"Let them fly": Experiences of sending parents in international high school exchange programs

by

Cruz Joel Isaac Falcon Campos

B.S., Kansas State University, 2012
M.S., Kansas State University, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

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Abstract

Every year more than 100,000 high school students around the world embark on a journey to study abroad for a few weeks up to a full year (CSEIT, n.d.). Most studies of international exchange programs address the university level, while very few researchers have examined high school study abroad. Of those who have, the focus has been almost exclusively on individual exchange students. For example, researchers have identified that some of the benefits for exchange students include developing a broader global perspective (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010), increasing their intercultural competence, maturity, and sensitivity (Shiri, 2015), an increase in their personal development and growth (Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013), and increases in self-confidence (Hadis, 2005). While exchange students are in a unique position of being members of two families, the literature focusing on sending parents is currently nonexistent. The current applied qualitative study focused on investigating and giving voice to 26 sending parents' living experiences. The participants in this study were in four participating countries – Denmark, Hungary, Norway, and Turkey. Using the lenses of family systems theory, these individual cases generated general patterns and common themes through collaborative, inductive, cross-case analysis. The results suggested that the experience of sending parents offers them some benefits at the micro and the macro levels (for themselves, their families, and for the world community). The analysis also revealed several challenges they faced and the coping strategies they utilized before, during, and after their teenagers studied abroad. This project begins to build a body of knowledge about the sending parents' experiences, needs and strategies that can help guide the development of evidence-informed best practices as well as open a body of knowledge that can be essential to preparedness and understanding of exchange programs, to family professionals, host families, sending families, international students, our local communities and schools, and to

assist them in their collaboration with each other to make these important, life-changing, world-changing experiences even better.

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Key Words: International, Parenting, Qualitative, Exchange Students, Family.

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

To my brother, whose words of encouragement will always be with me. I miss you!

To my Mother and Father who always taught me to work hard for what I want.

To my beloved wife, and my most beloved and beautiful companion, for giving me her endless support to pursue my dreams. Thank you for the depth of your love and all the sacrifices you have made. I love you!

To all the parents out there who have experienced sending their child to study abroad and whose lives have been impacted by this experience.

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

The lessons I learned will stay with me forever and my belief in cultural exchange will never leave me. This is how we can really learn about others. I now believe that exchange students can help change some of the assumptions and preconceived ideas in their societies because people are more likely to accept the change from within their society rather than from the outside. That is why I strongly believe that an exchange experience is one of the most powerful ways to promote human beings and help end those centuries' long conflicts that take our focus away from the real problems. Imane Karroumi (HuffPost, n.d.)

While I was an undergraduate student, I got to know a family that had hosted several high school exchange students over the years. I spent time with some of the students, and it was very fascinating to see how they transitioned into a new culture and into a new home. As a teenager who immigrated to the United States at the age of 15, I could see that their experiences were similar to mine.

As I read about international exchange, I encountered the stories of high school exchange students who traveled abroad and studied for a significant period of time. I remember running into a particular story that caught my attention. It was the story of Imane Karroumi posted on HuffPost.com (an American news and opinion website and blog that now has both U.S. and international editions available in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, German, Arabic, Portuguese, Korean, and Greek). She came to the U.S. from Morocco for a year as an exchange student when she was 16 years old. Reading her story fueled my interest and passion for this research topic, because I quickly discovered that her culture shock seemed much more intense than my own. She had come to the United States from Morocco, a Muslim country where the culture is vastly different from American culture. Her acculturation process seemed more grueling than my own. In her story, she mentioned that the exchange student experience changed her life forever, and I could relate to that on a very personal level. She said,

"Being thousands of miles from home was not always easy. Like everything in life, my experience had its ups but also its downs. The hard times helped me grow up and move away from my comfort zone to gain maturity and independence."
Imane Karroumi (HuffPost, n.d.)

I could relate to the process of trying to adjust to aspects of a new culture, such as the types of food, interpersonal relationships, and the different traditions and holidays celebrated here in the U.S. In addition, my study of lifespan human development emphasized that the teenage years can be quite challenging (for both the individual and those close to them) because so many changes are occurring, as well as the beginning of the common quest for independence (e.g., Christie, & Viner, 2005; Dahl, 2004; DePasque, & Galván, 2017). Considering these factors, the idea of going to a new country and immersing oneself in a foreign culture by living with a new family during these developmentally crucial years seemed like a daunting experience. I began to wonder how these teenagers go abroad without their families. What is it like for the parents to have their children live in another country for a year without them?

As I searched for research literature about the family component of study abroad, I found that, while there were studies investigating the students' experiences, there were only a few that included host parents, and none discussing the experience of the exchange students' parents. This observation made it seem that the stories of the parents were not as important. However, I disagree. I see great value in learning about their experiences as well. I understand that perhaps these organizations are more focused on the students and the host parents, because they are the ones most directly involved with each other during the teenager's time abroad. However, the parents of these students must also go through their own adjustment process while their teenagers are living in another country with another family.

As I began to look more into the academic literature on this topic, my search continued to support the fact that not all parties are well represented on this topic. To my surprise, the sending

parents and the host parents' experiences are not documented in the academic literature, and I view this as a hindrance to gaining a full perspective of the exchange experience. In my own history of immigrating, my extended close family members (such as grandparents, uncles and cousins) were greatly affected by my departure to the U.S. many years ago, and I can only imagine the impact it would have had if I had been separated from my parents. I believe that my experiences resonate with those of many of the international high school exchange students, and this conclusion left me resolved to shed light on the stories of everyone affected by this possibly life-changing process.

Rationale for Study

The objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of how international high school exchange programs impact the lived experience of the parents who send their teenagers to study abroad. This study is designed to discover what benefits these parents perceive and to collect information about how the parents must continue to maintain homeostasis, as they adjust to the new life changes that accompany sending their adolescents abroad. This will help to identify some of the needs (e.g., updates about their children well-being and experiences) of these sending parents during and after their teenagers' time abroad.

Most of the literature on international high school exchange students has been focused at the individual level (the student) and mainly discusses the challenges and benefits that the student may experience. The problem with using an individual focus is that it ignores that these teenagers are part of at least two family systems – a family of origin in his/her home country and a host family in the country they live in during their time abroad. In addition, previous research has not yet identified nor addressed the impacts of the exchange student's experience on his/her parents. Without this pertinent information, there is no opportunity to understand the bi-

directional influence that they have on each other's experiences. This is an egregious gap because it is logical to assume that such an influence exists. In addition, the ties that are formed between the sending parents and the host parents have not yet been explored. It would be fair to assume that the quality of such relationships would also affect the coping mechanisms of the teens and their sending parents, and therefore the entire experience with exchange program participation.

Lastly, most of the previous research and findings conducted on this topic have been gathered primarily in the form of self-report questionnaires. While this might be viewed as a practical approach for data collection, it also has limitations that can affect attempts to accurately interpret the participants' experiences. When participants are required to choose from a set of multiple-choice responses, this can leave a lot of room for secondary interpretation of their responses, and this method may not always reflect their experience appropriately. Therefore, the best way to attempt to build deep understanding "that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, and probing to obtain detailed meanings" (Creswell, 2007, p. 201).

According to Patton (2015), the methods of gathering data must be selected based on the goals of the research. Because the main goal of this study is to examine the effects on the lives of sending parents who have participated in an international high school exchange program by sending their teenagers to study abroad, using qualitative interviews is the most appropriate way to learn about their experiences. This will offer in-depth insight into their attitudes, actions, thoughts, and perceptions (Brenner, 2006).

Purpose of Study

This study intends to fill a gap in the literature by (1) providing more information on the effects that the exchange students' experiences and their time abroad have on their parents, (2) giving

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voice to the sending parents' regarding their lived experiences, challenges, and benefits of having their teenagers studying abroad, (3) building an understanding of the coping mechanisms these parents might use through applying Family Systems theory (Bowen, 1974) to look at these sending parents experiences as participants in an international high school exchange program.

Chapter 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In today's world, the demand for knowledge about a variety of cultures and places across the globe has increased, and such knowledge has been deemed necessary to succeed in the professional world (Institute for International Education, IIE, 2018). Success requires cultural awareness and intercultural skills (IIE, 2018). Developing such skills can be achieved by immersion into a culture different from one's own (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). Multicultural knowledge and global competency are continuously expressed within the dialogue of study abroad literature as "essential to U.S. 'national interest' in world leadership, homeland security, economic achievements, and foreign policy success" (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, p. 23). College students who have studied abroad report many benefits, such as an increase in their creativity (Maddux, & Galinsky, 2009), an increase in the ability to work with people from other cultures (Stebleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013), an increase in linguistic or cultural competency in another language (Doyle et al., 2010), as well as increases in their social awareness (Hadis, 2005). The opportunity to study abroad can provide later social prestige and better earnings in income depending on the school and country from which the student came and to which the student traveled (Marginson, 2006).

Educational institutions have been at the forefront of the plan to mobilize the globalization of young students, and are doing their part by offering study abroad programs (Bennett, Ballouli, & Sosa, 2011). The rate of international students studying abroad has been consistently increasing and has even became like a growing competition amongst some schools to search for international students and students with multicultural interests (IIE, 2018).

Exchange Students

Every year more than 100,000 high school students around the world study abroad (CSEIT, n.d.). Over the past several years, the number of international students coming to the U.S. has grown at a much higher rate, and they now outnumber those traveling outside the U.S. to participate in exchange programs (Institute of International Education, 2018). The number of American high school students has more than tripled in the last two decades, resulting in about 12% of U.S. students studying abroad before graduating from college (Institute of International Education, 2016).

Exchange students are students in high school or post-secondary systems of education who leave their home countries to spend anywhere from a few weeks to an entire year in a foreign country. During this time, most must attempt to learn a new language and thus experience the culture through the means of direct exposure (Harari, 1992; IIE, 2018).

Most individuals go on exchange as participants of some sort of large, reputable organization focused on facilitated study abroad. Such organizations will usually interview a potential exchange student to see if he or she is fit for the program. If the student is accepted, s/he often attends pre-exchange orientations to help prepare for the time abroad. The programs also help the exchange students to gain an understanding of what to expect abroad, and what to do in preparation for their cultural transition (AFS-USA, 2016; Dwyer, & Peters, 2004). In addition, these exchange students and their families are typically informed about the benefits and some of the challenges of studying abroad through their close social networks who are more familiar with studying abroad (AFS-USA, 2016; Kraft, Ballatine, & Garvey, 1994).

In general, there are three types of student exchange programs: protective studies, tour models, and total immersion (Kraft et al., 1994). The protective studies and tour models can last

from a few weeks to a few months and they usually happen during the summer months. One difference between these two is that in the protective studies type, the exchange students are usually hosted by resident advisors and instructors of the schools they are visiting, and they also tend to be a bit longer (e.g., weeks instead of days) than tour models. During the tour models, the exchange students are housed elsewhere, such as hotels, student dorms, or with families who volunteer to host them, rather than with their advisors or instructors, and tour models are usually less than two weeks long (Bennett et al., 2011).

The total immersion model was described by Sowa (2002) as one that places students in family homes in a foreign country for the duration of at least one semester, and typically for a year. This type of student exchange experience allows students to participate in and experience the language, the culture, and their host families' lives. The host families are expected to meet the exchange students' basic domestic needs by providing food and shelter and are encouraged to treat the students like children of their own. This means that exchange students are expected to follow the rules of their host families so long as they are just, reasonable, and suit the regulations of the exchange organization. This total immersion type of exchange student is the focus of this study and the term "exchange student" is used throughout this document to refer to high school students studying abroad, through an official organization, for 4-12 months while attending school and living with host families.

Motivations for Becoming an Exchange Student

There are a few common answers that exchange students will supply when asked to explain their motivation for studying abroad. Some of these reasons include their desire to travel and have fun (Byram & Dervin, 2009), their excitement for learning a new language and immersion in a new culture (Bachner, & Zeutschel, 2009), along with the desire for exploring

new places, seeing famous tourist attractions, experiencing the weather and natural environment of the host country (Llewellyn-Smith, & McCabe, 2008), and increasing their independence (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). Bennett et al. (2011) also found that international exchange students coming to the United States tend to appreciate the exchange student opportunities more than the exchange students from the United States studying in other countries.

Those who study abroad tend to come from urban areas (Li, Guo, & You, 2017), from families with above-average salaries, and parents with higher education degrees (Messer & Wolter, 2007). The cost of studying abroad varies based on the organization running the program, the country where the student is hosted, and the duration of the program. A trip lasting a few weeks usually costs several thousands of dollars at the minimum, and many semester and year-long programs cost $10,000 or more (Sarikas, 2015). Consequently, the financial aspect can make it difficult for low income and underrepresented students to participate in exchange student programs (e.g., Murray Brux, & Fry, 2010; Zemach-Bersin, 2007).

Outcomes and Benefits for Participants of Exchange Student Programs

Research reveals multiple outcomes and benefits for exchange program participants. While it is not clear if some of the personal and cultural benefits acquired from the exchange student experience have long-term effects, some of the personal benefits include increases in self-confidence (Hadis, 2005), maturity (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009), and personal growth (Dwyer, & Peters, 2004). These students have also been able to make constructive adjustments to their vocational options (Bennett et al., 2011), and have increased academic success (e.g., Hadis, 2005; Razack, 2002).

Cultural benefits. The experience of studying abroad has also been found to offer exchange students some cultural benefits, including an increase of knowledge regarding international issues (Bennett et al., 2011), developing a broader global perspective (e.g., Braskamp et al., 2009; Gu et al., 2010), a new level of appreciation for other cultures, language and places (Bennett et al., 2011), increasing intercultural competence, intercultural maturity, and intercultural sensitivity (e.g., Braskamp et al., 2009; Shiri, 2015), and increasing their overall intercultural knowledge (e.g., Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Dwyer, & Peters, 2004; Hadis, 2005).

Future benefits. The research literature has recorded some future benefits that these types of students also obtain as participants of an exchange student program. This list of benefits includes the ability to form long-lasting, and sometimes life-long relationships with their host families (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josić, & Jon, 2009) and other peers from a different culture (Hansel, 1988). Interestingly, technology and social media have been shown to play a big role in maintaining these relationships (Shiri, 2015).

Developmental Changes during the Teenage Years

Some of the changes that exchange students experience during adolescence include the development of their identities and self-consciousness (e.g., Greischel, Noack, & Neyer, 2016; Hess & Davidson, 2016), and their gender roles, self-concept, and self-esteem (Rice, 1996). They are beginning to develop a deeper understanding of their race-related socialization and their racial/ethnic/cultural identity (Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002). There are several reasons why the experiences of exchange students and their families need to be examined in greater depth. When international high school exchange students become part of their host family system, they are exposed to a sociocultural environment different from the one in which

they were raised; and that affects their previous values, traditions, and belief systems. This, in turn could create an inner conflict with their identity, and could possibly create conflict with their parents and family of origin. This entire sequence could easily end up affecting their relationship with their family of origin; either positively or negatively, once they make the transition back home.

Cultural Issues and Challenges for Participants of Exchange Student Programs

While literature findings on exchange students have shown many benefits, these students also face many challenges. For example, as a result of the transition and adaptation to living in a new culture, new school system, and sometimes a new language, some exchange students experience significant amounts of stress (e.g., Hwang & Ting, 2008; Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008), depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (e.g., Conrad et al., 2016; Furukawa & Shibayama, 1994).

