing for greater diversity in findings that may reflect multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of 44 participants took part in this study.

I informed participants in advance of the topic and the type of questions. I assured them of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the study. I audiotaped all the interviews, and they took 45–60 minutes on average. With exchange students in Oahu, I hold the interviews at the exchange organization's office or exchange students' schools in strict privacy, neutral of researcher or participants' personal space. Due to the large physical distance between participants placed on neighbor islands and the researcher, I conducted those interviews via video call, which is an alternative approach to accessing hard-to-reach participants (Sturges &

Hanrahan, 2004). Video calls allowed me to observe participants' body language as well as their facial expressions (Salmons, 2012).

Data Analysis

After each interview, I stored the audio recordings on a password-protected computer, and immediately transcribed the interviews. I wrote reflexive memos to myself based on my observations of participants' tone of voice, laughter, and pauses in the conversation. These memos served to aid my data analysis (Kvale, 1996). I shared transcripts with my study participants to ensure the overall accuracy, and to receive their immediate feedback when the interview was still fresh in their minds. I heard back from most students, about half of the families, and both coordinators.

I used NVivo, a software program for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, to help me organize and code the data that consisted of interviews, reflexive memos, observation notes, and program documents. I initially coded the data by open coding to identify emerging themes both individually and across the interviews (Saldaña, 2016). I used thematic analysis, a technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes or patterns, for the interpretation of the data. Saldaña (2016) maintains that thematic analysis is "a strategic choice as part of the research design that includes the primary questions, goals, conceptual framework, and literature review" (p. 200). Braun and Clarke (2013) introduce guidelines for conducting a thematic analysis that I followed:

(1) Transcribing all interviews and reading the transcripts multiple times;

(2) Developing and refining semantic codes (the "surface meaning" of the data) as well as latent codes (underlying ideas and assumptions);

(3) Sorting these codes into themes that encompass specific facets of the data; and

(4) Synthesizing the themes.

Moreover, Rubin and Rubin (2012) note that “themes should be stated as simple examples of something during the first cycle of analysis, then woven together during later cycles to detect processes, tensions, explanations, causes, consequences, and/or conclusions” (p. 206). Thematic analysis is appropriate because of my study’s emphasis on analyzing the data set as a whole to understand the experiences of the program participants (Flick, 2014). By incorporating an inductive approach when generating the various codes, thematic analysis is expected to yield rich descriptions of dominant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I drew on both inductive and deductive approaches to generating insights. I first worked inductively to draft initial open codes that emerged in my raw data. The inductive approach to data allows “categories of analysis to emerge from the data as the study progresses” (Mertens, 2005, p. 230). The NVivo software helped me create a coding book listing the frequency of each code. The most highly referenced codes among the youth included youth-host relationships (88 references), program (66), Hawai‘i culture (64), future profession (59), and personal growth (52). Among hosts, the most common codes were host-youth relationships (97 references), cultural exchange (70), culture sharing (59), community (52), and program (44). As for the local coordinators, the most referenced codes included host family recruitment (15 references), local coordinator role (12), program value (7), and enhancement activities (7). I coded program documents separately from the interviews to gain unbiased insights into the topics and language used in these documents. The codes revealed high references for the local coordinator role (36 references), host family recruitment (29), adjustment (21), American culture (18), workshops (18), program rules (17), and volunteering (16).

In the second phase of my data analysis, I made sense of the codes by first comparing them, and then grouping them into thematic categories (Boeije, 2010). For example, the student-host relationship theme emerged after merging codes such as relationships, communication, expectations, host family challenges, extended family, host family siblings, host family changes, and family dynamics. Besides identifying common themes, I looked for discrepancies to highlight perspectives that differed among participants (Creswell, 2012).

Finally, I used a deductive approach to data analysis to finalize the themes, the process that was informed by my literature review and theoretical perspectives. To answer my first research question, in what ways do the exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program, I centered my findings around the themes that corresponded to the cosmopolitan, biopolitical, and geopolitical perspectives in my framework, such as program rhetoric, American culture, values, program rules, program activities, and alumni. For the second research question, how do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives, I categorized my themes based on biopolitical perspectives (i.e., risk and potentiality, selectivity, values, and norms), and culture learning theory (i.e., the ABC responses). As for my third research question, how do participants experience intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences, I based my themes on the culture learning theory that specifically focuses on intercultural experiences.

I have chosen to approach data analysis in this way so as not to be restricted by the suppositions of my theoretical perspectives and literature review, and to leave open the possibility of identifying themes that go beyond what my theoretical perspectives assume.

Ethical Considerations

I performed all research following the University's IRB protocol for human research using proper information and consent forms. I obtained IRB approval (non-exempt research) for all rounds of data collection. Since most exchange students were aged between 15–18, I attained active consent from natural parents or legal guardian/host family for minors (Appendix D), after which I asked students for their assent (Appendix E). Johnson and Christensen (2017) note that "not only it is more ethically acceptable to obtain the assent of minors, but doing so might also enhance the validity of the study" (p. 134). Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants over the age of 18 (Appendix F). I sought permission to conduct this study from the local coordinator who oversees these students and host families in the state of Hawai'i.

As stated in the consent forms, participation in this project was completely voluntary. I did not provide any compensation to participants, to avoid any ulterior motives. Participants could stop participating at any time with no penalty or loss to them. I reminded participants to tell me if they become stressed or uncomfortable answering any questions or discussing topics during the interview. In this case, I skipped the question or took a break. I informed the participants that they could stop the interview or withdraw from the study altogether should they feel uncomfortable. I assigned pseudonyms for all the study participants. I anonymized information that may be private or sensitive, to minimize the potential risk of individuals being identified, exposed, or confronted.

Credibility

The researcher is considered one of the instruments in qualitative research (Stake, 2010). The interpretations of the researcher rely on the action of defining and redefining the meaning of what the researcher sees and hears, thus influencing the way findings are interpreted. To limit the

researcher's bias, I established the credibility of this study through triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation. Multiple study participants and data sources (interview transcripts, participant observation notes, and the review of documents) are expected to help triangulate data to clarify meaning (Stake, 2000). Triangulation of the data is one way for the researcher to increase the confidence of correct interpretation. It helps to see identified causes from different perspectives. Often this adds to a more complex or deeper explanation than originally envisioned.

Triangulation requires the researcher to look and listen from various vantage points, to become confident that the evidence is good. Stake (2010) argues that the researcher needs to determine whether or not triangulation is needed. For trivial descriptions and personal interpretations, there is little need for triangulation. If the description is relevant but debatable, there is some need for triangulation. When a statement is important for the findings multiple sources of data are needed to cross-check the evidence (Merriam, 2009).

Member checking. As a member check method, I solicited feedback from my study participant on the interview transcript. Member checking guarantees the credibility and trustworthiness of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and reduces the impact of subjective bias (Patton, 2002). Stake (2010) suggests a timely follow-up with the participant to increase the chances of feedback. As such, I sent copies of the interview transcripts to the participants by email, asking them to confirm the accuracy and clarity of the interview data (Merriam, 2009). I received response from most of the students, about half of the families, and both coordinators.

Merriam (2009) notes that member checking could include the sharing of a preliminary analysis with participants to check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Participants

need to recognize their experiences in the researcher's interpretation and comment for possible revisions. Their acknowledgment of the accuracy of the transcripts and the researchers' interpretations of the data ensure that trustworthiness was established (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, participants were asked for permission to use their direct quotes in the study.

CHAPTER 6: Findings I – Program Norms and Values

In this findings chapter, I intend to answer my first research question: in what ways do the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program? My findings are based on the data analysis of program documents, interviews with students, host families, and local coordinators, and my observations of the program events and enhancement activities.[7]

I begin this section by discussing the orientations that all youth must attend, and that are organized by the Oahu local coordinator: pre-arrival and arrival orientations, mid-year orientation, and re-entry workshop. In the next part, I examine three required enhancement activities: legislative internship, religious diversity workshop, and leadership training. I then explore students' perceptions, and the change thereof, of the various elements of American civil society that the enhancement activities promote. In the third part, I explore two major workshops and contests, international education week and civic education week, and students' experiences participating in these activities. In the final section, I focus on the community service requirement. I explore in what ways the exchange students engaged in and experienced volunteering in their host communities. I conclude this part by highlighting students' commitment to organized community service in the US, and their commitments to service in their home countries in the wake of being exposed to and participating in program activities.

Required Orientations

Pre-departure and arrival orientations. The exchange programming begins in students' home countries four to six weeks before student departure to the US with a required

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[7] During observations of the program events and enhancement activities, I did not record names for direct quotes.

Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO). The overseas field offices organize PDOs that last four days and include 12 sessions. As per the program handbook, “PDOs are designed to be fun and interactive, but also discuss serious themes and issues that will affect a student’s success on the program” (ACIE, 2019f, p. 41). The main topics include participation in a host family and host community, the uniqueness of each exchange experience, having realistic expectations, community service, responsibility, respecting other opinions, and cultural differences. During PDOs, red flag issues are raised as well, such as rules and laws, gender roles, religion, food, computer use, attitude, and gratitude. In addition, FLEX and YES students with disabilities attend a week-long Arrival Orientation organized by a non-profit organization Mobility International USA before arriving in their host communities.

Local coordinators are responsible to conduct an Arrival Orientation for their cluster of students within the first 30 days of students’ arrival to the US. I attended three group orientation sessions that took place at the end of August and brought together all students placed in Hawai‘i. This was the first of three major events during the year when all exchange students – including those on neighboring islands – gathered in Honolulu. Following the program guidelines, local coordinators are to “set the tone for the year, review expectations and rules, and gauge student adjustment” (ACIE, 2019f, p. 40). Cultural adjustment, expectations versus reality, and showing appreciation to the host family and host community were the main topics discussed.

Based on my observations, common questions that youth raised during each Orientation included host family changes, course selection, missing immunizations, and adjustment issues. An underlying theme I observed during the meeting, which echoes in all program handbooks, was that each exchange experience is unique, “not better, not worse, just different” (ACIE, 2019d, p. 98). In line with this mantra, the Oahu local coordinator urged students not to compare

their host families with other families, and their host communities with their home communities, saying, “you cannot live in two places at once” (LC1). Despite the group setting, local coordinators also were required to speak to each student separately to address any specific needs or questions at the time.

Mid-year orientation. The second required group event conducted by the Oahu local coordinator is Mid-Year Orientation in January. Mid-Year allows students to reflect on their experiences, accomplishments, and challenges at the halfway point, and to set goals for the remainder of their exchange program. Some of the key discussion points included talking about personality changes, i.e. before versus during the exchange, making the best of the exchange year, budgeting, and showing appreciation to host families. Students worked in small groups to perform various simulations such as how to deal with host family issues, how to make friends, and how to communicate effectively with a host family, local coordinators, and teachers. Another important topic was community service and making plans for future volunteering upon return home. This was the first time that students began planning for re-entry, which in my observation, they did not seem to fully grasp at the time.

Each year, Mid-Year served as an important bonding opportunity for the youth who at that point in time felt more comfortable and confident to communicate and connect on a deeper level. I observed several friendships that formed during this event, and that lasted until the end of the year. Compared to the Orientation meeting, the atmosphere at the Mid-Year was more upbeat with fewer requests for host family changes or other complaints. Students also appeared more comfortable with the local coordinators, whom they perceived as authority figures. Overall, the environment transformed from a classroom-like setting to a big family where everyone spoke up and asked questions without much hesitation.

Re-entry workshop. Re-Entry Workshop is the third major event organized by the Oahu local coordinator, and that is required for all exchange students to attend. The Re-Entry in early May also brings to Hawaiʻi American Councils representatives who provide a very structured yet interactive Re-Entry training to the students. As per the program handbook, this meeting is "a chance for all students to reflect together on their successes and challenges over the year and on how they have changed. It is also designed to introduce students to the concept and potential challenges of returning home" (ACIE, 2019f, p. 42). Self-reflection was one of the key activities, as students reminisced on the ups and downs of the exchange year thus far, and how their personality changes and traits can serve them well in their future personal, professional, and community service endeavors. The staff familiarized students with reverse culture shock, asking them questions such as, "How have you changed?", "How will this new you re-enter and interact with your home country and culture?" and "What learned ideas and activities can you incorporate into your life back home?" Community service and alumni groups were other big topics discussed, which appeared to gauge more interest at this time than at the Mid-Year, as most students expressed eagerness to stay connected to the program through the organized alumni activities, a topic that I will further discuss in the final part of this findings section.

The Re-Entry was combined with a Farewell party in honor of the host families. All youth, local coordinators, American Councils representatives, and most Oahu host families attended the Farewell. We were entertained by 10–15 performances of exchange students, both individual and group, that students themselves prepared for the occasion. Some of these included Hawaiian songs, chants, and dances that students learned in host schools, and cultural performances from their home countries such as popular folk dances. A couple of students took the stage with their host siblings. Of special note were students who read a letter or recited a

poem of appreciation to their host families. This event was not only emotionally charging for both students and hosts who anticipated the approaching farewell, but it also exhibited a heartfelt celebration of cultural diversity.

Enhancement Activities

The enhancement programming is implemented over the year in ways that aim to expose foreign youth to what the program deems as important elements of American civil society, including civic responsibility, community service, respect for diversity, and the rule of law. The student program handbook states that through enhancement activities, youth "gain exposure to specific themes that reinforce the broader goals of your scholarship programs" (ACIE, 2019d, p. 15). It goes on to say that "learning together in a setting tailored to exchange students and these shared program goals" (p. 15) would be beneficial to students' understanding of American culture as well as having an opportunity to "meet with each other or with your Local Coordinator for social activities" (p. 15).

Local coordinators must organize a minimum of two enhancement activities, each of them covering one of the following themes in American society: leadership/citizenship, democracy/government, free market economy and entrepreneurship, and diversity in American culture. Besides the activity itself, local coordinators must incorporate an introduction and discussion of the goals of the activity, the activity, and a time for reflection. The program encourages discussion that includes a comparison of the experience and knowledge of students' home countries. Local coordinators must submit a report of each enhancement activity to the sponsoring organization, in this case ACIE that needs to document enhancement activities in their quarterly reports to the DOS.

In Hawai‘i, the Oahu local coordinator organizes all of the enhancement activities that bring together exchange students, including those on neighboring islands. Despite limited financial support for these activities, the coordinator allocated “a lot of time, probably more than many others, to enhancement activities” (LC1). While program handbooks provide general direction, such as themes, the coordinator appreciated the freedom to develop unique enhancements that were “unlike anywhere else in the US” (LC1). The coordinator was particularly proud of the Legislative Internship and Religious Diversity Workshop, two signature Hawai‘i activities that require ample planning and community engagement. The coordinator explained that it was important that these activities were “culturally and learning-oriented,” and not just “socially fun,” emphasizing that through them students gain “knowledge that goes beyond school.” In the next section, I discuss in detail three main enhancement activities that occurred in the same format and time in each cohort: legislative internship, religious diversity workshop, and leadership training.

Legislative internship. The Oahu local coordinator plans a Legislative Internship that exposes students first-hand to the workings of American democracy and government in practice. In Hawai‘i, the House and Senate have provided this one-day internship each year since 2000. This one-of-a-kind internship in January, implemented in the state of Hawai‘i only, matches each student with a House Representative or a Senator for a day of shadowing in their office at the State Capitol. The participating Representatives, Senators, and their office Staff include their student as much as possible in any of their daily office activities. Each year, the local coordinator also sent a written request to the Hawai‘i governor to meet with the youth, which he kindly accepted. Although briefly, the Governor welcomed students in the Capitol and took time to mingle with them, which everyone greatly enjoyed.

A direct exposure to the internal workings of the American government proved to be a meaningful and enriching experience for the students. Following the Legislative Internship, students took part in a debriefing session led by the Oahu local coordinator. In their feedback, students excitedly shared the things they had learned about American government structure and processes, such as “seeing an inside view of the legislative process, including scheduling, office work, research, the process in which a bill becomes a law.” Furthermore, students shared their new perceptions that “the American legislative process is really precise and organized,” “in America, citizens have a higher level of freedom of speech to voice out their opinions compared to my home country,” “Democracy is a real thing!” and “Democracy is not just a word!”

Students expressed their surprise about the opportunity of meeting government officials on a personal level, the friendliness of their office Staff, and the way they included them in their office activities and lunch. They shared comments like, “I could never have thought that they are that honest and devoted politicians,” “everyone works hard to provide people’s needs and do what is best for them,” “Representatives are generous, kind, trustworthy, and they listen to the views of all people,” “Representatives were open, willing to answer questions and also express opinions,” and “they are passionate about their job, they are nice to each other and respectful.” Most students agreed that meeting government officials would be extremely difficult in their home countries, where even physical access to government buildings typically is prohibited to ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, in Hawaiʻi, they appreciated that the State Capitol was an open space accessible to everyone.

Religious diversity workshop. The Oahu local coordinator organizes a Religious Diversity Workshop (RDW) in May, which corresponds with the diversity in American culture theme to help “students understand the concept of the American melting pot”, and diverse

religions “forming a cohesive whole while holding on to their unique traditions” (ACIE, 2019f, p. 54). The local coordinator arranged a one-day interfaith tour of five different religious institutions that represented various places of worship in Hawaiʻi: Episcopal Church, Buddhist temple, Jewish synagogue, Muslim Mosque, and Unitarian Church. The students got a chance to learn directly from the priests, rabbi, and imam, who shared about history, philosophy, and the main concepts of their respective religious beliefs. Youth got to enter these places of worship, many of which they have not set foot in before. They also were encouraged to ask questions and clear up any misconceptions they may have had surrounding these religions.

Following the RDW, students took part in a debriefing session in which they reflected on their experience. For all students – religious or not – alike, the RDW presented a unique opportunity to learn first-hand about five different religions in a single day, something that “I would have never dreamed of, ” and “I learned things that I probably have never thought about and saw places that really amazed me.” They came to agree that even though religions are different in terms of their traditions and practice, at their core, they share many things in common. Students realized that “each speaker had the same purpose, to teach us good and always listen to our heart,” “all religions have similarities in aspect of good ethics, we all believe in a deity or some kind of supremacy,” “all want to unite people in the community,” and that “they respect each other’s point of view and accept people from different backgrounds.” For students who themselves identified as religious, either Christian or Muslim, the RDW opened their eyes to the many commonalities they were unaware of, such as, “all the religions are so similar and follow similar morals and values,” “we are all brothers and sisters,” and “in terms of moral values, ethics, conducts, they all lead to the same good way, to be a better human being.”

When being asked how they would use what they had learned during the RDW, students primarily felt they were better able to understand people of faith and beliefs different from their own. The RDW helped them “have more respect for other people’s faith and values,” and “change my opinion about some religions.” Once back home, several students said they would try to spread religious awareness and reduce misconceptions about other religions by educating friends and communities that are “not as open-minded,” recognizing that people “are all the same,” and that people of different faiths can be friends. Finally, students held that the RDW was a unique opportunity that gave them a new perspective on diversity. As they said, “viewing everything by myself is the best part of learning,” and “giving me a broader view on other religions and bringing light to what I have been in the dark about other religions.”

Leadership training. The FLEX and YES exchange programs place a lot of emphasis on developing students’ leadership skills that would be helpful for their future. Each May, the Oahu local coordinator organizes a one-day Leadership Training for all exchange students, which corresponds to the leadership/citizenship theme. The program handbook states that this enhancement activity must center around “the difference that both leaders and individuals can make in their communities and how to achieve leadership positions” (ACIE, 2019f, p. 54).

The local coordinator invited an educational specialist who had had experience conducting youth leadership training for many years. Students explored personal and small group perspectives of leadership as a means of creating a shared definition for the workshop activities. Students then identified their values and personality traits as a means of understanding the necessary components of effective leadership. Through group activities, students learned about essential features of the leader, did research about their leadership styles, defined what it entailed to enable others to work together, and identified strategies to enable action. They practiced how

to make a SMART goal, which was about a global problem that they could solve. At the end of the training, students shared experiences and insights gained during their time in the US and established personal goals and commitments to leadership.

In the debriefing session, students reflected on what skills of an effective leader they acquired during the training. They listed communication skills, honesty, responsibility, flexibility, kindness, public speaking, and problem-solving, among others. Students then reflected on what makes a good leader by using a metaphor of a thermostat. They explained that like a thermostat, a good leader is a change agent that influences the people around them, and works for the community's benefit. Students further emphasized that “if you want to do something, you need support and the right people around you,” “you need to be flexible and be ready for the changes,” “everyone is able to be a leader or at least a part of the team,” “make hard decisions and take risks,” and “be ready for the good times, but also to lead people through the dark times.”

When being asked how they plan on using their newly acquired leadership skills and knowledge once they return home, students shared a plethora of ideas. Some of the common issues they wanted to address included poverty, corruption, education, and the issues of disability. To tackle these issues, many students felt that the leadership training made them more confident to create a plan, set SMART goals, and find resources to make it happen. They were motivated and determined that even at a young age they can “start changing my country for the better,” and “move mountains and make this world a better place.” One student commented that she “got to see how all of us have changed throughout this year and how we all are able to become future leaders of our countries when we return.”

Besides the leadership training, the program requires students to join at least one

leadership or service club at school or in the host community. The student handbook states that "leadership clubs help you to build confidence, increase understanding of your peers, and learn various ways to work together" (ACIE, 2019d, p. 16). In my interview with the Oahu local coordinator, she thought that the exchange was just "the beginning of their realizing they can make a difference" (LC1). When asked whether or not she observed leadership development over the year, she said, "It is really up to the students how committed they are to getting involved if they are involved in clubs and projects" (LC 1). The program staff also emphasize the leadership component of the program to the host families. For example, at the DOS host appreciation event, the representative spoke of the influential role hosts have when it comes to student leadership, saying, "these exchange students will carry forward what you gave them once they go on in their leadership roles."

Workshops and Contests

International education week. International Education Week (IEW) in November is an annual initiative of the DOS and the DOE to celebrate international education and to promote awareness and understanding of various cultures. The FLEX and YES students are required to get involved in the IEW by presenting about their home countries and cultures in their host communities, including schools, churches, or other local community organizations. Students must conduct at least three presentations during the IEW to an American audience. They need to report the number of presentations and people in the audience to the sponsoring organization. As a way of motivation, the ACIE holds a series of contests for IEW, such as Best PowerPoint Presentation, Best Photo, Best Artistic Response, Best Written Response, and Best Creative Non-PowerPoint Presentation. Only students who complete the required three IEW presentations are eligible to compete in these contests. There are awards and social media recognitions for the

winners.

As per my interviews, several students reported that initially, they found IEW as one of the most nerve-wracking requirements to complete, especially for those afraid of speaking publicly in a non-native language. However, this week proved to be an overall enriching experience. One student reflected on her initial lack of confidence in public speaking:

> I did not know I can do public speaking but I did and people really liked it. I heard that they said, "She is really good at speaking," "You have a really good personality," and "You are so funny." I did not know that I can actually do public speaking in front of all the people watching. (S17)

After receiving positive feedback from the audience, students' confidence grew and they became more comfortable with public speaking, even to the point of doing 6–8 presentations in a week. A student from Lithuania shared his experience doing multiple presentations in his classes:

> People do not usually care, and then you do that presentation and you really want to make them feel interested in whatever you are talking about… The biggest achievement with that was that after the presentations were over, people were coming up to me and thanking me. One gave me a full-size drawing of a Lithuanian soldier with a flag… The actual idea that you inspire people, that feels just amazing. That was the most cultural experience I was doing with anybody. (S13)

Besides the mainly positive feedback, several students expressed concerns about misconceptions that people held about their countries. Students from Africa in particular encountered questions that made them uncomfortable as they faced stereotypes about Africa being undeveloped. Examples of these questions included, "Do you walk with animals?", "Are you sleeping on elephants?" and "Do you go to school with giraffes?" To such questions, a

student from Tanzania responded by providing more context that people could relate to, "Africa is just like the US. It is one huge country with different states but it is different. It is a huge continent with different countries" (S2). While school presentations were the most common, several students did presentations in local organizations that their host families were a part of such as the Rotary Club, which allowed them to share culture with a wider host community.

Civic education week. Civic Education Week (CEW) is a DOS-funded workshop, typically held in February in Washington, DC. CEW offers a week of leadership and diplomatic skill-building seminars for a select group of FLEX and YES students. The workshop that was created in 1994 brings together 100 students who are chosen through an essay competition. In their essay, they typically must address a social, political, or economic issue in their home country, and how they would propose solving it. They also need to submit a letter of recommendation from a teacher from their host school.

During the CEW, students attend seminars and learn first-hand about the federal system of government, First Amendment rights, grassroots volunteer efforts, and foreign policy. They also get to meet with State Department politicians and ambassadors on Capitol Hill, Members of Congress, and staff representing the districts of their American host families and visit museums and monuments. The goal is to learn about some of the key values integral to the US society and culture and to gain leadership and diplomatic skills that they will eventually use in their home countries. Tim Hair, a Program Manager at American Councils explained that although many issues have changed over the past 25 years, "the importance of discussing them has remained the same, and providing students more historical background about an issue does help them understand and give them some perspective" (ACIE, 2018). Megan Lysaght, the YES program manager, stressed the long-term impact that attending the CEW has had on foreign youth. In her

view, "students finish the week feeling energized to maximize their impact when they return home. Once CEW students become alumni, they have a proven track record of leading both their fellow alumni community and in their chosen professions" (ACIE, 2018).

Seven students in this study who were selected to attend the CEW spoke enthusiastically about their experiences. The group activities that asked them to think about tackling global issues were their favorite, as shared by one FLEX student:

> A lot of teenagers say that they want to change the world because they see how many problems there are. And then it is just so overwhelming because there are so many issues… The CEW was opening my eyes to how people with no funding, with nothing except their own will to change something really change a lot going from little to bigger projects. They also taught us how to do grassroots projects that come from the bottom, from people who do not have any power in the world but can still organize and do something. That was really transformational, it changed my mind on a lot of things that I want to have an impact on in my life. (S16)

Certainly, most of these students considered the CEW as a defining moment of the year as they got to interact first-hand with government officials including House Representatives from Hawaiʻi, ambassadors from their home countries, and prominent politicians who were, as per one student's words, "like role models for me because they do so much for international education" (S1).

Besides these high-end meetings, students also spent time with their peers. As described by one student, this was a great opportunity "to meet them and have this week with them" (S9). Thus, the CEW not only deepened their understanding of American politics, amplified their leadership potential, and boosted their commitment to community service, but it also expanded

their friendship networks with other exchange students.

Community Service

Community service is a requirement taken seriously by the program. As stated in the student handbook, “Americans highly value being involved and being able to effect change in their local communities… For many of you, the idea of serving your local community may be a new concept” (ACIE, 2019d, p. 13). Students must complete a minimum of 30 hours of volunteering through at least three different types of activity. Failure to complete this requirement could result in a disciplinary action. The aim of this requirement is two-fold; for the youth “to use different skills,” and “to interact with different groups of people” in the host community.

The local coordinator is to introduce students to specific community service opportunities available in their local community. The coordinators prepare and hand out at the Arrival Orientation a list of community organizations where students can volunteer at. It is up to the students themselves to reach out and arrange for their volunteering. Host families also are invited to do community service with the students. The host family handbook encourages families to “think about organizations you are associated with that do community service. Even if you rarely participate in such activities, these ventures could easily help your student feel more involved with the family” (ACIE, 2019e, p. 12). Students need to log in their volunteer hours in their monthly check-in reports and update the local coordinator regularly. Sponsoring organizations (ACIE) must report quarterly to the DOS about youth’s involvement in host communities. Students who complete 100 hours of community service by the end of the year are awarded a certificate from the DOS. The possibility of receiving a special recognition motivated most youth in this study to reach 100 hours. One of them had already collected 206 hours by April.

The vast majority of the youth volunteered at their schools, such as in the cafeteria, library, and tutoring center. Some joined the Interact and Key clubs where volunteering is at the heart of their mission. Students on smaller islands or at schools with limited resources needed to be more creative. For example, a student on Molokai initiated sharing his digital knowledge with teachers who quickly asked him to volunteer for various projects. He explained:

> There are not a lot of organizations or places in Molokai that are requesting volunteers. So, I had to be flexible and try to use my skills as a video editor to help the school. In many cases, teachers come to me if they have to record an event or meeting that they have. I got to do posters of the events at school and flyers. (S20)

Several students also did volunteer work with their hosts. These families saw the value of volunteering in their own lives, which they wanted to impart to their students as well. One experienced host family said:

> All the students we have had in this house learn that volunteering in America is important. We probably do more than most homes. We were brought up that way. And it is important to give back and the students realize how important it is. (HF8)

In my interviews, host families expressed their appreciation to students who joined them in their community efforts, as explained by one host father:

> Our church has a community meal every Thursday afternoon and [my student] volunteers over there serving food to at least 200 people who come for a meal. And other meals we take to homeless people and people camping down at the beach. He has been very helpful. (HF5)

Besides churches, students also volunteered at local organizations that their host families supported, such as Assistive Living Center for the elderly, animal shelters, and Boy Scouts.

Through these activities, some students got more aware of not only local issues but also global issues, such as poverty and climate change which as per one student are indeed "universal problems" (S2). A YES student from Bangladesh talked about how her perception of organized community service changed in the US:

> We do not have this concept in our country. And here everyone just volunteers here and there. I think I will really miss volunteering. Because of volunteering, I have met a lot of people and had a lot of conversations that I will probably never forget. Wherever I go now, I want to volunteer. (S3)

Not all youth shared enthusiasm about community service as those cited above. However, for those who did it was clear that volunteering, a rare practice in FLEX/YES recruited countries and among this study's youth, boosted their desire to pick up these efforts upon returning home.

Alumni networks. One of the long-term goals of the FLEX and YES programs that tie into its public diplomacy agenda is a desire for exchange participants to contribute to change in their home countries. For this, the DOS allocates funding to support alumni networks in each of the participating countries, with the hopes that all participants join and become active alumni immediately upon re-entry. The student handbook encourages students "to become active alumni and share acquired knowledge and experience with their local community in their home country" (ACIE, 2019d, p. 51). Moreover, students are to take an "active role in your community through the community service and civic responsibility" (p. 19) that they were exposed to in the US. Not only do these networks organize community activities but they also offer professional and leadership development opportunities funded by the Department of State, such as workshops, conferences, and grants to support alumni's projects. The local coordinator and host family handbooks state that the alumni "have gone on to become leaders in their communities by

starting new volunteer organizations, organizing alumni networking groups, and developing community initiatives" (ACIE, 2019f, p. 3).

As per my interviews, all students wanted to join the alumni groups. While most of them were not familiar with the type of projects the alumni do, they thought being in a group of like-minded people would be beneficial for their re-adjustment to the home society. They also were eager to share through presentations about their US experience with their peers, as per one student:

> I am thinking about how to help the new exchange students prepare for coming to the US. I think this will be such a great opportunity to share my experience with them, and helping them to understand what to expect, and give them advice. I needed them when I came here. (S10)

When asked what projects they would be interested in doing with the alumni, only a couple of students had thought about projects more deeply. A student from Mozambique said:

> They have a program that is specific to young girls. They want to give opportunities to young girls to get out of the country, or to study again. It is about pregnancy… Because I have cousins and nephews who are getting pregnant early and talking about that is very important. It is something that we all should do because a lot of young girls are losing their teenage time, and losing opportunities because of getting pregnant. (S22)

While this student had a clear goal in mind, most others were not clear yet on what to expect in the alumni networks other than doing projects with like-minded peers.

Chapter Summary

In the first findings chapter, I illustrated how the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempted to instill in the foreign youth the official norms and values of the program. I first

offered a snapshot of the required meetings, including the PDO, Arrival Orientation, Mid-Year Orientation, and Re-Entry Workshop. Through these structured events, the program attempted to draw upon and instill directly the official norms and values. For example, the emphasis of the PDO and the Arrival Orientation was on the desired attributes and behaviors that would ensure the youth's successful adjustment to the host family and community, and an overall successful exchange year.

I then discussed the structure, content, and youth's feedback of the three enhancement activities: legislative internship, religious diversity workshop, and leadership training organized each year by the Oahu local coordinator. These first-hand encounters with prominent leaders in local government and religious groups exposed the youth to the various elements of American government and civil society.

In the third part of this chapter, I presented the less explicit ways that the program promoted its goals throughout the year. The educational initiatives such as international education week, civic education week, and community service requirement proved meaningful and enriching experiences for the youth and the host community. Since the IEW and community service were less structured, it was evident that the youth had more freedom to decide on the effort they wanted to put in. Thus, the experiences and the extent to which youth got influenced by these activities varied. While most FLEX and YES youth engaged in structured community service in the US for the first time, some of them expressed a genuine desire to continue community service at home, mainly through the alumni networks. However, it is unclear whether their commitment will hold in the long-run.

CHAPTER 7: Findings II – Program Experiences

In this findings chapter, I aim to answer my second research question: how do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives? The data analysis of program documents, interviews with students, host families, and local coordinators, and observations at student and host family events revealed three major themes that are organized and presented chronologically, i.e. in line with the exchange program timeline.

I begin this chapter by discussing the rigorous application process and exploring participants' selection experiences and motivations to take part in the program. I then turn to volunteer host family recruitment, host motivations, and their trust in the program. I conclude this part with a discussion of the program's reinforcement of desired behaviors and attitudes, as well as the challenges and ulterior motives that some students who resist the program may have.

In the second section, I look at how the program defines the public diplomacy role for students and host families, and how the participants themselves experience and carry out their role as cultural ambassadors. In the bulk of this part, I explore how students' subjectivities evolve during the program as they experience and get influenced by American values. Here, I uncover the complexities of student identities, some of which do not correspond with the program objectives.

In the final section, I focus my discussion on youth's personal and professional aspirations post-exchange. I explore in what ways the exchange experience broadened participants' horizons of the world and the possibilities of future international pursuits – not only in the US but in other Western and Eastern countries as well.

Selectivity and Motivations of Program Participants

Selectivity of foreign youth. The selection of exchange program participants begins a year before the exchange. The program staff claims that “one of the strengths of the FLEX and YES programs is the rigorous and uniform recruitment process that participants undergo,” which sets them apart from exchange students who come through private organizations. The first round of testing includes a multiple-choice English language test that filters out students with limited English ability. In the second round, students respond to different prompts during proctored essays. The essays elicit responses that indicate student’s maturity level and suitability for exchange evaluated based on various factors considered critical for exchange success. The program handbooks (ACIE, 2019d) do not reveal the exact criteria, but state that the selection is based on students’ “maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude” (p. 90).

Each year, less than 15% of the initial applicants make it to the third round which consists of interviews with one American staff and one local staff member, and group activity. Group activities are conducted in a local language, while American staff “observe the students in a less formal setting to see how they interact with their peers.” The program handbook states that the selection of finalists is made in Washington, D.C. by “approximately 200 community service evaluators” (ACIE, 2019f, p. 26). The Oahu local coordinator once participated in the final selection process in D.C. As someone who has worked on a grassroots level for over 30 years, she was critical of not only the numerical ranking system that they used to evaluate applicants, but also of the reviewers. She recounted:

> Foreign Service retirees, former Peace Corps people, and staff who take a week or whatever out to read. I asked these people, “Have you ever had anybody in your home?”

> 90-95% said never. So, how can they judge who is going to be successful in a homestay? And if you do not have a homestay experience, you ain't got nothing! (LC1)

The local coordinator also thought that not enough, if any, emphasis was put on evaluating the composition and character of students' natural families, arguing:

> When you have a student who comes from a highly dysfunctional family, dealing with not just divorce or family illness, but ongoing alcoholism, low or no income of parents… If you do not at least acknowledge that, then you really, as a local coordinator, do not know the product you are getting. (LC1)

Local coordinators lack background knowledge about students' natural families such as their socio-economic status, which would be helpful information to aid the homestay adjustment. The coordinator remarked:

> If a student comes from a very wealthy, affluent family, you want to have a clue. That will help the local coordinator to help a middle-class [host] family to adjust to… They are expecting this poverty-stricken government grantee to be coming and they get somebody whose parents make three times more, no matter what financial economy they are coming from. (LC1)

Several hosts shared their surprise about their student's family background and status. For example, a family hosting a student from Kyrgyzstan expected a "rural kid from a more exotic country" who would use "less cell phones and technology", and be "a little more appreciative" (HF18). The coordinator explained that in certain countries where these programs do not have a long-standing tradition, "the only people who will be qualified to apply as a FLEX or YES candidate would be those who have been appropriately educated and do not come from some backcountry school" (LC1). While the program claims that most students come from middle-

class families, hosts found it astonishing that some youth from economically less developed countries come from wealthy upbringings.

Given the highly selective nature of the application process, oftentimes students apply a second or third time if their first attempt failed. One FLEX student shared her approach:

> Last year I did not even make my second round. Imagine that, I failed in the first round. But I did not give up. I went to an English [language] school in my country, I was watching movies in English, I was talking to myself in English… I had a very, very small chance to win, but I did. I did win! (S4)

With the widely available information on the Internet, most students had received plenty of advice on how to write essays and pass the first two rounds of the application process. A couple of them had an older sibling who was a program alumnus as well. When asked about their motivation to apply multiple times, students gathered this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study in the US. Most students saw the value of the program "with all of the expenses covered by the US government" (S20). Even so, in the local coordinator's eyes, most students' motivation was in line with the program goals:

> They are genuinely interested and motivated and somewhat knowledgeable even if their knowledge is dependent on Disney movies, television, or things of that sort… The kids are going to be to one extent or another whether in their local communities or their country or their profession, young leaders, and because they go through such a very thorough selection process, you really are dealing with top students who are highly motivated. (LC1)

The application packet, including students' demographics, essays, and a selection of family photos, is shared with the host family once a family is officially admitted to the program.

Hosts spoke highly about the demonstrated students' resilience throughout the selection process, recognizing that they had "a lot of writing" to do and "a lot of things to fill out" (HF17). One experienced family learned that not all students were being truthful in their applications:

> I read through the applications and I take what I read with a grain of salt. We have found over the years that students write what they think people want to hear in order to get into the program. (HF8)

While dishonesty can cause bad feelings and issues of trust with host families, the Oahu local coordinator maintained that ultimately, it all comes down to a student's willingness to participate in the program and be "successful" – once in the US.

Selectivity of American hosts. Host family recruitment may take several months to complete. The local coordinator's role includes identifying a prospective, volunteer host family that has no ulterior motives for hosting. The program handbook (ACIE, 2019f) lists unsanitary homes, family members who receive federal subsidies for room and board, a non-English-speaking environment, wanting a babysitter or wanting to impose religious beliefs as inappropriate motives for hosting. Thus, it is the local coordinator's responsibility to assess family motivations for hosting. These should be in line with the program goals, such as being interested in exchange, wanting to learn about other cultures, or wanting to expose children to different cultures.

Since 2010, the DOS has put more emphasis on host family oversight. To this end, host families must meet certain requirements. A prospective host family must complete a host family application, submit home and family photos, and provide four references. Part of the vetting process includes completing a criminal background check. Since hosts do not receive compensation for hosting, local coordinators must ensure that a host family is capable of

providing a comfortable and nurturing home, has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations, and has a good reputation and character. The program is not clear on how much hosting may cost a family, saying that "the amount that a family spends on their exchange student is largely a matter of personal choice. We believe that host families do not need to be wealthy to provide students with wonderful experiences" (ACIE, 2019f, p. 30). However, as per the Oahu coordinator's years-long experiences, the pool of families that are willing to host voluntarily in Hawaiʻi is small, and per her own words, "a dying breed." She portrayed a typical host family profile in Hawaiʻi:

> In most cases, they are from 55 to 75 years of age, they are internationally oriented, they are professional in most cases, not at all with kids but often empty nesters, and also, some retired single adults, and some who have never parented. (LC1)

While many hosts in this study fit the described profile, five of them decided to host because of their childhood experiences. One host detailed how her parents' hospitality affected her decision to pay forward:

> My folks were interested in international students and so I grew up in a home where for holidays we would invite international students who went to university in the D.C. area to come over and we made friendships with them. And I was always intrigued by the diversity of experiences, the cultural differences. (HF2)

For most families, it was clear that they either have had cross-cultural experiences in their professional or personal lives, through travel or volunteering abroad.

When asked about why it is that younger generations appear less intrigued about hosting, the local coordinator reflected on the changes over the years:

> There is a whole generation that does not volunteer and maybe some of those people who

> volunteer, volunteer for an environmental or climate issue, but they are not into international goodwill. This is not the generation of the Peace Corps… All of these programs, for the last 40 to 50 years, are 100% dependent on American post-war volunteerism… Post-World War II, there were all these people who had been exposed and were therefore excited about international things. (LC1)

Both coordinators agreed that while recruitment never was easy, it has gotten more challenging in recent years. Instead of offering remuneration to hosts, the DOS insists on the post-war ideals of goodwill and hospitality. The coordinators thought this logic has impeded the overall quality of placements which could be seen in the lack of diversity in host profiles, and frequent changes of host families throughout the year. While the recruitment challenges were the main topic at the local coordinator's conference that I attended, and hosted coordinators from all over the US, there also were certain issues unique to Hawai‘i. The Big Island coordinator explained:

> The three barriers that families give me are: "I do not have the room, I do not have the time, and I do not have the money." And I think all three of those are very legitimate. Especially when they say, "I don't have the time," I take them seriously, "Well, then you are not going to be a good host family." (LC2)

Besides time commitment, space is a big obstacle for Hawai‘i-based families. Due to the high cost of living, families' homes tend to be smaller than the ones of a mainland family, and thus, there is no extra room for an international student.

All hosts expressed trust in the FLEX and YES programs, mainly because they are run by the DOS, which in their eyes makes these exchanges more credible compared to privately run programs. One experienced host said:

> When I discovered the FLEX program back in 2002, I was drawn to it because of the

> process by which the students are chosen and prepared and the fact that they are monitored by the US State Department. So, I feel like there is structural support not only for the host family but also for the student. (HF2)

Hosts also appreciated that the program staff visited local communities, where they made efforts to meet with host families in person each year. One host shared, "the people from the State Department came and visited us and we were impressed with them" (HF17). In February 2021, the DOS hosted the first of a series of host appreciation events that I got to attend. Over 170 families from all around the US were present. This was an opportunity for the government officials to not only express their appreciation but also to encourage hosts to continue hosting and spread the word to potential families about the benefits of exchange. The government official told the families that the US government was "deeply appreciative of your part in ensuring the program reaches its maximum potential as a quality educational and cultural exchange experience." In my interviews, hosts gave credit not only to the government and placement organizations for the oversight and quality of programming but also to the local coordinators for their support on the ground. One host said, "Their counsel to me was very comforting, that there are backup systems. There is a lot of support here in Hawaiʻi" (HF16).

Being successful. From the beginning of the exchange, the program staff and local coordinator used the terms "success" and "failure" as a way of reinforcing the rules and expectations of the program. A welcome letter by the DOS addressed to each student explains what is meant by being a "successful" exchange student:

> You are a valued guest in the US, and we want you to succeed in this program. Your goal should be to learn as much as you can about American customs, values, and culture and to build strong relationships with your host family, new classmates, and new friends. You

> will be living with a host family and attending a new school, both of which may have different rules and ways of life from what you are used to, so keeping an open mind will be very important to your success (ACIE, 2019d, p. 54).

This was further emphasized by local coordinators throughout the year, especially during Orientation, Mid-Year, and Re-Entry meetings. The local coordinator thought “successful” students were those who proved to be “excited and open,” “flexible, adaptable, and mature” (LC2). These kinds of attitudes were explicitly encouraged in consultations between the local coordinator and students when any trouble arose, as described by one student:

> The first month was very hard because… I was always being lonely. But then [local coordinator] talked to me, “OK, I have to deal with this, what I want to do, if I fail to do it… I am going to be a failure.” (S22)

In the context of a homestay, success meant forming close bonds with one’s host family. However, in my conversations and observations at Orientation, exchange students felt that being successful in a homestay meant staying with a permanent host family for the year, which could cause a lot of stress and anxiety if not achieved. One student shared his concerns: “When I changed host family for the first time, I started thinking about going back home. I was like, it was not a good idea to do this program” (S9).

Academically speaking, students were expected to perform successfully in school by receiving grades no lower than a C. One student said:

> I wanted to get good grades, so my program will be proud of me. That was the only stress that was going through my head. If I get one bad grade, I will be this one exchange student that came here and failed school. Even though I was not even close to failing, I had this stress of like, “I have to get perfect grades, so I’ll be the perfect student.” (S8)

While being successful in an American school was something most students took to heart, a few of them carried an even heavier burden because the year in the US would not count in their home schools. One student illustrated this well:

> In February, I started preparations for my next grade in Ukraine. [The program] requires me to get C. I will just get C and spend more time on the preparations. I explained to my teachers I had an A but now I have a C because I have to study much more for the Ukrainian school. (S14)

Hosts sympathized with these students, especially those who were in their final year of high school and had to do double the work to graduate back home. One host observed:

> In the past two months, he had to do all of the homework for the 11th grade in Kazakhstan, while he is doing all the homework for [Hawai‘i high school]. Four days after he gets home, he takes final written exams, all of which he has to prepare here on his own… Because it is graduating year in Kazakhstan, he is going to go into the military at the age of 17 if he does not pass the exams. There are a lot of things going on in his mind. He wants to go to university and he wants to do well on his final exams. (HF6)

In general, hosts welcomed the high academic standards set by the program. They thought this spoke to the high quality of students in the program. One host observed that students were well aware that “if they mess up, they go home. And in their home countries, education means a lot” (HF8).

In rare cases, students may be found to have ulterior motives that are unrelated to educational and cultural exchange, and thus, may fail to complete the program. As per local coordinators’ insights, examples included students who wanted to buy an electronic device that they could sell for a higher price at home, becoming popular at home, or because their parents

forced them to apply. Other common reasons for early program termination, as stated in the program handbook (ACIE, 2019f), include unwillingness to adapt to the host family's lifestyle, failure to follow program or host family rules, psychological problems that cannot be supported by the program, poor attendance, or lack of interest at school, among others. When a student is found to resist the program rules, they may be placed on warning. If an issue persists, then a student is placed on probation at which time they need to sign a written behavioral contract with the program. Program staff and the local coordinator must follow students' progress and determine whether or not the problem has been resolved. The Oahu local coordinator described occasions when she was asked to find a replacement host family for a student who was placed on the mainland US, and who was given a second chance in Hawaiʻi. She said, "Sometimes that works. Not really very often, but once in a while that person needs to go home… Have I ever sent anybody? Yes" (LC1). Recent reasons for program resistance included academic failure, lack of maturity, and lack of cooperation with a host family. Ultimately, it is up to the DOS – as the program sponsor – to determine whether or not a student should depart the US early.

To make sure that the students are progressing "successfully" in homestays and academically, the program uses a system of required monthly reports completed by students and local coordinators. As stated in the program handbook (ACIE, 2019f), these reports are used "to track student progress in different areas throughout the year and report this progress to our funders" (p. 51). If a student does not complete a monthly report on time, they do not receive their monthly stipend, which is a way of reinforcing the completion of required check-ins. In addition, every three months, a designated VIP caller – typically, a person who is not directly involved with the program – checks in with a student to "learn how they are doing," which is another way for the program to monitor student's progress and to tackle any problems if deemed

necessary, throughout the year.

Most host families held high expectations from hosting FLEX and YES students given the program's selectivity and reputation. As expressed by some of them, “They are good kids, to begin with, but they take the training that they get at the PDO very seriously” (HF1), “they have higher qualifications that I have on my resume at 17 and the expectations of them are even greater” (HF14), “they just are superior, good students” (HF4), “they strive to be their best, even though they’re learning new things” (HF8), and “we love getting to be exposed to folks with great leadership potential” (HF2). On the other hand, a few hosts noticed that their students did not take the exchange as seriously as they should have, seeing it as a vacation in Hawaiʻi. One of them said:

> I was holding him maybe to higher standards, just given the nature of the program… Because he did not have to pay and he was getting a really good experience out of this, I thought he would be a little bit more appreciative… I felt sometimes he felt entitled to certain things… That was a little bit disappointing, but we had talked about it, and he admitted to some of that stuff himself. (HF18)

Similarly, one local coordinator observed that not all youth met the program expectations, be it in terms of educational or cultural exchange. She said that “often families that are experienced know that some can be winners and some cannot” (LC1). This is one of the reasons that they “may not want to commit for an entire year” of hosting.

While students remained humble about their accomplishments during the exchange, hosts could not hide the pride in sharing their student’s achievements as they would about their children. Some hosts applauded them for being “fearless” (HF16), “brave” (HF15), and “putting forth the best effort” (HF14) in everything they did while in the US. Others were impressed by

the youth's willingness to try new things and celebrated their achievements, including the school art exhibits (HF17), dance performances (HF4), debate contests (HF14), videographer awards (HF8), and numerous sports events they participated in. One long-term host reflected on how hosting a student who is giving full efforts in all aspects of the exchange made the family and local community proud:

> Because they were super at school, and they get recognition, which gives recognition here… And that is a reflection on us as a family… I give every one of the [exchange] kids credit for trying new things. Almost every one of them strives to do the best… And that is the type of people who are not showing off. It is just their desire… and they happen to do their best and they end up showing. (HF8)

Cultural Ambassadors

The program goals stipulate an ambassadorial role for exchange students as well as for American host families – each of these parties is to represent their home country and culture. Moreover, when an exchange student gets first-hand experience in the US by way of contact with Americans, they are expected to assume a more positive attitude towards American society. They may develop an appreciation for its value and merits, while at the same time deepen understanding of the home country's society. However, there were nuances to participants' perceptions of the host and home culture that will be explored in this section.

Youth ambassadors. The language of the program defines the youth ambassador's role. In the welcome letter to the youth, the program states: "As an exchange student, you are an ambassador for your country. That means you will represent not only yourself but your entire country. We see this as a great honor that should make you feel proud" (ACIE, 2019d, p. 3). This is further stipulated under the description of student responsibilities that one has towards

themselves, the program, and their host family. Moreover, the student handbook (ACIE, 2019d) makes multiple statements along these lines: “Make your natural family, your host family, your program, and all of us working on your program proud. Be the best ambassador you can be!” (p. 21). Based on my observations, similar language was used at Orientation. The local coordinator emphasized the importance of youth being “good ambassadors” of their home country, and at the same time, being good “guests” in a host community. More specifically, the coordinator stresses that a good guest is always polite, respectful, and willing to adjust and share with people around them, just as any good ambassador does. It was also said that Americans like to ask questions, and that “there are no stupid questions,” so students should answer any inquiries most positively and politely.

In my observations, most students did not seem to fully grasp the meaning of “ambassador”, and perhaps for this reason rarely referenced this term in the interviews. One student reflected on how he carried out his “diplomatic” responsibilities: “People come to you and just ask the most random crap. You are still the ambassador for your country and you just answer every question no matter how stupid it sounds, but you just do not show it” (S13). Similarly, a student from Kazakhstan recounted: “Some people asked me about Putin, about Stalin, communism. I just answer them. I try to tell people what they want to hear” (S5).