Research on the challenges of older (university) students has shown that acculturative stress; better known as culture shock, can be part of the transition to living in another culture (Berry, 1997). Moreover, exchange students with less knowledge about their host countries struggle more, and have shown fewer cultural gains from their study abroad experience than those who become familiar with their host country before departure (e.g., Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 2007).

In addition, an exchange student's level of language proficiency in their new host country has been shown to greatly affect their chances of forming new relationships with their peers and host families (Kinginger, Wu, Lee, & Tan, 2016). Those with low language skills have a more difficult time forming peer relationships, and report a greater struggle to connect with their host parents and host siblings (Spenader, 2011). Moreover, the lack of the support system that these

teenagers had in their home country has been found to be a risk factor for difficulty in adaptation to their host country culture (Gu et al., 2010; Nilsson et al., 2008). Also, exchange students' self-reports indicated feeling lower levels of satisfaction in their host communities when they perceive less availability, adequacy, fulfillment and honest social relationships (Furukawa & Shibayama, 1994).

Exchange students also can face issues related to their racial background. Maundeni (1999) discovered that exchange students of color studying in the United States faced racism and discrimination due to some of the United States' societal attitudes and socialization patterns towards African Americans, and the stereotypical views of African American socioeconomic status. This resulted in reports of negative experiences for some Black exchange students studying in the United Sates.

Another factor that directly affects the struggles exchange student may face while abroad is the type of culture their host country holds. If a student comes from an individualistic culture, then they may face greater difficulties adjusting to a collectivist one. In individualist cultures, most people's social behavior is largely determined by personal goals, attitudes and values, and individuals tend to emphasize personal achievement regardless of the expense of group goals, resulting in a strong sense of competition. In collectivist cultures, most people's social behavior is largely determined by goals, attitudes, and values that are shared with other people and individuals, and they tend to emphasize family and work group goals above individual needs or desires (Cheung, Maio, Rees, Kamble, & Mane, 2016).

For example, this type of social interaction made it difficult for exchange students in the U.S. who came from collectivist cultures to adjust and learn the language, culture, and customs that prevailed in their new individualistic school environment. This cultural transition often led

to feelings of isolation in group discussions; as their peers did not seem to want to help them, or preferred to work alone instead of working as a team or in groups. (Alberts & Hazen, 2005).

The nationality of exchange students coming to study in the U.S. has also been found to play a role in their struggles. Many who come to the U.S. face stereotypes because the U.S. students did not know much about their cultures of origin. For example, some Asian students were thought to "work on fields and plant rice" (p.179) and they felt that they were treated with a lack of respect by those who held these stereotypes (Scott, 1998). A similar lack of respect was felt by students from Mexico, Iraq, and Russia because of negative stereotypes held by some U.S. students (Scott, 1998). While this study is 20 years old, this is still occurring in current times (Linley, 2018; Nowicka, 2018).

Student Struggles in the Homes of Host Families

The challenges these students can face are not limited to issues within their new school and with their peers in the new country, but struggles are also present at their host homes. Very little research has been done in this area. However, the little bit that we know indicates that sometimes the students' desires, wants, or needs (including basic necessities such as food) can be difficult for the host family to meet, which creates tension (Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004). When exchange students are less flexible and open to adopting the customs of their host families and host countries, they tended to report more struggles throughout their exchange student experience (Bacon, 2002). Another factor causing stress in the host family system is that the reasoning behind the host family's rules, customs, and expectations can sometimes be difficult for the exchange student to understand, which can easily lead to conflict (Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004).

Returning Home

The exchange students' struggles of adjusting to a new culture, family, and educational system while abroad does not end once they leave their host country to return home. On the contrary, returning home is often another difficult transition for them to navigate. As mentioned by Wilson (1993) in his study of 272 high school exchange students from Australia, Ecuador, Norway, and Sweden, it was common for them to experience a problematic reentry into their original cultures. Many of them indicated that they felt confused about their identity, nationality, and their place in the world. Also, exchange students often struggle with the complicated process of trying to transfer academic credits from courses taken abroad, back to their original educational setting. Unfortunately, they will often end up not transferring at all, which adds to the financial and emotional burden of the experience (Bennett et al., 2011).

Not much research has been conducted about reunification after voluntary departures of teenagers. However, we have some information when the parents leave home and come back to their children. For example, parents leaving for work for long periods of time a rural area (Su, Li, Lin, Xu, & Zhu, 2013) and leaving their children behind can have a negative effect on their children's health, behavior and school engagement (Wen & Lin, 2012).

Role of Host Families in Benefits and Struggles

Relationships with the family in the host country are considered by the teenager to be very important in their psychosocial adjustment, and can also have the power of influencing and adjusting their values, beliefs, and life goals (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002). An important role of host families is that they are encouraged to treat the exchange students like children of their own throughout the exchange student experience (Sowa, 2002). During that time, there is the opportunity for a reciprocal bonding between the host parents and students, often with their

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host mothers, that help exchange students to develop important skills that help the students in the areas of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural matters, and often lead to an overall feeling of better adjustment (Shiri, 2015). In addition, having a good relationship and good communication with host parents has been found to help exchange students perform better in school, learn more quickly, and adjust more easily to their new cultural settings than those who do not report have good relationships with their host families (Di Silvio, Donovan, & Malone, 2014).

The role of host siblings is not a common subject in the literature, but Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) found that when exchange students had siblings their same age at their host families' homes, they made better and faster adjustments to their new cultures and to their new homes, as well as more gains in linguistic and social skills than those who did not. Moreover, as the number of similarly aged host siblings increased, the student did better in school. This study included a comparison of students' grades and adjustment, and correlated with the student's number of peers at home and demonstrated that the interaction with siblings in the host homes gave them a sense of connection and belonging when the parents were not at home (Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004).

Perhaps these findings can be related to the amount of time exchange students spend interacting with natives in their host countries, whether these are peers at home or outside the home. Most gains for exchange students in societal and academic skills came when they learned the "rules" (e.g. customs, traditions, mores) of the culture, and this often occurred within relationships with peers (Bacon, 2002). The roles of the host parents and siblings has been identified as crucial to the lives and positive experiences of exchange students.

AFS Intercultural Programs

AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization in 50 different countries that provides young high school students with an intercultural learning opportunity by facilitating and supporting study abroad for a semester or a year. The organization's mission is to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world (AFS-USA, 2018). The AFS organization has its origins during WWI and its acronym used to stand for the *American Field Service* which was a volunteer ambulance group who believed that it was important to help prevent other wars through international and cross-cultural exchanges (AFS-USA, 2018).

It is clear that exchange student experiences are family experiences, because different family systems are involved in the processes that the exchange student experiences as the host families open their homes to the exchange students, share their traditions, their customs, rules, and their family systems. In fact, AFS has a guide for host parents that is over one-hundred pages long. It is mainly focused on explaining the structure of the organization, the rules and regulations of the agency, and the organization's expectations for the host parents. The guide is geared towards explaining what support systems are in place to help them if any issues arise (AFS-USA, Inc. 2016). Besides making this guide accessible to host parents, AFS also requires host parents to attend orientations in person and online before they can be qualified to host exchange students (AFS-USA, Inc. 2018). However, similar resources are not available for the sending parents and families. They are encouraged to attend some orientation sessions with their children (for whom they are required), but there are no required orientations for sending parents specifically provided while the children are abroad. This seems to be a likely gap in the services provided by AFS requiring the attention of scholars and practitioners.

The Family of Origin

Although the role of parents of exchange students has rarely been researched, it is known that parents are often the most important adults in the lives of most children, because they serve as the primary influence on how their children and teenagers should act, react, and survive in a society (e.g., Murphy, Rodrigues, Costigan, & Annan, 2017; Orr, 2005). Parents also have a major effect on their children's beliefs, goals, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Beam et al., 2002; Kidwell, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2018) and serve as the main model of the morality system, values and principles of conduct (Lu et al., 2017).

As exchange students are exposed to diverse cultures, their established moral compasses may be challenged (Lu et al., 2017). They might also begin to feel confused about their identity (Wilson, 1993), face many more struggles abroad (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Conrad et al., 2016; Hwang & Ting, 2008; Nilsson et al., 2008; Scott, 1998), and also face struggles after they come back home (e.g., Bennett et al., 2011; Wilson, 1993). One could expect that their parents would be crucial to helping with these challenges; however, there is very little information about the roles their parents play while these students are abroad, or when they return home. Further, little is known about how such experiences might lead to new family roles and new changes for their whole family system.

While there is a guide developed and available for the exchange student program participants and their parents (AFS-USA, 2016), I believe the required workshops and meetings for these families to attend that provide them information about the processes, challenges the students might face, expectations from parents and students, and the wide-range of additional resources, still this is not enough to prepare them. The available resources do not provide the student nor the parents with information on how the precise roles of the parents and the

experience as a whole may affect their family from both short-term and long-term perspectives. Therefore, there is a need for in-depth exploration of the effects of such experiences at the family level. Specifically, what impact an exchange student experience has on the family of origin. This might help us see how family systems experience the process. However, it is impossible to know what these similarities and differences may be without embarking on the exploration of such phenomenon.

Family Systems as the Theoretical Framework

The successful adaptation of exchange students can be enhanced by the kind of interpersonal support network they have in their home and abroad environments, such as that of both sets of parents and peers (Ye, 2006). Thus, beginning to understand the support these exchange students receive from their family members is crucial and of great importance for understanding their experiences and struggles. In addition, it is equally important to focus on the ways family systems (host parents and sending parents) might be affected when they support their students.

While it may not be clear if such benefits on teenagers are temporary or have a long-term effect, these benefits and others should be explored at the family level because there might be similar benefits for their families and the interpersonal relationships within. I think that such benefits for their parents might include gaining a broader world perspective through the teenager's anecdotes about their experiences abroad, feelings of closeness with each other or being more appreciative of each other due to each other's absence while abroad, and parents getting a more mature teenager back after their exchange experience.

General Systems and Natural Systems theory

The General Systems theory or Natural Systems theory is a framework that emerged during the 1920's, and has its roots in the field of biology. This theory was created to help explain the holistic organization of living organisms and social groups (Bertalanffy, 1968). Since its introduction, this framework has been applied to many different fields such as medicine, human sexuality, and communication (Bowen, 1978). In recent years, the systems theory approach has gained popularity within the social sciences, and more specifically in the areas of family therapy (Goldenberg, & Goldenberg, 2012) and family studies, as Family Systems Theory (FST) (Bowen, 1978)

In general, FST explains that the relationship between individuals and their environments is interactive and bidirectional. With this understanding, each person in a family is viewed as part of an open subsystem that experiences output and input from its environment. Various other subsystems and individuals who are part of a bigger system (in the suprasystem) can also influence the interaction between an individual and his/her environment (Bowen, 1974). In order to better understand the Family Systems Theory framework, one should examine its main constructs in greater depth.

A *system* is defined as the combination of parts (subsystems) that work together to create an entire structure. A basic family system could be illustrated with a family consisting of a mother, a child, and a father. It could also be grandparents, a couple, and a child all together. In the case of this study, a family system can include a host family and the exchange student who is living with them. It is important to recognize that various levels of systems can be identified according to the perspective of the people within the system or even to the perspective of a researcher. Thus, each system is capable of deciding who is part and who is not part of the system, each family system can define its own boundaries (Bowen, 1974). For example, a host

family might decide that the hosted exchange student is part of their idea of a family. They might include this student as a family member and treat him/her as such. On the other hand, a researcher might not consider an exchange student as part the host family's system and might decide not to include the student in this family system for certain purposes. What is considered inside a family system can vary across perspectives and purposes.

Boundaries within the Family Systems framework are defined as symbolic or physical borders established by each system that have permeability in a continuum fluctuating between open and closed (Bowen, 1978). These boundaries are responsible for allowing or blocking the flow of information and energy between the environment and the system. The boundaries serve to identify what or who belongs to each system, subsystem, or suprasystem, and what or who does not (Bowen, 1978). For illustrative purposes, consider a system consisting of Joel, Anna and Marie. Joel is the father, Anna is the mother, and Marie is the daughter of Joel and Anna. With this information, we could refer to them as a family system. If this family decides to host an exchange student named John, John becomes part of the family system and all four of them live in the same household and form a new family system. However, when John later goes back home to his country, then he could be still considered by his host family as a part of their family system even though he is living with his family of origin again. Each boundary is dictated by each family system. In addition to boundaries, each system contains various smaller *subsystems*. This is one of the main ideas of the family systems theory.

Subsystems are described as the units in a family that are embedded within a system (Bowen, 1978). An easy way to conceptualize the idea of subsystems is by understanding the interaction or role of each unit within a system. For example, if we take the previous family composed by Joel, Anna and Marie, Anna could be considered as part of two different

subsystems, one as a wife and a partner to Joel, and the other as a mother to Marie. As a wife her relationship with her husband impacts the relationship with her daughter Marie.

A *suprasystem* is described as a force in the environment that can influence a system. Every system is embedded in suprasystems that affect how the system interacts with other systems (Broderick, 1993). For example, the church can be a suprasystem that dictates some of the behaviors that a family displays with other systems or families. In addition, being of a certain nationality might influence some of the displayed cultural behaviors or cultural traditions a system might follow.

The concept of *homeostasis* is defined in the Systems framework as a balance of inputs and outputs that helps to maintain equilibrium by way of feedback and control (Bowen, 1974). It requires that a system (e.g., a family system) modifies its structure in an effort to adjust to change and maintain balance. Thus, homeostasis is a process involving important functional elements such as routines, customs, and new behaviors adopted by the system that cause it to remain balanced or structured (Bowen, 1974). A system can only be in a homeostatic stage under certain conditions of interdependence and "effective" functioning of all members of the system (Bowen, 1974). For example, if the host family of John begins to have troubles with him and his behaviors begin to disrupt their home's harmony, then the host parents might create some new rules to bring back the sense of harmony back at their home to reestablish a sense of balance (homeostasis).

Input can be understood as the information that a system receives from its environment, such as cultural norms and rules. *Output* includes those inputs (information) a system receives from the environment and then transforms into *output* (behaviors) that may fit the cultural norms or rules of the environment into which the system is embedded. Outputs can explain why

systems display behaviors that are socially acceptable at a certain time and place or information

and exhibits different behaviors in another environment (Bowen 1974).

Feedback is the circular process in which output into the environment by the system is

brought back as input into the system, and then back to the environment, and so forth. The

primary goal of this feedback loop is to help a system reach a goal and to control the system's

own behavior. The system maintains two specific forms of feedback called *positive feedback* and

negative feedback (Bowen, 1974). During the process of positive feedback, new behaviors are

adopted to promote change in the system (Bowen, 1974) and the whole system is involved in

helping to change behavior and reach a new stage of balance that is different from their previous

homeostatic stage (Broderick, 1993).

For example, applying this concept to the previous case of John, the exchange student

who disrupted his host family's homeostasis (harmony) because he was having problems

adjusting to their rules and their ways of doing things, through *positive feedback* the family goal

would be to find ways to help the teenager to change his behavior (*input*) and exhibit more

positive behaviors that would be beneficial for the whole host family system, for the community,

and even for society (*output*). Some support systems for the exchange student could be found in

the environment or community, such as resources aimed to help individuals struggling with the

transition of going from one culture into another, like a counselor at school. Here the family goal

could then be reached through the exchange student receiving assistance from the counselor, and

the counselor's suggestion of the host family spending more time with John to help him

transition better into their new home environment.