On the other hand, host families noted the benefits of the youth ambassador role within their friendship circles and communities. One host proudly shared about the two students she hosted at the same time:

> They are good ambassadors. I had 7 people for dinner. The people were so impressed… My friends my age are very grateful to me for hosting. They say, “I cannot tell you how happy we are to have met some of the wonderful people, these students. I have learned

more from having dinners with you and your students than I have ever learned from school." (HF1)

A unique case represented students who did not quite fit culturally in their home societies. Ethnically, some students belonged to minority groups, geographically, some lived in remote or autonomous regions that did not reflect the culture of mainstream society, and religiously, they did not belong to the mainstream religion in their country. These students faced a dilemma as to what to share with families because their ethnic/cultural identity did not match one of their governments. However, as cultural youth ambassadors in the program, they had to carry out the duty to represent the country. For example, two FLEX students from Kazakhstan and one from Kyrgyzstan, both former Soviet Union countries, belonged ethnically to Russian minority groups. While these students admittedly tried to share with host nationals about their country's traditions as much as they could, the hosts noticed their struggles. Without being asked explicitly, host family comments included, "she is Russian but living in Kazakhstan" (HF10), "he speaks more Russian at home than Kyrgyz" (HF18), and "he feels more Russian than he feels Kazakh" (HF6).

Moreover, a YES student from Zanzibar, an island that is ethnically and religiously distinct from mainland Tanzania, admitted that she did not know much about the mainstream culture in Tanzania as a country. It happened that her host mother visited mainland Tanzania before, to which the student observed, "I come from Zanzibar island… Some things about Tanzania [mainland] I do not even know. When I talk to her about my country, I have to talk about Tanzania" (S2). Students admitted that they had to do independent online research to learn more about their home countries' mainstream culture, politics, and history, to provide what the program deemed "accurate information" to host nationals.

Ambassadors of the US. As per the program handbook (ACIE, 2019e), one of the host family's responsibilities is to teach their students about American culture and values as "students are expected to adjust to US conventions" (p. 18). The handbook provides concrete examples of what counts as American values, such as politeness, good mannerism, an optimistic worldview, and independent decision-making. It also states that the notion of "entitlement" and "whining" are not generally accepted American values and that these types of behavior should be discouraged by the host family. Finally, the handbook (ACIE, 2019e) stresses the long-term impact of homestay on exchange students:

> The ripple effect that this experience has on international students cannot be emphasized enough. After their year in the US, students like yours return home as ambassadors for American values and culture, determined to have a positive impact in their own countries. (p. 3)

A more diplomatic language was used at the DOS host appreciation event. The government officials spoke highly of the "citizen diplomat" and "cultural ambassador" roles that host families hold in the program. The officials emphasized that by opening door to foreign youth with leadership potential, hosts "are grounding American foreign policy and American values" by sharing with the youth "what it means to be an American," "what it means to grow up in America", and "what they need to know about us to understand our perspectives."

In my interviews, most hosts indicated their commitment to the program goals by sharing American culture and hospitality. As per one family, they wanted "to share and be ambassadors of the US" (HF19). Another host reflected on the broader implications hosting may have on American foreign policy:

> My understanding was to help to encourage a better concept of America and promote the

> up-and-coming youth within our country. Kind of bringing that back home to get better relations… Especially with countries that the US is building a possible future with, military, whatever it may be that serves the influence. (HF18)

Only a couple of hosts spoke critically about the power dynamics, pointing to the importance of sharing cultural differences on the equal ground rather than imposing American culture as the superior culture. They argued that "we get so caught up in our own culture like the American way is the best way, it is the only way, and it is not necessarily true" (HF19), and "a huge part of the purpose of the program like that is to educate Americans" (HF16).

Youth perceptions of American Society. In my observations and interviews with all program participants, it was clear that most students already were somewhat influenced and in favor of American culture before the exchange. The Big Island coordinator shared her observations of how this phenomenon evolved in recent years:

> We are more global than we used to be. The kids are more aware [of American culture] and a lot of that is social media. A lot of the kids watch American movies and so they know a lot about American culture already. More so than they used to, and that is because they are watching movies and Netflix. (LC2)

While it is important to understand that some students carried preconceived notions about American culture, their views about it may have been to some extent flawed or inaccurate.

Living with a host family offered students day-to-day insights into American lifestyle. This provided them with first-hand accounts of American values and norms that they got to experience on a deeper level, as per one student:

> Now I understand this country much better, and now I see that stereotypical things were not true. I learned about America a lot, especially the idea of the American dream and the

> first amendment… be not afraid to say what you really think of or who you really are. (S5)

Indeed, several students reflected on feeling inspired by the ideals of the American dream. In students' eyes, the American dream was all about working hard towards achieving one's goals. A FLEX student from Kyrgyzstan said:

> The thing I learned was that you have to do something from the heart and work hard for it… Back home, they just tell us, "You will become who you are now"… But here, they give different definitions of dreams. They say, "Dreams can come true." (S21)

Similarly, a YES student thought that in her home country, Palestine, one cannot strive for a better future in terms of socio-economic mobility without personal connections:

> I have got more hope here. People here were willing to fight for their future even if it meant the long way. That is what is really unique about the US, the American dream, that you can become something out of nothing. I guess I do not want to go back to the same way of like, "You have to be smart, and you have to know people." I want to think bigger, brighter than that. (S8)

A few families cautioned from overly idealistic views youth developed about American society. One of them explicitly stated that the homestay provided students with "a more realistic perspective on the United States that it is not necessarily the promised land" (HF2).

American culture is not just about the American dream. Its national ethos includes democracy, rights, liberty, and equality. Most students felt strongly about the freedoms in the US, some of which they got to exercise for the first time themselves. A student from Mozambique reflected on how she has changed while in the US:

> I have experienced a lot of things, to say what you want to say, to do what you want to

> do. I would say my country is more closed and I do not have all the freedom that I had here. And even with my parents… (S22)

Similarly, a student from Cameroon reflected on the patriarchal society back home:

> I will miss the freedom that I have in the US, talk to people, and express what you think is right, not just follow them because they are older than you… And the freedom of school, speaking to the teachers and expressing, again, what you think is right. Make yourself heard. (S9)

Freedom of speech was especially pertinent to students who came from authoritarian and theocratic regimes. These students were well aware of the restrictions in their home societies and greatly appreciated the freedoms in the US. A FLEX student shared how her experience of not fitting into Azeri society fueled her desire to go to the US:

> I felt that I did not belong in my country. Our environment is more like, “Oh, you need to get married at that age. You need to do this and that.” I did not want to do that. I was completely different from the people over there. When I talked about that with my parents, they told me, "You are just daydreaming. They cannot be real over here. Maybe in a different country but you are living here. You cannot do this and do that.” (S17)

These students developed an even deeper appreciation for American values. One long-term host family reflected on the impact that experiencing certain freedoms in the US has had on exchange students:

> They are all so amazed by our freedom of speech, how open we are, and we criticize our President. One student said, “Oh, you cannot say that. If somebody said that in my country, my family would disappear.” And for them to see and for us to share the differences we have freely, we can speak and exercise our freedom. (HF4)

These families argued that being able to express themselves freely for the first time in their lives boosted students' self-confidence and independence. One host shared proudly:

> To see this young woman independent, ready to take on anything, embrace anything, willing to step back and look at her society critically and positively to accept what is positive about her society and what is positive about American society and really think about what is important to her. (HF16)

While both hosts and students perceived the shift of values as highly positive and beneficial for their future, some students who appeared to undergo drastic changes in thinking already feared re-entry. For example, a student from Egypt felt like readjustment to his home society would be more difficult now that he has experienced certain freedoms:

> All the people are sovereign here. Like, also the difference between Egypt and US. It is going to be harder to talk to those people [back home]… We have people who think they are open-minded. So, it is going to be hard to make conversation. (S15)

Gender equality was another ideal that students grasped during the exchange, particularly within a homestay. Hosts observed that in patriarchal societies, the common characteristic of students' societies, the roles of parents were more clear-cut than in the US, which was reflected in these students' attitudes and behaviors within a homestay. For example, boys seemed less willing to help in the kitchen than girls until the hosts explained that this was expected of all genders in American society. One host shared about how their family lifestyle mirrored gender equality:

> She sees me working hard and she sees my husband working very hard and then also coming home and helping around the house… I think for her to see our family dynamics, [my husband] and I are very much equal in our relationship… There is no separation of

> duty and activity by gender that she sees in her own home. (HF16)

Admittedly, most students were open to becoming more equal in their relationships with the opposite gender, however, this change did not happen overnight. It took some adjustment, especially for students from societies where gender inequality occupied most aspects of daily life, as per one female student from Ukraine:

> I know better what equality means, equal opportunities. In my country, if you need to carry something heavy, usually it is boys. There are gender stereotypes about what girls do and what boys do. Here, it is not that much. Probably I was thinking about this the wrong way in my country girls cannot do heavy stuff, but actually, you can. (S7)

One family who hosted a student from a Muslim society thought the exposure to gender equality in the US has had a profound impact on her:

> She has shared with us a lot of concerns and disapproval of the way that women are treated in her country and sort of the mannerisms and habits of Muslim men in regard to their treatment of women… I think it has probably strengthened her resolve to not just go back and conform to old-fashioned and possibly Muslim-influenced patterns of how women should behave. (HF16)

While this topic was seemingly closer to the heart of female participants, another host argued it was essential for their male student from Egypt to think about the possibilities for women such as obtaining higher education and career. While per the host's insight, the student became "much more liberal in his thinking" (HF12), the host also expressed concern about the struggle he may encounter when going back to a predominantly Muslim society where his liberal views would be refuted. Only a couple of students reflected critically on the wider implications that gender inequality has had in their home countries. A student from Kazakhstan said:

> I am really big on women's rights. In my country, we still have a lot of problems with that. Even just in governmental structures, for example, we have just old rich men who came there by corruption and stuff. (S16)

The exchange students also observed the openness of American society toward different sexual orientations. One student did not expect to encounter "a lot of lesbians and gays" (S22) expressing affection in public spaces, while the other one compared the clash of social norms in this regard between the US and Ukraine:

> In my country, if a boy will do some silly stuff with another boy in front of people, they will think there is something wrong with them. But here, nobody does it. They are more tolerant. And now I understand that we need to be more tolerant. You always think that you are tolerant, but now that you are even thinking about it… (S7)

For many students, living in Hawaiʻi exposed them to a multicultural society, and put the issues of race and inequality into a new perspective. There were mixed opinions about American society being racist versus tolerant. African students were specifically briefed at the PDO about the possibility of encountering racism in the US, however, none of them had a bad experience. One student said that she expected the US "to be more racist, but it is not" (S2). A student from Cameroon thought more deeply about the issues of inequality when writing an essay for Civic Education Week. He said:

> I wrote about tribalism in Cameroon, treating people differently based on the tribes. I tried to put my essay on how it is almost the same as race. I found that I did not like people that are racist, but in a way, I was kind of racist because I felt that treating people, because they come from a different tribe is almost similar to someone treating someone differently because he is black or a different race... I now think differently about people

> that are different from me, that look different. (S9)

A student from Kyrgyzstan recognized that despite the anti-racist rhetoric from the American government, he noticed tensions between different races in his host community on Kauai, saying: “I see how it actually is here, how the white group is different, how the dark group is different” (S21). On the other hand, white students who came from homogenous societies shared their surprise that white people were not a majority group in their host communities. A student from Lithuania noticed that she was “the only white girl in the classroom, in the cafeteria, which was pretty shocking” (S1), while a student from Montenegro reflected on her lived experiences:

> I do not want to come up as someone who is not tolerating to other races, but considering I live in a part of Europe where it is mostly white, and me coming from an area that is mostly Caucasian population, coming here was not shocking, but different for me and it affected me as in perceiving and hanging out with different races. (S11)

Another theme that emerged in the context of equality was related to disability issues. Appreciation for special accommodations in terms of infrastructure and treatment of people with disabilities was especially evident among students who had disabilities themselves, and among those whose natural parents had disabilities. One student who was placed on Molokai, and whose mother was in a wheelchair back home, observed that “you can go everywhere with a wheelchair”, there are “special bathrooms”, and “classes for the blind” (S7). She elaborated on the lack of inclusion in her hometown:

> It is pretty hard to find special places in the city that can be used by everybody. Here it is just a part of daily life. When I first came, for me it was so like, “Wow!” Even on Molokai, there are not many people here but still, they have all of the stuff! You look at this, there are 750,000 people in my city in Ukraine. (S7)

Another student from Ukraine noted a positive attitude Americans held toward people with disabilities. As someone with cerebral palsy, he recounted being treated poorly back home. With the support of his host family who has had experience working with people with disabilities, he developed the self-confidence that allowed him to build on his strengths rather than focus on his physical weaknesses. Hist host family observed:

> He has given us so much in terms of how he can turn his disability into extreme mobility in terms of his flexibility to adapt… He has gained some perspective as to how we have tried to adapt to him and accept him for his challenges. (HF11)

Clash of values and norms. Contrary to what the program aspired to achieve, not all students positively perceived American culture. For example, students from predominantly Muslim societies struggled to understand the American perception of living with pets. The program handbook (ACIE, 2019f) specifically noted that families were encouraged "to be sensitive to this issue when introducing their students to their pets" (p. 36). The program warned families that "some students may express fear or aversion to pets, especially dogs" (p. 36) because dogs are kept outside the house and are perceived as guard dogs rather than pets. Furthermore, in Muslim societies, dogs are seen as unclean, and thus, touching them could make students feel uncomfortable. A student from Tanzania who was Muslim shared her fears:

> When I first came here, the challenge was the dog inside. It was just a tiny dog but I could not get used to it, so to me, it was a challenge, but also to them [host family] because they had not allowed the dog to get in my room. (S2)

The youth were informed at the PDO that having pets indoors is a big part of American culture and were expected to adjust to it. While in most cases, the adjustment did not take too long, one family shared their long-term struggle that impacted negatively the host-student relationship:

> He was not happy with the animals being inside the house. Honestly, it was never up for debate about whether my animals are inside or outside… I just felt like he would be disrespectful toward me. He knew coming into this also that he would be living with a dog. (HF18)

Their student had a hard time understanding why Americans "treat dogs as any other human" (S21). The student shared further insights on the ways animals are treated in his home society, Kyrgyzstan, and how he gained a new perspective about animals in the US:

> I am a Muslim, so for me, it was OK to raise a sheep and when it becomes big enough to kill it. I did that. But when I came here, I was like, "That's kind of cruel." You do not really realize when you grow up somewhere, because you kind of assimilate to that place, and all your thinking is already blocked by some kind of shared mentality. (S21)

The exchange experience made most students more appreciative of their own culture. Most students admitted that they used to think about the US as the best country in the world. However, living in the US opened students' eyes "to see the differences and to create opinions" (S4), to "realize that I am really attached to my culture and that my culture really means a lot to me" (S10), and to understand "how culturally unique [my country] is" (S12). A student from Lithuania elaborated:

> I have realized how much I actually appreciate and love where I come from and how my values are determining what I am and how this experience also pushed me to develop some of my opinions from a rather patriarchal society from where I come from. (S11)

The exchange also boosted some students' national pride. These students felt immense pride when sharing about their culture with Americans and fellow exchange students, as per one of them:

> I would say having gotten to know many different people from many different cultures, I have also gained a better understanding of where my culture and my people come in place… I would say [I got] prouder for myself and for my people. Getting to know people from other cultures, I gained respect for my own culture as well. (S18)

Stemming from this newly discovered appreciation, youth began thinking of how to contribute to their home societies with their knowledge and experiences from the US. A student from Mozambique said:

> I give more value to my culture. I think I have more feel about helping my people, and doing something different to change my people's reality. You know, people are poor, and I need to do something to change that. (S22)

On the other hand, a few students developed more critical views toward their home society's norms, as per a FLEX student from Azerbaijan:

> I understand my culture better and I do not like it more. I know that I cannot change everything just by myself… I certainly do not like my culture and I extremely suggest that we need to change a lot of things, including how people are thinking and how people see the environment as a straight road instead of looking at the full map. (S17)

This student also thought if there were no changes in her home country, she would be better off moving abroad permanently. Living in the US uplifted her hopes that moving out of her country would be a possibility in the future.

Finally, a couple of students took a stance that did not pick any sides, for better or worse, but rather emphasized the value of being exposed to and understanding the different ways of being and living. One student argued that the world is not "just two-sided, it is dynamic, I got to see that in different places there are different dynamics in terms of ethnicity, gender or anything

else" (S16), while another student claimed that it is important to "learn the different approach to life" (S13).

From Cultural Ambassadors to Global Citizens

Desires for future mobility. Students openly expressed desires for future international pursuits, such as studying or working abroad. While most believed that English fluency attained in the US would be advantageous in the college application and job market, a student from Albania was cautious about this assumption, arguing that nowadays one can no longer count on English skills alone since "a lot of people my age already speak English because they learn from the internet" (S19).

Several students thought that they got more informed about the American higher education and college application process. One student said: "Now I am thinking more broadly. I am really thinking to come back to the US, I am already thinking about colleges and what is the process of applying" (S10). Families were eager to have students return for college. One experienced host observed over the years that "almost all of them [exchange students] want to come back to this country, in some way or another" (HF1). These families hoped to offer another homestay should students return, as per one host, "We are hoping that he comes back to the US and stays with us. If you want to go to college if you want to go to university in Louisiana, all you got to do is let me know" (HF15).

However, very few students were keenly interested in coming back to the US for their studies, partly due to the J-1 Visa rule that requires government grantees to remain in their home country for two years before returning to the US, but mainly due to high tuition fees that their families could not afford to pay. A FLEX student from Ukraine explained:

> I got to know a lot, about what I want and how to apply to US universities. For me, the best choice is to transfer from a Ukrainian university to an American one because even if I got all the possible scholarships, it will still be about $5,000, which is a lot. In my home country, my parents both make about $300–400 a month. (S14)

Likewise, other students were realistic about the limitations of returning to the US shortly after the exchange.

Those who were hoping to study abroad for their bachelor's degree most commonly referred to Western European countries, such as the Netherlands, England, and Germany. These countries, in the eyes of students, offered reputable higher education opportunities and career prospects. A student from Kazakhstan shared her long-term plans:

> I would like it if I could go study abroad or get my Master's abroad. I would like to go not too far from my home because I have been far away from home for a long time. I would like to go to Europe. The Netherlands is interesting… I am just willing to learn anything about any other culture in the world, there is no one particular culture. (S16)

For those who thought obtaining a degree from a Western college would be financially inaccessible, they considered doing another short-term exchange, such as Erasmus in Europe. A couple of students preferred to study in Japan and South Korea. While both of them were interested in these countries before the exchange, experiencing first-hand some of the East Asian cultures in Hawaiʻi boosted their wish to explore this part of the world. For the student who wanted to go to Japan, the "wish became stronger" (S21), and for the other one, the exchange "opened my eyes" (S8) to Korean culture in Hawaiʻi.

While most youths appeared determined to obtain scholarships that would allow them to remain mobile and to be able to explore various places and cultures around the world, a couple of

students did not share in the excitement of going abroad in the future. The main reason was another cultural adjustment. A student from Cameroon said, “I do not really want to go study abroad again or work out of my country” (S9), while a student from Azerbaijan already got accepted into a university in his country. Except for these two students, others were passionate about continuing their international pursuits abroad.

The world of possibilities. The exchange experience not only broadened the youth’s horizons of the world but more importantly, it uplifted their vision of possibilities abroad. As per my interviews and observations, students gained confidence in their potential during the exchange, which is needed when applying for funding opportunities. Most students were confident that participation in a highly selective, merit-based program “will open the doors for many new international experiences in the future” (S18), and felt that “the world is kind of open for me now” (S3).

Moreover, students thought that the exchange experience helped them identify their interests and talents, which could be pivotal when applying for universities. One student reflected on how her career vision became clearer this year:

> I realized the job that I want to do, what specific area… I am thinking about becoming a doctor. I wanted to be a doctor for 3 years but it was still a guess. I was confused about it. But this year made me certain about this. (S10)

Many others talked about international relations and international law as their ideal professions. This desire grew stronger following their interactions with not only Americans but also with people from different parts of the world, such as fellow exchange students. Several host families noticed students’ interest in “international things, global studies, and global economics” (HF13). One student explained how her career interests evolved:

> Even before I came here, I wanted to study international relations. Then I kind of shifted to political science, then I shifted to international law, so I do not know yet. But definitely, it is going to be something with "international." (S1)

While the youth's career aspirations were ambitious before the exchange, they became even more focused in achieving their goals at the end of the program. One host mother observed her student's ambition, saying, "it is very inspiring for me to be around young people who have thought a little bit more deeply of what they want to do" (HF2). The exchange also could serve as a step toward advancing one's socio-economic status, as explained by a student from Ukraine, "I had hopes before but after I came here, I realized how possible it is if I worked towards it. Being here gave me hope for a better life" (S8).

Experienced host families in particular took pride in sharing about former students' career trajectories over the years. For example, one family listed "three doctors, a number of engineers, an electrical engineer for Airbus" (HF8) among the 30 students they had hosted. Another host family who had kept in touch with former students over the years maintained that "all the girls we have hosted have gone back and done something bigger with their lives. And being here in the US was a really good foundation for them" (HF2). Host families admired students' enthusiasm to discuss with them aspiring careers.

The exchange year was an opportunity for students to not only think about careers that they may want to pursue in the future, but also to become more conscious about the wider implications of a profession. A student from Montenegro became passionate about environmental issues, as she shared:

> I feel like I should do something that is related to the environment. We need planet Earth and all that has been happening with pollution, it is all going on the backs of our children.

> I want to do something related to that, but in addition to that, if I want to make a change, then I have to start with politics. I am thinking about doing political science. (S11)

Moreover, several students were committed to opting for a profession that would enable them to give back to their home societies. A student from Mozambique thought that as a future business person, she could “give jobs to my people” (S22) in a country that is battling poverty. On the other hand, all the new information about career opportunities was overwhelming for a few students. For example, a student from Ukraine was contemplating how she could combine skills with her empathy for helping people, as she shared:

> I am pretty good at math but at the same time I like art, and at the same time I like to help people. In Ukraine, I organized some training and workshops for kids. And here, I got to learn more about community service work and nonprofit organizations. There are so many things that I want to do in my life. (S7)

Another student felt strongly that it is alumni’s responsibility to use the knowledge obtained in the US “not just for ourselves but also to contribute to our community” (S20). The motivation to explore local and global realms of possibilities, and to take the risks to advance oneself personally and professionally were evident at the end of the year.

Chapter Summary

In the second findings chapter, I explored the program participants’ experiences with each aspect of the program and its processes, and the extent that these experiences reflected program objectives. I first discussed the youth’s experiences with the rigorous selection process, and their motivations to take part in the exchange. Findings showed that most students held pro-American views before the exchange, and were motivated to come to the US with all expenses covered by the US government rather than for culture-sharing. I then turned to the volunteer host

family recruitment, host motivations, and their trust in the program. It was evident that while the hosts' motives were not in conflict with the program's goals, they decided to host for various reasons to meet their personal agendas. Families who were repeat hosts for many years demonstrated their trust and commitment to hosting for government-funded exchange programs. I discussed the program's reinforcement of desired behaviors and attitudes while in the US, and the possible consequences should participants not follow the rules and objectives of the program.

Second, I uncovered the complexity surrounding the public diplomacy role that the program set out for the foreign youth and American host families. As per participants' experiences, some of their identities did not correspond with the program objectives that stipulated students represent their "country", and hosts represent "American" culture. There were nuances to the ways youth and hosts carried out their roles, which largely was influenced by their own lived experiences rather than what the program attempted to achieve.

Third, I discussed the youth's personal and professional aspirations post-exchange that were mainly tied to their personal goals. With the exchange experience in the US broadening their horizons of the possibilities around the world, it was clear that not many youths genuinely desired to return to the US or remain in their home countries. The vast majority hoped to study abroad again. Very few students expressed deep commitment to contributing to their home societies.

CHAPTER 8: Findings III – Intercultural Exchange Experiences

In this findings chapter, I aim to answer my third research question: how do exchange students and host families experience intercultural exchange and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences? My data analysis of interviews with students, host families, and local coordinators, program documents, and observations at program events revealed three main themes, namely, culture-sharing experiences, relationship building, and self-improvement.

In the first part of this chapter, I illustrate how exchange students and their hosts experienced sharing culture within a homestay, including political and religious topics. I then explore the multicultural dynamics in the context of Hawaiʻi, illustrating the ways American hosts perceived and shared their culture with the youth. In the second section, I offer a nuanced discussion of the different types and layers of student-host relationships. My findings uncover the depth of interactions that characterized the participants' experiences within a homestay. Finally, I look at youth participants' experiences of personal growth and development that contributed to their overall self-improvement. This theme was supported by trustworthy relationships developed in a homestay.

Culture Sharing Experiences

The nuances of culture-sharing. The DOS welcome letter to host families states that the homestay component of the program will provide American families with a unique opportunity "to experience firsthand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own" (ACIE, 2019e, p. 60). In exchange, families should "exemplify American values and culture to a foreign visitor" (p. 60). The handbook, however, does not go into detail about what exactly American families should share with their students, except for including them in their day-to-day life and activities. The student handbook is more specific about what is expected of exchange students in

terms of cultural exchange within a homestay. Students should teach Americans about their culture and home country by way of sharing national artifacts. As stated in the handbook (ACIE, 2019d), “we suggest bringing your national clothing, music, maps, and pictures” (p. 3) to show Americans part of their culture. The program further encourages students to share “a family tradition, popular food or dance, or common phrases or words in your native language” (p. 15).

Within a homestay, culture- and life-sharing were on the agenda regularly, particularly over dinner conversations and holidays when students and hosts spent ample quality time together. One student captured his culture-sharing experience:

> I talked to them about the history, about nature, climate… I also showed them my traditional dress. I talked to them about traditional food, dance, our traditions during Christmas, and Easter. Just talking and showing… I also brought a book about my culture, history, and arts. (S10)

Only three hosts were familiar with their student’s culture prior to hosting; either by traveling there before or having previously hosted a student from the same country. The vast majority of the hosts were interested in students from countries that they were not familiar with.

In my interviews, hosts appreciated learning about students’ cultures, which admittedly expanded their worldviews. This benefitted their children as well, as explained by a 16-year-old host sister:

> I understand that we as Americans – it is a stereotype as well as the truth – that we do not learn as much about other countries as we should. I knew Albania was a country, I just did not know much about it. I definitely learned more about Albania as a country. I learned a little bit about its history as well, but we did not sit down every night and talk about it. (HF17)

Another common way of culture sharing was through food. Preparing national dishes was a common way of sharing culture directly. This was not an easy task as some students, especially boys, never cooked before. Nevertheless, they recalled the times when they cooked traditional foods for their families. Hosts appreciated their efforts, and overall, agreed that person-to-person interactions presented a valuable opportunity to learn about different cultures. As described by one host, "to meet somebody, learn about their culture, firsthand, is always better than any book or someone else's story could be." (HF9) Several students shared that they felt comfortable enough with their hosts to make jokes about their countries, and did not mind when host siblings teased them with stereotypes, which indicated a certain level of trust between the two parties that resembles the one of the natural family. A student from Georgia said:

> I talk about my country all the time [laughter]. They always tease me. My [host] brother, he knows that I get mad when somebody calls me "Russian". And I fight and I say "No, I am Georgian" [laughter]. (S4)

There appeared to be mixed opinions as to what or how much was being shared culturally. As per hosts, certain students were less willing to share about their culture. Based on the interviews and my observations, these individuals appeared to be the ones who did not feel particular pride in their home country – typically, the ones from an authoritarian system of government – and who enjoyed the most freedoms in America. When culture sharing did not occur naturally, host families initiated a conversation. One host expected to learn more from their student about the culture and life in Albania, as they explained:

> A lot of it is just us asking her questions. I think she is very ready to respond when I have questions about what her life is like [back home]. I would not say she goes on and on about it without my asking, but she is very forthcoming and very familiar and I ask her a

> lot of questions. She talks about school and then her daily life as a student. Not so much about history or politics. (HF16)

Families also were curious about students' natural family, lifestyle, and home community. One host said, "I asked about home, like what they do, what the kids do, what her friends do" (HF17). The program handbook (ACIE, 2019e) recommends that families show an interest in student's life back home, which can help in developing trust. Even though the program discouraged contact between hosts and students' natural families, hosts often joined a video call with students' parents and grandparents to get a glimpse of their homes and relationships. They thought this cultural interaction, despite the language barrier, made them feel closer to the student's families and culture.

Overall, hosts shared similar opinions that hosting expanded their views of cultures and perspectives different from their own. One host thought this learning experience made him more "hopeful about strangers" (HF17), while the other one reflected on the big picture:

> I think it is important for Americans to experience foreigners because we have a tendency being surrounded by ocean on both sides of the continent and sometimes the mentality that we are first or that we are the biggest and the most powerful… that is something that has to go along with human beings, all of us. (HF5)

Sharing culture within a homestay was not only about exchanging one's traditions and beliefs, but on a more profound level, it was a realization that despite cultural differences people share common human values – being loved, cared for, and respected. One long-term host family captured this well:

> The family is the family, no matter what the country is, no matter what the culture is. The mother and father want the best for their children. It is the same all over the World. A

family is a family. (HF4)

Sharing politics. Most hosts learned not only about the country but also about the specific region of their students. Being able to discuss topics such as politics with teenagers was for many an unexpected yet welcoming addition to their conversations. The choice of topics indicated a high level of proficiency in English among students, as well as trust in a student–host relationship to be able to discuss such issues. One student humbly acknowledged that as a 16-year-old, she could only share "her understanding" of her home country's politics, while a few others stressed that they always made sure to provide facts. This meant going online to look for answers to the host's questions. There were cases when students held in-depth conversations with hosts about geopolitical dynamics and conflicts affecting home societies, as recounted by one host:

> He is for a 16-year-old very much aware about the geopolitical situation in his country. For example, Crimea, which is always a problem for Ukraine, and also, he just was following the recent election. A new prime minister who was the Jewish President of the country, he is very much aware. (HF11)

Similarly, a student from Egypt shared with his family about the constitutional crisis in Egypt, a student from Palestine about confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis, and a student from Azerbaijan about the border conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Discussions of these large-scale political issues that were part of students' lived experiences back home made hosts more "aware of conflicts that impact the lives of these students" (HF5). In one case, a host father shared how his democratic ideals conflicted with the ones of his student, saying:

> He came from Kazakhstan, which is a former Soviet Union country, but Kazakhstan still likes Russia for the most part. So, he told me they think that Putin's government is

> wonderful and Kazakhstan still wants to be like Russia. That means a lot to them. He has different political values because they have a dictatorship. (HF6)

While hosts enjoyed political discussions, some of them emphasized their goal of exposing students to a positive side of American culture in general and politics in particular. This could have wider implications after the exchange, as articulated by one host:

> Hopefully, when they go back, they can show their friends and family that America is not all the negative things that you hear about on the news. You got the Presidents in the news all the time, whether you agree with them or not, and negative attitudes toward a lot of people in the world. We are not all like that. We are just people, just like everybody else. (HF8)

One long-term host family felt the responsibility, though not stipulated by the program, to teach their student about the American political system. The host mother detailed the approach:

> We teach our students politics. We tell them, "Why is our president doing it, why is our Congress doing it, this is what is happening about our government. Tell us about your government." Politics is an important part of what we share. (HF4)

Conversations about politics not only informed the hosts but also helped the students "have a better understanding of own culture and political situation especially" (S5).

Furthermore, the topics sometimes expanded beyond American and student's home country politics, to a discussion of global politics. Impressed by their student's ability to discuss politics intelligently at such a young age, one experienced host shared, "We have not had any student over the years that has gotten into politics, but he is well-versed in politics, not just at home but pretty much around the world" (HF8). By comparing government systems and elections, both parties became more aware of contemporary political issues in the US, in the

students' countries, and around the world. Ultimately, most students and hosts came to the same conclusion: politics should be separated from its people. One host explained this sentiment:

> You share different geopolitical things and things you hear in the news. I mean, regardless of all that, [our student] is a real, genuine person. You cannot just go by what you hear, you know, what people say, perceptions, and the news. He is just a real, genuine person. (HF11)

Sharing religion. Homestay also offered opportunities to share one another's religious beliefs and traditions. Five hosts identified as Christians, three were Jewish, and one was Buddhist. The host family handbook (ACIE, 2019e) clearly states that "both host families and students must respect each other's rights to their own beliefs. Both must refrain from any attempt to proselytize and must avoid the perception of trying to influence or convert" (p. 104). Hosts made this point clear to students from the very beginning, as per one family:

> Right away, we let her know that we are a Christian family and that she was free to ask us any questions she wanted to about our faith, but she did not have to, and we let her know that our expectation was not to get her to change her mind. She came with us to church and she came with us to some of our church activities that revolved around the church. (HF17)

Families who identified as religious did not have a particular preference as to students' religion. Most appeared open about hosting a student from another religion. However, being able to share their religious beliefs was the main motivation to host one Christian family:

> The biggest driving force for me or the biggest highlight is being able to share my faith with him. And he is very interested in understanding things from an American and a Christian perspective. As he has mentioned that in Azerbaijan, he would only be able to

> come into contact with a Muslim worldview. So, he has been very interested in how an American sees things, but then also understanding history and social issues through a Christian worldview. (HF7)

In exchange, the family learned from their student that “Azerbaijan is more of a culturally Muslim country than it is a religiously Muslim country” (HF7).

The YES program brings into the US students from predominantly Muslim countries. In this study, seven YES students identified as Muslims and two as Christians. It is important to note that even if a student was Muslim by birth, they did not necessarily practice Islam at home or abroad. Those who did were willing to share about the Muslim lifestyle. One host mother in particular enjoyed conversations about Islam that helped her draw comparisons with other religions:

> We talk about religion. We were looking at different Quran versions and looking at some of the stories that are in the Quran, the ones that are actually in the Old Testament as well. They have the same kind of stories from multiple religions… I think having conversations about religion now is very informative, especially with Islam, I think Americans do not know many things about it except it must be bad. And so, I am actually sitting around talking about these stories that are much more interesting to me. (HF3)

Likewise, several FLEX students who were part of the Orthodox Church shared with families about different holiday traditions. Overall, conversations centered around religion paved the way for a better understanding of another layer of participants’ cultures.

Conversations about race. Racism, an issue commonly associated with American history and society, was a topic of conversation in two African-American host families. These families openly discussed racial issues. One family who hosted a student from Northern

Macedonia introduced him to African-American culture. They explained that in Hawaiʻi, these issues are often not as explicit as they may be on the mainland US. The student recounted:

> Because they are of African-American descent, some of the movies that they have shown me in February during Black History Month, I would say that I became more informed about black history and how they live now. Speaking with them, I know how they live now. But through the movies that they have shown me, I can see how they lived in the past. I feel quite informed about this now, and I can be very grateful to them for informing me. (S18)

Only a couple of other hosts found it important to expose students to the issues of race. While they were not African-American, and thus could not share lived experiences with them, they took their students to the Martin Luther King Jr. parade and celebration. Moreover, a couple of students experienced living in a racially mixed family. One host thought exposure to racial diversity within marriage was a positive influence on their student who comes from a racially homogenous society. He explained, "Because we are an interracial couple in Hawaiʻi, nobody thinks about it. Nobody cares. I mean, when I go out with my grandchildren, they are Caucasian" (HF11).

Context of Hawai'i. Most exchange students were initially surprised to be placed in Hawaiʻi. Realizing that Hawaiʻi is a chain of tiny islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, they shared some concerns. One student recounted his pre-departure expectations:

> When I entered the FLEX program I was just interested in traveling and learning about different cultures, as many of us were. When I knew that I was going to Hawaiʻi, I was kind of disappointed because I thought it was not going to be an authentic American experience or it is going to be just a bunch of tourists, and I am not going to be culturally

aware, you know, I am not going to learn stuff. But when I came, those expectations were not true. (S16)

Similarly, other students' expectations were not clear when it came to what to anticipate culturally within a homestay in Hawaiʻi. One student noted that the PDO did not brief them at all about Hawaiʻi and its unique culture. Students simply assumed that Hawaiʻi would resemble the culture of the mainland US.

In terms of demographics, Hawaiʻi is one of the most diverse states in the US. However, the host family profiles in this study did not reflect this diversity. Local coordinators confirmed that most Hawaiʻi hosts are racially white, and belong to the middle- or upper-middle socioeconomic class. As previously noted, this appears to be due to the high cost of living, and limited space available in people's homes. When it came to recruitment, local coordinators found families of Asian descent oftentimes "unwilling to accept strangers", and Native Hawaiian families thinking that their homes were too "humble and modest", and thus unsuitable for welcoming a foreign student. Most hosts in this study did not grow up in Hawaiʻi but moved there from the mainland US for either university or work. A few retired military families remained in Hawaiʻi after their assignments. Without being asked explicitly, hosts revealed the cultural identity conflict they felt while hosting as an American family living in Hawaiʻi. One family shared their background, "We are not native. We came from the mainland, so our culture is a blend of being here the last 25 years, but also being born somewhere else" (HF17). As per another host, the family made a "conscious effort" to talk about what is typically American and what is more common for Hawaiʻi families. They explained, "Our home is more like in the mainland. And I think they had a good experience here. And they get a little, you know, the culture of Hawaiʻi" (HF8). There was a general agreement among families that living American

culture through the Hawaiʻi lens made up for a rather unique experience. Most of them made a deliberate effort to show students Hawaiian landmarks and historic sites, as explained by one family:

> We took her to see all the Hawaiian beautiful scenery and we took her to *heiaus* [Hawaiian temples] and we took her to historical monuments in Hawaiʻi and we tried to show her as much Hawaiian culture as we could. But not being Hawaiian, it feels a little bit important for me to be here. I am a little out of my element, it felt like taking her to San Francisco or New York City or somewhere that I am more familiar with. (HF14)

Still, hosts mainly shared about their "growing up experiences on the mainland", and the celebration of American holidays. One student who was placed on Molokai, a small island with a relatively high Native Hawaiian population, got to learn about the American South:

> She [host mother] taught me a lot about the American culture because she is from Louisiana originally… She taught me about Southern foods, sayings, movies, history, and other cultural characteristics of the South. (S20)

His host, however, felt that the student got plenty of exposure to Hawaiian culture even if not within a homestay, saying:

> The community here embraces other cultures. Because the aloha spirit is all about embracing others and giving, letting others be who they are, and, you know, accepting and tolerance. All of that is so ingrained here that I believe that this was really the best place for him because of the community. (HF15)

Students also realized that families felt more comfortable sharing about the mainland culture. One of them observed, "They tell me about common things here but they are from the mainland, so they know more about that" (S21). A couple of students got a chance to travel with their

families to the mainland US over holidays and school breaks. These families were proud to expose their students to the “real” American culture, as per one host:

> We had Christmas in Atlanta… About 10 days in Georgia. And I took her to a university in Alabama, Auburn University, which is really close to our home. Quiet, large American campus… There is more to the United States… I am sure that [travel] expanded her view of the US, put into perspective, all that she saw. I am not trying to put down diversity. (HF13)

On the other hand, host parents who grew up in Hawaiʻi were of various Asian descents. They saw their culture as a hybrid between their ancestors who were immigrants, and American culture. For instance, a Chinese American host provided a different cultural experience to his student who had expected to live with a white, blue-eyed family:

> He thought we eat potatoes, but I eat chao noodles, rice, Chinese food… I like Chinese culture. I go to Chinatown where I hang out with a lot of Vietnamese people too. I go to karaoke bars, where I meet Vietnamese people there. I am very interested in Chinese martial arts, Tai Chi. And Cantonese is my second language. (HF6)

Similarly, a Filipino American family thought their student got good exposure to Filipino culture through Filipino food, family gatherings, and Filipino TV shows that they enjoyed watching together. The student reflected upon the cultural aspect of her homestay experience:

> The only big expectation that was not met and that I experienced culture shock was that my host family was Filipino. I just did not expect to be in a Filipino family and experiencing all this cultural stuff. But that was a great experience. (S16)

While their lifestyle perhaps did not mirror the one of a “typical” American family that the students had imagined, these families were the epitome of diversity in American society.

There was only one Native Hawaiian family on the Big Island. Acknowledging the blend of cultures that influenced her upbringing, the host mother still thought it was important for their student to learn the Hawaiian language. She said:

> I feel like, growing up in Hawaiʻi, everything I do is multicultural. It is fun to learn Hawaiian. So, we have asked him to speak Hawaiian. He is so good with languages and can pick up. But I wish I had done more of that like done for us the way I was taught, and immersion this year using the language. (HF12)

While other homestays did not offer opportunities to have youth immersed in Hawaiian culture through its language, several students took Hawaiian language and Hula dance classes at school, which was often encouraged by hosts. In my interviews, I sensed some guilt among hosts who could not offer a true Hawaiʻi cultural experience, but with students, they seemed to appreciate the diversity of cultures that were represented across homestay, school, and in the host community. One student reflected:

> I was told that the US in general is considered the melting pot, but from what I can tell Hawaiʻi is one of the meltiest of the pots. A lot of variety, people from all different ethnicities, which I got well-acquainted with. (S18)

Most participants echoed this sentiment, realizing that the exchange experience in Hawaiʻi offered a distinctive encounter with the many layers of cultural diversity constituting American society.

Relationship Building

Adjusting to the family. The DOS welcome letter to host families states that the exchange offers families and students "the opportunity to create a strong lifelong relationship" (ACIE, 2019e, p. 60). The program encourages students to join host family activities and to help

with family chores, with the idea that this type of engagement will ease their adjustment into the daily life of an American family. This message was stipulated numerous times during the PDO, Orientation, and Mid-Year meetings. For example, the local coordinator stressed at Orientation that youth must "adjust to American host family lifestyle and local culture", to have a successful homestay experience. Likewise, the host family handbook (ACIE, 2019e) stated that hosts are to "treat him or her like your own child and not as a guest… With that understanding, provide your student with a sense of his or her role in the family" (p. 11). Although both sides got informed multiple times, through Orientation and program handbooks, about each other's roles and responsibilities that ought to guarantee a successful homestay, relationship building sometimes proved to be a daunting task, yet one of the most rewarding experiences for most students and hosts.

Exchange students came to the US with certain expectations as to the composition and characteristics of an American host family. Influenced by the Hollywood entertainment industry, most youths dreamed of a two-parent family with children and pets, as illustrated by one of them:

> Everyone has this image of the perfect American dream… My expectations were a big family, two big dogs, and my high school five minutes away from me. That was mostly what I was expecting. Well, that is not exactly what I got, which does not mean it is bad but still, it was different. (S11)

At Orientation in Honolulu, I observed exchange students comparing their host families, referring to them as "better" or "worse". I sensed pride in students who shared enthusiastically about sightseeing and the places they had visited with their families in the first few weeks. On the flip side, I noticed a certain level of disappointment in the voice of students whose hosts did

not provide them with the same level of activity. Comparing families was a big topic that students held during breaks, as some already encountered challenges in their homestay. The Oahu local coordinator shared that “high expectations or fixed expectations” about one’s host family have always been some of the biggest issues to handle, especially in the first few months. The coordinator made sure to emphasize during Orientation that “the best FLEX and YES student comes with no expectation” as he or she is willing to adjust to any family.

The first couple of months are always the most crucial for adjustment, and thus, the orientation meeting emphasized the fact that with each family composition being different, each student would have a somewhat different American experience. At the time of my interviewing, seven out of nineteen host families were single hosts. Three of them did not have children of their own. There was a sense of disappointment in the beginning for students who were placed with single hosts. In my conversations with students at Orientation, they felt like they were missing out on a perfect American family experience. Also, most students were used to living in a nuclear family set-up, except for two students who lived with single mothers at home. By the end of the year, students realized the benefits of living with a different type of family. One student said:

> I never expected living with a single mom but I think it is a great experience. We live in a house all my life and I never lived with only mom. I lived with my mom, dad, and my five siblings. But now it is quiet. It is different. (S2)

Shifting family dynamics. Internal family dynamics played a role in shaping student–host relationships in both positive and negative ways. For those who claimed positive impacts, having another young person in the house enriched their conversations, and overall, improved the behaviors of all family members. One host explained:

> My husband likes the idea of having one more person so that he could hold on to family dynamics. We are kind of on better behavior when we have a person in our house all the time, who is here to listen… And we are thoughtful together, instead of just being our hair is down and we can just say whatever we want to each other. It just puts us all in a better behavior towards each other and towards a person that we are hosting, and so I feel like it all probably just creates a nice dynamic for us. We try harder, and we are more interested in each other, and ask more questions at the dinner table. There are just more thoughtful conversations. (HF14)

Several hosts found themselves more proactive in doing things together "as a family", being influenced by the positive attitude of an exchange student, as explained by one host:

> We wanted to show her things or engage in activities or watch movies together as a family…That enthusiasm for things that we maybe take for granted every day… Her presence spurred me to think of things to do and to get going as a family. (HF16)

In one instance, hosting had a deeper meaning for bringing families closer together in times of grief. Overwhelmed with emotions, a host father reflected on the relationship with his daughter:

> The reason I did it [hosting] is not a typical one… My wife passed away. My youngest daughter was getting kind of, being kind of withdrawn… She [exchange student] made our home life livelier, happier place… I was concerned about where me and [my daughter] were going before the exchange. I go back to why I wanted to do this because I thought we came closer over discussions, just being close, and being together. (HF13)

On the other hand, the family dynamics could also be obstructed by the addition of a new member. This was apparent in families with children. A host mother of five young children described the challenges that the family faced following their exchange student's arrival:

> He came from a family where he was the youngest and favorite of two. And he got thrown into a [host] family being the oldest and least familiar of six… I think that he did not really know how to not be the baby of the family… At first, there was what I determined as immature behavior. And perhaps a holding of the bar too high, like high expectations for say, perfect cleanliness. And a house with five children and one domestic ninja. (HF7)

Eventually, this family and student accepted their differences, admitting that unrealistic expectations on both ends would be the driving force for any conflict. The student felt that he was not accepted by some of the siblings but he tried to understand their position, saying:

> I am thinking of kids. They are living with their siblings. And suddenly another sibling appeared at age 17, you know. I kind of understand them. But from the parents, I feel like they fully involve me with them. But the kids… not really. (S12)

Five students were in families with host siblings of the same age, but only one of them shared about establishing a close friendship:

> She [host sister] is a Junior, too. We get along very well, and we spend a lot of time together. They [host family] help me and support me when I need it. We found what we like to do together and know each other so well. (S10)

However, most student-host child relationships resembled typical sibling relationships, as explained by one host sister:

> I feel like I definitely had a little less of an experience because we had her the second half of the year. She already had her friend group, she was already established, she had already tried all the fun food, she had gone to all the fun places… On a weekend, she

> would go off and hang out with her friends but at home, she would play games with the family and we would interact and talk on our way to school. (HF17)

Overall, it appeared from both youth and host perspectives that students established closer bonds with host parents.

Multigenerational families stressed the importance hosting had on their extended family members. Four families had either grandchildren or grandparents living in the vicinity who got to interact with the youth regularly. With no children around, one empty nester felt a teenager would have felt "bored" in their home. Thus, it became common practice for the student to spend weekends with host children and grandchildren. The host explained the impact these extended relationships had had on their family:

> It has been a wonderful experience, not only for my husband and myself but also for our kids and our grandchildren. Now they have experience. They know there are other people who live in different places around the World and they learn about differences in the cultures. And they are interested in it. My granddaughter came and she said, "Oh, I saw something about Georgia on TV the other day". I think this has opened up the world to our younger ones. (HF4)

Besides building relationships over cultural differences, hosting a student with cerebral palsy had wider implications for a family who had young grandchildren living nearby, as explained by the host father:

> For the grandchildren to see different people, I think it is about their familiarity and their acceptance… Because of being with him [exchange student], they have never been afraid to go up to someone to talk to them, and interacting with people like him has made it very positive. I think because of his disability, I think it has brought into kids that they are

> aware of that, you know, there are different kinds of people. (HF11)

The family relationships also extended to include hosts' family members living in the mainland US. Families included students in video calls and had them converse with their relatives.

Being part of the family. Becoming a member of the family came with both responsibilities and rewards. In the first few months, when students were still adjusting to the new place, language, school, and culture, homestay changes were seen as particularly burdensome. Each year, I had observed instances of students sobbing in the local coordinator's office, or in a group of students, because they perceived changing families as a sign of failing. The local coordinator clarified that it was not always the student's fault:

> We have had some great host families and some that we would never ask to host again. I would say it is kind of 50:50. As a local coordinator, probably half the issues are the doing of the student. I am not going to say fault of the student because maybe it is just a misunderstanding. (LC1)

By mid-year, most students realized that there is no perfect family just as there is no one perfect exchange student. Building a trustworthy relationship requires effort and a certain level of adjustment. For example, one student could not get along with his host mother, but because of his good relationship with his host father, the student, and family decided to make the best out of it, as explained by the host father:

> There was a lot of struggle at the beginning between him and [my wife], but I guess he just kept his head down and kept working at it and not blowing up. If she was in a bad mood, maybe leave her alone. You should keep working hard or love so much, work it out and it will be rewarding in the end. (HF18)

Some students took longer to adjust, and ended up changing up to four families in a year. One student found building a relationship with four host families especially challenging, partially due to his flawed expectations, as he shared:

> I was not expecting them to treat me like their own kid because that is really difficult to take someone that you do not know and treat him like your own kid. I thought they were going to treat me like a super important guest by giving me a gift and treating me super well. Yes, that did not happen. (S9)

Rather than being treated as a special guest, he strengthened the relationship with his final host through family activities and chores in which all students had to take part throughout the year. Oftentimes the reasons to change hosts were out of students' control. Some hosts could not commit for the whole year or did not feel that they could provide a positive homestay experience for longer periods. While moving families was undeniably stressful, as recounted by students who moved several times, living with different families was also an opportunity to build relationships with new people, and to experience different lifestyles.

Both students and hosts emphasized regular communication as the key to success and overcoming any misunderstandings along the way. One student reflected on the difficulties with her family, which in her opinion reflected real family dynamics:

> I am not an angel. We have had some difficulties getting used to each other. We have had some difficulties communicating with each other. We had some arguments, sometimes fights. It was not smooth but after every fight, we would be like, "I love you." We will hug each other. I guess that is one definition of a family, as I would always help out with family events and I will always be invited to family events. I would always get support when I am stressed or scared and to me, family comes with all of that. I really feel like

> part of the family. (S8)

At the end of the program year, all students felt like they became true members of the family. They got to appreciate the love and support they received from their hosts which, in most cases, resembled a parent-child relationship that they have with natural families. Trust, understanding, and care were the keywords when describing the student-host relationship. They found their hosts treating them the same as other people in the family. Students accepted that if they did something wrong, they got punished the same way as other children, and likewise if they did something right, they got rewarded in the same way. At the Mid-Year and Re-Entry, I observed students naturally referring to their host parents as “mom” and “dad”. This was both in sharing stories with fellow exchange students and local coordinators, as well as in addressing the host parents directly. I noticed that most families, especially those with children, dropped off and picked up their students in the same way as they do with their children.

Students who lived with single hosts and empty nesters in particular appreciated that hosts asked for and respected their opinions. This student-host relationship looked more like friendship. Consequently, students thought they were granted more freedom compared to their natural families, as shared by one of them:

> We really trust each other. I would not say it is totally like my parents because they give me freedom. They trust me and think that I am responsible. I learned how to make my own choices. But it is a really good relationship. If I have a problem I can always ask my host mom for advice. Even if she just sees me sad, she always asks. (S16)

However, freedom cannot be earned overnight but when both parties establish trust with each other.