New habits and behaviors learned by the exchange student would help him or her to later

become a more functional family member (*output*), reaching the system's desired goal of ending

his conflict within the host family system. The exchange student could later reciprocate by offering *output* to the environment by being socially perceived as a more productive individual in society than he was before. The whole family doing more activities together could be perceived as an increased involvement and closeness as a family system. In this situation, the new balance of the family system is reached, with a positive feedback process that helped create and alter behaviors.

N*egative feedback* allows the system to regulate, but not to change its behavior when deviation from homeostasis occurs (Broderick, 1993). The main goal is to sustain the equilibrium of the system and to keep the limits established by the system itself (Bowen, 1974). An example of a negative feedback process would be that every time a mother finds out that her exchange student uses curse words, she gives a very angry speech that usually ends in a dispute. The host mother does not do anything to change the behavior of her exchange student but just gets angry, and the exchange student stops for a while. Although this happens about once a month, the exchange student has not stopped using curse words. This repetitive behavior by both members of the system maintains homeostasis, but does not include change. No real change is being promoted in this situation; it remains a frustrating experience with conflict.

During this negative feedback process, the family system does not get involved as a whole, but usually only one or a few members attempt to establish a homeostatic stage, even if that stage is dysfunctional. Oftentimes, one person is seen as the one with the problem and is blamed by one or a few family members (Bowen, 1978). Both negative and positive feedback are necessary for the system to maintain its homeostasis.

The *Rules of Transformation* are how family systems transform inputs from the environment into outputs from the system, back to the environment. The degree and type of input

depends on the how open or close the boundaries of the system are (Bowen, 1974). For example, a set of host parents (a family system) might take inputs from the media on how to host an exchange student or even to raise their children, and thus these parents might try to raise their children and help their hosted exchange student to become social and independent, which then becomes the output to the environment.

Variety is a concept referring to the extent to which the family system has different types of resources needed to assist them to meet new environmental demands and navigate the adaptation process (Bowen, 1974). For example, if a family loses its home during a fire, it may have several resources such as savings, insurance, or extended family members and friends helping them. This variety of resources will help them to rebuild their home and move on with their lives, towards homeostasis.

Lastly, *equifinality* refers to the idea that different family systems can reach the same stage through different routes, regardless of the circumstances surrounding each system at the initial starting point of each system (Bowen, 1978). For example, if a family wants to become more knowledgeable about different cultures around the world but does not have much money to travel, they might set aside some free time on the weekends to watch documentaries about it and even invite people from other cultures to their home. Another family might have the same goal and decide they want to start to travel abroad together to reach their goal. A third family might decide to host an exchange student from a different country to learn more about other people's cultures. All three families become more knowledgeable about other cultures around the world and have reached a similar goal using three different strategies.

The experience of studying abroad involves several different systems theory aspects, including various subsystems such as the hosting mother and the exchange student, or the host

sibling and the student. The boundaries in the system must be somewhat open to allow the exchange student to become part of their family system for a certain period of time. The influence that the main unit (the exchange student) has on the two separate family systems (the sending and the hosting family), each holding their own values and traditions can be interesting to see from this Family Systems perspective because student would also influence and be influenced by them through interpersonal interaction.

In summary, literature to date has mainly focused on the experiences of the exchange students. Yet, as explained above, the experiences of exchange programs and studying abroad do not only affect the children but rather their entire families and host families throughout the process. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the experiences and the impact that exchange programs have in the children's families as well. For this reason, in this study, we have analyzed the effect that exchange programs have on sending parents. Not only have we tried to understand the challenges and coping mechanism that these sending parents experience but we have done this in a qualitative manner, which is a gap in the current literature of exchange programs. To fully understand the reality that sending parents go through with minimum bias, we have followed the methods discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 - METHODOLOGY

The current study is an applied research project. Applied research is designed to "contribute knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment" (Patton, 2002, p. 217). In this case, the intent is to gain understanding about the experiences of sending parents to ultimately improve the services provided by exchange organizations. Therefore, the overarching research question for this study was:

> To what extent do international high school exchange programs
> affect the lives of the sending families who participate?

To explore this question, I examined the complexities of the sending parents' experiences, beginning from when they began to consider study abroad through their teenagers' year abroad and after they returned home. I hoped to better understand the benefits and challenges of sending parents, as well as what kind of coping strategies they employed.

The following set of specific research questions were used:

- SRQ1: What benefits do parents gain as a result of their children's study abroad experiences?

- SRQ2: What challenges do parents face as a result of their children's study abroad experiences?

- SRQ3: What coping strategies do parents use as a result of their children's study abroad?

Data Collection

The data for this study came from a research project (Kansas State University IRB application number 8125) conducted by Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman (Principle Investigator (PI)); an expert in qualitative methodology and participant of AFS. The PI contacted AFS staff

members and volunteers in seven participating countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Turkey, and the United States) who then shared information about the research project with potential participants in each of their countries. After possible volunteers responded, they were contacted by the PI to schedule conversational interviews at times and places of their choice. A total of 120 participants (former high school exchange students, sending parents, host family members, AFS staff, and AFS volunteers) provided data for this project between March and July of 2016. All interviews were conducted in English and lasted anywhere from 15-125 minutes, depending on the number of roles the participant filled. (Many participants were former exchange students as well as sending and/or hosting family members, volunteers and/or staff members.)

The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, in the apartments where the researchers were staying, in the participants' places of work, and in the local AFS offices after informed consent was obtained. (See Appendix A for the informed consent form). The interviews consisted of seven to ten open-ended questions depending on the roles of the participants. These questions were designed to explore their experiences and retrospective perceptions. (see Appendix B for the interview guide.) Most participants were interviewed individually; however, six host or sending parents couples were interviewed with their partners, and two focus groups of recent former exchange students were held. Interviews were audio and video recorded by a professional videographer/filmmaker and project collaborator.

Participant Selection

The primary data set consisted of 120 participant interviews from 18 countries. Participants included men and women, teenagers through adults in their 70s, and people who filled different roles in the exchange student program. To select appropriate data for this study's

research questions, homogenous sampling strategy was employed to identify which cases to include in the analyses for this study. Homogeneous sampling is a purposive strategy used by researchers to include people with similar backgrounds and experiences to provide focus and clarity of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this study, I chose to utilize homogenous sampling strategy because of the emphasis on examining a new perspective from those who have the lived experience to reflect on the phenomenon. For this investigation, homogeneity was defined as anyone who identified him/herself as a parent of a child who studied a year abroad in high school in another country. A year was identified as providing the parents with a long enough period of time to adjust and adapt without their child at home. This criteria selection yielded a total of 23 interviews (including 26 participants) rich in information. Tables 3-1 and 3-2 are presented as a visual summary of the individual participants and the sample.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was the individual parents of high school international exchange students. This focused my examination of the experience of sending parents and helped to gain insight to the effect that exchange programs have on each sending parent's life. Sixteen of the 26 participants also had a partner/spouse who was interviewed. Most were interviewed separately, but three couples chose to complete the interview together. In order to keep the focus consistent, data from each participant were treated individually, rather than at a couple level, regardless of interviews being completed alone or jointly

Case Selection

The primary data collected consisted of 120 participant interviews from 18 countries, men and women, teenagers through adults in their 70s, and people who participated in different

roles in the exchange student program. A homogenous sampling strategy was employed to identify which cases to include in the analyses for this study. Researchers choose to include people with similar backgrounds and experiences to provide focus and clarity of the phenomenon for a particular group (Patton, 2002). In this study, I chose to utilize homogenous sampling strategy because of the emphasis on examining people with similar perspectives. The criteria to achieve a homogenous sample was to include all the individuals who had experience with sending a child to study high school in another country. The participants were fathers and mothers from Denmark, Hungary, Norway, and Turkey. The cases also were selected based on the amount of time the participant spent in their specific role – only cases where the participant was in their role for a year were included. These parents experienced an extensive process of sending an exchange student for a long enough time to adjust and experience a substantial amount of time without their child at home. This criteria selection yielded a total of 23 rich in information cases who met the criteria. Tables 3-1 and 3-2 are presented as a visual summary of the individual participants and the sample.

Table 3-1. Individual Participants

Country of Origin	Child's Hosting Placement	Parent Role	Interview
Denmark	U.S. - Seattle	Mom	Alone
Denmark	U.S. - California	Mom	Alone
Denmark	U.S. - Maryland	Dad	Alone
Denmark	U.S. - Maine	Mom	Alone
Denmark	U.S. - Arizona	Mom	Alone
Denmark	U.S. - Maryland	Mom and Dad	Separate
Denmark	U.S. - South Carolina	Mom and Dad	Joint
Denmark	U.S. - Kansas	Mom and Dad	Joint
Denmark	U.S. - Iowa	Mom and Dad	Separate
Denmark	Italy	Mom	Alone
Norway	U.S. - Kansas	Mom and Dad	Separate
Norway	U.S. - North Carolina	Mom and Dad	Separate
Norway	Belgium	Mom and Dad	Separate
Norway	Canada	Mom and Dad	Joint
Norway	U.S. - Kansas	Mom	Alone
Hungary	Sweden	Mom	Alone
Hungary	U.S. - Kansas	Dad	Alone
Turkey	Chile	Dad	Alone

Table 3-2. Summary of Sample Characteristics

Total # mothers	15
Total # fathers	11
Total # children	18
Total # participants	26
Total # interviews	23

Data Analysis

As a researcher, I conducted inductive constant comparative analyses consisting of interacting with the data and reducing it to identify core consistencies and meanings by identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Patton, 2015). First, the 23 interviews selected were transcribed verbatim using Express Scribe Transcription Software by a member of the research team. The transcripts were analyzed inductively from a family-systems perspective. I read each transcript repeatedly. The first time was to get a sense of the overall scope of the data. Next, I began with the first research question regarding benefits and coded each interview by hand to capture what each line, phrase, or sentence communicated. This allowed me to assess how the sending parents felt, behaved, and thought about how they benefitted and changed from their experiences (Patton, 2002). This process was repeated for the second and third specific research questions (challenges and coping strategies).

Next, Family Systems Theory lens was used to identify common patterns, themes, and categories in the interviews related to the research questions. While FST was helpful in recognizing themes during analyses, it became clear that an ecological perspective also was evident in the emerging patterns, themes, and categories. Therefore, systemic and ecological lenses were both applied during the analysis process.

To help offset my own biases, bracketing techniques were employed (as outlined by Moustakas, 1994). The inclusion of writing notes assisted me in reflecting on my assumptions and thoughts. Moreover, analytic triangulation was used, in which another graduate and an expert in qualitative methods helped to corroborate my analysis of the data and identify any biases in the analysis process. As a group, we discussed all coding and findings and came to agreement regarding themes, categories and exemplars.

Reflexivity

One key component of my own culture that led me to have a significant interest in family dynamics and how they are affected by different factors, is the concept of familism. This is a term used to describe a social structure or a cultural value that emphasizes close family relationships with strong social support for each other, where the needs of the family are more important and take precedence over the needs of any of the family members alone (Campos et al., 2008). Familism is very common in Latin culture, and I was raised with this perspective and cultural value. This is a strength that I was able to use in this study, because it allowed me to focus on how studying abroad affected the sending parents and their family dynamics.

Since my junior year as an undergraduate student, I have been exposed to qualitative method research techniques under faculty supervision. I was able to conduct a research project as an undergraduate involving several families. I looked at parent-child communication and the ways cell phones facilitated and hindered their communication. This qualitative project was presented in a McNair's program yearly symposium at the University of California, Berkeley. This study later was extended and became the topic of my master's thesis, in which I found that parents and teenagers are able to plan, communicate, support each other, ask for help, and build their relationships via cellphones.

I strongly believe that my background, my education in Family Studies, and my previous experience with qualitative methods allowed me to conduct an effective analysis of the effects of the exchange student process on the sending parents. Moreover, my knowledge and exposure to additional theories related to the family and the cultural influences on the individual and the family (e.g., Bowen's Family Systems theory (1978), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979), and Bennet's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Bennet, 1998)

helped me dissect the sending parents' experiences well. My academic background, and the broad variety of experiences I have had as an immigrant student allowed me to see these parents' stories from many different angles and analyze them thoroughly and effectively.

As an immigrant; I have truly found my niche in the field of Family Studies. My natural curiosity about family dynamics has grown into a passion for studying diverse sets of family systems and noting the impact of surrounding contexts, culture, and environmental factors. My experiences as an immigrant have made it impossible for me to ignore the influences that each individual's culture has on the way s/he views cultural experiences, and even the way s/he views family systems. Throughout my studies, I have noticed how one's culture is greatly impacted by environmental contexts, and over the years I know that my family and I have been affected by cultural and environmental influences here in the United States. Sometimes we stop and realize that we now do things very differently from our traditional ways, or the way that we would have done them in Mexico as a part of that culture.

My previous personal experiences and interactions with exchange students have shown me that I can often relate to them easily, because our stories have several things in common. Many of the transitions and culture shock that these students describe are things that are easy for me to understand, because they were a part of my story as well. I believe that this helped me to better understand their experiences, more so than someone who has never been fully immersed into a new country and culture for an extended period of time. However, I must remain faithful to the qualitative research method and remind myself that every participants' experiences are his/her own experiences and are unique and different from my own.

Therefore, when I was conducting the analyses and trying to find the common themes and patterns that might emerge from the interviews, I remembered and acknowledged my own

biases. I reminded myself that the patterns and themes that I noticed did not have to match with my own previous experiences of adjusting to American culture. In order to ensure that I looked at the study with an objective eye, I constantly reflected on how I saw their experiences and how I conducted my analysis.

Because I was not present for the interviews with the sending parents, I did not have any preconceived notions about what their experience might have been like. This left me room to learn a lot about their experiences, and ensured that I did not push my own agenda on them. Not having previous experiences with sending parents was a positive aspect that I brought to the study, because I was able to look at their interviews with a very open and inquisitive mind.

Another strength of this study was that even though the interviews were collected in other countries, the participants' proficiency in English was very good, helping the process of transcription to be more accurate than if they had to be translated to English. Also, these interviews were collected by an expert on qualitative methods, making this data set a very trustworthy and professional source of information. Another asset of the data collection was that each one of the interviews was video and audio recorded, which helped the transcription process and helped to see body language signs that might have indicated important feelings, or very meaningful moments from the participants.

One of the limitations of this study was that these participants' interviews were retrospective, and sometimes the participant could have a hard time remembering events and might not have been able to remember and explain their experiences well. Also, because these interviews were collected only at one point of time it was not possible to see how the individual parents changed in their perspective about the benefits and challenges they had with the exchange student experience. However, because the interviews collected include sending parents

from different decades, this is a strength that could possibly help illuminate how the benefits and challenges might remain similar across time for the individuals in the sample. For example, there might be similar benefits and challenges for the parents who were interviewed two years later after their teenagers came back home, and the parents whose interviews were collected 20 or 35 years after their teenagers returned home.

Although this study is not perfect, the process of planning the study was carefully deliberated, in hopes of bringing meaningful addition to the gap in literature described previously. The goal of this study was to fill that knowledge gap with more information about the effects international high school exchange student programs have on the sending parents and their family dynamics. Further, I chose to engage in this research topic in order to give a voice to the parents who have experienced real life changes as a result of this process, and to highlight the way their lives have been impacted.