The strong bonds developed within a homestay also set the stage for students' expansion of the host national network. Through host families, students had opportunities to interact with host community members. In talking with families, they excitedly shared about introducing students to their social networks that revolved around work, children, neighbors, church members, and community service volunteers. It was common for students to make friendships with people of all ages, especially with the elderly, which can be unusual for teens. One student said: "My host mom's friends, they are in their 80's and 70's, but I feel like our relationships will be long lasting" (S3). Most families lived in close-knit communities where people knew each other, but could sometimes be reluctant to reach out to a foreigner. One student who was placed on the small island of Molokai explained her experience: "It is a very close community here, and usually closed communities do not let outsiders in but I did not feel this at all" (S7). One host family thought that involving the student in community service through their social connections had a ripple effect on building student's community relations over time:

> We get them to do things [in the community]. And by doing that they get to meet new people. By meeting new people, there is more opportunities for them to do different things, and they get invited out to do things. So those things happen all the time. That is a very positive thing. And they are just bringing different attitudes into the home. (HF8)

Hosts thought exposing students to people in their networks would not only benefit the students but would also open the community's eyes to different people from around the world.

The farewell party at the Re-Entry meeting in Honolulu brought all host families and students together. At this event, I observed first-hand the close family bonds that were established and appeared to be the beginning of long-term relationships. All students and hosts hoped to keep in touch with each other for years to come. Most hosts got teary-eyed when

talking about the student's departure, as per one host:

> The memory lingers, it stays with me. "Do not think for an instance when I take you to the airport and say goodbye to you that is the end of it. You are still in my heart, you are in my soul, you are in my house, you are still in my life". (HF1)

Similarly, students felt assured that they now had a second family on the other side of the world. One student stressed, "I have created bonds with them that is hard to be broken once I go back to the other side of the planet" (S11). Families who hosted for the first time enthusiastically shared their plans of visiting the student's home country, such as per one host:

> I am for real now thinking of Egypt, you know, and I have to go and visit him sometimes. I was just sitting here thinking, actually, when he graduates from college maybe we go to Africa, we go visit his family. (HF12)

Those who had hosted for several years remained grounded yet confident about not losing touch with their students. One long-term host shared:

> We follow a lot of our students, I see their children and their husbands on Facebook. And we see their weddings, and then they have babies. It is really fun, and we consider them all our extended family. Our family around the world. (HF4)

Finally, these experiences of students and host families within a homestay demonstrate the various layers and depth of relationships that they established during the exchange.

Self-Improvement

Growing up. Students in this study emphasized personal growth and development during the exchange that altogether contributed to their overall self-improvement. The areas of improvement discussed here included personal attributes, personality traits, and communication abilities. This theme was supported largely by trustworthy relationships within a homestay.

The program handbook (2019d) states that while learning about American culture, students will become more open to examining their own opinions, values, and ideas objectively. Students also are to become "more adaptable and more critical and independent" in thinking, "better able to assume responsibility" for themselves, and "better able to communicate with others" (p. 44). The handbook promises that above all, students will learn more about themselves. It further encourages youth to set personal goals while in the US like improving English skills, building self-confidence, personal change, or developing a new skill. The handbook also states that these goals "should relate to the importance of your exchange program while still being unique to you" (p. 20). However, when asked about their motivation to apply for the program, only a handful of students perceived this year as an opportunity for personal growth.

Even though at the PDO, the exchange staff briefed them about common issues of adjustment to host society and family, it was not until they had to face challenges, and learn life skills to handle problems themselves, as noted by one student:

> I learned a lot from the PDO but coming here, personally, I see that there is so much more to the program than all the advice they gave us. They said, "Students experience personal growth." I was like, "Yeah, OK". But coming here and actually experiencing that is very unique and I see that it is very helpful in life. (S20)

For all students, this was the first time to live abroad without their natural families. This meant students had to learn how to solve problems, cope with challenges, and communicate with foreign people in a non-native language and on their own.

Personal growth does not happen overnight or in one specific moment. It also does not follow a linear progression but rather, it may look like a curve consisting of ups and downs.

When talking about growth, students recalled the painful stages of adjustment in the first couple of months. While homestay provided a sense of security, the honeymoon stage of cultural adjustment subsided quickly. Students found adjusting to host family one of the major obstacles they had encountered, as shared by one of them:

> This is just a general switch because the first week, it is just like, "What do I do?" You just get thrown into it, if you have never been in, you are just sinking. It is up to you if you decide to get out of it or not, which I did pretty quickly. You just learn to adapt to new stuff. As long as you do that, I believe there are no real issues that can occur. (S13)

For most students, the initial adjustment required a switch to a more positive mindset supported by the fact that this “once in a lifetime opportunity”, i.e. exchange, is relatively short. Therefore, they should focus on the positive rather than the negative, making the best out of it. To achieve this mental state, students had to put in some effort. A couple of them shared about learning to control emotions by developing stress-management strategies that kept their mental health in balance. The student who encountered challenges with five young host siblings said, “I managed to cut my stress and to manipulate my brain. When you get stressed, the only thing you are damaging is yourself. If something bad happens, if I think it over, it will damage me” (S12). Another student who switched families when encountering hateful speech against Palestinians in his first host family said, “Now I know how to be with people if they are mad” (S6). In such challenging situations, these students learned important life skills such as controlling negative emotions that could harm their mental health.

Another area where families thought they had affected students’ growth was in improving their communication skills. While most families described students’ English proficiency upon arrival as “very good,” “excellent,” and “fantastic”, the local coordinator exerted caution, saying,

“On arrival, many of them are far from fluent initially, but academically have some real solid background in English” (LC1). Indeed, homestay provided opportunities for language acquisition and immersion. In the interviews, students proudly reported that they got to communicate in English more fluently. One student explained how improving his language skills served as a motivation to apply for the exchange:

> I wanted to learn how to speak fluently English. There is no better way to speak the language than being in an environment that speaks that language. It motivated me because in my country if you want to have job opportunities, you need to speak good English. (S22)

Others also thought learning English from native speakers in America would be advantageous in the future. However, becoming fluent was not an easy task for everyone. Coming from countries where English is not being taught by native speakers, students were sometimes misunderstood because of improper pronunciation or accent, as explained by the student from Cameroon:

> In the beginning, it was my way of speaking. People did not get what I wanted to say… It was the accent and the way I use certain words. When you are not used to living with people, they have a certain kind of way of speaking, and you do not know the way they speak, so you seem bizarre or strange to some people. They are like, "Hmm, he different." That was a big problem for me. (S9)

Likewise, a few hosts reported occasional lapses in communication that were language-related. For instance, it could be a matter of cultural appropriation, as explained by one host, “I had to correct him on some things that he did not know about and that would be culturally inappropriate” (HF15). Another family took things into their own hands, saying:

> Many of them have studied English for years but most of them study with teachers who are not native English speakers. I think the sooner and the more they can immerse in their host family, the faster they improve. We teach them English. We speak proper English with them and we correct them… And they become cautious of what they do and they correct, although they choose not to sometimes. (HF4)

Those living with host siblings and extended family had even more opportunities to practice English. In my talking to students throughout the year, I noticed a growth in confidence in communicating with Americans. One student said, "I feel more comfortable speaking with people, asking them if I really do not understand something and if for me it seems silly to not understand something I can still ask them" (S7). Because of this, hosts observed that the overall host-student communication improved by the end of the year.

An area of personal growth that was most pronounced among the students concerned independence. Living away from a natural family forced students to start thinking for themselves and making their own decisions rather than relying on their parents' advice. One student articulated this well:

> I became more independent. Back in Lithuania, I would ask my mum, "Do you think this is OK?", or "Do you think I should do this?", and now here I just make my own decision. Of course, I have some advice from others. (S1)

Moreover, students grasped that when making decisions, they also needed to accept the consequences – both good and bad – that can impact their lives. Independence was reinforced within a homestay. While natural parents may be more forgiving, students soon recognized the risk of breaking trust with host families. Establishing trust gradually earned students more freedom, which typically transpired in the second half of the exchange. One student explained,

"They give me freedom. They trust me and think that I am responsible" (S16). In return, students learned that becoming responsible for their actions is not an easy task, as described by one of them:

> The challenge for me was to be so independent because you are a part of the family but still, you have to be responsible for what you are doing. You have to know that your actions can influence your host family. (S10)

Students also felt that they became more mature due to the exchange experiences. Again, homestay played a big part, especially for students whose hosts expected them to commute independently to and from school, or to meet their friends. Living with a single host, this student felt early on that she was being treated as an adult:

> My parents used to treat me like a two-year-old kid. My dad used to take me everywhere. He took me to school. When school is over he is out waiting for me so I never took a city bus. But here, I have to take the city bus every day… I never used to buy stuff for myself. But now, I have to go downtown to buy clothes for myself. I can pick what I like and buy it. But before my mom picked and she brought it to me. (S2)

Likewise, students gained an important life skill of managing their own money. Receiving a small monthly stipend provided by the program, students had to become more aware of how they spend their monies. One student compared this change to handling finances back home:

> I have to deal with my money and how I spend my money. I have to be more responsible with the things that I do. When I am with my parents, even if I fail or if I spend all my money, I could ask for it. (S22)

In the same vein, students gradually became more "adult" in their behaviors. When at home, most of them used to socialize with peers only, but during the exchange, they got to

interact with adults of various ages as well. Some of them valued the time spent with hosts because at home their natural parents worked long hours, or they did not have a habit of eating meals together. Some also appreciated the richness of conversations they held with hosts, which helped them grow personally, as articulated by one student:

> When I am at home, I spend time with them [host family]. I can go to other places with friends, but talking with them is very important because they are very smart and it helps me to become more mature and just become a better person. (S4)

Stepping outside one's comfort zone. For students who identified as introverted, the homestay experience challenged them to get out of their comfort zones. One student shared how the exchange experience helped her come out of her shell and improve her self-esteem:

> I was so shy back in my home country. I could not talk, and I was scared of defending myself … I was so weak but now I have more self-confidence, I believe in myself, I can talk with people more, and I am working toward my goals. (S17)

Students who were initially shy over time developed more confidence, stating that they could now "talk to whoever I want" (S12), and "become more expressive" (S9). This also was evident in my observations throughout the year. Students who appeared timid at Orientation blossomed by the end of the year, and in the interviews, they appeared communicative and more comfortable in expressing their opinions. They said open communication was not encouraged in their natural families. In one case, the student's lack of communication with hosts triggered multiple changes in host families. He explained the difficulties of overcoming social norms stemming from his home country:

> Where I come from, when your parents are talking, you do not just get to come right in and talk with them. In my first host family, my parents were talking and I was always

> sitting quietly and they were like, "Talk with us. Just jump right in and talk." I am like, "Oh, really?" In Cameroon, you do not talk when parents are talking. You need permission if they invite you to talk with them. That was a big challenge for me. (S9)

On the other hand, students who were more extroverted from the get-go positioned themselves in leadership roles among their peers. One student explained how he took opportunities to advance himself in this area:

> Back home if I ever saw an opportunity or a chance to differentiate myself from my peers, if I needed to speak in front of people, in front of a camera, or just socialize, I would always take this chance. But since those kinds of chances were few and far between, I did not have that many chances. But coming here, being communicative and not shy definitely helped me in succeeding in real life. (S18)

Through his hosts' encouragement and social connections, this student took leadership roles in the host family's church, building upon his communication and social skills. Similarly, several others became more proactive, either through involvement in host family activities or community service.

Despite students' largely positive recounts of growth, hosts shared stories of immature behaviors. One family felt disappointed when their student went behind their backs asking the local coordinator to change families. In the interview, the student felt peer pressure from other exchange students who advised him to get away from trouble by moving to a new family. Instead, the student soon concluded that running away would not solve the problem. He decided to handle the situation more maturely, detailing:

> I was thinking about it for some time, and then I just realized, "Why do not I just try till the end?" It has been really good now… I tried to keep everything between us, and it

> worked well. It is better to say to the person what you think, and if the person says her or his opinion, you can find a compromise. (S21)

In another case, the host made it a point for the student to demonstrate integrity after cheating on a test:

> That is what we tell him, "You always got to do the right thing. Always. No matter what. Just suffer the consequences." No world is perfect and no family is perfect and no child… Nobody is perfect. Of course, we have those growing pains, but those are opportunities for everybody to learn. (HF19)

These instances demonstrated the host family's accountability to stick through the trouble, which in return helped cultivate students' sense of moral responsibility to themselves and the family.

Teenagers are the same everywhere. Several hosts experienced adjustment fatigue, especially when students did not live up to their household expectations. For example, one host found his student "a bit challenging initially" because he came from a well-off family where he did not have to do any house chores. To assist with homestay adjustment, hosts took the initiative to encourage positive behavior that they expected in their homes. Interestingly, families attributed most homestay challenges to teenage behavior and not to cultural differences.

During the interviews, most hosts shared the realization that teenage kids are "the same everywhere", while one admittedly expected a student who grew up in Kyrgyzstan to behave differently from American peers. The host shared: "I was hoping he was not going to be an American teenager, but I think he turned out to be an American teenager" (HF18). Most hosts preferred to deal with adolescent issues within a family, similar to handling the immature behavior of their children, as per one host:

> If we cannot deal with it in our own home, then we should not be host parents. If there is

> a problem, that is something that we should be able to handle. And if it is so bad, that we cannot handle it, the students should not come here in the first place. (HF8)

Even so, hosts who were retired or older sometimes felt the burden of taking care of a teenager. As explained by one host:

> It is always much more responsibility with a 16-year-old. Because they are minors, the judgment is very different… You have to advise them a lot more… He has to be reminded to pick up after himself. But that is a pretty typical 16-year-old boy. Dishes, and chores in the kitchen, he has to still be reminded. One thing I know – his mother will be shocked when he goes home. (HF11)

Patience was the key personal quality that these hosts claimed to have learned from hosting adolescents.

By the end of the year, students appreciated the host's persistence in becoming responsible family members by contributing their part to the household. They gained new skills that they thought would be useful upon returning home. Most male students learned how to perform household duties independently for the first time, as illustrated by one of them:

> I did not know how to make food before I came here. But now I know how to make food, and also wash my clothes. Just my mom would wash my clothes. But now I got the skills how to wash my clothes, be more tidy, and clean up. (S6)

In another male student's opinion, the homestay experience resembled a college prep that allowed him to become more self-sufficient. He explained his home family norms did not match the ones of his American host family, which is why he had to make the necessary adjustments:

> Me and my [natural] family, we are more agriculturally oriented, so I had my specific duties outside of the house. And my mother would have her duties inside the house. But

> now coming here, having all of these duties switched, where I would have to do what my mother would do. I would say there were some problems with that. But gradually, I got more and more used to it. I make less of those mistakes. Tidier, more responsible with household chores. (S18)

While not many youths took pride in performing household chores, as could be expected by teenagers, there was a sense of satisfaction among hosts that learning life skills would have benefitted students in a long run, and would make their natural families proud.

Single hosts dealt with challenges of parenting that they had never experienced before. Because of their friendship-like relationship, these hosts often struggled with employing rules for teenagers. One host said:

> I try to remember that I need to be a daddy, this is where the red line is, you cannot cross it… Teenage kids, basically think they know the world, they think they know it all. I think I am used to rolling with the punches now. I think my tolerance went up because I had to put up with this teenage kid for a year, and realizing that he has not grown up yet. I get over it, and the next day I have to take care of him again [laughter]. (HF6)

Hosts who never parented before learned more about managing teenage behavior. Another host who could no longer lead the same adult social life stated, “If she had been a college exchange student, it would be different. We would be closer in age or they would be already an adult, a legal adult” (HF9). Parenting a teenage kid was something they had to figure out on their own. In general, families found watching students “grow and change over the year” (HF1) gratifying, and by large, they felt that adjusting and maintaining a positive homestay experience played a vital role in their growth.

Overcoming the sense of entitlement. Most teenagers do not like to admit they are

"teenagers". This study's participants were no different at the beginning of the exchange. In my observations, students did not like to be called "teenagers" during Orientation, much less "typical teenagers" as they were well aware of the high selectivity to participate in the program. Since one of the selection criteria was personality traits, it appeared that some of them thought highly of their personalities, and did not think this year would change them to the extent it did. The Oahu coordinator noted that some students "arrive with a certain sense of entitlement and high self-value that is not necessarily justified because they think they are winners" (LC1). The entitlement tended to fade away when students realized that they are the ones who needed to adjust, as further elaborated by the coordinator:

> I think often FLEX and YES students think that everybody else should flex to them, and they do not understand what being an exchange student really is. So, usually, we emphasize their role, teaching them they need to be flexible, adaptable, and mature.

One host acknowledged his student's efforts to improve his attitude:

> I do not think he comes off as entitled anymore… It is a very tough situation for a kid to be in. They think they struck goals like in the lottery or, at least, he did coming here essentially is, but it is actually difficult coming to a completely new place, in a totally new family… It probably feels like you won the lottery. Then you got to do the hardest work of your life you have never done and be in a completely uncomfortable setting. (HF18)

In my interviews with students, some of them explicitly stated feeling like they embarked on adulthood during the exchange, as described by one student, "I have been taken away as a teenager, I am coming back as an adult" (S13). Another student articulated how she experiences the transition to adulthood:

> I am starting to accept who I am and learn more stuff about who I am and who I want to be. And I think that is very important for me as a teenager who is just going inside the adult world. (S11)

I, too, have observed more adult-like behavior at the end of the year. With most challenges being solved at the beginning of a homestay, at the time of the interviews, families commended students for their flexibility in adjusting to host society, especially given their young age. One host observed, “I do not know if I were 15 and 16 if I would cope nearly as well. So, I just think kids that age are more resilient than we think” (HF3). However, resilience does not come with the age only, but it became more obvious when exchange participants learned to overcome life challenges independently, or with the help of a host family. For example, some students recalled experiencing feelings of “loneliness” and “isolation”. At the end of the program, they felt that these moments “made me stronger” (S8), and “it was something that I needed to grow and to develop” (S11).

Self-improvement during the exchange was seen as an opportunity for advancing one’s position in future professional pursuits. For a student who won a prestigious award for an outstanding videographer in Hawaiʻi high schools, furthering his creative traits and professional skills could affect his career path following the exchange. He said:

> I definitely became more open creatively since I always thought I was creative anyway. Now, since I have the ability to do stuff, I actually express that… You actually explore your creativity, you see where the boundaries are. Before that, I was only mainly working in my head, and the most I ever did is write screenplays. (S13)

While not all students achieved awards, most of them became more proactive by expanding their horizons and discovering new possibilities. Another student proclaimed that he became “more

prepared to do anything in my life" (S5).

Finally, both parties expanded their horizons through the homestay experience, and in their opinions, became more open-minded about different people. As per one student:

> Like when I say, "No, I'm right, you're wrong." And then I was like, "There's no way to be right every time." Because others' perspectives are completely different so it makes me like I have to respect others. I cannot be right every time... there are different ways of living, how people behave and it is not right or wrong. (S23)

Additionally, students thought they became more understanding and tolerant towards other cultures and opinions, and in general, they felt more eager to learn about the world. Per one student's advice to future exchange students, "If you want to know yourself better just go to another country. And then you will find who you are" (S23). Only one student self-reflected on the privilege of having the unique opportunities that not many youths of his age have. He said, "I changed a lot of my way of thinking, I know more about my privileges" (S15), and as a result, has decided that he can use it to make changes in home society upon return.

Chapter Summary

In the third findings chapter, I explored how exchange students and host families experienced intercultural exchange and what kinds of interactions characterized their experiences. I first illustrated the culture-sharing within a homestay that expanded beyond artifacts into sharing about politics, religion, and race. I highlighted the nuances of culture-sharing, especially for the youths and hosts who did not identify closely with the mainstream culture that the program attempted to promote. I also uncovered the unique multicultural dynamics in Hawai‘i, illuminating the ways mainland American hosts, Asian American hosts, and Native Hawaiian hosts perceived and shared culture with the youth.

Second, I discussed the various layers of the student-host relationships, including family dynamics of nuclear families, single hosts, and multi-generational families. As per my findings, different host profiles set the stage for a diversity of interactions that characterized the participants' experiences within a homestay. Overall, despite the initial challenges of adjustment or the clash of values and norms, students became members of the family. The close bonds they formed with host parents, and that had a long-term potential to hold, indicated that the program met its goal of building close relationships between foreign youth and Americans.

Third, I explored the ways the intercultural exchange within a homestay contributed to the youth participants' experiences of personal growth and development, resulting in a process of self-improvement. While hosts largely perceived the exchange youth as any other teenagers, findings among the youth demonstrated that their growth was supported by trustworthy relationships developed in a homestay.

CHAPTER 9: Discussion

In the previous Findings chapters, I illustrated through my data analysis (1) the ways in which the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempted to instill the official norms and values of the program, (2) how participants experienced different aspects of the program, and the processes that go into it, and to what extent did these experiences reflect program objectives, and (3) how participants experienced intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterized their experiences. As such, this study added value to what happens during the exchange; in different time points, events, and experiences.

In this chapter, I turn to a discussion of my findings to provide in-depth and cross-cutting insights into my research questions. First, I discuss the FLEX and YES programs' explicit efforts to instill the norms and values of American society through highly structured programming that allows for the vertical dynamics that shape the enactment of the program objectives. Second, I explore the tensions surrounding the public diplomacy role for both students and host families. I highlight the ways participants perceived and carried out their role as cultural ambassadors, which often met their motives rather than the program objectives. Third, I discuss participants' culture-sharing experiences within a homestay and highlight the tensions that emerged related to hosting in Hawai'i. I conclude with a discussion of the youth's aspirations for personal and professional advancement that are misaligned with the program's leadership goal.

Explicit Efforts to Instill the Norms and Values of American Society

The findings of my first research question paint a picture of FLEX and YES as well-structured and well-supported youth exchange programs. Through its highly structured programming, including multiple orientations and workshops throughout the year, the program attempts to draw upon and instill directly the official norms and values. The emphasis that the

program puts on orientation is evident with a four-day Pre-Arrival Orientation (PDO) held in students' home countries about a month before student arrival in the US. The role of the PDO is to prepare students for a successful exchange year. The emphasis of the PDO and the Arrival Orientation is on the attributes that will make for – what the program labels – a "successful" year in the US. One key aspect of these required sessions is carried out through activities that ask for youths' self-reflection and assessment that emphasizes the desired attitudes and behaviors that make a successful exchange student. There was a sense that despite the two required and lengthy orientations, students' adjustment to a homestay presented initial challenges. The findings also revealed that despite being briefed about various scenarios that may occur during the exchange, there were certain aspects that students could not grasp in theory, but only when they experienced it themselves. For example, the youth realized that personal growth and development necessarily come with challenges that one needs to face and resolve. Thus, while the orientations provided theoretical understandings of cultural adjustment, and focused on the desired attitudes and behaviors, there seemed to be a lack of emphasis on the experiential and cognitive aspects of learning.

Enhancement activities allowed the program to instill the norms and values of American society explicitly. Implemented at different points in time over the year, the enhancements exposed foreign youth directly to specific aspects of American civil society, such as civic responsibility, community service, respect for diversity, and the rule of law. Local coordinators who are responsible for the development of these events have a certain amount of freedom, however, they need to abide by the program guidelines and submit the reports and student evaluations to the sponsoring organization. This process allows for the vertical dynamics that shape the enactment of the program objectives.

Legislative internship, religious diversity workshop, and leadership training were the three enhancements provided each year in Hawaiʻi. As per my findings, students got to learn more about the government and legislative processes, and better understand various religious practices, and the characteristics of a leader. These first-hand encounters broadened their perspectives about the functioning of a democratic government, and made them compare the American government with their home countries' systems. The religious diversity workshop had them realize that all religions share similarities centered around the values of common humanity. However, the youth's perceptions of the US government and religious diversity in American society appeared rather idealistic, which signals that these workshops promoted pro-American attitudes on a rather superficial level, with the lack of critical discussion. In comparison to their home countries, youth seemed to hold American ways in higher esteem, that is, as a superior culture that they should learn *from* if they were to "correct" the system or perceptions of people at home. The leadership training was the only activity that focused on individual traits and served as a way to motivate the youth to believe in their leadership potential. Admittedly, the youth were determined to pass the newly acquired knowledge and information to their peers and family, which would meet the long-term goal of the program with youth influencing their co-nationals' opinions about the US. This study has its limitations in not following the youth over the years, to explore how their stated commitments play out years after the exchange.

While these opportunities are optional, students are encouraged to apply and participate in selected workshops and contests during the exchange. Participation in these exclusive meetings is competitive, and being selected through an essay competition may serve as an extra boost of confidence. My findings demonstrate that youth who attended a CEW in Washington, D.C. enhanced their understanding of American history, the federal system of government, First

Amendment rights, grassroots volunteer efforts, and US foreign policy. Importantly, students got to interact not only with the DOS officials and ambassadors but also with other exchange students placed all over the US. These personal peer connections with like-minded individuals appeared to strengthen the group's resolve toward the program goals. More specifically, findings show that the CEW boosted youth's pride and motivation to serve as youth ambassadors after completion of the program through alumni networks. For this, the CEW incorporated elements of leadership training that had youth think about issues and start planning for community initiatives at home. However, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that the enhanced youth's commitment to the program goals is held in a long run. It is beyond this study's scope to provide insights into the long-term effects of the said enhancement activities and leadership roles, if any, assumed by these youth in the future.

My findings further illustrate how the program attempts to expose students to community service in the US, and with this, instill in students a sense of civic responsibility, which the program deems an important value in American society. The students took on various forms of volunteering in their host communities. For most youth, this was the first time to take part in organized community service. They picked up volunteering in their host schools or joined host families' community efforts. While the idea behind this requirement is to have youth start thinking about the issues in their home countries that they could attend to in the future, it is not clear how much genuine commitment to volunteering this study's youth felt – beyond obtaining a DOS certificate – and to what extent they desired to get involved in community service at home outside the alumni network.

The program's attempt to motivate youth with a DOS certificate for completion of 100 volunteer hours does not put much emphasis on the type or the quality of community service that

the youth perform. Besides learning new skills, as this requirement anticipated, one student on Molokai volunteered in a capacity that allowed him to share his digital skills to support teachers' work at his host school. This finding puts the program's assumption that foreign youth would be learning new skills from Americans into question. Being hosted in a remote island community like Molokai, with one public high school and limited resources, this student's volunteering of his technological skills to the school's teachers is significant. However, there is no evidence from teachers in host schools to verify youth's contributions to remote communities and public high schools in Hawai'i. The other goal of community service was for the youth "to interact with different groups of people." While there is no evidence that long-lasting relationships were formed, several youths appreciated the opportunities to converse with people in the host community, with whom they were able to share their culture. Community service thus set the stage for youth-adult interaction across multiple generations, but the extent to which these relationships with host nationals were developed and will hold in the future remains unknown.

Moreover, the exchange students are regarded as future leaders of their countries. By increasing awareness of local and global issues through active participation in community service, participants may have developed leadership skills. It appeared that students underwent changes that affected not only their attitude but also their behavior, triggering them to act during the exchange and as per the interviews, upon reentry to their home countries. At the end of the program, youth envisioned their future engagements mainly to take place through established alumni networks in their countries. Perhaps this is the reason their community service initiatives were not well-developed, with few students sharing a clear vision of their desired projects that would advance their home communities.

It is important to note that in certain FLEX/YES countries with long exchange tradition, the alumni groups are well established. These groups may be more active in various cities, and with activities organized throughout the country, while newer countries may not provide as many opportunities for the alumni in smaller cities and remote communities. The question remains how long will the motivation for community service last upon re-entry, and who will be able to get involved considering their geographic access and resources? What this study shows is that at the end of the program, the youth seemed intrigued about their ongoing participation in a global network of like-minded people – fellow FLEX and YES exchange alumni – with whom they will be able to share similar experiences.

Tensions Surrounding the Public Diplomacy Role

My findings to the second research question revealed participants' experiences with each aspect of the program. The findings suggest that most of the youth desired to take the opportunity to study abroad with all the expenses covered by the American government, as their main motivation. Several students applied for the program more than once. They took tutoring classes, acquired information online, and consulted program alumni in their schools and community, to level up their chances of being selected. The strong desire to become a winner may lead some students to write what the selection committee wants to hear. As per long-term hosts, they quickly realized that some of their students were dishonest in their application materials, which endangered their relationship. Dishonesty may cause trust issues with host families and local coordinators from the get-go since the expectations are based on students' applications – the only information being shared with hosts and coordinators before the student's arrival. This issue emerged from my interviews with the hosts and would be interesting to explore further in future studies. Also, it would be valuable to interview the FLEX and YES

selection committee members, to gain more in-depth insights into the application and selection process.

The findings call into question the lack of background information about the youth's family, such as the socio-economic status relative to their home society. As per the hosts and local coordinators, this would be valuable information to set the right expectations on the grassroots level. For example, students who expect to be treated as "special guests," and to receive gifts from hosts may be used to a wealthy upbringing at home – even if the country's GDP is lower than the one of the US. While some hosts expected an impoverished grantee from a low-income, "exotic country," this study made it clear that it is a false assumption to believe that FLEX and YES youth come from poor families. As the program claims, most youths come from middle-class families, the income of which is relative to the country's economy, and indeed, could be lower than the one of an average middle-class American family. However, in newer FLEX/YES participating countries, the program has not had a reach as wide as in long-standing countries. The lack of information about the program also may put in disadvantaged position youth who do not have access to the program alumni. Thus, having access to information, the resources to apply for the program, and family support is essential to consider in the selection process.

An issue that emerged from the findings is host family recruitment. The program claims that hosts do not need to be wealthy to provide students with "wonderful experiences". Indeed, most hosts in this study did not consider themselves wealthy, yet they were internationally-minded, professionals in their careers, and often empty nesters. Over the years, the DOS has insisted on the voluntary role of host families rooted in the post-war ideals of goodwill and hospitality. With generational changes, the volunteering focus also has changed. As per the

experienced local coordinator's remarks, it appears that Americans nowadays may see less value partaking in public diplomacy efforts through people-to-people exchanges than they used to.

The findings further demonstrate that while the hosts' motives met the general rules of the program, hosts held specific motives for hosting. For instance, a couple of hosts admitted that their main motivation was to share with the youth their Christian faith. These families were careful not to impose their religious beliefs, but would typically include their students in all religious events. Other personal motives for hosting stemmed from internal family dynamics. This study found that for families with children, the addition of a foreign student aimed to improve family behaviors and attitudes towards each other, positively impact extended family members, or even help with overcoming grief. The long-term host families' motives were more closely related to the program goals. These families appreciated the prestige and selectivity of the FLEX/YES exchange programs and the extensive and personal support that they received on the local level. Moreover, they were proud to serve as public diplomats, spreading the values that they admittedly lived by and believed in. This corresponds with the previous studies that have shown that government-funded programs give legitimacy to intergroup contact (Allport, 1979; Brewer & Gaertner, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005).

Another issue that emerged from the findings is the volunteer nature of host families. The DOS rule that families receive no remuneration for food, transportation, and time invested in their student has remained the same since the beginning of the FLEX program. Considering they agree to host on a volunteer basis, it may be reasonable for the families to expect youth's nearly perfect behavior, attitude, and appreciation. When a conflict arises, some hosts – especially those who are new to the program, those who never parented before, and those who may not recognize the long-term value of hosting – may not feel the urge to stick with the trouble unless the student

is willing to adapt to the family's lifestyle. My findings show that while most challenges were solved within a homestay through open student-host communication, there were cases when hosts did not compromise to meet their students halfway. Overall, the generational and social changes coupled with the fact that hosts do not get paid may be the reasons for the recruitment challenges, lack of diversity in host profiles, and multiple host family changes.

The program uses the terms "success" and "failure" as a way of reinforcing the rules, desired behaviors, and attitudes that students – but not hosts – must demonstrate in various contexts. For example, a successful exchange student is to keep an open mind and is flexible, adaptable, and mature. The program asserts that these personality traits are to set the stage for a successful cultural adjustment in one's host community, as well as the adjustment in one's host family. Besides the homestay, students must be successful in their educational pursuits, receiving nearly perfect grades in all subjects. The issue that emerged from the interviews with both students and hosts, and was not covered in any program documents or orientation, shows that the program does not provide extra support to the youth who carry the double academic workload. Each year, some students enter the program in their Senior year of high school and therefore need to study for national final exams that they need to take upon re-entry – often immediately upon return. In most FLEX and YES participating countries, a lot of emphases is put on these final examinations that may be determinantal to these young people's future careers. On the other hand, there were a few students whose home schools did not recognize educational credentials from the US. This additional burden that a small group of youth carried during the exchange was observed by the hosts themselves who empathized with them. The program does not appear to have proper support for these students who deal with unique challenges about their

educational credentials at home, and who are told by the program to focus solely on a successful exchange year.

The findings on the public diplomacy role as stipulated by the program provide complex insights into participants' cultural identities and the ways they perceived and carried out their role as cultural ambassadors. The youth must assume the role of cultural ambassadors who bridge cultures and promote cross-cultural understanding in the US. The exchange students' desired subjectivity is two-fold: to openly receive American culture, and to willingly share their own culture with host nationals. Youth in this study did not seem to fully grasp what the job of a cultural ambassador entailed, which was evident at the beginning of the program. They saw this scholarship as a prestigious award that triggered a sense of entitlement, and not as a duty that comes with specific cultural, social, and political responsibilities.

There was tension in my findings about the ambassadorial role that appeared as a burden for the youth who belonged to ethnic minority groups, and those who lived in regions that did not reflect the culture of mainstream society. Still, the public diplomacy role expected them to represent proudly "not only yourself, but your entire country," and to answer any inquiries from Americans in a most positive and polite manner. Being a cultural ambassador does not leave much room for students who identify as somebody else. In my findings, the youth who expressed these concerns appeared overwhelmed with the ambassadorial role, especially when this role expanded into political or geopolitical spheres they had no control. For example, students encountered misconceptions from people in the host community that they felt responsible to correct, or were asked to share opinions about sensitive geopolitical issues. These questions, even if not ill-intentioned, could place youth in an awkward position of speaking on behalf of the people or political groups that they do not associate with, and in the long run, undermine their

trust in Americans and the US. This is one of the program components that cannot be fully monitored by the institution, as the interactions often occur privately within a homestay or host community environment.

For the Muslim participants in particular, the tensions between the US and the Muslim world presented a burden to debunk certain anti-Islamic prejudices in the host community. This was a similar issue identified in Radomski's (2008) research among YES students, however, this study did not consider host families' perspectives. Through interpersonal contact that allowed hosts to learn more about Islam, and to develop positive attitudes towards Muslims, some hosts felt the need to defend all Muslims – not only their students. This is a confirmation that the goals of the YES program hold, at least to a certain extent, as those hosts who maintained positive interactions with Muslim students spoke openly against Islamophobic stereotypes, which was similarly found in Christian and Lapinski's (2003) study among American high school students.

Freedom of speech, gender equality, issues of disability, and appreciation for diversity, were some of the topics students felt most passionate about, largely due to being exposed to them within a homestay or host community. Freedom of speech was especially pertinent to students who came from authoritarian and theocratic regimes. Students who felt like they did not belong in their country before the exchange seemed to develop an even deeper appreciation for American values. In addition, youth found the issues of race unique in Hawaiʻi, where the white race does not dominate like on the mainland US. Interestingly, the racial composition in Hawaiʻi made several FLEX students uncomfortable. These students came from homogenous societies where racial and ethnic diversity is not a norm.

Most students used to think about the US as the best country in the world. However, living in the US opened their eyes "to see the differences and to create opinions." Contrary to

what the program aspired to achieve, not all youth perceived American values in an entirely positive way. As found in studies among exchange returnees (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Wilson, 1993), this study's youth admittedly gained national pride and appreciation for values stemming from home culture, which led them to appreciate their culture and in a couple of cases, even boost their national pride, something they did not feel before the exchange. Very few students developed critical views toward their home society's norms. For instance, a FLEX student from Azerbaijan who admittedly did not identify with home values even before the exchange, saw this year as an opportunity to level up her chances of moving out of her country in the future. Beyond these experiences, only a couple of youths emphasized the value of being exposed to and understanding the different ways of being and living beyond the national norms and values.

Even though the findings show predominantly pro-American attitudes among youth participants, even for those who gained national pride, most students did not wish to return to the US in the future. The sentiment to return was stronger among host families who appeared emotionally attached to their students. The findings further show that the exchange experiences broadened youth's horizons of the world, and uplifted their hopes about the possibilities of future international pursuits elsewhere in the world, in other Western and Eastern countries as well. As the saying goes, "the world is your oyster," youth felt confident, hopeful, and inspired to explore new possibilities of obtaining future educational and career credentials more globally. This also was reflected in their career interests that centered around "international" and "global" issues.

Cultural Reciprocity Within a Homestay

My findings to the third research question reveal culture-sharing experiences within a homestay. They represent participants' learning and growth across different dimensions. Both

parties expanded their cultural as well as personal perspectives through the homestay and became more open-minded, tolerant, and understanding of different ways of being and living. For the youth, homestay provided opportunities for language acquisition and immersion and improved communication skills. With the cultural component being a big part of the exchange program, there is evidence in this study that certain youth were less willing to share about their culture than others. These individuals may not feel particular pride in their home country or culture.

This study fills the gap in the literature by exploring host families' perspectives which paint a picture of the reciprocal exchange; what youth had contributed to Americans' understanding of their cultures, and vice versa. Looking at these findings on a deeper level, the hosts' culture-sharing was limited to their cultural practices, religious or ethnic identity, and understanding of American society and politics. The findings demonstrate that non-white hosts shared with their students the Asian and Native Hawaiian cultures that they most closely identified with. Interestingly, a few long-term hosts made it a point to teach their students about American politics in particular, which expanded beyond the program requirements. Overall, most hosts expressed their desire – without being asked explicitly – to expose youth to a positive side of American society. Only a couple of hosts spoke critically about the power dynamics, emphasizing the importance of sharing cultural differences on equal ground with foreigners, rather than imposing American culture as the superior culture.

It was apparent that several youths did not quite fit into the mainstream society of their home countries. While hosts anticipated learning about their youth's country, they sometimes got to know more about a specific region, a minority, or a religious group that their students identified with. For example, a YES student from Indonesia was Catholic, while FLEX students

from Azerbaijan were Muslims. Ethnically, some students belonged to minority groups, and geographically, some lived in areas that did not reflect the culture of mainstream society. The lived experiences shared within a homestay reflected the reality of these adolescent youth, who themselves admitted that as “16-year-olds” they could only share their own experiences and understanding of their culture. Moreover, the findings reveal that these students in particular felt the pressure of providing “facts” to the hosts that they were not familiar with, or did not have readily available. Although the program labels them as youth ambassadors, the title and the role themselves carry responsibilities that can be burdensome for youth whose knowledge of politics, history, and religion was limited to personal experiences, and who were not trained in leadership and diplomacy before the exchange.

On the other hand, a few hosts found it fascinating that teenagers were able to discuss politics and geopolitical dynamics in such an intelligent manner. There was only one case when a host father reported that his political views conflicted with the ones of his student. Even though his student upheld his pro-Russian beliefs, the student-host relationship did not get affected. Overall, the in-depth conversations surrounding culture, politics, and religion, paved a way for improved awareness of contemporary issues not only in the US and students’ home countries but also around the world.

An unexpected tension that emerged from my findings relates to the settler colonial context of Hawaiʻi. Most Hawaiʻi hosts were racially white and belonged to the middle- or upper-middle socioeconomic class. Most of them did not grow up in Hawaiʻi but moved there from the mainland US. The native culture of Hawaiʻi was something that most mainland families were not well acquainted with, which made them feel somewhat uncomfortable. Without being asked explicitly, hosts revealed in the interviews the cultural identity conflict they felt while

hosting as a mainland family living in Hawaiʻi. They made a "conscious effort" to talk about what is typically American and what is typically Hawaiian, but their lifestyle fundamentally reflected the one of a mainland family. While some hosts made an effort to expose students to parts of the Hawaiian culture – mostly limited to cultural sights and tourist attractions – there was a sense that the host community itself would suffice in offering students a "real" Hawaiʻi experience. Moreover, some hosts felt the need to share about the "real America," i.e., presumably the mainland US. Again, it is unclear what "real America" is – unless it is a place that lacks diversity, as per the host who took his student to the Southern US in hopes that the student would recognize that "there is more to the United States" than Hawaiʻi, and therefore get a more complete "cultural" experience.

The youth claimed that the PDO did not prepare them well enough about Hawaiʻi culture, one of the most ethnically diverse states in the US. The host family profile did not reflect this diversity. Only a few host parents grew up in Hawaiʻi. They were of various Asian descents, and only one family was Native Hawaiian. All of these families perceived their culture as a hybrid between their ancestors who were immigrants, native, and American cultures. These families were the epitome of multiculturalism in American society. In Hawaiʻi, "the meltiest of the pots," as observed by one student, the diversity is a blend of Hawaiian, American, Polynesian, and multiple Asian cultures. Even if most students did not get a first-hand encounter with native culture within a homestay, they got exposed to diversity – even if superficially – through the school environment and host community. Ethnic diversity in Hawaiʻi was a major theme that youth came to appreciate by the end of the program.

The program expounds that the exchange offers families and students "the opportunity to create a strong lifelong relationship." Relationship building was sometimes a daunting task, yet

one of the most rewarding experiences for the vast majority of this study's participants. By establishing trust, youth and their hosts got to develop a sense of belonging that came with its challenges and rewards, which participants referenced as a typical family environment. All exchange students in this study felt that they became a member of the family at the time of the interviews. Students in nuclear host families assumed the status of a teenager in a family. Interestingly, only one out of five students whose host sibling was of similar age developed a close, friendship-like relationship with their siblings. Most student-host child relationships resembled typical sibling relationships where the activities and time spent together did not go beyond the family activities.

Hosting also could endanger family dynamics in families with children when it was the parents' and not the children's choice to host. This may be one of the reasons why students formed closer bonds with host parents rather than host siblings. The findings further confirm that no matter the type of host family profile, the closest bonds established were the ones between youth and host parents. Within a homestay, students benefited also from capitalizing on the host to gain access to their social networks. The homestay set the stage for students' expansion of the host national network through youth-adult friendships and multi-generational networks. Introducing foreign youth to people in the host community not only benefitted the students but also opened the community's eyes to foreign youth, which was one of the program's goals. One of the limitations of this study is the lack of host community voices that would illustrate youth's relationships beyond the homestay. Including wider host community perspectives would allow us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the actual impact that the foreign youth's interactions may have on Americans who are not hosting, and broadly speaking, on the host communities.

Much to the youth's surprise, one-third of the families were single hosts. Those with single hosts perceived their status on equal ground with the host. Their relationship resembled friendship where the youth's opinions were respected, and they were treated like adults. This host profile turned out to be the kind that cultivated more freedoms as opposed to a nuclear family set-up where students were just one of the kids and had to follow the established family rules. As per my findings, hosting was a unique challenge for adults who never parented before. The program does not provide specific guidelines to these hosts, who had to figure out the ways of dealing with adolescents on their own. Interestingly, families attributed most challenges to teenage behavior and not to cultural differences. Most hosts preferred to deal with adolescent issues within a family. Although they held youth to high standards, given their academic credentials and high selectivity of the program, hosting made them realize that teenage kids are "the same everywhere" – in regards to their maturity levels.

For students who had to change hosts multiple times, the adjustment to a new family mid-year was an undeniably stressful experience. The youth strongly wished to be placed in a stable homestay situation. An indication of host changes, unless it was initiated on behalf of the student, provoked anxiety and could ultimately lead to a sense of failure. However, living with different families also was an opportunity to build relationships with more people, and to experience different lifestyles. These students admittedly gained important life skills and resilience that could serve them well in the future. Overall, the experiences of students and host families within a homestay demonstrated the various layers and depth of relationships that they established during the year.

The youth in this study reported gains in self-confidence, responsibility, and independence. While hosts perceived youth as teenagers, the same sentiment was not shared by

the youth. They thought that the exchange helped them mature and grew into an adult Even though students felt emotionally supported within a homestay, living away from a natural family for the first time in their lives forced them to make their own decisions, problem-solve, and overcome challenges on their own. They also learned that the decisions they make come with consequences for themselves and their hosts. Overall, the exchange made youth change certain attitudes and behaviors towards becoming more responsible in their actions. One's personality traits also played a role in students' personal development. There was a noticeable difference between youth who were more extroverted compared to introverted ones. The extroverted students positioned themselves in leadership roles among their peers from the very beginning, dominating the conversations during required meetings. However, the findings show that students who were initially shy reported improved self-confidence by the end of the program. Overall, personal growth and development during the exchange contributed to the youth's self-improvement across various dimensions. This theme was supported largely by trustworthy relationships within a homestay.

Moreover, the findings show that youth perceived personal growth as a way of self-improvement rather than a way to meet the program's leadership goals. The program assumes that students will carry on their diplomatic role as alumni, spreading the values of American society in their home communities. Through alumni activities, youth remain part of the broader goals of the US public diplomacy, working towards democratic ideals in the FLEX and YES countries. Thus, youth should assume a role of leadership and should become change agents who willingly promote democratic values in home society (i.e., the multiplier effect). Indeed, through community service and host families' active lifestyle, most youths became more proactive during the exchange, expanding their horizons and discovering new possibilities. While the program

aspired to build bilateral relationships with alumni becoming “ambassadors for American values and culture”, this study’s youth largely saw the scholarship as a stepping stone towards their own personal and professional advancement, enhanced future socio-economic positioning at home, and future mobility. Although this was a common perception at the end of the exchange, youth’s engagement in the alumni networks post-exchange may be crucial to meet the US government’s long-term goals, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10: Implications

In the previous chapter, I reflected on the insights from my three findings chapters. In this chapter, I turn to my research implications through the lens of my theoretical perspectives, i.e., culture learning theory, cosmopolitanism, biopolitics, soft power and geopolitics. The FLEX and YES youth exchanges positioned within larger US public diplomacy objectives, aim to foster international relations through positive educational and social experiences of foreign youth in the US (ECA, 2007). The main goals include the promotion of mutual understanding, lasting personal ties, awareness of and involvement in civic and democratic processes among youth participants, and finally, engagement of foreign youth in activities that advance mutual understanding and civil society in their home countries (DOS, 2005). Through a multitude of perspectives and program participants' lived experiences, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the culture-sharing within a homestay on a micro level, as well as broader cosmopolitan, biopolitical, and geopolitical dimensions of government-funded youth exchange programs on a macro level of analysis. In addition, this study adds value to the literature on American host families' experiences and the culture-sharing in the context of Hawai‘i, the understudied topics in the present empirical literature on study abroad experiences.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the implications of the reciprocal and bilateral aspects of cross-cultural exchange within a homestay based on the culture learning theory. This includes a discussion of changes in the program participants' attitudes, behaviors, and cognition. I then highlight the tensions in my findings that relate to the issues of diversity in the context of Hawai‘i, and a possible conflict of values and norms upon re-entry that the program fails to address. In the second part, I look at my findings through the lens of cosmopolitanism. I discuss what it meant for the youth to embody a liberal cosmopolitan subjectivity as promoted by the

program norms and values. I critique the superficial diversity and propose a move towards the emancipatory expressions of cosmopolitanism that would engage youth in multicultural and global perspectives. In the third part, I engage my discussion in biopolitical perspectives to uncover the implications of the program's biopolitical tools that dictate the living and being of foreign youth in the US. I discuss the dynamics behind the program's attempts to sustain the desired subjectivities, and the tensions surrounding the youth cultural ambassadorial role. In the final part of this chapter, I turn to the macro-level dynamics surrounding these government-funded exchange programs, engaging my findings through the lenses of soft diplomacy and geopolitics. My implications suggest that the government should make a shift from bilateral pro-American aspects of the exchanges towards preparing youth for responsible global citizenry.

Reciprocal and Bilateral Aspects of Cross-Cultural Exchange

A detailed recount of mutual homestay experiences of a diverse group of foreign youth and American host families is this study's unique contribution to the literature on study abroad that mainly explored student perspectives. The homestay component provided this study's youth and hosts with favorable conditions for meaningful engagement on a deeper level, which adds value to previously studied short-term homestays (Rodriguez & Chornet-Roses, 2014; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Rohmann et al., 2014; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004). This study showed that youth gained a better understanding of the host culture, society, and people, which is in line with previous studies (Cheng & Yang, 2019; ECA, 2009; Hansel, 2008a, 2008b; Thomas, 2005; Weichbrodt, 2014). More specifically, students acquired new knowledge about American politics, government, and the economy. Their knowledge of the host culture was enhanced within a homestay where student-host interactions occurred in a natural setting (Cheng & Yang, 2019).

Homestay allowed for a certain level of intimacy that can be difficult to replicate in a

wider host community context. As per the culture learning theory and literature review, the person-to-person daily interactions and life-sharing experiences were valuable occasions to learn as an insider about different cultures, values, and lifestyles. Both parties expanded their cultural as well as personal perspectives through the homestay and became more open-minded, tolerant, and understanding of foreigners and different ways of living. Similar to the findings in Rohmann and colleagues' (2014) study, host families served as informational and emotional support to exchange students. However, a close living situation presented opportunities for positive and negative interaction. By establishing trust, a process that required time and mutual effort, youth and hosts managed to develop a sense of belonging to a family, which came with its challenges and rewards. As in most cross-cultural situations, the burden of adjustment fell on youth participants who needed to adapt to a host society. Ward and colleagues (2001) state that a greater amount of interaction with host nationals within a homestay improved the participants' intercultural competence, and facilitated a more positive adaptation to life abroad. As per the culture learning theory, the responses in affect, behavior, and cognition lead to stress management and social skill acquisition, resulting in psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (Zhou et al., 2008).

A tension that emerged from the findings relates to the culture-sharing in a homestay in the context of Hawai‘i. The culture learning theory does not recognize the nuances across cultures, but like the exchange programs themselves, it assumes the existence of one dominant, superior culture. As discussed in the previous chapter, the host family profile neither reflected the historic, ethnic, and racial composition of Hawai‘i's population nor were they representative of the contemporary composition of American society. It is concerning that the hosts themselves expressed a cultural identity conflict they felt, hosting as a mainland family in Hawai‘i. The

program stipulates that host families share with the foreign youth American culture and values. However, "what it means to grow up in America," and "what it means to be an American" can look different for a white middle-class family than a Native Hawaiian family.

Similarly, youth's culture-sharing was limited to their own "adolescent" understanding of their cultural or religious identity which was rather complex than clear-cut as the program handbooks attempted to portray them. Ultimately, both program participants shared cultures that they most closely identified with. The homestay component of the program is a unique opportunity for the US government to explicitly illustrate what diversity in American society looks like. Experiencing the multicultural localities and contexts within a homestay and host community could be one of the strengths of the program.

Relationship building, another key component of the exchange program, offers "the opportunity to create a strong lifelong relationship". This is important for the bilateral aspect of public diplomacy. This study demonstrates that positive intercultural contact within a homestay improved the overall exchange experience for both students and hosts. Thus, the inclusion of host families as a sedentary (rather than mobile) group that takes part in intercultural exchange adds unique contributions to the culture learning theory. The reciprocal intercultural learning for everyone involved can transpire within a positive homestay environment. All youth in this study reported that they were treated as true members of the family. There is strong evidence that both parties got to develop meaningful connections across cultural, religious, and even political boundaries.

The fact that these scholarship programs are funded entirely by the US government, and are thus promoting a one-sided (American) view of the world, there is an issue of cultural reciprocity. With a single political agenda, the program transmits values and mutual

understanding from a pro-American standpoint. Even though the findings show predominantly pro-American attitudes among participants, it was surprising that most students did not wish to return to the US in the near future. The sentiment to return was stronger among host families who appeared emotionally attached to their students. As opposed to previous studies that found alumni's life-long attachment to the host country (Pisarska, 2016), and a strong desire to return (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Wilson, 1993), the exchange made this study's youth excited about opportunities elsewhere in the world.