Chapter 4 - FINDINGS

The main objective of this study was to explore and better understand the experiences of parents when their children participate in international high school exchange. Through listening deliberately and reflectively analyzing these parents' stories, I gained an understanding of the benefits these parents experienced as a result of their children to study abroad. Their stories also helped me perceive the challenges these parents went through before, during, and after their teenagers were abroad, as well as what kind of coping strategies they employed during the time they faced their challenges.

In this chapter, I describe the categories and themes that emerged during the analyses as answers to the three research questions. All 26 parents discussed experiences related to each of the research questions. Selected exemplars from the interviews are presented to illustrate each theme. To protect the participant's confidentiality all of the names were omitted.

What benefits do parents experience when their high school children study abroad?

All 26 parents reported that they experienced some sort of benefit and the responses yielded a total of 7 main themes. While participants discussed micro-level benefits that impacted them and their immediate families directly, they also described positive macro-level effects on their communities and/or the world. At the Micro level parents included feeling proud of their children, learning new things about the culture, place, and school system their children were hosted in, as well as becoming more open minded. The benefits for their families included positive impacts on the siblings' relationships, the family members becoming closer to each other, the family making new friends in another country, and the whole family learning about other cultures.

At the macro level, parents indicated benefits for the world community, which included their children becoming more aware of other cultures and creating good positive relationships with other people in another country, learning more about world conflicts, wanting to give back to the community and to the world, and helping young students from other parts of the world.

Micro-Level Benefits

Personal benefits. The micro-level benefits include those that directly impacted the parents and their families' relationships. The benefits that parents acquired for themselves were related: feeling proud about the positive changes they noticed in their children after studying abroad for a year, learning new things about the culture, place, and school system their children were hosted in, as well as becoming more open minded.

Pride in child's accomplishments. Most of the parents talked about the good feelings they felt when their teenagers changed positively. Some of the changes these parents noticed in their teenagers included how they had become more independent, confident, and mature. One parent commented that he felt proud of his daughter's ability to being able to study abroad for one year and being away from her own family. *"Proud. I am definitely proud of her."* A father from Norway who is very interested in world politics said,

> *I can say with 100% security that he benefited very much from that. He developed as a person, he matured, and he got new friends forever, and that's amazing. He also learned a lot about a new country, a new culture, a new political, a new policy, the U.S. is very different from the Norwegian politics and [my son] was very interested in, became very interested in American politics. You know, the U.S. politics is very difficult from the Norwegian politics, and he became fascinated by the American way of organizing their political life. And also, I think that he got his first girlfriend when he was in the U.S. and for us it was very fascinating, was amazing, and very interesting to us as parents to see.*

Knowledge about another country. Most parents also mentioned that they learned something about the culture where their teenager was studying. For example, a Danish father

who had vacationed in the U.S. before his son lived in the U.S. on exchange, felt that he got to expand his own knowledge of American culture.

> *Yeah. Maybe the things about the religion and gun policy and abortion. We felt that we got to use the host family. We got to know them better than what we have known other people in the U.S. just visiting. And I think what we learned is that, what we actually did not know, is that American people is actually much more open, much more open, curious and open. I think that's the right word. And I think that's the good thing. And I also think they have an open mind. Yeah, for the new people [they] are meeting, I think.*

A mother whose daughter went to the U.S. perceived that she learned a lot about American culture through her daughter's experiences: "*Yes, I think we did…we learned almost as much about the culture because we saw it from her and through the family.*"

A mother who went with her family to visit her son's host family in the U.S. learned American culture being positive and appreciative in ways different from her own culture.

> *They are always positive in the U.S. I love the way, in Denmark and Sweden as well, we talk about the bad weather and this and that and this is wrong, and oh and everything. We forget sometimes to turn it around and say, "The last two days the sun has been shining, it has been great. It is almost spring again." …But in the U.S. you don't have the, of course you say negative things sometimes as well, but there is positivism or whatever it is called in the U.S. You are open minded. You think, "That is great! Good for you!" I miss that sometimes. When we went to the U.S. last summer to visit my son's family, I was like, "Oh yeah."*

Another mother, whose son went to the U.S. from Norway, deliberately learned more about the specific area where her son was hosted.

> *I learned a lot about Kansas because I did not know much about Kansas. I did know about Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz and that was what I knew about Kansas because I'd never been there, but we started to read about that part of the States.*

Several parents also learned something about the educational system of their teenagers' host countries and how they discovered some educational differences with their own country. A mother from Denmark whose daughter went to the U.S. commented:

The many fantastic things that they do at U.S. high schools – the different courses that they give. I think that has been interesting to follow. It was called Mock trial – the thing that she did. I think that they give, or they did at that school, they give them lots of challenges, which I think we could learn from. And it's definitely been very motivating, the way of learning and the way that they have different teachers and aren't following the same class all the time. So, it's been a motivating thing for a girl like [my daughter]. I don't know that it works for every child. She really enjoyed it.

A mother from Denmark described how she and her husband became more open to learning about religion:

In her exchange year…she get into this youth group and church. And there she found the friends. These very nice, very decent girls. And then suddenly, me and my husband, when we heard that we thought, "Well, that sounds good." (I don't know if you know the attitude here in Denmark to Christianity, but we are a little, "Well, ah, Americans, they are so, there is gospel, and all these things. They are very religious.") [We wondered], "Will this be good for [my daughter]? Will they brainwash her? You are in a country with a lot of Mormons." Well, we were just, there was a lot of prejudice from our side. But then we heard about it and it sounds just fine, and they were social and they was taking care of her, and I could also hear about her telling them about her experience there. And I thought, "Well, maybe that's the way to do it."

The following dad also mentioned how sending families could form new friendships across countries.

Another thing that you also need to consider, not just for your kid, but for your own self, you also may have some new friends and have a new relationship with other people in other cultures that maybe last for more than that year. I think that you can only be wiser.

New perspective on oneself. While many parents learned new things about other cultures and became more open-minded because of their children's experiences and interactions with other groups, some parents also learned to be without their children. One mother from Denmark said she thought she could not be without her son for a long, but she learned she was able to handle it.

I think I found out I can be without him for a longer period of time. That it's okay. Well, we have 3 more children so, of course, still we have children at home. But I can handle it. I didn't think I would be that good at it, but I'm quite good at it.

Another mother echoed similar feelings: *"I learned to be patient. Not to call him. Not to try to go there and try to be there for him. I learned to let him go and to let him grow up."*

Benefits to their families. Participant parents identified benefits that affected their families. Some of these benefits affected siblings, and other times they were related to the entire family becoming closer, making new friends in another country, or the whole family learning about other cultures.

Positive family relationships. One father from Norway noticed a positive change in the relationship with his son after he returned home. *"I think, I think that [my son] being away from us for one year got us closer when he came back. And that is really a benefit to get closer to your son."* Another father from Denmark described his family appreciating each other more.

I think like family... like when being apart, you learn, you experience so much. You appreciate each other and how much you need [each other]. Yeah, that you are family and everything. You appreciate, yeah. You learn to appreciate each other and what you take for granted.

A mother of two girls recognized that when her oldest daughter was on the exchange program, her younger daughter was able to establish different relationships in the family:

Our youngest daughter, she was 12 years old, and she is rather cool. So, she was, "I don't want to miss her. Now I have a lot of space at home." She was a little bit sad, but she didn't want to share that. But then we find a new way to be a family with a single child. That was rather special. Also fun, because suddenly – there are three and a half years between the girls – and suddenly [my daughter] our youngest, she so much became talkative when [the other daughter] was away. Suddenly we discovered that she has something to say, (laughs) because the grown one is so more dominating, because they're more, they're more mature. So, she get her own space in the family – more focused on her.

A mother of two children also perceived that her husband became closer with his child who was not abroad:

Well, one part is, that's of course, also the dynamics of family. That's [my older daughter] and my husband is a little bit the same and quite close, whereas I'm a little more like [the younger daughter]. So, a very important part was that my husband actually and [the younger daughter] got a little closer, because they could suddenly spend a little more time together.

Studying abroad also was described as impacting the exchange students' relationships with their siblings. Some parents mentioned that they saw positive changes in their children's relationship after the exchange student returned. A father from Denmark commented:

They appreciated each other when they were apart. Before, they were fighting like everyone else. But after, they learned to get along, respect each other. He was looking forward to [his big sister] when she came back and they had something together. He liked to kind of follow [her] when she came back. He didn't go to a party without consulting her. She just was, "No, or yes, do you like this?" and he would do it right away. They had, they found out that they had things to learn from each other. They appreciate each other. They needed it and got used to each other in a good way

A mom from Norway commented that her two boys became closer to each other while their sister was studying abroad. *"The boys got closer when the sister wasn't here. But of course, they both missed her. But I think it was good for them."*

Benefits for extended family members. Some parents described the benefits for a whole family. For example, a mother from Denmark, whose niece also had been an international high school exchange student, commented that she saw unity in her family because they all were involved in her experience.

Is it enough to say it's a very good family experience? It's a good thing to do together as a family, because, yeah, we are all into it. I mean, we all miss [my daughter]. We all talked a lot about [her cousin] being away. It's been great to get this contact with the families. So, as a family, it's not just the sending part. It's, we're all involved in it. There's a lot of attention from grandparents and friends and, "What's going on?" So, it's a good family experience all together.

Echoing the previous mother, another mother talked about how her whole family learned something new by sending a child to study abroad.

One is about self-confidence, I think of course your daughter gets that, but also you get that as a family. We have to see that we can do this and that we get through the year and get out on the other side. And as a family we have experienced something new about all of our people in our family.

As a result of her daughter studying in the U.S., another mom stated that her extended family learned to be more tolerant of same-sex marriage because her daughter was hosted by a family with two moms:

Coping a little with homosexual relationships is probably a part of it. It's not anything that we talked about, but again, my parents are old and my husband's parents are quite old so it's not as accepted and I think that the fact that [my daughter] stayed there made it more acceptable. And now they've met the family, "Oh, they're so nice." So, things like that.

Some participants also appreciated how participating in an exchange program opened a new opportunity for their families to build long-lasting friendships with the host families. The following sending mom, who was once an exchange student herself, talked about how her family formed cross-national ties with her host family.

They just had a ball. When they were together, they were laughing, making jokes, doing all kinds of things. One of my sisters went over there, my niece went over there, I had visits from the nieces there. My parents lived in a big house outside Copenhagen and all of the rooms would always be taken because there was someone coming from the United States during the summer. And the doors were always open. So my experience really expanded both for my sisters and my parents, my cousins, my nephews, everybody! And everybody knows the family from over there.

Parents also asserted that the whole family learned things with their children abroad. According to the following mother from Norway, the whole family also learned a lot about themselves when one member of the family went as exchange student. *"They learn a lot about themselves and the family learns a lot about not having her there."* Another mother succinctly suggested that her family also learned about the world through her daughter's narratives about

her experiences abroad: *"I think that's good for a family to [send a child to study abroad], we also got a more broadened view of the world."*

Sending parents identified benefits for their families. In fact, many of these benefits impacted their relationships in one way or another. In addition, the parents described benefits at the macro level.

Macro-Level Benefits

Macro-level benefits include benefits that parents mentioned as having an important role on creating positive relationships with people and effects beyond their families. Such advantages included the exchange students becoming more aware of other cultures and creating good positive relationships with other people in another country, learning more about world conflicts, wanting to give back to the community and to the world, and helping young students from other parts of the world.

Benefits to the world community. Participating parents identified the benefit of exchange as creating a better and more peaceful world. This included creating constructive relationships with people they met in their host countries and how exposure to other cultures can lead to better international relationships more broadly. For example, a dad of a boy from Denmark commented:

> *I think it's more important than ever that you realize that cultures are different… and you have to have kids that are more open and less judging,' cause I'm very afraid that the times are changing back to bigotry and so on. And that worries me a lot. So, I would say that they should send their kids not just for the kid's sake, but also for the world. It's a very important job. And the kids are part of that job also because they are going to live in that. It's their world and they are going to take over. And the more people that they have more experiences with from other cultures, the better it is. And I think, actually that they are not getting it at home and to have any relations with the multicultural world. You actually only get that when you, when you get out of your own home. So, I think they've got to go get that out there as an exchange student.*

A father indicated that creating a peaceful world occurs when their children expand their sense of belonging to include another country.

> *The benefit is a lot (laughing). So, my daughter has got another family, and it's really unbelievable that she has got another family in the other side of the world, of the globe, in United States, so big country. And for a lot of Hungarian people, it's really unbelievable thing, that there's a family who are accepting a totally unknown person from other country, from another culture, and trying to handle this person as the member of the family and this is really big benefit for all of us.*

Exposing their children to other cultures in the world was mentioned by several parents as having important implications in the world. A mother from Norway of a son who studied in the United States said:

> *I think it is an experience, it was an experience for him to sort of, he saw us for the first time, he realized that the things we did as a sort of natural thing was not something everybody else did as a natural thing. That all the families live differently. And that is sort of a developing thing to experience, because you see yourself from outside. That is also why we also have, or always encourage, our kids to travel - because of the experience of the people's lives and your self's and different circumstances, and see your own country, your own child with a different light. I think that is very important in the world. I mean, we live in a very globalized society and we really need to know more about each other to understand each other.*

A parent from Turkey, who also had been an exchange student, recognized how studying helps people understand more about world conflicts.

> *So, I think that the two main benefits would be understanding what's going on out there, and also understanding what's going on within yourself or within your community, within your country…I think that by kind of being exposed to various people at an early age it gives you perspective of, you know we are all human, we are all good we are all different, but we can survive together.*

Giving back. While several participants commented on the global benefits their experiences with AFS brought them and their families, some noted that giving back to the community and to the world became important for them after their experiences with the

exchange student program. For example, a mother who saw AFS disappearing in her area also

wanted to help other parents in her community to be able to send their children to study abroad.

> *I volunteer because, well, in [my area], the AFS group was very, very small and they were, like, dying. So, two other parents and I decided, well, let's give it a chance. So, we have been working then with all of these people. I think, yeah, coming out and meeting all these people, from everywhere, and from different places in the world, I think that is great.*

After the positive experiences they and their children had abroad, some parents also felt

the need to help young students from other parts of the world to know more about their countries,

and they decided to become host parents.

> *Well, it started that it felt a bit like, well, huge responsibility when you sent over of your child. And just because it felt a bit like obligation with the world, and because it had worked out that good with and so thought it right thing to do. That's the start.*

Summary of Benefits

Sending parents perceived benefits of their children studying abroad for themselves, their

families, and the world. The cultural learning and the cultural exposure of the children who

studied abroad seemed to be very closely related to the benefits these parents identified for

themselves. In the following section, I will discuss some challenges these parents faced and the

coping strategies they used to deal with them.

What challenges do parents experience when their high school children study abroad and

what coping strategies do they use to handle these challenges?

While the research questions about challenges and coping strategies were initially

analyzed separately, it became clear that the techniques and solutions parents employed

depended on which specific hurdles or difficulties they encountered. Therefore, these two

research questions are addressed together in this section to present a comprehensive picture of

the parents' experiences. Each challenge described by the sending parents is followed by related coping strategies, unless these parents did not mention any for that type of challenge.

All the participants in the study described facing challenges and reflected on how they handled them. A total of 17 challenges and 29 coping strategies were identified in the interviews. Similar to the benefits, three main categories emerged according to who was affected by the challenges: their children, the sending parents, or the entire family. Additionally, the coping strategies fell into three main categories: communication, staying focused on the child, and letting go. The challenges and coping themes also were grouped into three categories indicating when they occurred: before, during, or after the teenagers' time abroad.

Sending Parents' Challenges and Coping Strategies: Before the Teenager Went Abroad

Most of the participants (19 of the 23) described struggles before their children left to study abroad. Six specific themes emerged from the participants' responses – four challenges impacting the sending parents, two related to their family, and one related to their children. A total of 12 coping strategies emerged: eight related to communication, three to staying focused on the child, and three to letting go.

Challenges Faced Before: Sending Parents. The four challenges directly impacting the sending parents include feeling scared about sending their children abroad, finding a trusted organization, not knowing about the host family/placement for the children, and losing control.

Challenge: Feeling scared about sending their children abroad. Several of the parents discussed struggles that came soon after they found out their child wanted to go abroad. Not surprisingly, they described feeling worried and scared. For example, a Norwegian father of a son said:

> *It was my son who came to us saying that he would like to do it. I think that he had heard from some youngsters about their experience and he wanted to do the*

same thing. I must admit that when this developed from an idea to reality that I was a bit scared. My son, 16 years old, going to another place! He has been with us every day! But there is something about sending him out in the world. So, I was scared, that I have to admit.

A Danish mother also expressed feeling worried when her son told her he wanted to go abroad. *"Okay, as a mom you are always a bit worried, yeah. So, I think that maybe worried... but also a bit proud of him wanting to do this."* Another Danish mother expressed feeling scared about not being able to be there for her son if something happened to him.

A bit scary, I think. And not only because you are sending your boy and you have, no, you are not able just to get in the car and drive if he needs help. And who is he going to live with? And is he getting in trouble? And how is he going to cope with all the problems? And, yeah, a bit scary, I think.

Coping strategy: Being supportive of their children's decisions. When parents were scared or worried about their children's desires to go abroad, they tended to cope by telling themselves that they wanted to be supportive of their children's decisions and wishes. This was one of the most common strategies they used to help them make the decision to let the child study abroad. For example, one mother said, *"Well, I just trusted that if [my son] pouted all the time he would let us know…So we settled with that. We just had to cope with the fact that he was growing up and making his own choices."*

A dad from Hungary commented about how he and his wife used this strategy to become supportive of his daughter's intention to go abroad:

When she told me, immediately I was thinking that it's a chance for her, not for me, for her. Because I am thinking of my children, and somewhere I got the fortune that she has got this intention to go. Maybe it seems that it's a bit early in our culture and that it's quite rare to have got this intention for this kind of generation, but she wanted to go. And, finally, I said okay, and finally we supported her.

A mother from Denmark emphasized how she did not want to let go of her son, but when she remembered how important it was for her husband when he was an exchange student as a teenager, she chose to respect their decision.

> *Well, it's always been a part of this family. This was an opportunity. And I was quite against it! Because I thought, "Well, I have these children until they turn 18 and they can decide for themselves, and I don't want to send them anywhere." But it's been something that they really wanted to do because it's been such a great experience for their father and life changing, I guess. So, they wanted to try that themselves. So, our oldest has been talking about it for some years, that he wanted to go abroad. And I thought, well, I had to support him in that.*

Her husband described it this way:

> *You know, I see myself as giving a gift, I think. I think it's giving, it's the most, one of the most important gifts I think you can give a kid, is to show them that you trust them and that you are willing to let them fly. You know, and let them, get out, and experience life.*

Coping strategy: Talking to extended family members. Talking to others who had experience with study abroad was another tactic used by sending parents when they felt worried or scared about their children going abroad. For example, one mom said,

> *I said, "You can just look at her cousin. She did it. She went over to Los Angeles by herself and it went well." So, we'll try to see that." So, that was the first step. Then we were talking with the grandparents, our own parents. And my parents were just, "Oh that will be nice, and we've seen it work with [her cousin]. But my mother-in-law was the same, it's her first grandchild. And well, "Will it go good? What if the family is not nice? And blah, blah, blah." Of course, it was discussion in the family.*

Challenge: Having trouble finding a trusted organization. After the study abroad decision was made, trying to find a trustworthy exchange organization presented some parents with a new challenge. A father commented how he and his family realized they had chosen the wrong organization at first.

> *Actually, we were, our boy was trying to decide whether to go to a boarding school or abroad. And, actually, we said, "Have you actually been thinking about maybe going abroad, instead? And then we were just looking for an organization.*

And, actually, we picked another one. The wrong one. And we found out that was not that good. And then we, AFS was looking very good, what would you say? It has it all, good information, and we felt pretty informed, and we felt that they have done that for, I don't know how many years, for many years. So, we was feeling comfortable. Good stories and nothing negative, so that's why we decided to go with AFS.

Another father was concerned because his family had never had any personal experience nor knew anyone whose child had studied abroad.

It was a really big challenge for us. I haven't got, and my wife hadn't got, any of this kind of experiences, connections, or English knowledge and so on. And there was nobody in our family who had got this kind of experience. I wanted to, and I started to, collect information, but these are information was from different channels, but this is not the real experience.

Coping strategy: Talking to acquaintances with previous experience. Some parents decided to talk with someone they knew who could guide them in choosing an organization for their children to be able to study abroad. For example, one mom mentioned that she and her family turned to her neighbor and that helped her choose an organization she could trust.

We were reading what AFS had - information and stuff. And our neighbor is actually part of the AFS and also he had some quite good experience with it. So, we talked about it with him, and we felt very comfortable to do that.

Coping strategy: Doing their own research. Some sending parents did their own research online to find a good organization and get some of their inquiries answered. A father found a Facebook group where sending parents could talk about their concerns with other sending parents.

I remember the first time I went on the Facebook group. Parents were having questions. It was just answer the questions and help. Helping out especially about the school - who do you contact, to make sure it's the right organization, how to you get there. And I think that's a good place. It was a closed group and nobody else is there. So, that's a safe place.

Challenge: Not knowing about the host family/placement. Several parents described

how difficult it was not knowing anything about the culture to which their children were going.

For example, one dad commented,

> *You can imagine that it was a really big challenge for us. We have never been to United States and, in spite of the fact that I worked for the international company, but it was a Swedish company, and there were only one or two cases when I met with American people and no other connection. For a lot of Hungarian people, there's a lot of prejudice and perceptions about American people as they have got about another people which they don't know at all. And it was a really big challenge for us, for me, to send my, to let my daughter to go to that kind of culture, but which we don't know almost anything.*

After applying to an organization, several sending parents also talked how they struggled

with waiting to learn who would be taking care of their children abroad. A dad commented that it

was hard to see that other kids were getting host families assigned, but not his daughter.

> *We heard some rumors - some didn't get their family before they went off from Denmark… it was two months before she had to leave…We heard someone down the road got a family. Someone else too, she got a family, He got a family. And then suddenly [my daughter] got a family too. And then, yeah, everything calmed down and knowing that a family would like her, well would wanted her.*

Coping strategy: Contacting AFS. To cope with the worries that time kept passing and no

host family was assigned to their children, some parents just kept on contacting AFS. One

mother commented:

> *Yeah, that was a nightmare. That was really a nightmare, because, well, that's the only criticism I have for AFS; because we were told that normally you get a family in due time. And, well, when you are accepted by the organization, you are dedicated to come to the country you have been applying for, and so on and so on. So, we were just, "We are not worried." But then nothing happens. And my husband especially gets very worried and a little bit angry with the organization. And I was phoning them all the time, "Well, can you say anything?" "Blah, blah, blah. We don't know." And we get a little mixed message from them. And that was a problem, of course. It was very hard to get our daughter's spirit up, because one day she was just saying, "Oh, it didn't come, and I don't come to the U.S., and I'm very sad." She was crying sometimes. But still, I think she, if you can see the possibility in also that kind of process. It was also a mature process for her, because suddenly, it was when we were down in the basement in our mood, she*

was telling both me and my husband, *"Well, if it doesn't going to happen, maybe it's just like that."*

Challenge: Losing control. Losing control over their children's daily lives was another challenge that accompanied these sending parents' experiences. One mother said,

> *Of course, you never know what it's going to happen. You are used to having control, and you lose control. So, of course, you live afraid. Everything can happen, even here, but you are there. So, I guess that is one thing.*

Coping strategy: Accepting that the host parents are in charge. While it was hard for sending parents to accept the loss of control over their children when they were abroad, they learned to accept that the host parents were going to be caring for their children.

> *It sort of balanced between not holding on, being like so far away and holding on, and giving him sort of over to new people, new family. But I realized that it is important as a mother to let go and accept the fact that the host mother and host father are sort of taking the responsibility for the child for a year. I think that you have to accept the loss of control, because you don't have control. You have to accept it. If you don't accept it, it will be hard. It's never nice.*

Challenges faced before: Family. Participants identified two main challenges they faced that were mainly related to their families – not being able to be involved in the children's lives for a year and concerns about illnesses of extended family members. Their coping strategies during this period were, trusting and relying on the host parents, seeing the situation as an opportunity to practice separation, getting to know the host parents, talking with their children, and disclosing important information to the host parents.

Challenge: Not being able to be involved in the children's daily lives. After learning to what country their children were going and getting a host family assigned for the child, several parents struggled with the idea of a lack of daily involvement in their children's lives during the year abroad. For example, a mother felt she was not ready to let go of the child for a whole year when asked about memories in thinking about her son's study abroad experience.

Well, sending him off. That was hard. I didn't, I didn't really like it. I was quite quiet for the two weeks up to his departure. It was quite hard. Well, [my husband's] family and him were like, "Well, it's gonna be exciting!" And I tried to find that in me, but I really didn't like him being away that long. But I tried and said, "Well, it'd be fun and nanannana." But it was quite hard.

Another mother said,

I mean it's, I think if you listen to the pre-orientation then you learn. And for people it's this thing about being able to let the other family and your kid do the job, and I think that is the challenge, I think.

Coping strategy: Trusting and relying on the host parents. Again, trusting the child and relying on the host parents were two coping mechanisms often mentioned together by sending parents to help them deal with the fact that they could not be there physically for their children. A Danish mother said,

It's for 11 months and you can't just go by car and see. If now he is in some kind of trouble or is sad and whatever, you can't do anything. So, you really need to rely on the host parents.

Another mother commented on how she had to learn to just trust the host parents with her daughter when asked how she prepared herself.

Well, I think that was part of the process - that we also have to let go and for us it would, we would need to, kind of need to be there to support her if she had any troubles. But then again realizing that we cannot do anything; or we can be there and talk to her, but we cannot really help her out. But we would have to trust the family and the people around her where she was going. So, that was kind of part of the process.

This mom also relied on trusting her child and the host parents:

This is about trust, that you have to trust in your daughter, she has to trust in us, we have to trust total strangers on the other side of the globe. That really calls for a lot of trust – that people are nice to each other and nice to your most valuable thing in your life – your own children.

Coping strategy: Seeing it as an opportunity to practice launching. Another strategy for parents to cope with the fact that they would not be able to be very involved in their children

lives once they left to study abroad was to treat this as opportunity to practice separation from

their children, because they would be leaving home in a few years. One mom commented,

> *I don't know how I did this. I know it had to happen sooner or later anyway. And I*
> *really want them to have a good life. So, it is that kind of thing during the process.*
> *It's just, of course, it's going to be different and both good and bad at the same*
> *time, but it is good. I think you have to, they have to, you know. It will happen in a*
> *year or two from now anyways.*

Coping strategy: Getting to know the host parents. In addition, several parents mentioned

that learning to know the host parents helped them to cope with the separation from their

children and they felt more comfortable knowing who would be there for their children. For

example, when asked how she prepared for her daughter to go abroad, one mother said,

> *I think it was a good thing that we had known the family for these two or three*
> *months. We had been writing a lot with them. [My daughter] had, and we had as*
> *well, almost, well not daily, but we did write a lot together to get to know each*
> *other. So I think that was a big comfort that we knew it was, we had a good*
> *feeling that it was a good family and they were going to take very good care of*
> *her. So, I don't remember being that nervous - more excited for her.*

Several other parents described similar strategies. A mother said,

> *I'll just say I was calm because we sent her off and we knew what kind of family*
> *she was going to. That was very lovely to know the family through Skype, you*
> *know. But we got to know them somehow and they were a good family, we*
> *thought. And if you are going to send your daughter abroad without talking to the*
> *host family, then I don't know how I would have reacted.*

And a father commented, "*We Skyped with the family. We did a lot of Skyping and that was a*

good connection to me. Yeah. So, it felt very safe."

Challenge: Illnesses of extended family member. Some of the sending parents

experienced challenges of having sick family members who were close to the child who was

going abroad. They were concerned about how to handle things if the person became sicker or

even died. One mother described her experience:

Our parents are quite old. So, what would happen if one them died, which actually happened. So, we had talks about how are we going to deal with that. Are you going to come home or should we just talk about it?

Coping strategy: Talking with their children about it. As illustrated in the quote above, deliberate communication between the sending parents and their children about possible deaths in the family was a tool they used. Another mother described using the same kind of approach:

I told her, "Okay, now we need to talk about this." We need to talk about this part of it, because, I tried it myself, that my grandfather died when I was out traveling. And the not nice part of it is that you are not part of the sorrow, so you're not part of what's happening, so that's quite difficult. So it was important for us to give her just a little bit of that. But I think it worked out quite well.

Coping strategy: Disclosing information to the host parents. Proactively communicating with the host parents was another of the strategies these parents used when they had sick family members that could possibly pass away and affect their children while abroad. For example,

I did not know much about this host family yet and I started writing to the mother and telling about who we are and my father is sick with cancer, so I'm going to tell them about that and just...being prepared for that. And that my daughter and my father are very close.

Challenges faced before: Child. Participants identified one main challenge they faced that was mainly related to their children – the possibility of them having romantic relationships abroad which they coped with it by having open communication with their children. A Norwegian mother said,

I was a little nervous about it. She's a girl. She's pretty. Blonde. And the boy-girl relationship in Scandinavia is different than it is there. She could send signals in the U.S. that is not - how would you call it? - read the same way as here. So, my plan was that I had a talk about that with her. I'm a nurse, I do that in this family. That's my job.

Another mother described using a similar strategy regarding her concern about this:

We were talking a lot more about how we were going to deal with things. Yeah. She wanted to talk about everything! (laughs) Which is, yeah, I mean everything –

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from boys to school to language to how to cope with families, what to bring, how to do this and that, how to cope with mobile phones and everything.

Summary of the sending parents' challenges and coping strategies: Before.

Prior to their children leaving to study abroad, many of the challenges experienced by parents were related to uncertainty. Studying abroad includes many unknowns – place, people, situations, risks, and so many more details have not yet been determined. It was clearly hard for the parents not to know everything their kids were going to face. The parents emphasized the challenges they faced personally and stressed the importance of communication as a coping strategy. Next, the challenges these sending parents faced while their children were abroad are presented.

Sending Parents' Challenges and Coping Strategies: During the Exchange Year

Most of the participant parents (21 of the 23) described struggles while their teenagers were abroad. A total of six challenges emerged from the participants' responses – two challenges impacting the sending parents directly, two related to family, and two related to their children. A total of 10 coping strategies emerged.

Challenges and coping strategies during the year: Parents. The challenges that directly affected the parents during the year their children studied abroad fit into two main themes – missing their children and the lack of communication with the child they had with them. The coping strategies the parents utilized to cope with their challenges included focusing on the children's benefits, staying positive, keeping busy/focusing on themselves, knowing that no good news is good news, letting the children take the initiative to call, and following their children through social media,

Challenge: Missing the child. The absence of the child was described by sending parents as the biggest challenge they had to deal with as sending parent. Not surprisingly, parents missed

their children in their daily routines and during special days, such as holidays and family celebrations. For example, one mom commented how hard it was for her when her daughter first left for her exchange year.

> *Weird, she was going up to the stairs and looking back and waving; and I was just like, "Oh it is real and now it is the moment, and now she will be gone one year before we will ever see her, but there is God and there is mail and I can remember. I had to, I was in a cause, and 8 pm, I was crying at dinner, and I said I am going to bed because I love my daughter, my daughter left me this year and now I am going. And I called my husband and I was crying and he was crying. It was hard. Yeah!*

A dad commented on how he and his wife missed their son and their home felt empty.

> *That was the first year we were home alone. So, it felt very, very empty and quiet. So, we missed him a lot and we missed all his music - we missed that. And all of his friends always coming in. So, it was a quiet year.*

Another mom commented that she missed doing things with her son.

> *He's very easy going and so on, which makes - so, so the dynamics between the kids change. And he's also, you know he would, eh, do more things with me for instance. So, I could feel, "Oh my God, you, know, he's gone."*

Even though some parents thought they were prepared to be away from their children and had attended preparation meetings within the exchange student organization and had talked to other people, they still missed their children after they left. One mother highlighted how she missed her son more than she thought she would.

> *Mainly I went to a AFS meetings, they were telling about what would happen. Yeah, we read a lot, we talked to people we knew that had been exchange students and I think I was prepared. But it was so different when it happened. I missed him a lot more than I thought I would.*

Holidays and memorable days without their children were described as a particular struggle for the sending parents. For example, when asked about certain times that stick out in her memory, one mother said:

> *Well, maybe Christmas, because that's a time of the year when we have a lot of traditions, and she was not there, and that was the first time she was not there for*

that celebration. So, that might have been a bit difficult. And after that also from January, February, onwards, I actually started to miss her more…then I started to miss the daily contact and wondering what she was up to and what she was doing. Had she changed a lot? That kind of thing.

A father talked about how it was hard for him to miss an important milestone:

This was his year. And we accepted and respected that. Although, I must admit that I found it a little difficult not to be present when he had his[U.S. high school] graduation day. I suggested to [him] that I should come to his graduation ceremony, but I felt that he really didn't want me to go there.

Coping strategy: Focusing on the children's benefits. Focusing on the advantages that studying abroad would offer their children and staying positive were the most common ways parents coped with their challenges during the times they were missing the child and were not being able to contact him or her. For example, one mother said,

I remember missing him a lot. I remember being frustrated of not being able to be contacting him more. I wish, I'd have liked that we could easier message each other once in a while. And that's what I remember, what I missed the most, beside the part of seeing him, of course. But we would keep telling each other, "I know he is fine, he is with a great family, he is experiencing a lot of great things and he is in a different school system."

Another father also commented that he focused on the benefits for his child as a coping strategy.

The differences of course that when your son lives with you, you communicate with him every day, all the time. We are a very close family, a very warm family. We communicate a lot. And suddenly I couldn't communicate with him every day when he came home from school, because he was coming home from a school in another country. But, I knew in my head that this was very important for him and I understood that he was happy, and it was interesting, and it was important for him to get new friends, learn English, and study topics he didn't study in here in schools for example, like theater. And I know that my son has a talent in playing theater and I think it was very important to get the chances in the U.S. to participate in theater plays.

A mother said that she missed her son, but when asked by others what it was like to have a child abroad, she said she knew he was having good experiences abroad that would benefit him for the rest of his life.

> *They ask me, "Did not you miss him?" "Well, no," I said. And then people look at me like I am from out of space. I said, "No, yes! Of course, I missed him, but I knew he had a great time." He was staying with a great family. He was coming home in eleven months, and then it was ten months, and then nine months, and two months, and now it is a month, and then next week he is coming. So, as long as you know they are having a great time, they are having a good time doing and making experiences, growing more mature or whatever, bringing home stuff that they can use the rest of their lives. So, yeah. That is the way it should be. I missed him, but yeah, I knew he was having a good time.*

Coping strategy: Focusing on the positive. Focusing on her daughter and trying to emphasize the positive aspects of the experience rather than dwelling on negative emotions was another coping strategy for parents while missing their children. One parent commented, *"We really missed her, but on the other side, you can say, of course it will be the lifetime of, for the child, for our child, and just believe in it. And be positive."* Another mother emphasized taming her negative emotions:

> *It was day by day. It was horrible. It kind of let your emotions come through. I thought, "I'm not so rational." I was unable to work - not full time. It did something to me. Yes. I got my mindset moved. I never cried on the phone or Skype and I never told her that it was terrible. But I can recall a time in the last period. I should have been home. But I am in a way... When [my daughter] left, I knew she would profit, take profit of it, and when she came back she would have a life and an experience for life and that, for me, was very important. And that's worth all of it, and you pack your emotions. And I was surprised how much, how many emotions I have packed when she came back.*

Coping strategy: Keeping busy and focusing on themselves. A father mentioned how he and his wife just decided to focus on their own lives while their son was studying abroad. When the interviewer asked him what he would tell a parent considering sending a child abroad, he said,

It's great! Just do it! Yeah, because, the young person, [my son] in our case, is having so much experience in that year and so much new, and we were not just sitting back and saying, "Ooh, it's so unfortunate that he is there and we are here and we miss him." Yeah, we missed him, but we also made a choice and said, "We will not be. It's for him, not for us. We will not be sad every day. We will live our lives and enjoy just being ourselves" And it was great!

A mother said,

> *We missed her, but quite quickly came into an everyday going around. I think the fact that we didn't talk that often also made us just, "We live our lives, she lives her life." You miss her when it's Christmas, but it's like, yeah, we knew.*

Challenge: Lack of communication with the child. After their children left, the majority

of sending parents found it challenging that they did not know about their children's day-to-day

happenings, because the exchange organization told them not to contact their children. A

Norwegian mother described her struggle:

> *I thought that was tough because AFS rules are quite strict. You are not supposed to be in touch with the kid for the first month. I think it was because they should attach to their new families, their new moms and dads and all of that. And I respect that, because otherwise he would have gotten more homesick, I don't know. It was tough not to be able to follow him up every day, because I was used to seeing him every day and knowing what he had eaten, you know? Did he get healthy food? Was he okay? Did he have good friends? What did he do in his spare time? Did he spend too much time doing something I didn't want him to do? All those things I wasn't in control of, because I didn't know anything about it, because I couldn't ask him, because there was no contact between us. And I wish that I could have text him or called him or Skyped with him at the time, but I couldn't.*

Similarly, a Danish mother said,

> *So, we respected the AFS rules because we realized that they were there for a reason, but I still wish we could have known more in the beginning and we were told he had arrived and was fine. But, okay, what does that mean? How do, do you sleep in a room with no windows or do you have big dogs there? Or if it was tiny dog, but we didn't realize it at the time. So, all of those stupid questions you worry about as a mother.*

A father described the lack of communication with his son as his only challenge:

Our challenge was not hearing from him. So we didn't, "Is he still alive?" Of course, he is. But we're not hearing anything from him. But that was the only challenge, I think

Being in another time zone made it difficult for sending parents to communicate with their children. One mother said,

I missed having more contact with him, but I think the main thing was the contact. I missed being able, because of the time frames it was hard to, really hard to find times where we could be in touch, because we were working, or he was in school, or you were busy, or traveling, all those things. So, I guess that was the toughest thing, I think.

Coping strategy: Knowing that no news is good news. A common coping strategy employed by the parents who were not hearing from their children was to remember that they would be contacted about an emergency or big problem.

If we didn't hear anything, if it was, no news was good news. Good news, yeah. If he would have been in real trouble, he would have told us. But, it was a good sign and we actually accepted it. We had to accept that we wouldn't hear from him more, that he wasn't putting everything on Facebook or whatever.

Another parent also said she knew that if there was something bad happening to her daughter, she would let her know.

I am like that kind of parent. As long as you don't hear anything, is okay in some ways. I trust my kids so much that I know they would tell me if there is something wrong or something they cannot handle.

Coping strategy: Letting the children take the initiative to communicate. To cope with the lack of communication with their children, some parents let their children take the lead. For example, a mother said,

It was quite clear to us that she was the one who needed to contact us. We would not be contacting her on a general basis. So, it would be her driving of needing to talk to us, which has been keeping actually the whole way through. And we didn't talk to her a lot, but that's the way it is.

Coping strategy: Following their children through social media. Several parents also described how they had indirect communication with their children by using social media to learn about their children's experiences abroad. This helped reduce their worry and concern. A mother described how she kept track of her daughter online:

> *She shared some videos, pictures via email; and she never wrote. Of course, she did, but she never said much: "And then we did this and this." Then we hear from some of our friends' kids, "Hey [she] was in ____." "How do you know? Yeah, I see her Facebook," our connections said. "Oh, there are pictures from it." I was, "Oh, I want to see." Then [my daughter] ask me, "Mom, go on Facebook. It is much more easier, because the family is posting so much." They were very young, 30-year-old parents. So, they were on Facebook every time. So, she made my account. So, before she left I did not want to be in Facebook, but she said, "Mom, it is much easier for me if you are in Facebook." And then we got millions of things of information.*

A father had a similar experience, and he appreciated the fact that the host parents were posting things on Facebook so he and his wife could see what their son was doing.

> *What we really liked was that the host family was very nice and put something on Facebook so we could actually follow our son, because our son didn't do it. So, if the host parents hadn't done it, we probably hadn't heard anything. (laughter)*

Another father also got a sense of his daughter's experiences indirectly through the Internet.

> *[My daughter] started to write a blog on the internet, and it was really interesting for me to see the change of her thinking somehow, but some way it was not surprising me.*

Challenges faced during the year: Family. Parents described two main challenge these parents that impacted their families during the exchange year: facing new family dynamics and deaths in the family.

Facing new family dynamics. For some, the departure of their children meant that they had to struggle with new ways of being a family, because they had other children at home who were alone or were affected by the exchange student's departure. They described ways of

acclimating to the new dynamics. For example, a mother described how they had become a family of 3 and not 4:

> *Well, we did talk about how to cope with a family of 3, because that is quite different; and I was a little afraid. I mean, we would work a lot. So, we kind of tried to make deals about, "Let's stay a family, even though it's only one, one at home."*

Deaths in the family. While their children where abroad, three parents faced deaths in the family. Deaths of loved ones have a huge impact on families – especially when the family members are close and interact often. It was difficult to have a child overseas during this experience. They coped by talking with the children and the host family. One mother talked about how she coped when she had a death in her family who was close to the child:

> *We started off telling the [host] family this has happened. "[My daughter] will probably need a little help, extra support." We had agreed that she would not come home. And then we, my husband is very good at that. I'm not as good as he is. He, we spoke to her over a couple of times and agreed. And we videoed it so she would have something to look at when she came home as so on and so on. But we made her talk. And we talked about it over a couple of weeks. And she was actually being the one that was the most sad in the end, because it was difficult for her to be abroad.*

Challenges faced during the year: Children. These parents experienced two main challenges that impacted their children during the year abroad: worrying about their children's safety and helping their kids deal with the new cultural environment.

Challenge: Worry about children's safety. Concerns about their children's well-being while abroad was commonly described by the sending parents. For example, one mother mentioned that she was worried because her son had been victimized. She said,

> *We were worried about him. He was mugged two times in Belgium. You know, it can be quite tough, and… so yeah. And so, his host father had to get him. He came up to the police station once, that one was quite bad, so I was a bit worried about that.*

A dad described his concerns this way: *"I think we were all scared that she don't come home. For any reason. And then once you do come home, it's good. We were anxious."* Another mother was very worried when her daughter shared some disturbing (partial) information:

> *It must have been in May, I think, or whatever. She said "Oh! I just broke AFS rule number one, or two." Number two she said. And we didn't know [my daughter's] Facebook. She didn't answer her phone or her e-mail. Then we tried the parents and the police, and we got on the AFS website to see which was rule number 2. And if you break any rules you get sent home. Pregnant, drive a car, illegal drugs, yes... Doesn't matter. But she broke the rule. And we knew she had a boyfriend, so I thought "Oh no, she's pregnant." Or I thought, "She had been smoking "But we couldn't get in contact with the family. So, we said, "They're sitting in jail now." For like the 15 minutes or half an hour we couldn't get into contact with anyone. No one answered. And we called AFS and asked what has happened, and we were worried for her. What had happened to her actually? Then she wrote back, and said "Mom, I've been driving a car." In a parking lot. Rear ended, in her boyfriend's car. We were worried. Yeah.*

Coping strategy: Trusting the host Parents to help their children. To deal with this worry, parents decided that they would trust the host parents to take care of their children's safety and help them when they were in trouble. One mom explained that her son suffered an injury abroad, but she trusted that the host parents would do their best to help him.

> *I think for me the challenge is that, if something happens, like, he got a concussion. I have to be able to let the other family deal with everything. That is a challenge for all families because they are used to doing everything for him, but cannot anymore….Yeah, he played football. Of course, but those things happen. But I think letting the other family take care of everything and hoping they make the right decisions….I don't know how I did that. You just trust that they do their best and you can see if he is happy or not.*

Coping strategy: Relying on AFS. Sending parents also said they relied on AFS to help them solve situations in which they were not sure about how to proceed. One mother talked about a difficult situation when she learned that her daughter was scared of her host sister. They decided to trust that the exchange student organization would take care of it.

I think, she had been there for one and a half months. We were traveling in domestic travel – me and my husband and daughter – and we had made an appointment with [my daughter]. That night we Skyped from our hotel room and she was just crying like hell. And I could hear this is not just homesickness. It's more than that. She was afraid of the host sister. So, we were telling her, "You have to talk with someone about this. And maybe it's too difficult for the family because they are a part of it. Try to ask your AFS contact person about this – how to manage." And we got some more information about it, that it went well and they were also discussing it with I think the coordinator of AFS in the state. So, in a way, my husband was more worried, but we also knew we were agreeing that there are people who are taking care of this. We cannot do anything. If they really think this is a big problem, they will tell us to get her back home. If she cannot, if they have an assessment of her that she cannot cope with this, they will tell us. We must trust that. So, it sounds a little bit cynical, but still, you cannot do anything. You have to trust that the organization is taking care of it.

Another mom expressed that she counted on AFS when she was experiencing a hard time and called them to ask for their advice.

We missed her. She missed us, she missed the traditions, and at the same time my father got very ill. He got a brain stroke. He was at the hospital and was very sick, and my mother, of course, was very worried. At the time, I thought, "Well, if he is going to pass away now, should I call her home?" Because, of course, it is very important. But then again, my husband and I said to each other, "What will it matter?" Because if she'd go home, she'd be very, very sad and then we cannot send her back. And of course, it's awful. And then I called AFS to tell them about the situation and said, "Well, what are we going to do about it? And how much should we tell her about it, because she will be worried?"…Then I told her in a short version, and not all about it but that he's just laying there", and we didn't know if he could get out of the bed again.

Challenge: Helping their children in the new culture. Hearing their children complain about new rules they had to follow with their host parents was a challenge the sending parents faced because they knew it was important to support the host parents' decisions.

One mother illustrates this challenge and how she handled it by supporting the host parents' decisions.

We never tried to question it or seek if there is any leaks in it. We kind of decided, and I think we decided that even though they would have a manner of handling children, that we didn't support. That would be a part of it in certain frames, of course. But we never questioned our daughter's abilities and things. And we

didn't tell her, "Oh what a stupid family," or "What a crazy idea they have." I remember a little thing, but she had to change her pajamas every night. We don't do that. And I could tell her, "Oh, don't do that. That's crazy. You're... just do it your way." Because she had only two pajamas and we don't give our children a lot of clothes. And she just had two pajamas, so she had to buy five more, six more, seven more. Because otherwise it doesn't go on well. It just was a little thing but I didn't tell her, "Crazy mom." It was just, "Okay, that's how it is." And then you need some more pajamas. So, I think it's important too.

Summary of the sending parents' challenges and coping strategies: During the year abroad. During the time their teenagers were abroad, the parents described challenges that were all related to the lack of daily hands-on involvement they could have in their children's lives. The parents missed their children intensely, but discovered many techniques to deal with that struggle. Most strategies centered on staying focused on the positives – the benefits their children would gain, the opportunity to focus on other children and themselves, and giving their children room to grow, develop new relationships and take on responsibilities. Next, the challenges the sending parents faced after their children were abroad are presented.

Sending Parents' Challenges and Coping Strategies: After the Teenager Returned Home

In their interviews, only 10 out of the 23 sending parents described challenges after their teenagers came back home. A total of four main challenges emerged from the participants' responses. One of these was related to the sending parents themselves, two were related to their families, and one was related to the child. A total of seven coping strategies emerged: three related to staying focused on the child, two related to communication, and one was related to letting go.

Challenges faced after: Parents. Several parents described that their children had experienced so many new and exciting things abroad that they now found their lives with their parents at home less exciting. The coping strategy they utilized to cope with this challenge was

letting their children know that they understood they were missing their exchange lives. One

mother described it this way:

> *Yeah, I think it took some time; and you could not say that I was jealous of the host family, but, of course, it was something that we were not a part of. And you have to find out how to cope with that, because they have been her closest relationship for a year, and, of course, you are very grateful for that; but also there is something you were not a part of. You were not there when it was difficult. You were not there when it was fantastic. So, I said to [my daughter], "Of course I can understand that you miss them, because they have been your parents for a whole year. And now it's difficult. And you have to cope with us – and you know what we are. We are just like we used to be – except for your sister. But we are the old boring people saying, "Do the dishes. Do your homework." Sleeping on the sofa at the night, just like we used to. So, of course, we said, "We can understand that you miss these people. And, of course, you miss your life there."*

A father also mentioned that he noticed that his daughter was missing the exciting life she

had abroad.

> *I mentioned she had gotten another family there, and it was hard for her, because she left there one part of her life, and she didn't know when she would get any opportunities to meet with them. She wanted to live there, but, of course, she wanted to live here. And in one year she has gotten so many things which is not as exciting compared to this life she has gotten here. The kind of things that we provided for 16 years, which it was totally a longer time comparing to this one year, absolutely intensive time, and we could see that she had gotten lot of material things, material impressions and being there, and being on a jet ski and so on. Of course, she missed her life there because it was so different.*

Challenges faced after: Family. Parents mentioned two main challenges that impacted

their families after the kids returned from their exchange year – their children did not want

prioritize spending time with their parents, and they had to adapt to a new kind of interaction

with their children. Their coping strategies the parents described using included letting the

children have their own space, scheduling family time, and understanding the children's

invaluable learning experiences.

Challenge: Children not prioritizing time with their parents. After their children

returned home, a few of the parents discussed how they wanted to reconnect with their children

and expected to be able to spend quality time with them. However, many students came home

and immediately made plans outside the family. For example, one mother explained it this way:

> *We had some [challenges when she came home]. I think we had planned that we were going on vacation to [a vacation destination]. But we had some weeks at home when the sun was shining and there were flowers in the garden. It was like a fairytale in a way. But she definitely needed time to be alone. She would close her door and need time alone. She left her family and boyfriend and some very good friends. I think that was hard…she missed her friends.*

One father described his daughter's avoidant behavior when she returned home.

> *You know, there's a time where it's very frustrating to come home, because now they have been abroad and they have been deciding for themselves and now they're going back to the family, to the family's rules, and it is quite frustrating. It was very hard; it was a very hard period. It was 3-4-5 days doing nothing. Just sitting for all of us for days, she took some time, it took some time, yeah.*

Coping strategy: Letting children have their space. Respecting the kids' need to have

private time was a common coping strategy for parents during these times. A father described

how he and his wife were looking forward to spending some special time with their daughter, but

she was not interested because of her grief. He illustrates how some parents recognized that their

teenagers needed the space to feel sad and acclimate to being back home.

> *When she came home, it was hard for her, then, of course, for us too. She got really homesick and it was very strong. Despite of the fact she came back at the beginning of July when music fest started, and it is her favorite music fest, and we had got the season ticket for this, and she came at the first day of this fest, and we wanted to go there, she was in her room and she was just crying. Yeah, it was really hard, and she felt herself really alarmed. So, we were here, but this was really hard, and she was just crying, was not able to stop, and we wanted to go with my wife to a good concert. But we thought, "No, she doesn't want to go." So, we are staying here because we wanted her to come, and she doesn't want to go there. And, yeah, it was it was really hard.*

Coping strategy: Scheduling family time. Some parents scheduled family-only activities

to try to reconnect when their children returned. One mother commented:

> *I mean, she was looking forward to come home, we were as well. After half an hour, she'd had enough of us, basically, because, I mean, she just came home, "Hi. Good to see you." And went out to see all her friends again. I said "Hey, come on. We need, a little bit was going on the last year." I was, "I'm here!" Ahhhh, "You haven't changed." I think that's the way it is. So, there is a lot of teenager to it, but we definitely had to find each other again. But we have a summer house in Sweden and we spent a couple of weeks there just as a family and that was quite good I think. Just taking away all disturbances and just, "This is us. We're back." I think that was important.*

Another mother described that the child's grandmother wanted to come to the airport to

welcome him home, but she felt that it was important for just the family to spend time alone.

> *So, we look forward to seeing him, and my mother is like, "Well, ok, can I come too? To the airport?" "No, you can't because we're going on our own." Well, we would decide with [my son] that we'll just be us, and because he's going to this music festival in the afternoon when he gets home in the morning and just have a nice lunch and he'll go.*

Challenge: Adjusting to a new kind of interaction with their children. Parents described

a family-level challenge at their children's return as needing to adjust to the changed person who

had learned new things abroad. They indicated that this had an impact on the interactions they

had with them. For example, one father described it this way,

> *We missed his music, his laughter, his loud discussions, and when he came home he had learned a lot of philosophy in his school. So, it was really difficult to follow him in his discussions.*

Coping strategy: Understanding the children's invaluable learning experiences. Parents

learned to deal with how their children changed after they came back by trying to understand

them and talking with them. A mother learned that her daughter wanted to change some things in

their family, and the mother understood that her daughter had got a new perspective.

> *She's much better girl. And in music. And I think she also learned a lot about herself. If we just talked a little about things she said, we should do, what things I*

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didn't do that I should have done and we should do as a family since I guess she learned a little and came back with some different ideas. She sees the difference, of course.

Challenges faced after: Children. These parents described one main challenge that impacted their children after they returned – they seemed uninspired to return to their lives in their home country. The sending parent's coping strategies consisted of letting children have their own space, talking to other sending parents, and letting their children fly. For example, one mother said,

> *But I remember when he came back he was a bit bothered and uninspired in terms of starting his last year of high school in Norway because he just had graduated. So, he felt like, "Why do I have to do this once more? I just graduated in the States. Why can't I just apply for college somewhere?" And I guess he could, if he had applied for an American college, but he had not done that! And that was or would be a different story in terms of staying somewhere else, and financing it, and all that since universities in Norway are free. So, he was uninspired when he came back in terms of school work and I talked to other AFS moms and they said the same thing about their kids, that they had a great year, learned a lot, grown you know as human beings, but it was tough to go back and do another year of graduation.*

At her return, one parent's daughter went right back to her host country and began a life there. This was a challenge for him, but he wanted her to be happy and he let her fly.

> *Now she has got another life which is currently there. Of course, there she's got a boyfriend and yeah and this is another extremely strong connection and sometimes it seems that if we don't have enough acceptance for this it would be really hard, and ok sometimes it's hard to realize, to see this, but somewhere we have to accept this. My father-in-law told me some days ago that we lost this girl, and I'm telling him, "I haven't lost my daughter. I have given her this chance." I had got an opportunity to say, "No, you are staying here, I am the boss." But if I have chosen this way, I knew that I increased the chance that my daughter will leave me and this is not my style. This is not my behavior to make a fortress or prison for my children and that was not my aim. I supported her. If she or the boys can find this happiness in another country with another person who has got another nationality, who is a normal person, of course! For me the most important thing is to have a happy child… and I let her go.*

Summary of the sending parents' challenges and coping strategies: After the teenager returned home. The parents' challenges after their teenagers came back from

studying abroad were mainly related to the changes their children displayed when they returned. Out of the three types of coping strategies staying focused on the child was the most important technique they described.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter included a detailed presentation of the lived experiences of 26 parents who had children in an international high school exchange program. They shared benefits, struggles, and coping strategies they employed. Reported challenges and coping strategies were similar across the interviews. A summary of the themes and categories for challenges and coping strategies is presented in Table 4-1.

Timeline of exchange program	Type of Challenge	Challenge	Type of Strategy used	Brief Description of the Coping Strategy
B E F O R E Issues related to uncertainty	Related to the sending parents	Feeling Scared About Sending their Children Abroad	Staying Focused on the Child	Being supportive of their children decisions
			Communication	Talking to other extended family members
		Having Trouble Finding a Trusted Organization	Communication	Talking to acquaintances with previous experience
				Doing their own research
		Not knowing about the host family/placement	Communication	Contacting AFS
		Losing Control	Letting go	Accepting that the host parents were in charge for a year
	Related to the family	Not being able to be involved in the children's lives for a year	Letting go	Trusting and relying on the host parents
				Seeing it as an opportunity to practice separation
			Communication	Getting to know the host parents
		Illnesses of Extended Family Member	Communication	Talking with their children about it
				Disclosing important information to the host parents
	Related to the child	Concerns of the child's possible romantic relationships abroad	Communication	Having open communication with their children
D U R I N G Issues related to lack of involvement in the child's life	Related to the sending parents	Missing the Child	Staying Focused on the Child	Focusing on the children's benefits
			Letting go	Focusing on the positive
				Keeping busy
		Lack of communication with the child	Letting go	Knowing that no good is good news
				Letting the children take the initiative to call
			Communication	Following their children through social media
	Related to the family	New Family Dynamics	Communication	Acclimating to their new family dynamics
		Deaths in the family	Communication	Talking with the Child and Host Parents
	Related to the child	Worry about children's safety	Letting go	Trusting the host parents to help their children
				Relying on AFS
		Helping their children in the new culture	Communication	Supporting the host parents' decisions
A F T E R Issues related to the unexpected	Related to the sending parents	Children now found their lives with their parents at home less exciting	Communication	Understood they were missing their exchange lives
	Related to the family	Children not prioritizing time with their parents	Letting go	Letting children have their own space
			Communication	Scheduling family time
		Adjusting to a new kind of interaction with their children	Staying Focused on the Child	Understanding the children's invaluable learning experiences
	Related to the child	Children seemed uninspired to return to their lives in their home country.	Staying Focused on the Child	Letting children have their own space
			Communication	Talking to other sending parents
			Letting go	Letting their children fly

Table 4-1. Summary of Challenges and Related Coping Strategies

Chapter 5 - DISCUSSION

The focus of this applied study has been on the experiences of parents of international high school exchange students. It is intended to begin to fill a gap in the literature about the impact that international exchange has on individuals beyond the students. Twenty-three retrospective interviews including 26 sending parents' experiences were used. The parents resided in four European countries: Denmark, Hungry, Norway, and Turkey. The majority of their children went to the United States to study. These parents shared rich descriptions of their experiences as sending parents and the impact it has had on their lives. In this chapter, I will consider the results and address the overarching research question: How do international high school exchange programs impact the lives of the sending families who participate? I will also suggest implications from this study for future research and practice for these families.

A Family Experience

The findings of this study demonstrate that the when adolescents study abroad, they are not the only individuals who experience change, growth and challenges. It also has a substantial effect on their parents, siblings, and extended family members. The parents who participated in this study described in detail many benefits and challenges they experienced as a result of their children's year abroad. This seems obvious, and yet, it had not been studied before.

From a Family Systems Theory (FST) perspective, it is important to understand the effects the process has on the student's context, especially the family system. Investigating the students' experiences in a vacuum will not provide a complete picture of the phenomenon. For example, the findings support the systemic assumption that the child's absence for a year disrupts the prior homeostasis within the family, which leads to changes for all other members of the family system. All members must adjust to new roles and patterns in the family when one

member is missing. This is similar to what has been identified in studies of teenagers leaving for college (Han, 2018; Piper & Jackson, 2017) that once these teenagers left their parents homes, some parents experienced loneliness and negative feelings.

Also from a family system perceptive, family systems make adjustments whenever members are added or subtracted from the home. The results of this study and the previous example of parents and children affecting each other also show the constant efforts of these parents to achieve a new sense of homeostasis within their family systems. These efforts can be seen in several themes identified in the analyses. For example, they made adjustments when they focused on other relationships within the family system (with children in the home with or a spouse) and when parents faced a death in the family. It is obvious these parents were trying to make appropriate adjustments within the family system to avoid a chaotic stage. Moreover, several of the parents in this study seemed to open their boundaries and let the host parents become part of their family circle. This helped parents to trust the host parents with their children and allowed them to feel more comfortable letting others be in charge of their children. For some, the boundaries were not easy to open they seemed to struggle to loosen control in order for the host parents to parent their children.

Bidirectional effects are included in many of these parents' stories between them and their children. For example, some parents described facing their own challenges when their children were struggling (e.g., to adjust to their new culture, experiencing ambivalence at their return). Many parents found ways to cope with such struggles and to also help their children. When the children reported that they were better, then parents reported feeling better, too. This illustrates how the mood of the children affected the parents vice versa. This reciprocal influence can be explained by the FST concept of interdependence, which explains that the experiences of

one member of a system impact other members within the system. For example, once the

exchange students left to go abroad, sending parents entered a process that was full of constant

adjustments. They reported experiencing a wide variety of emotions – pride, stress, excitement,

anxiety, relief, and sadness, for example. Through this experience they described that they also

faced new challenges and learned more about themselves. They discovered how to be without

their children, they found the opportunity to develop their relationships with other family

members, and they realized that their children were able to live without them. In some cases, the

experience of being apart helped parents see and value the roles that their children played in their

home. They recognized that it led them to a new sense of appreciation for each other. Several

parents said they felt closer to their children when they got back and they saw them as more

mature and adult-like They also recognized that they learned more about the world, broadened

their knowledge, and were able to make good connections with other people from other cultures.

    As their children returned home, several of the parents indicated that the reunification

with their children was not as they thought it would be. They perceived that their children had

changed while the family members at home had remained the same. These changes in their

children introduced a new dynamic in to the lives of these parents (*input*). Some parents could

not communicate and interact with their children in the same way as when they left. From a FST

lens, the changes in the child gave parents two choices, to change and modify the way the family

system integrated all these changes into the family (*positive feedback*), or to resist changes and

try to make the child revert to the old ways (*negative feedback*). For example, at the return of

their children, some parents had conversations with them about what the child had seen and

learned to discover appropriate coping strategies, while other parents expected the child to

realize that his or her family was the same as when the child left; therefore, the child needed to

return to his or her previous behaviors, attitudes, and interaction patterns. This, of course, was impossible for the students. Therefore, the negative feedback loops led to conflict and difficulties upon the child's reunification with the family.

Communication as a Central Issue

The importance of communication was very clear in the participants' responses. It was a central issue included in their descriptions of the challenges as well as the strategies they used to cope with the challenges. Overwhelmingly, the lack of frequent direct parent-child communication was mentioned as one of the most difficult aspects of the year for parents. Many of them indicated that they were warned to expect this would occur, because AFS discourages frequent contact between the parents and their kids, so the children can adapt to their host culture and learn how to thrive in that environment without being torn between the two families. However, that did not make it any easier when they longed for contact with their sons and daughters. While the parents acknowledged that there were good reasons for not hearing from the students, the lack of daily communication still resulted in some of the difficult feelings, such as sadness and worry.

The magnitude of this challenge may be attributed to the experiences and resulting expectations of parent-child communication in the 21st Century. All but two of the parents in this study had kids who studied abroad during the digital age. The common practice of using digital communication between family members has been shown to help them maintain their relationships (Busch, 2018; Morrill, Jones, & Vaterlaus, 2013), and even to positively affect their teens' self-esteem when they are not physically present (Weisskirch, 2011). In this study, it is clear that digital communication helped parents to feel connected with their children and to know what and how their children were doing. However, it also could have contributed to the anxiety

of these parents related to the lack of communication between them and their children (e.g., being worried about the children's safety and feeling frustrated and lonely for not hearing more from their children) because of their expectations and practice of frequent communication. The parents who said that they did not struggle as much with being in touch with their children reported that they did not expect frequent communication, many because they had studied abroad themselves – before the digital age. It appears that this influenced their expectations for the frequency of contact. They remembered how little they communicated with their families during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s when international communication was an expensive and rare option for most families.

Even though these sending parents could not be in constant communication with their children, most of them indirectly monitored what was happening in their children's lives through communication with the host family, having limited conversations with their children over Skype or email, or following them on social media. This provided them with the opportunity to show their support for their children from a distance and to keep abreast of the children's lives while abroad. Dennis et al. (2005) also discovered that parents' attachment and support made a positive difference when students left their homes for their first time to attend college. Perhaps it was the combination of this constant monitoring and virtual communication that helped these sending parents' children feel less stress as they learned how to appropriately communicate with their kids in this unique situation.

Normative Separation

A large number of the participants in this study were from Denmark. Many of the Danish parents talked about the choice their children faced regarding whether they wanted to go to boarding school or in an exchange program for their ninth grade year. In Denmark, children

finish their compulsory school attendance in eighth grade. At that point, they often take a year off to participate in a non-academic program before beginning the college-preporatory school. Most choose to attend a boarding school that is in a town other than the one where they live permanently. There are many different kinds of opportunities in these schools – sports, music, travel, and some academic topics. Another common option is to study abroad as an exchange student. It is a normal and expected experience for college-bound students to take this "gap" year. Therefore, in Denmark, the separation from parents during this year is a normal event in their lives.

There is a big difference in the experiences of parents and teens when they experience a normative versus an unexpected or undesired separation. For example, parents of juvenile delinquents who were in detention centers, which could be consider a non-normative and undesired event, reported very negative psychological and emotional effects (e.g., anger, guilt, sadness, general discontent, and excessive crying) related to struggling to be without the adolescent (Bartollas, Schmalleger, & Turner, 2017). On the other hand, empty nester parents whose children have gone to college, which is considered a more normative and desired event, have reported some feelings of loneliness and sadness during the initial transition, but their experiences are not often extreme or prolonged (Han, 2018; Piper, & Jackson, 2017). Perhaps that explains why most of the sending parents did not report many intense negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, loneliness, sadness, stress, helplessness). It was normal for their children to go live outside their homes during this period of time. A larger sample of participants from countries in different areas of the world would be necessary to investigate this phenomenon in more depth.

Parents Remained Focused on the Positives

Parents in this study described managing many of their challenges by focusing on their children and the benefits of the exchange experience for them during their exchange year and in the future. This acted as a motivating factor for them and helped parents put many of their challenges and fears in perspective. It helped them navigate the rough waters and sometimes the bitter taste of being away from their children. They also put their time and attention into strengthening their other family relationships – with their spouses and their other children. They clearly described how helpful this was in dealing with their sadness and missing the child who was abroad. They chose to see the good in the situation for themselves and their families.

Implications for Practice

Because societies are becoming more globalized and more inter-culturally connected (Bennett et al., 2011), exchange student programs as a cross-national phenomenon are becoming more common around the world (e.g., Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, 2004; Daly & Barker, 2005). The findings of this study point to the importance of addressing the quality of exchange programs for education and support of family members as well as the students.

Although AFS has manuals for the host parents and the exchange students (e.g., AFS, 2016), these manuals lack a section that address the sending families' needs and experiences. Much of the manual explains procedures and steps on the application process, how the organization works, and the history of the organization. While these are important topics, the findings from this study help us understand that parents often need information and support that will help them with their challenges before, during and after their children's involvement within the exchange program.

Family life educators (FLEs) are experts in prevention and education. They also are professionals who are well prepared to investigate the needs of individuals and develop and implement programs to help these individuals to live better lives by providing them with knowledge and skills for their self-identified needs (Myers-Walls, Ballard, Darling, & Myers-Bowman, 2011). Moreover, the training of FLEs helps them to be able to set goals on the basis of these families' needs and strengths, makes them able to teach families — individually or in groups — in a variety of different settings (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

FLE's are knowledgeable in several areas that could benefit sending parents - e.g., families and individuals in societal contexts, internal dynamics of families, human growth and development, interpersonal relationships, parent education and guidance, and professional ethics and practice (Duncan, & Goddard, 2016). For example, to help sending parents plan how to be in touch with their children and to stay informed on what and how they are doing while abroad, FLE professionals could help parents to learn how to use new social media apps that will allow them to fulfill their own needs as parents without being too intrusive in their children's exchange experiences (e g., Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook). FLEs can provide helpful developmental information about adolescence at the same time that they can teach parents about how to meet their own developmental and family needs

The experiences reported in this study also can be used by FLEs to create face-to-face and social media support group groups for sending parents. The groups can be composed of former sending parents who wish to share their time to help other parents through difficulties. These groups should be open spaces where sending parents could to talk about some their struggles they faced. FLE could provide training for these volunteers to help when sending parents are struggling.

Because of their training in families in societies, FLE professionals could assist sending parents have conversations with the host parents *before* they send their children. They could help guide the conversation and provide these parents with interpreters when needed. This would help with some of the worries sending parents had that were related to them not knowing anything about the host parents and their culture, traditions, customs, parenting techniques, etc.

FLEs can also become another part of the sending parents' and their families' support systems and help them navigate their adjustment process and guide them to needed resources. FLEs are very knowledgeable in what kind of organizations are in the communities and what these organizations do to help families (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). It would also be appropriate to help connect sending parents to the local AFS chapter in their area and the current exchange students living abroad in their country. This connection can help them understand the process from the exchange student perspective. They can learn what the students are experiencing and learning. Perhaps this would help them understand how to better fulfill their roles of parents of their teens during their exchange year.

When parents and exchange students are reunited, they have all changed. Therefore, parents and the children may need help during the reunification process. FLEs can use their knowledge about internal dynamics of families and human development to develop programs to help these families reconnect and learn from each other. These FLE-led programs can contain activities for the parents and their children in which they share some of their experiences, feelings, and struggles they had while they learn to reconnect on a new level.

Periodic assessment of sending parents' needs, implementation of new programs and evaluation of the impact of such programs are important and responsible aspects of the FLE profession. FLEs could collaborate with AFS and other international exchange organizations to

help evaluate the impact of such programs in the family and assist in the improving effort of the same.

Implications for Research

The focus of this applied study was to gain a better understanding of the impact of international high school exchange programs in the lives of sending parents. The results in this study add to the gap in the literature about this phenomenon. They provide a sound foundation for additional research that is needed in this area. The sampling selection provided the opportunity to learn more about these sending parents' experiences. It was not intended to generalize these findings to all sending parents and their families from other parts of the world. More research is needed to gain information about other sending parents and their families' experiences with exchange student programs.

To better understand the broad impact of international student exchange, future research should also be focused on obtaining information from other family members, friends, host parents, AFS staff and other individuals involved in exchange programs. In addition, longitudinal research following the sending parents at different stages in their involvement with international high school programs could increase our understanding of this phenomenon.

The current study provides a concentrated look at the experiences of sending parents whose children participated in AFS international high school program. To add to our knowledge base, investigating other cultures could identify cultural differences and similarities for sending parent experiences. Perhaps, for example, parents from more dependent cultures than the Scandinavian countries that dominate this sample would report a greater number of challenges. In addition to including other cultures, including more fathers could help us see if there is any

difference in the way the genders experience challenges and benefits when sending their children to study abroad.

It this study, some parents reported that the child's time abroad had an impact on their parent-child dynamics. Some parents described that having their children study abroad helped them become closer to each other. Others said it was hard to see their children not wanting to do activities with them after they came back home. Parents attributed these challenges to be part of the children's transition process reintegrating to their previous lives and missing their host parents and friends. It is important to obtain the children's perspective to understand the "other side" in the parent-child dynamics and relationship. Additionally, in the study of this phenomenon, the inclusion of parents, their children and other family members could help us better understand how each family as a whole experiences challenges.

Finally, since we have noticed that in the current literature most of the experiences of exchange students have been recorded in a quantitative manner, I suggest continuing to explore their experiences more deeply by utilizing qualitative and multimethod tactics to allow the stories of the participants to guide our work.

Concluding Remarks

This study addressed the question of how sending parents are affected by participating in an international high school exchange program. By focusing on the experiences of these participants, I have provided a stepping stone for other professionals who are interested in cross-cultural exchanges programs. My conclusion is that there is much to learn about the family-level experiences of this phenomenon.

It is imperative to emphasize that sending a child to study abroad has challenges and difficulties. They experience daily life challenges, such as missing the child, being worried about

the child, not being able to communicate with and know about them, and getting used to the life without the child present at home for one year. However, there are also many benefits from this experience, such as being able to get a more mature, open minded, and confident child after their time abroad. In addition, parents and children might be able to create new life-long friendships in other countries, as well as being able to learn about a different culture through the child's stories, and perhaps while the child is abroad, being able to focus more in other family relationships at home that might need to be nurtured.

Courageous and open-minded parents were able to let their children fly, and live their lives, with the hope that their children would benefit for a life time. They described a deep commitment to making the world a better place by sending their children into another culture to learn about those who may be different. In the words of one of the participants:

> *I think it's more important than ever that you realize that cultures are different… and you have to have kids that are more open and less judging,' cause I'm very afraid that the times are changing back to bigotry and so on. And that worries me a lot. So, I would say that they should send their kids not just for the kid's sake, but also for the world. It's a very important job. And the kids are part of that job…You know, I see myself as giving a gift, I think. I think it's giving, it's the most, one of the most important gifts I think you can give a kid, is to show them that you trust them and that you are willing to let them fly.*

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Appendix A - CONSENT FORM

High School International Exchange Programs:
Understanding and Enhancing the Experiences of
Individuals, Families and Communities
Researcher: Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, and possible benefits and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Description of Study

This study is being done because we would like to learn about the experiences of those who are involved with study abroad during high school. For example, we are interested in the following questions: What are the benefits and challenges for the students and their families? How can we make the experience better?

If you agree to participate, you will talk to an interviewer about your experiences with high school international exchange. The interview will be audio and video recorded. The interview will last about an hour to an hour and a half. This depends on how much you choose to share about your experiences.

Risks and Discomforts

You might feel uncomfortable with one or more topics brought up in the interview. But you may refuse to answer any questions and are free to leave the study at any time.

Benefits

Knowing about high school international exchange programs is important to society. Thousands of lives are touched by high school international exchange programs every year. The things we learn from the study will be reported to the participants in the study, to other general audiences, and to professionals who are interested in this topic. The results can help us improve the exchange programs to increase the success of positive experiences for those who are involved in international study abroad programs.

Confidentiality and Records

Information about you will be kept confidential. Video and audio recordings of the discussion will be kept on a computer protected by a password. No information that identifies you will be included in written transcripts. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman, project director, Kansas State University, karensm@k-state.edu, 001-785-341-4974.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, 001-785-532-3224.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered

- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____

If you would like the researcher to send you a copy of the study results, please provide an email or address in the space below:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B - INTERVIEW GUIDE

High School International Exchange Programs:
Understanding and Enhancing the Experiences of
Individuals, Families and Communities

Interviews will be conducted in a conversational style. Participants and the stories they have to share will guide the interview and its structure. Therefore, interview questions may not be asked in the same order or with the same exact wording. Instead, the initial question will be presented and then the probes will be used to encourage the participants to discuss the issues that will help to inform the research questions.

I. After completing the consent/assent process, participants will be asked to introduce themselves and their involvement with AFS/exchange programs.

- Name
- Occupation
- Age
- Country
- Role(s)
- Timing of involvement
- Involvement in other programs?

II. Next, all the participants will be asked to share the beginning of exchange stories:

You have been/are involved with AFS. I am interested in hearing your story and learning about your experiences with international exchange. Let's start at the beginning of your AFS story. How does it begin?

- *When did you/your child first consider studying abroad?*
- *Who initiated the idea?*
- *Who else was involved in the decision?*
- *How did you react/feel about the idea?*
- *What were the main considerations that influenced the decision?*
- *When and how was the decision finalized?*

III. Once the beginning of the story is told, the interview will move to the "middle" of the story. This is the main focus of the interview. The interviewer will use information learned in the beginning of the interview to follow up here.

Questions/probes may include the following:

- *When you describe your involvement with international exchange, what do you tell people?*

- *When you reflect on your experience of sending your child abroad, what memories are most vivid?*

How did you prepare for your experience?

    Possible probes:

- *Orientations*
- *Who?*
- *Emotionally*
- *Physically*

- *How prepared did you feel?*

- *How have you benefitted from your involvement?*
  Possible probes:

  - *short- and long-term*

  - *personally (how grow as individuals)*
  - *interpersonally/relationally*

  - *academically*

  - *professionally*

  - *worldview*

- *What challenges did you face?*
  Possible probes:

  - *short- and long-term*

  - *culturally*
  - *personally*

- interpersonally/relationally

- academically

- professionally

- *What strategies and resources did you use to cope with the challenges you encountered?*

- *Who was especially important in your experience?*
  Possible probes:

- *Describe the experience of when your child returned home.*
  - *Feelings*
  - *What went well?*
  - *Challenges*

IV. The final section of the interview will focus on the "end" of the story.

- *If someone came to you to ask advice about sending their child abroad, what advice would you give?*

- *What 3 terms would you use to describe your overall experiences as a sending parent?*

- *Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't? Is there something you'd like to add?*