It is not clear how the program intends to support youth upon re-entry, beyond the required Re-Entry workshop that does not specifically address the possible conflict of values and norms, which emerged from some of the interviews. Previous research found that returning home to a tight culture with a socially imposed code of conduct is more challenging than entering a loose culture (Szkudlarek, 2010; Ward et al., 2005). Youth and even their host families expressed concerns about re-adjustment, or the refusal of thereof, in students' home societies. As noted in Szkudlarek's study (2010), the exchange program alumni may no longer fit in the mainstream of their own culture – even if they developed a bicultural identity. Thus, joining the FLEX/YES alumni groups may present itself as an opportunity for being understood in a supportive outgroup environment within one's home country (Sussman, 2000). Alumni networks are spaces linked to the shared intercultural identity, resources, and opportunities, through which youth may continue building intercultural and global connections.

Cosmopolitan Subjects

A cosmopolitan subject is expected to hold "a sense of tolerance, flexibility and openness toward otherness" (Molz, 2006, p. 2). Most of this study's youth had held certain cultural dispositions before the exchange, which showed in their English proficiency and self-perceived

familiarity with the American socio-cultural context. Looking more closely, their knowledge stemmed from Hollywood movies, and thus did not entirely reflect the reality of American society. As observed by the experienced local coordinators, the new generations of youth have become increasingly Americanized in their thinking and way of life, through the consumption of social media and Netflix shows in their home countries. It was evident from the findings that the exchange students' attitudes toward the host nation often were romanticized and cosmopolitan before the exchange.

The exchange students' motivations prior to and during the exchange were in line with those of a neoliberal cosmopolitan subject who migrates intending to obtain educational credentials as an investment in their potentiality. A cosmopolitan subject values individualism, one of the highly celebrated values in American society. There is evidence in this study to suggest that the youth internalized individual freedoms, which was reinforced by the hosts' encouragement to form and express their individual opinions and make their own decisions. The need for students to think for themselves while in the program emphasized their agency. Moreover, the youth looked up to the ideals of the "American dream" which celebrates individual achievements through hard work, which was a value they referenced in the interviews if one is to become successful in their career.

Research shows that the exchange comprises complex people-to-people encounters, activities, and circumstances (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009). Through its highly structured programming, including several required orientations and enhancement activities, the FLEX and YES programs attempt to instill in foreign youth directly the liberal values of democracy, diversity, and civil society. This occurred through arranged personal encounters with government officials (e.g., legislative internship and CEW), and religious leaders (e.g., religious diversity

workshop). While indeed, the findings confirmed that direct exposures to the internal workings of the American government and society proved to be meaningful educational experiences for the youth, there was a sense that the learning occurred on a surface level. This is in line with liberal cosmopolitanism that celebrates superficial diversity under the mask of oppression and imperialism (Peters, 2014). For example, youth learned about the US government processes, however, these workshops overlooked the issues of growing inequality, racial injustices, issues of identity and exclusion, multiculturalism, and migration, among others. The opportunity to explore some of these issues on a deeper level would expose youth to the complex historical, social, cultural, and political dynamics that have shaped American society in particular, and global governance in general. This programming approach would be an effort towards the emancipatory expressions of cosmopolitanism that engages youth in multicultural and global perspectives (Nederveen Pieterse, 2006). Without understanding the power dynamics that silence the voices of those on the margins, the youth may unknowingly perpetuate the onto-epistemic ideology rooted in Western frameworks (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

The cosmopolitan language used by the DOS, program sponsor, and local coordinators speak explicitly to the program's expectations. The program says, “keeping an open mind will be very important to your success.” For this, students need to be “flexible, adaptable, and mature” to succeed in the program. The embodied flexibility and open-mindedness are desirable traits of a cosmopolitan subject who holds a cultural disposition toward difference (Molz, 2006), as long as the subject conforms to the dominant culture of the government program that is invested in it. Furthermore, the program stipulates the desired cosmopolitan personality traits that, as it claims, aid cultural adjustment by a widely promoted slogan, “not better or worse, just different.” It was evident that students consciously minded their language when addressing cultural differences, to

not portray American culture in a negative light. They often declared that something was "just different" in the US. This kind of language that the program promotes is used to endorse desired attitudes and behaviors that Mills (2020) describes as "the willing-to-share cosmopolitan global citizen, and the flexible, adaptable neoliberal citizen" (p. 776). Youth who meet this profile are the ones who the program labels as "successful" exchange participants.

While leadership is perhaps the least tangible of the program requirements, there is evidence to suggest that students improved certain skills essential for good leadership. Personal growth and development was a major cognitive change among the youth, in line with studies conducted with high school returnees (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Chang, 2010; Soeterik, 1998; Weichbrodt, 2014; Wilson, 1993). In previous studies, the exchange has been reported to improve adolescent participants' growth and maturity (Chang, 2010; Wilson, 1993), self-esteem, and self-confidence (Bachner and Zeutschel, 2009; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). The students in this study reported gains in self-confidence, responsibility, and independence. The findings show that youth conceived personal growth as a way of self-improvement rather than a way to meet the program's leadership goals. As teenagers living away from their natural family, they had to learn how to overcome various challenges during the year in the process of adulting. They acquired crucial life skills, including problem-solving, communication, and emotional control, among others, that helped them become more resilient.

Through the acquisition of valuable foreign credentials, the program may enable youth to develop a transnational/global capital across economic, social, and cultural lines (Gerhards & Hans, 2013) that they can use for their own personal and professional advancement. Similar to Kim's findings (2011), youth accumulated valuable global cultural capital by way of newly acquired knowledge, social connections, and a cosmopolitan attitude that can be advantageous in

the competitive global market (Prazeres et al., 2017; Weenink, 2014). Moreover, being part of a prestigious exchange program, and a selective alumni group may let students acquire a distinct level of symbolic capital (Sin, 2013) that can position them ahead of their immobile peers in their home countries. It also can enable those from lower socio-economic backgrounds to overcome domestic barriers to function beyond the nation-state.

This study found that most youths did not wish to return to the US for their future studies or career. The question remains whether or not these individuals would apply for a merit scholarship to another, even a non-Western country if the opportunity presented itself. Thus, is the program truly preaching to the converted, as shown in previous studies of the FLEX and US-Soviet exchanges (Erbsen, 2018; Tsvetkova, 2008), or is it that most teenagers nowadays would accept an opportunity for a free year abroad anywhere in the world. In terms of future mobility, limited research among exchange program alumni shows that study abroad typically served as a stepping-stone for future international pursuits, such as studying or working abroad (Hansel, 2008a; Hansel, 2008b; Weichbrodt, 2014). More large-scale longitudinal studies would need to be conducted, especially among students from the less privileged socioeconomic background, to confirm the mobility trends of highly educated young people, which could potentially lead to a brain drain phenomenon. There is a risk that the exchanges further perpetuate the existing power structures within and between countries.

The broader implications tap into the exchange as a way of fostering global construction and circulation of knowledge (Tournès & Scott-Smith, 2018), social engagement and responsibility (Brandenburg et al., 2019; De Wit, 2020), and global citizenry (Brown & Graham, 2009; Cheng & Yang, 2019). These goals exceed the political agenda of a dominant nation and its liberal cosmopolitan values that the government exchanges aim to promote. As per Peters

(2014), liberal cosmopolitanism has sustained the American hegemony and global governance in support of its wider diplomatic, economic, and political interests. In line with Sidhu and Dall'Alba's argument (2012), there is a need for the current governance guiding government-funded exchange programs to be replaced by an embodied, grounded cosmopolitanism that prepares individuals to face and solve today's most critical global issues.

Biopolitical Manifestation of Desired Subjectivities

One of the biopolitical goals of the US government is to bring exchange participants closer to the norms and values of American society (Erbsen, 2018). As Banta holds (2012), the nexus of biopolitics and geopolitics produces "objects, and especially subjects" (p. 382). Government exchanges promote the development of desired bodies through a transaction of cultural, economic, and social capital for larger political and social outcomes (Brooks, 2015; Foucault, 2008). Despite their young age, the youth assume an ambassadorial role that takes on identity manifested by the program. The ambassadorial duty comes with specific cultural, social, and political responsibilities to present "not only yourself but your entire country."

My findings paint a picture of a highly structured institution of exchange diplomacy that constitutes the two exchange programs. The program structure allows foreign youth to interact with many different people in the host community, and pursue several goals throughout the year. The ways these programs instill the official norms and values of American society are carried out (1) explicitly, as reflected in the program language and activities, and (2) implicitly, as part of the ambassadorial "job" of a selective group of foreign youth, guided by local coordinators and volunteer host families who are tasked to keep these youth on track with the program objectives.

The program prides itself on the rigorous selection process that admits, what it deems, only the most qualified youth with leadership potential. This highly-structured process favors

biopolitical bodies that hold surplus value (Anagnost, 2004; Murphy, 2017), and that is worthy of government investment (Erbsen, 2018). It is only the subjects who meet specific criteria of identity, and who can appropriate dominant discourses who earn the biopolitical investment (Anagnost, 2004; Amos, 2010; Erbsen, 2018). In other words, the government-funded exchange is a tool of biopolitical governmentality that selects a limited number of individuals who are willing to accept the social norms and values of the host nation.

The careful selection of foreign youth deserving of an investment is the key. From the get-go, the program focuses its rhetoric on the “finalists,” “winners,” and “successful exchange students”. While the selection is claimed to be based on merit, academic credentials are not a single decisive factor. In its three rounds of testing, the selection also is based on the preparedness of a young applicant to be a successful exchange student. Perhaps it is not surprising that former foreign service agents and Peace Corps volunteers serve as the committee members in the final round of selection. Holding cosmopolitan values themselves, they may select youth who most closely embody the desired subjectivities of the program.

Both risk and potentiality accompany a biopolitical investment in government-funded exchanges. There is always a risk that the invested body does not live up to its desired potentiality (Butler, 2006). As argued by Indelicato (2016), foreign objects need to prove their love for the host nation otherwise they are not deserving of an investment. It is evident from this study’s findings that there is little room for students to make mistakes, or else, there will be consequences, such as changes in host families and host community placement. Students who continue to resist or break the program rules may be subject to probation or termination of their scholarship. Due to the program’s prestige, some students held a sense of entitlement coming into the program, which presented a challenge to the volunteer host families and local

coordinators on the ground. The entitlement may come as a result of the program's selectivity that filters youth based on their prospects of biopolitical potentiality.

One of the biopolitical goals of the funding government is to bring exchange participants closer to the values and norms of a host society (Erbsen, 2018). Findings show that most youths developed more nuanced yet still idealistic attitudes toward American society, which is in line with the extant studies (ECA, 2009; Grove & Hansel, 1983; Wilson, 1993). As a result, new subjectivities and new forms of belonging may be created (Molz, 2006). For youth coming from authoritarian and theocratic regimes, the adjustment to American social norms and values was difficult at first. Sussman (2000) maintained that cultural and political distance may influence sojourner's cultural adjustment and identity shift. Previous research found it was common for adolescents from non-democratic societies to find norms and values in conflict with their home culture (Kartoshkina, 2015; Seiter & Waddell, 1989). For example, students from more oppressed or patriarchal societies and families struggled to express their opinions freely. However, not all youth perceived American values in an entirely positive way. As found in studies among exchange returnees (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Wilson, 1993), this study's youth admittedly gained more appreciation for values stemming from home culture, which led them to appreciate their culture more and even boost national pride, sentiments that they did not feel before the exchange.

Investing in human capital by itself is insufficient (Simons, 2006). Thus, the foreign youth need to be guided to perform as the ideal subjects during the exchange (Walters, 2012). The program emphasizes the value of social capital through relationship building within a homestay. Besides culture sharing, the program states that American hosts, as public diplomacy ambassadors, have "the obligation and the opportunity to influence positively these students'

attitudes and perceptions about the US and its people" (ECA, 2007). The host family handbooks portray foreigners and their cultural practices as the "other." Therefore, the host's role is to guide youth towards the desired, superior subjectivity. The program explicitly encourages hosts to correct any attitudes and behaviors deemed inappropriate or in conflict with American values. For example, FLEX students from ex-Soviet countries who are believed to hold a pessimistic worldview should be encouraged to see the world through a more "optimistic", i.e., American lens. To help with cultural adjustment, hosts are to embody American values, such as hospitality, positivity, and tolerance. In line with Mills' (2020) findings, the ethnocentric language used in the program handbooks dictates the responsibilities of the youth and host families towards conformity to American norms and values. Furthermore, it positions the youth's culture as inferior to American culture. The examples and suggestions in the host family handbook spread stereotypes and misconceptions that are based on the former Soviet system, and may not reflect the socio-cultural reality of new generations. The program needs to reconsider the language that presently sets the tone of dominance-inferiority from the onset throughout the exchange.

Findings also show that long-term host families in particular appreciated the prestige and selectivity of the FLEX and YES exchange programs and the extensive structural support they received from their local coordinator. They felt proud to be public diplomats, spreading the values that they lived by and believed in. The lived experience recounts of American host families add value to the previous studies that found that government-funded programs give legitimacy to intergroup contact (Allport, 1979; Brewer & Gaertner, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005).

The program enables, regulates, monitors, and at times, it disables participants through the use of biopolitical mechanisms (Mills, 2020) put in place on micro and macro levels. The

communication and reporting channels between the multiple layers of programming are well-established, with a local coordinator on the ground serving as an essential point of contact between program participants and program sponsors. The coordinators are in charge of developing and implementing the required orientations and enhancement activities, monitoring the progress of the participants, and mediating any student-host conflicts. While many issues are handled on the ground, coordinators are to regularly communicate and submit reports on successes and challenges to the sponsoring organization that has the authority to reinforce the rules.

The findings show that the program does not shy away from continuous monitoring of students' progress, challenges, and achievements through various biopolitical measures, including written evaluations, self-reflections, and monthly surveys that aim to direct foreign bodies toward the ideal exchange subjectivities. A summary of monthly evaluations is presented to the DOS quarterly. The examples of these biopolitical measures indicate the program's attempts to influence the exchange experiences of the youth – both in terms of living and being. As such, biopolitics reinforces the self-regulation of foreign bodies to the dominant power mechanisms. This allows local coordinators to monitor youth's development in the "right" direction, and to address any flaws or "failures" promptly. The youth are expected to engage actively and respond positively to program requirements if they want to have a "successful" exchange. They are made aware of the reporting procedures, a measure that further enhances youth's conscious awareness and self-regulation. In other words, if at any time a student resists the norms and values of the program, there is a risk of immediate repatriation from the US which can be a life-long mark on one's record.

The biopolitical rhetoric stresses the importance of leadership development, which is to play out in the alumni's commitment to the long-term goals of the program. To engage youth in activities that promote awareness of and involvement in civic processes, youth completed the community service requirement. Students volunteering choices did not necessarily hone their leadership skills, as most of them chose the easy way out, such as volunteering in school cafeterias and clubs. The program assumes students will carry on their diplomatic role as alumni, spreading the values of American society in their home communities. Through alumni activities, youth remain part of the broader goals of the US public diplomacy, working towards democratic ideals in the FLEX and YES countries. Thus, youth should assume the role of leadership and change agents who willingly promote democratic values in home society (i.e., the multiplier effect).

After completing one's ambassadorial duties in the US, a successful exchange subject may be granted the benefits of a biopolitical investment even post-exchange. By joining an exclusive alumni community, the alumni can apply for grants, training opportunities, scholarships, and workshops, to further their educational and career prospects and position themselves as leaders, and successful neoliberal subjects. While at the end of the program, the youth perceived the exchange as a stepping stone towards their own personal and professional advancement, enhanced socio-economic positioning at home, and future mobility, getting engaged in alumni networks would tap into the US government's long-term objectives.

Moving Beyond Geopolitics

Power relations in governance influence international models and educational policy to meet the particular needs of a nation-state (Amos, 2010). Government-funded exchange programs are intertwined with the changing political, economic, social, and cultural relationships

(Altbach & Knight, 2007; Campbell, 2005; Rizvi, 2004). The goal of exchanges taps into the US soft diplomacy's efforts to bridge gaps among nations (ECA, 2018). In the case of FLEX and YES, it was because of unique historical, ideological, and geopolitical contexts that captured US foreign policy interest to invest in the youth exchanges with former Soviet Union countries, and predominantly Muslim countries. Soft diplomacy aims to skillfully exercise the government's influence abroad, enhancing its national security. However, the way the program participants perceive the exchange may be different from the government's objectives (Erbsen, 2018). This study's findings show the gap between participants' exchange experiences that centered around individual motives and development, and the soft diplomacy objectives that evolve around the bi-national power dynamics.

Geopolitically, the basis of the two exchange programs was to promote mutual understanding between the US and former Soviet countries (FLEX program) and to strengthen US national security efforts with the Muslim world (YES program). To bridge the macro with the micro-dynamics of the exchange programs, this study implies the need to reassess the changing geopolitics that nowadays concerns themselves less with the Cold War and 9/11 events than they do with global economic competitiveness. Recent events tell us that the American diplomatic efforts to bring former Soviet youth closer to its values fell through with an unexpected Russian withdrawal from the FLEX program (Erbsen, 2018). Russia used to be one of the largest participating partners involved in the FLEX program. While Russian departure was largely seen as a diplomatic failure on behalf of the US government, it later proved to be an opportunity to expand the FLEX program to other Eastern European nations, members of the EU and NATO, whose youth may be ideologically closer to the West. Recent political developments have pushed the government to alter its geopolitical agenda, by redistributing its influence (i.e.,

the government-funded exchanges) to the rest of Eastern Europe. With the war in Ukraine, the question remains whether the FLEX program will contribute to deepening ideological divides in the region (Gerhards & Hans, 2013). Since my research took place before the war, the findings do not directly cover this phenomenon, however, the implications of this study show that one youth held pro-Russian values even at the end of the program.

Globalization has brought the world closer together than ever before. With the forces of globalization, biopolitical governmentality also has become increasingly globalized – what Dillon and Reid (2001) call “global biopolitics,” and Kelly (2010) “global governmentality”. Global biopolitics produces a new form of transcendent sovereign power on a global scale. With the emergence of new powers, such as China, scholarship programs have become a global phenomenon. While the key goals of these soft diplomacy programs have remained the same, i.e., the promotion of peace and mutual understanding among participating nations, the geopolitics have changed, and new global issues have emerged in the recent decade. The rise of nationalism, xenophobia, the rise of China, and de-globalization are just a few that the program sponsors should take into account when reassessing its diplomatic priorities.

Looking forward, unforeseen power shifts may emerge and challenge the outmoded geopolitical program models that are the basis of the two exchange programs. There is a risk that if these models do not adapt to the global dynamics, they may fail to meet their underlying goals of achieving mutual understanding and peace among nations. The program should think of ways to move beyond the bilateral diplomacy that divides people between “us” and “them”. Such worldview underlies the dominant nature of American values that the program attempts to instill in foreign youth. The current war in Ukraine and US diplomatic tensions with Russia should serve as a reminder to move past the promotion of the Pro-American lifestyle and worldviews as

the single “right” way of being and living. History tells us that when a single-handed approach to soft diplomacy fails, the next thing remaining is the use of hard power.

Moving beyond its national objectives, and as the strongest economy in the World, the US has the responsibility to lead in its soft diplomacy efforts through people-to-people exchanges to ensure global security and stability in the long run. Rather than limiting foreign youth’s perspectives to interactions with American policymakers and diplomats, youth should gain a more in-depth understanding of local and global issues. Instead of putting on their young shoulders the often difficult and abstract roles of youth ambassadors and leaders, youth should engage in meaningful community service, and have opportunities to gain critical knowledge and skills. As young adults assuming various roles in their future careers, they would be prepared to overcome conflicts peacefully, function across differences, appreciate diversity, and tackle the most critical local and global issues facing the planet and today’s globalized world.

Ultimately, through the acquisition of intercultural understanding and critical awareness, the youth may be able to create their own opinions that do not side with one political view, but rather challenge the dominant paradigms and beliefs. They would develop a commitment to the responsible global citizenry, and be able to reimagine our common future by engaging in a range of cross-cultural perspectives during the exchange. In the face of a such an imagined reality that these programs could attempt to create, the prospects of mutual understanding and peace among nations seem not only attainable but also more sustainable.

CHAPTER 11: Conclusion

This dissertation examined international educational exchanges within the purview of the US foreign policy efforts to foster diplomatic relationships with other nations. Situating its empirical part of research within the broader context of international relations and politics, it recognized the FLEX and YES exchange programs' diplomatic role in promoting mutual understanding and lasting ties between Americans and international youth, awareness of and involvement in civic and democratic processes, and engagement of foreign youth in activities that advance mutual understanding and civil society in youth's home countries. These competitive merit-based scholarships bring to the US a selective group of high-school-aged students for an educational and cultural exchange. Students live with volunteer American families within a homestay environment. Through an interdisciplinary research approach, drawing upon literature from international education, international relations, cultural studies, and philosophy, the purpose of this dissertation was to offer a more nuanced understanding of the multi-level dynamics shaping government-funded exchange programs and participants' experiences.

Gaining valuable insight into the experiences of multiple program stakeholders informed our understanding of how government-funded exchanges foster public diplomacy on an individual (micro) level. This research adds value to what happens during the exchange; in different time points, events, and experiences. Through qualitative inquiry, I addressed the following research questions:

(1) In what ways do the FLEX and YES exchange programs attempt to instill the official norms and values of the program?

(2) How do participants experience each aspect of the program and its processes, and to what extent do these experiences reflect program objectives?

(3) How do participants experience intercultural exchange within a homestay, and what kinds of interactions characterize their experiences?

I analyzed the data collected from Fall 2017–Spring 2020, to include three cohorts of the FLEX and YES exchange program participants in the state of Hawaiʻi. I interviewed 23 exchange students, 19 host families, and two local coordinators. I conducted participant observations at different points in time to get a comprehensive understanding of how this study's participants interact with each other and with the host community. I also reviewed program documents and websites relevant to the policies, expectations, and activities of the two exchange programs. These multiple sources of data helped me triangulate descriptions of events and experiences.

My findings illustrated the programs' processes to instill the official norms and values of American society. Through highly structured programming, regular monitoring and reporting, and the use of ethnocentric language, the programs attempted to instill pro-American norms and values in the youth explicitly at multiple points of the exchange year. The programs emphasized the ambassadorial role of a selective group of foreign youth, to keep these youth on track with the program objectives. Furthermore, the findings lent evidence that these exchanges make a positive contribution toward mutual understanding between foreign youth and Americans. While the youth and host families shared an overall positive cross-cultural exchange and homestay experience, with the youth gaining rather idealistic views of American society, my findings also uncovered tensions surrounding the public diplomacy role for both parties. Specific issues that emerged and warrant more in-depth future research were related to the participants' cultural identities that did not align with the program objectives, the host family recruitment and profile

in the settler colonial context of Hawaiʻi, and a possible conflict of values and norms upon re-entry that the program fails to address. Finally, the programs assume that the FLEX and YES alumni become "ambassadors for American values and culture," a long-term goal that this study could not confirm. However, the youth seemed to perceive the scholarship as a stepping stone toward their personal and professional advancement, enhanced future socio-economic positioning at home, and future mobility, the goals that were somewhat misaligned with the program's long-term leadership goal.

While differences between the two programs may be expected, my findings did not indicate major discrepancies in experiences between FLEX and YES students merely due to their programs. There were instances of FLEX students who experienced more political tensions (e.g., students from authoritarian regimes whose values clashed with their hosts' democratic values) than YES students. This is likely due to the fact that FLEX students come from countries that have a history of political instability, such as the former Soviet Union. A few YES students who were Muslim, on the other hand, experienced some religious tensions that clashed with their host families' lifestyle (e.g., students who were not comfortable with animals in the house). The tensions, however, were not pronounced among the whole group of FLEX/YES students. This could be due to the multicultural and multireligious context of Hawaiʻi. My findings suggest that some FLEX and YES students may experience different challenges while participating in these exchange programs.

In my implications, I provided a link between the broader political context of the government-funded exchange programs, and how that related to the program participants' experiences. Through a multitude of perspectives and program participants' lived experiences, this study offered insights into culture-sharing within a homestay on a micro level, as well as a

discussion of cosmopolitan, biopolitical, and geopolitical dimensions of government-funded youth exchange programs on a macro level of analysis. Considering the many local and global challenges the world is facing today, the exchange programs can take a unique approach to provide a foundation for intercultural understanding based on the common set of values, such as empathy, inclusion, justice, sustainability, community, and social responsibility.

Contributions

This study makes several contributions that add value to the literature in international education, international relations, and public diplomacy. As a result of this research, we attained a deeper understanding of what it is like to be a foreign youth living and sharing culture with an American host family. Thus far, very few studies have been conducted among the FLEX and YES exchange student population, and none of them employed theoretical perspectives that consider power dynamics shaping these programs.

Another contribution of this study is its focus on the homestay component of exchange which is an understudied topic in the present literature. This study filled the gap in the literature by shedding light on the experiences of volunteer host families, and the challenges and rewards that come with hosting a teenager. We also learned about the youth and hosts' understanding of their public diplomacy role and its processes, and the ways they play out within a homestay.

Finally, this study included the voices of two experienced local coordinators. Their experiences and perspectives helped us understand what happens at the organizational (meso) level of these government exchanges.

Limitations

This case study offered a more in-depth understanding of the government-funded youth exchanges and provided important insights into the experiences of exchange students, their host

families, and local coordinators. Despite these contributions, it is important to acknowledge this study's limitations.

First, participants were deliberately selected using purposeful sampling from two specific youth exchange programs, and who were located in the state of Hawaiʻi. The program design and the exchange context limit the transferability of my findings to the other structures and contexts of intercultural exchange. Future studies should draw on a bigger sample, to include various localities, youth, host families, and local coordinator profiles around the US. This would allow for possible cross-country, cross-gender, and cross-religious comparisons. Due to the limited number of youth placed in Hawaiʻi each year, this was not an option for my study.

Second, all participants in this study were self-selected and participated voluntarily without remuneration. People willing to participate in research often have a positive attitude about the phenomenon under study. However, the findings show that most participants were willing to share both positive and negative experiences, perhaps due to the trust that I established with them as a volunteer, chaperone, and observer throughout the exchange year.

Third, I conducted all the interviews at the end of the exchange. Future studies should conduct interviews at various points in time as well as after the exchange, to see how the participants' experiences and perceptions evolve and possibly change over time. Besides the interviews, the inclusion of youth and host journaling, and other artifacts collected at different times would provide a fuller picture of the exchange experiences.

Finally, this study did not take into account the perspectives and experiences of host nationals other than host families. Future empirical research should include a variety of host nationals with whom the foreign youth interact and develop deep ties (e.g., American friends, teachers, neighbors, and other community members). Their insights would lend holistic evidence

into the depth of relationships between youth and host nationals. In terms of culture learning theory, such research could serve as an extension of our understanding of host nationals' changes in attitudes, behavior, and cognition after prolonged interaction with foreigners. Despite these limitations, I hope that my research has contributed to our understanding of the multi-level dynamics shaping government-funded exchange programs and participants' experiences.

Recommendations for Program Policy and Practice

While this study demonstrated several positive outcomes of the youth exchange programs recognized by international youth, American host families, and local coordinators, it also identified gaps that call for programmatic changes in policy and practice. There are opportunities for improving the effectiveness of these programs to promote mutual understanding and peace between the US and the world. For this, I make the following recommendations.

Government-funded exchanges serve its national objectives that are largely one-sided, i.e., in the interest of the US government rather than the foreign youth and their home countries. Bachner (1991) recognizes that "exchange has the advantage of being programmatically manipulatable to result in favorable contact" (p. 172). The program should consider the following question: Who are the goals for? Who should the goals be for? How can these goals better serve the expectations and potential of the foreign youth's personal and professional goals during and after the exchange? My findings suggest that the program goals as they currently stand may not incorporate the interests of youth, which can undermine its effectiveness.

Fundamentally, the FLEX and YES programs aim to serve American hegemonic interests through promotion of American values and culture to young people from other countries. While these programs may provide some benefits, such as increased understanding of the US, they also have the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes and promote a one-sided view of the US and

the world. The contributions that these programs can make to world peace would be greater if they offered opportunities to immerse the participants in diverse ways of living and being. Such exchanges would help to promote a more nuanced view of the world. A more balanced exchange that will be mirrored in the government rhetoric and program goals would demonstrate the US commitment to promoting mutual understanding and peace among nations. Thus, I am hopeful that the State Department, as the funding agency, would be receptive to this study's implications that highlight the value of building upon multicultural resources within local communities – with Hawai'i as a case study – as well as the value of selecting a diverse group of international youth participants who enrich the American communities.

The program is priding itself on the extensive orientations and monitoring mechanisms, which were especially valued by the local coordinators and host families. but they have a one-sided purpose, i.e., to direct the youth toward a desired identity of a "successful" exchange student. The program should revisit the ethnocentric language used in its program handbooks and orientations that serve as the main guidelines for desired behaviors and attitudes. In its current form, the program documents position foreign youth in an inferior position, in terms of their norms and values, as opposed to American culture. Rather than concerning itself with the "other", the program should embrace diversity in all its forms, both with students and host families. Indeed, the program could pride itself on American diversity and encourage American citizens to accept the cultural differences that these youth bring into their homes, rather than "correct" their attitudes and behaviors that do not align with American society.

Moreover, the orientations should serve as the main support mechanisms for students and host families to make them feel at peace even when things do not go "right", or when mistakes are made. Labeling adolescent youth in binary terms such as success and failure can undermine

their confidence, and affect their mental well-being. Instead, the program should offer proper emotional support to students who are struggling, who may not "fit in", or who deal with heavy academic burdens, and allow for different definitions of success that have students grow and develop at their own pace. Rather than quantifying one's accomplishments, the program should acknowledge the growing pains of one's sojourn abroad, and make a conscious effort to recognize the uniqueness of youth's identity and experiences. In a similar vein, the program should acknowledge the different kinds of host families. For this, local coordinators should be trained to guide and support nontraditional family units and provide assistance to hosts who never parented teenagers before.

Importantly, FLEX and YES do not include training on the issues that make the historic basis of these programs. The present generations of selected youth were born after these events, and since they do not have lived experiences, their perception of the program goals may not be as tangible as those who were personally affected by these events. It is assumed that through people-to-people exchanges, foreign youth, and Americans would become more compassionate towards each other, and spread love for each other's nation and culture. However, if the program is to meet its goals, there needs to be more emphasis on the actual understanding of the conflicts – the root causes – for FLEX and YES. None of the youth referenced the Cold War or 9/11 events in the interview. For example, if the YES program is to promote peace between Muslims and non-Muslims, the program should expose students to religious conflicts in the US and around the world, and even within the participating countries. As per my findings, not all YES students were practicing Islam and some of them were Christian, a minority group in their home countries. Thus, the youth need to receive structured training in peacebuilding, mediation, and

conflict resolution. These skills could serve them well when they face difficult situations in their culturally and religiously diverse home societies.

The leadership component is based on the long-term premise that FLEX and YES youth will use their cross-cultural skills and knowledge attained in the US once they assume positions of influence in their future careers. This study showed that youth perceived leadership as an intangible concept. Even though they developed certain skills that are needed for good leadership, they did not connect them to their career aspirations. There is a disconnect between the leadership component that the program aspires to achieve, and the actual perceptions of leadership – or the lack thereof – among the youth. Thus, the program should provide experiential learning opportunities in specific leadership skills, such as cooperation, conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding, among others. Here, my suggestion is that the program steers away from political leadership. Instead, it should recognize that youth will assume professions in various fields, which would help the youth develop a clearer purpose of leadership in the professions they are interested in.

Finally, the program should give its community service requirement a clearer purpose. The findings show that most youths did not engage in volunteering that would have them develop skills in leadership, mutual understanding, and peace. Again, the program goal in this area is rather elusive and there appears to be a lack of structural support locally on the type of community service that can help youth meet this goal. With the help of local coordinators, the program could form partnerships with local organizations that work towards social justice, mutual understanding, and peace on a local level. Local coordinators could plan community service events in collaboration with these organizations that could purposefully engage students in skill-building activities around local community issues that may have global implications.

Host families could be invited to these activities, bringing the local community together to work towards the goals that the FLEX and YES programs are trying to achieve.

In light of the many challenges the world is facing today both locally and globally, the exchange should provide a foundation for intercultural understanding based on a common set of values, such as empathy, inclusion, justice, sustainability, community, and social responsibility. This in-depth experience would provide the youth and hosts with a deeper intercultural and global understanding that draws upon and celebrates multiple cultures, religions, identities, lifestyles, and perspectives.

Future Directions

Government-funded exchange programs such as FLEX and YES were founded on the assumption that people-to-people exchanges contribute to mutual understanding among nations, and ultimately, a more peaceful world. Not only did this study shed light on how individual participants experienced the exchange, but it also brought forward several issues of the onto-epistemological nature that the programs and future research should address going forward. As it currently stands, the programs serve as one of the soft diplomacy tools to sustain American hegemony. Through the program, it is hoped that the participants would come to embody the norms and values of liberal cosmopolitanism that celebrates diversity only on a surface level, and under the umbrella of Western ontology. Instead, I propose that these and similar programs draw upon multicultural and critical resources that go beyond the political agenda of a dominant nation.

In this spirit, the current understanding of the global and the local should be problematized and then redefined, where the global is all-encompassing and embraces the different ways of being on equal ground. In regards to the local, this study identified a plethora

of opportunities that presented themselves. The program should capitalize on the multicultural resources from local communities around the US, recruiting actively host families of various backgrounds and experiences. A homestay is a unique chance for all program participants to not only learn *about* the different ways of being and knowing but to actively *engage* in this difference (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

To move in this direction, international exchange programs need to recognize and embrace alternative ontologies and epistemologies so that program participants can learn to co-exist and thrive in the same space and time. On a micro (local) level, this kind of exchange would be reciprocal, where people purposefully engage with non-Western worldviews and subjectivities. Such experiences would expose participants to ways of knowing, being, and seeing with which they may not be familiar, and would thus help to move them in the direction of mutual understanding. These lived experiences would allow the possibility of counteracting the present asymmetric power structures and ethnocentric perspectives embodied by these programs.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Exchange Students

Location/Setting. Interviews will be held via video call (e.g., Zoom or Skype) at the date and time that is mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher.

Time. Each interview will last approximately an hour.

Facilitator. The student investigator for this study will lead the interviews.

What will be the procedures followed during the interview? Recruitment for all participants will begin in the Fall 2020 semester. During recruitment, and throughout the interview, participants will be reminded that participation in the research is voluntary. At the beginning of the interview, participants will be informed that:

- You will be able to take a break during the interview when you need one.
- Whether or not you answer questions or participate in the interviews will have no impact on your relationship to your host family, local coordinator or the interviewer.
- If at any time you are not comfortable answering a question, you will have the option of not answering it.
- If, at any time during the interview, you feel uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you may do so without any penalty.
- To ensure confidentiality you are being asked not to use your last name or the last names of others. Keep the discussion anonymous by not listing the names of people or the places they talk about.
- To ensure confidentiality we must all agree that the information discussed during the interview must remain confidential, “what we talk about during this interview stays in this interview.”
- The entire interview session will be audio recorded and transcribed. We will keep all

recorded materials and transcriptions in a secure and locked area.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself: your age, school standing, country you are from, etc.
2. Tell me about your expectations about the U.S./Hawai‘i before your arrival in Hawai‘i? What did you think it would be like?
3. How did you find out about the program?
4. What was your motivation to apply for the exchange program?
5. In your own words, can you please describe the goals of the exchange program?
    a. How did you learn about the program's goals?
6. Have you experienced any culture shock? If so, what were some of the ways for you to overcome it?
7. I will now ask a few questions about your high school experience. How do you like your school experience in Hawai‘i overall?
    a. What clubs, sports or other activities have you been involved in at the school?
    b. How did you make friends?
    c. How have you shared your culture with your schoolmates and teachers?
    d. What have you learned through making presentations about your country during International Education Week (IEW)?
    e. What have been some of the challenges at the school? If any: How did you overcome those challenges?
    f. How does the school system in Hawai‘i differ from the school system at home?
    g. What were some of the most positive experiences and highlights at the school?
    h. How have your experiences at your school in Hawai'i fulfilled your expectations?

8. I will now ask a few questions about your homestay experiences. Can you first tell me about the relationship with your host family?
    a. What activities have you been involved in with your host family?
    b. Do you feel like you are part of the family? How?
    c. In what ways have you shared your culture with your host family?
    d. What have been some of the highlights (events or activities) with your host family? Please provide some examples.
    e. Have you encountered any challenges with your host family? If so, can you share with me some examples.
    f. How did you overcome those challenges?
    g. How have your experiences with your host family fulfilled your expectations?
9. How have you shared your religion with others?
10. Please tell me about your community service activities. What kind of community service have you done so far?
    a. What was it like doing community service?
    b. What have you learned?
11. Can you tell me about the relationship with your local coordinator? How often were you in touch with them? Have they provided support when/if needed?
12. I will now ask a few questions about your personal growth and development during this year. How would you have described yourself prior to your U.S. experience?
    a. Since you came to Hawaiʻi, how have you changed?
    b. Do you feel comfortable speaking your mind? Why yes/no? How do you find this different from your home country (if at all)?

c. Have you taken on any leadership roles this year? Please give examples. How do you find this different from your home country (if at all)?

d. Have you acquired any new skills?

e. Do you think you have gotten to know yourself better through this exchange experience in terms of who you are, where you come from and what defines you culturally?

13. What people you have met and activities you took part in have made the biggest impact on your exchange experience?

14. When you leave, what will be some of the things you will miss most about your host family, school and community in Hawai'i?

15. I will now ask a few questions about returning home. Do you think you will experience reverse culture shock upon return home?

    a. Do you still want to keep active following your return home, such as an alumnus?

    b. Do you have any ideas of what projects you would like to get involved in with the alumni group?

    c. What do you want to become in the future, profession-wise?

    d. Do you think this experience will lead you to another international experience in the future, such as studying or working abroad?

16. Overall, do you think that your exchange experience has met the goals of the exchange program? How/why?

17. Is there anything you would like to add to help us understand your exchange experience in Hawai'i?

18. Can I contact you again if I have further questions?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Host Families

Location/Setting. Interviews will be held via video call (e.g., Zoom or Skype) at the date and time that is mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher.

Time. Each interview will last approximately an hour.

Facilitator. The student investigator for this study will lead the interviews.

What will be the procedures followed during the interview? Recruitment for all participants will begin in the Fall 2020 semester. During recruitment, and throughout the interview, participants will be reminded that participation in the research is voluntary. At the beginning of the interview, participants will be informed that:

- You will be able to take a break during the interview when you need one.
- Whether or not you answer questions or participate in the interviews will have no impact on your relationship to your exchange student, local coordinator or the interviewer.
- If at any time you are not comfortable answering a question, you will have the option of not answering it.
- If, at any time during the interview, you feel uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you may do so without any penalty.
- To ensure confidentiality you are being asked not to use your last name or the last names of others. Keep the discussion anonymous by not listing the names of people or the places they talk about.
- To ensure confidentiality we must all agree that the information discussed during the interview must remain confidential, “what we talk about during this interview stays in this interview.”
- The entire interview session will be audio recorded and transcribed. We will keep all

recorded materials and transcriptions in a secure and locked area.

Interview Questions

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, your household and your community?
2. What is your and your husband/wife's profession?
3. Tell me why have you decided to serve as a volunteer host family for an international high school exchange student?
4. How many high school exchange students have you hosted so far?
5. Do you have any preference such as the country/culture, sex or age of your exchange student? If so, why?
6. Are you familiar with the goals of the FLEX/YES exchange program? Can you please describe them in your own words?
    a. How did you learn about the program's goals?
7. Were you familiar with the culture of your exchange student before she/he arrived?
8. What expectations did you have prior your exchange student's arrival?
9. How did you include your student as a member of the family?
    a. In what ways have you shared your culture with your exchange student?
    b. Can you share with me some of the culture sharing events or activities you have done with your exchange student?
10. How has your exchange student shared his/her own culture with your family? Please provide some examples.
11. What were some of the highlights of hosting an exchange student?
12. What have been some of the challenges of hosting an exchange student? How did you overcome those challenges?

13. Can you tell me about the relationship with your local coordinator (LC)?
    a. What kind of orientation have you received by your LC? What kind of information about hosting were you provided?
    b. How often are you in touch with your LC?
    c. Has LC provided support when/if needed?
14. What do you think has been the most significant impact hosting an exchange student has had on:
    a. Your family?
    b. Your children (*if applicable*)?
    c. Your extended family (*if applicable*)?
    d. Your local community?
15. How do you think that you as a host family has impacted your exchange student?
16. What are some of the things that you have learned through this hosting experience?
17. How has your hosting experience fulfilled your expectations, if any?
18. Do you think that your hosting experience has met the goals of the exchange program? How/why?
19. When your exchange student leaves, what will be some of the things you will miss most about hosting him/her?
20. Is there anything you would like to add to help us understand your hosting experience?
21. Can I contact you again if I have further questions?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Local Coordinators

Location/Setting. Interviews will be held via video call (e.g., Zoom or Skype) at the date and time that is mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher.

Time. Each interview will last approximately an hour.

Facilitator. The student investigator for this study will lead the interviews.

What will be the procedures followed during the interview? Recruitment for all participants will begin in the Fall 2020 semester. During recruitment, and throughout the interview, participants will be reminded that participation in the research is voluntary. At the beginning of the interview, participants will be informed that:

- You will be able to take a break during the interview when you need one.
- Whether or not you answer questions or participate in the interviews will have no impact on your relationship to your exchange student, local coordinator or the interviewer.
- If at any time you are not comfortable answering a question, you will have the option of not answering it.
- If, at any time during the interview, you feel uncomfortable and want to stop participating, you may do so without any penalty.
- To ensure confidentiality you are being asked not to use your last name or the last names of others. Keep the discussion anonymous by not listing the names of people or the places they talk about.
- To ensure confidentiality we must all agree that the information discussed during the interview must remain confidential, "what we talk about during this interview stays in this interview."
- The entire interview session will be audio recorded and transcribed. We will keep all

recorded materials and transcriptions in a secure and locked area.

Interview Questions

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Let's talk about your role as a local coordinator (LC). How long have you served as a LC for FLEX/YES exchange programs?
    a. Why have you decided to become a LC for these exchange programs?
    b. Is this your full-time or part-time job?
    c. Do you work with any other exchange programs? Which ones?
    d. *If applicable:* What are some of the differences between the FLEX/YES exchange programs and other exchange programs that you work with?
    e. Can you please tell me what does the job of a LC for FLEX/YES entail?
    f. Do you attend any professional development training each year?
3. Have you hosted any exchange students yourself?
    a. *If applicable:* Can you please share a little bit about your hosting experiences?
    b. *If applicable:* Has hosting influenced your decision to become a LC?
4. In your own words, can you describe the goals of the FLEX and YES exchange programs?
    a. What sources/experiences informed your knowledge about these programs?
5. Let's talk about your exchange students. How many students do you have in your cluster this year?
    a. To your knowledge, what is taken into account when students are selected during the application process?
    b. In your opinion, how does the selection process attempt to identify students who

are sympathetic to the program's goals?

c. Do you normally have any preference such as the country/culture, gender or age of your exchange students? If so, why?
d. How much choice do you have in what exchange students you get to place in your community?
e. How do you orient exchange students?
    i. How do you prepare them for a successful homestay experience?
    ii. How do you prepare them for a successful high school experience?
    iii. How do you prepare them for getting involved in community service?
f. How often do you meet your students in-person?
g. How do you establish trust and rapport with your students?
h. What are some of the differences, if any, among students that you have observed over the years of your job as a LC? (e.g. generational, cultural differences, etc.)
i. What do you find most challenging in overseeing exchange students?
j. What do you find most rewarding in overseeing exchange students?

6. Can you tell me about the types of host families in your cluster? (family structure/age/professions/community, etc.)
    a. How do you recruit host families? What are some of the strategies that you use? What strategies seem to work and what does not seem to work well?
    b. What kind of characteristics are you looking for when you select host families?
    c. How do you attempt to select host families who reflect the goals of the program, if at all?
    d. How do you know that the host families won't teach students things or expose

them to things that may go against the goals of the program?

e. How do you orient host families? Are first-time host families receiving different orientation from long-term hosts? What material is provided to host families?
f. How do you establish trust and rapport with host families?
g. How do you communicate with host families? How often do you contact them?
h. How do you mediate conflicts between students and host families?
i. How do you go about host family changes, if any, during the year?
j. What are some of the differences, if any, among host families that you have observed over the years?
k. What do you find most challenging in working with host families?
l. What do you find most rewarding in working with host families?

7. Can you tell me about events and enhancement activities that you organize for your cluster?
    a. What government requirements do these events/activities need to meet?
    b. Do you receive specific directions by the program about what kind of programming the LCs need to provide?
    c. What are the main goals of these activities? How, if at all, do you attempt to communicate the specific goals/values of the program to students through these enhancement activities?
    d. How much freedom do you have in organizing these activities?
    e. What events/activities do you find especially important and/or impactful? Why?
    f. How do you establish community relationship for these activities?
    g. What are some impacts that you have observed in exposing students to the local

community, for both students and the community?

h. Have you ever encountered students who would resist the program's values? How did you handle these types of students?

i. Who do you report to after the events/activities? What do you need to report?

8. Can you tell me about high schools that you work with/place exchange students in?

    a. How do you communicate with at these schools? Who do you communicate with?

    b. How do you orient schools/school counselors about having exchange students?

    c. How do you mediate conflicts if they occur between students and schools?

    d. In your opinion, what is the value of having exchange students in local high schools?

9. What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of the LC's job?

10. What have been some of the major challenges of the LC's job?

    a. If applicable: Do you have any suggestions on how to improve this?

11. How do you think that you as a LC can impact your exchange students? Why?

12. Is there anything you would like to add to help us understand your LC job?

13. Can I contact you again if I have further questions?

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent

Aloha! My name is Manca Sustarsic. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in my dissertation research. I am a PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), Educational Foundations Department. The results of this research will contribute to my dissertation.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you agree for your child to be in the study, I will interview your child in one interview session. The interview questions will ask about the nature of the intercultural exchange experience in Hawai'i. You can choose to allow your child to take part, or you can choose not to take part in this study. I also will ask your child to agree to participate in this project. You or your child also can change your mind at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. The purpose of my research is to understand how international secondary school exchange students and their host families perceive the exchange experience in the U.S./Hawai'i. This study will be a valuable resource to improve support services for exchange students as well as for host families who are involved daily in exchange student life. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this project because he/she is the only representative of his/her native country placed for an academic year of exchange in the state of Hawai'i.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study? If you and your child agree for your child to be in the study, the interview will be held at the local coordinator's office in strict privacy. The interview will take no longer than an hour. Your child and I and no one else will be present in the room during the interview. If your child participates, he or she will be one of the 20 exchange student participants that I will interview separately. Examples of the kind of questions I will ask are, "What were some of the ways for you to overcome culture shock?", and

"How did your expectations of an exchange year meet the reality?". If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed near the end of this consent form. With your and your child's permission, I will record the interview using an audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a written record of what we talked about during the interview. I will evaluate the information from the interview.

Benefits and Risks: I believe there is little or no risk to your child in participating in this project. There is a possibility your child may become uncomfortable or stressed by answering an interview question or questions. If that happens, we will skip the question, take a break, or stop the interview. Your child may also withdraw from the project altogether at any time. There will be no direct benefit to you or your child for participating in this project. The results of this project might help me, other teachers, and researchers to understand in what ways international high school exchange students experience cross-cultural adaptation.

Results of Research: No research results will be disclosed to participants.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child, will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. All study data will be secured in encrypted files on a password protected computer. My University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawaiʻi Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

Future Research Studies: After I write down the interviews, I will destroy the audio-recordings. Identifiers will be removed from the research records. When I report the results of my research project in my typed paper, I will not use your child's name or any other personal information that

would identify your child. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your child. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form. Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Compensation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. No compensation will be received to conduct the interview.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please email me at msustars@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Prof. Donald Brent Edwards, Jr. at 808. 956.7913 or donalde@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to your child's participation in this project, please sign and date the following signature page and return it to: Manca Sustarsic at msustars@hawaii.edu

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission for my child to join the research project entitled, "Life in a Year". I understand that my child can change his or her mind about being in the study at any time. I understand that I may change my mind about my child being in the study at any time.

Name of Child/Exchange Student (Print):

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian (Host Family) (Print):

Parent/Legal Guardian (Host Family)'s Signature:

Date:

Appendix E: Minor's Assent

Aloha! My name is Manca Sustarsic. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in my dissertation research. I am a PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), Educational Foundations Department. The results of this research will contribute to my dissertation.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you agree to be in this study, I will interview you after school at your convenience. The interview will be held in a private room in the office of International Hospitality Center. The interview will last about an hour. No one else will be present in the room during the interview. If you choose to participate, you will be one of a total of 20 international secondary school exchange students that I will interview separately. Example of the kind of questions I will ask are, "What were some of the ways for you to overcome culture shock?", and "How did your expectations of an exchange year meet the reality?". If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed near the end of this consent form. I will record the interview using an audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a written record of what we talked about during the interview.

Benefits and Risks: There may be no direct benefits to you for participating in this research project. The results of this project might help me, other teachers, and researchers to understand in what ways international high school exchange students experience intercultural exchange. I believe there is little or no risk to you for participating in this project. There is a possibility you may become uncomfortable or stressed by answering an interview question or questions. If that happens, we will skip the question, take a break, or stop the interview. You may also withdraw from the project altogether.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I will keep all study data secured in encrypted files on a password protected computer. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study. After I write down the interviews, I will destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project in my typed paper, I will not use your name or any other personal information that would identify you. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for you. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. At any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission and stop participating without any loss of benefits.

Questions: If you have any questions about this project, contact me, Manca Sustarsic, by phone 808.343.9710 or msustars@hawaii.edu. You can also call my advisor at the University of Hawaii, Prof. Donald Brent Edwards, Jr. at 808. 956.7913 or donalde@hawaii.edu.You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at (808) 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

Please keep the section above for your records.

If you assent to be a participant in this project, please sign the signature section below and return it to: Manca Sustarsic at msustars@hawaii.edu

Signature(s) for Assent:

I assent to join the research project entitled, “Life in a Year”. I understand that I may change my mind about being in the study at any time.

Name of Participant:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Appendix F: Adult Consent

Aloha! My name is Manca Sustarsic. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in my dissertation research. I am a PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), Educational Foundations Department. The results of this research will contribute to my dissertation.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview at a location and time convenient for you. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

The purpose of my project research project is to understand how international secondary school exchange students and their host families perceive intercultural experience in the U.S./Hawai‘i. This study will be a valuable resource to improve support services for exchange students as well as for host families and high school teachers who are involved daily in exchange student life. I am asking you to participate in this project because you are currently serving as a volunteer host family for an international secondary school exchange student in Hawai‘i.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

The interview will consist of 10-15 open ended questions. It will take about an hour.

The interview questions will include questions like, "How do you share your culture with your exchange student?", and "Why did you decide to host an international high school exchange student?". Only you and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of the 20 people I will interview for this study.

Benefits and Risks: I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether. There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may help improve the international secondary school exchange program to benefit future students and host families.

Privacy and Confidentiality: I will keep all study data will be secured in encrypted files on a password protected computer. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study. After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Compensation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. No compensation will be received to conduct the interview.

Future Research Studies: Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at 808.343.9710 or msustars@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Prof. Donald Brent Edwards, Jr. at 808. 956.7913 or donalde@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at

808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page and return it to:

Manca Sustarsic at msustars@hawaii.edu

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission to join the research project entitled, "Life in a Year".

Name of Participant:

Participant's Signature:

Date: