Globalization and Moral Personhood: Dyadic Perspectives of the Moral Self in Rural and Urban Thai Communities

Jessica McKenzie

Abstract
Although the psychology of globalization is a burgeoning area of research, literature on the topic remains primarily theoretical to date. This study empirically examined the moral psychological impact of globalization in northern Thailand, a rapidly globalizing cultural context. Eighty participants (20 adolescents and 20 parents in both a rural and an urban community) took part in semi-structured interviews on perceptions of morality and globalization. This article shares three sets of mixed-methods analyses of participants’ private moral experiences. Results indicated varying conceptions of morality and self across cultural and dyadic lines, and thus revealed a double-gap in moral personhood across contexts of globalization. Whereas the moral experiences, evaluations, and reasoning of rural adolescents and parents were characterized by similitude, those of urban adolescents and parents were characterized by divergence. Findings indicate an emergent intergenerational moral disconnect in the urban Thai setting. Situating interview data in light of ethnographic evidence gathered in community, school, and home contexts, this study suggests that globalization profoundly impacts moral reasoning and perceptions of oneself as a moral person.

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Within the social sciences, there has been considerable debate about what precisely globalization is, and what it entails. One such debate revolves around the question of whether or not globalization is new. As contact among culturally diverse people has existed—to some degree—for centuries, it would be myopic to contend that the process is entirely new. What is unique about globalization at present, however, is the degree and intensity of contact between culturally diverse products, people, and ideas (Arnett, 2002). As such, globalization is presently defined as “the increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel . . . and its local and regional adaptations to and resistances against these flows” (Lewellen, 2002, p. 7). Although psychologists took some time to add to the social science discussion about globalization, the case for its profound impact—particularly on adolescent identity development—has been raised in recent years (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Hermans, 2015; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Jensen, 2003; Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011). In spite of this theoretical work, however, there is a paucity of empirical research on the developmental psychological impact of globalization (McKenzie, 2015). In our rapidly globalizing world, it is increasingly imperative that psychology, a discipline that studies the human mind, extends its relevance by studying the ways in which the human mind responds and adapts to cultural change.

The current project fills this gap by exploring the effects of globalization on perceptions of the moral self in Thailand, a country undergoing rapid socio cultural change. To do so, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews were conducted with adolescents and their parents in urban and rural northern Thai communities over the course of one year. Focusing on discourses surrounding participants’ private moral experiences, and situating findings in ethnographic data, this article investigates dyadic perceptions of moral personhood in variously globalized Thai communities. The aim of examining local perspectives of morality is to illuminate how moral values are maintained and reshaped across generations in rapidly changing cultural contexts.

This article adds to the literature from which it was born in several ways. First, it offers an empirical analysis of the psychological impact of globalization and, by examining globalization’s impact on moral development, expands beyond the more common focus on identity formation. Second, it offers an ethnographically grounded study of a region of the world that has
been relatively unexplored by psychologists. This pushes beyond the disciplinary tendency to focus on just 5% of the world’s population (Arnett, 2008; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), giving rise to a broader understanding of moral development than is typically conveyed. Third, the mixed-methods analysis provides a multilayered understanding of processes that would be difficult indeed to understand using only a quantitative or qualitative approach. Finally, the comparative nature of the study—including both urban and rural-dwellers, and adolescents and their parents—reveals a multiplicity of perspectives.

**Interdisciplinary Analyses of Globalization and the Long Road to a Psychology of Globalization**

Globalization has been a topic of theoretical and empirical study for most social science disciplines for two decades. Economists have examined financial integration and economic interdependence, geographers have examined global cities and intensified movements across nations, anthropologists have examined the impact of globalization on cultural practices, and sociologists have examined economic, political, and cultural shifts (e.g., Allen & Hamnett, 1995; Appadurai, 1996, 2001; Giddens, 2000; Inda & Rosaldo, 2008; Lewellen, 2002; Sassen, 1998; Sen, 1999; Shangquon, 2000; Robertson, 1992). By describing the structure and content of changes that are deemed, or attributed to, “globalization,” these investigations have contributed immensely to our understanding of the *macro-level* processes of globalization and modernity.

One scholar who has weighed in on *micro-level* ramifications of globalization is sociologist Giddens (2000), who suggests that globalization and concomitant detertraditionalization render identity a more salient phenomenon than ever before. Moreover, whereas historically one’s identity was based primarily on role obligations, it is increasingly choicefully constructed based on individual desires. Navigating this shifting identity construction process, according to Giddens, comes with challenges. Anthropologist Bucholtz (2002) has also focused on micro-level ramifications of globalization, including the disproportionate effects of rapid sociocultural change on youth, who struggle with the tension between tradition and innovation. As a result of radical shifts in modernization, Bucholtz notes, youth-elder relationships may become strained.

Although work from sister disciplines has indicated that globalization is likely to transform human development, the psychological impact of globalization as a subfield has lagged behind. Psychology has benefitted greatly from recent theoretical work that has proposed a variety of psychological
consequences of globalization. Such work shares a focus on identity issues, including the formation of a bicultural identity that combines local and global cultures (Arnett, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1998), the dialogical navigation between global and local identities (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007), the global expansion of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2002), and shifting adolescent custom complexes (Jensen, 2003). More recently, it has been suggested that adolescent and emerging adult identity developments are particularly impacted by shifts in language, diet, and media, and that such shifts have rendered identity and cultural identity development increasingly complex (Jensen et al., 2011).

In spite of substantive theoretical work indicating that globalization impacts adolescent development, empirical work that examines the psychological impact of globalization on adolescents is exceedingly rare. Recently, however, a survey-based study on urban middle class Indian adolescent perceptions of cultural change and identity development indicated a hybridization of identities in this cultural context (Rao et al., 2013). Using the term “the identity remix,” the authors describe adolescents’ strong identification with collectivist (Indian) and individualistic values, beliefs, and practices. This work has certainly shed light on the impact of cultural change on identity development for this demographic. And yet, much remains unknown. Research that investigates rural adolescent and parent perspectives of globalization is sorely needed, as is qualitative work that richly describes these diverse perspectives. The current project heeds this call in its comparative, dyadic, and qualitative nature.

If the psychology of globalization is to grow, empirical research must draw on interdisciplinary knowledge regarding the impact of rapid cultural change on youth. This project is founded on the psychological insight that globalization impacts adolescents in particular. Importantly, though, it also draws from anthropological and sociological insights. Theoretically, it takes as a starting point the deep impact of globalization on cultural practices and on identity; methodologically, it integrates ethnographic embeddedness in both contexts studied.

Psychological and Anthropological Examinations of Morality

The literature outlined above on the psychological impact of globalization overwhelmingly focuses on identity and cultural identity development. With its focus on moral development and personhood, this project adds a critical dimension.
Cultural-Developmental Approach

Although moral psychology began with an almost exclusive focus on the development of concepts such as justice and equality (Kohlberg, 1971; Piaget, 1932), the cross-cultural applicability of these conceptions has more recently been called into question. Psychologists have begun to treat moral development as contextually grounded, investigating, for example, the key roles of religion (Huebner & Garrod, 1991; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016; McKenzie & Jensen, in press; Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995) and culture (Dien, 1982; Jensen, 2008, 2011a) in moral reasoning. One pluralistic framework from which to examine moral reasoning across cultures without envisioning morality as linear individual development toward justice-based reasoning is Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park’s (2003) “big three ethics” of morality and selfhood—Autonomy, Community, and Divinity—bred from a survey of diverse literature and the results of interviews conducted in the United States and India.

The Ethic of Autonomy, which aligns with Kohlberg’s conceptualization of pre- and post-conventional reasoning, focuses on the individual self. Autonomy-based reasoning includes moral concepts such as individual rights, justice, and harm to other individuals. The Ethic of Community focuses on the social self and includes moral concerns such as social order and harmony goals, role obligations, and hierarchy. The Ethic of Divinity focuses on the spiritual self and includes moral concepts such as virtues of holiness, purity, and sanctity. These ethics, then, incorporate a wide array of individual, social, and spiritual concerns.

The three ethics exist across cultural contexts; the extent to which each ethic is prioritized, however, varies widely (e.g., Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Jensen, 1995, 1998; Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001). Extending this cultural theory to the field of developmental psychology, the cultural-developmental approach (Jensen, 2008, 2011a, 2015) maps the use of these ethics across age groups and cultural communities. This approach has illuminated distinctive developmental patterns of moral reasoning in such locations as the United States (Hickman & Fasoli, 2015; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015), India (Jensen, 1998; Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2015; Pandya & Bhangaokar, 2015), Finland (Vainio, 2015), and Brazil (Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2015). The cultural-developmental approach is beginning to expose variations in moral reasoning and conceptions of the self across cultural contexts and the life course.

Empirical work using this approach has pointed to adolescence as a period of substantial shifts in ethic use. One study showed that evangelical and
mainline Presbyterian U.S. adolescents use the Ethic of Autonomy less than children but more than adults (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). The same adolescents also use the Ethic of Community more than children and the Ethic of Divinity less than adults. Another study (Hickman & Fasoli, 2015) found low use of Divinity reasoning among evangelical children and high use among adults. The authors suggest that adolescence is likely a period at which the uptick in Divinity reasoning occurs for their sample. Such shifting adolescent moral discourses may be fruitfully understood in light of the fact that adolescents are actively exploring their identity (Erikson, 1968) and moral identity (Hart & Carlo, 2005). During the transition from childhood into adolescence, there are an increasing number of moral socialization agents (e.g., parents, peers, the media) influencing behavior and values, and adolescents are met with the challenge of learning to navigate their moral cultures (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Hence, adolescents focus not only on themselves as they cultivate their identities; they also navigate plentiful—and potentially contradictory—messages from an increasing number of moral socializers.

The cultural-developmental approach, then, offers an empirically tested methodology from which to explore the effects of globalization on local moralities. Examining points of dyadic and subcultural divergence and convergence allows for a dynamic understanding of the micro-level consequences of globalization.

**Moral Personhood**

*Personhood* refers to “the quality or condition of being an individual person” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.); anthropologists have used the term, however, to convey the inextricability of the individual person and her cultural context(s) (e.g., Cassaniti, 2015; Fortes, 1971; Hickman, 2014; Parish, 1994). In his piece, Parish (1994) demonstrates that for Newars in Nepal, individual identity and self are deeply woven into the fabric of relational webs. As such, moral personhood portrays the inherently psychocultural nature of morality and self. Although not using the term *moral personhood*, the notion that morality is inherently cultural, and intertwined with conceptions of self and personhood, is also seen in Shweder’s three ethics. As Shweder and colleagues (2003) write:

Presupposed by the ethics of autonomy is a conceptualization of the self as an individual preference structure, where the point of moral regulation is to increase choice and personal liberty. Presupposed by the “ethics of community” is a conceptualization of the self as an office holder. The basic idea is that one’s role or station in life is intrinsic to one’s identity and is part of a larger
interdependent collective enterprise with a history and standing of its own. Presupposed by the ethics of divinity is a conceptualization of the self as a spiritual entity connected to some sacred or natural order of things and as a responsible bearer of a legacy that is elevated and divine. (p. 99)

According to this theory, varying conceptions of persons lead to different moral conclusions.

The present conception of moral personhood draws from the literature described above in two ways. First, because psychological morality and self are envisioned as intertwined and inherently cultural, participant perspectives of the moral self, derived from interview data, are interpreted in light of ethnographic data. In fact, the ultimate contention is that participants’ unique perspectives of the moral self cannot be severed from their cultural contexts. Second, the three-ethic based cultural-developmental approach is used to examine moral reasoning and conceptions of self.

For this article, moral personhood also carries with it a more specific meaning. That is, it refers to a trifecta of the way one thinks about, reasons about, and judges one’s own moral behaviors. By examining participants’ private moral experiences—as opposed to hypothetical moral dilemmas, for example—the present analyses tap into moral issues that participants themselves deem important in their everyday lives.

Northern Thailand as a Context of Globalization and Modernization

Psychologists who have conducted research in Asia have overwhelmingly focused on China, Japan, and India. There is a dearth of psychological research in Southeast Asia, a region of the world that presently serves as a natural laboratory for psychologists studying micro-level ramifications of globalization. Southeast Asia is undergoing rapid sociocultural change, particularly with the 2015 opening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, n.d.). The aim of ASEAN is to promote regional and economic integration among 10 Southeast Asian nations by facilitating trade and immigration between countries. With the establishment of new international relationships among globalizing Asian nations, it is critical that scholars studying the psychological impact of globalization turn their attention to this region of the world.

Thailand, a member of ASEAN, has undergone rapid economic development over the past 30 years, spurning dramatic sociocultural transformations. As anthropologists and geographers have pointed out, Thailand’s complex modernity and dualistic pairings of tradition and modernity affect its
inhabitants in many ways. According to Ganjanapan (2003), Thai economic shifts spurned a swift expansion of major cities and an influx of people resettling to urban communities. When previously rural-dwelling individuals move to cities, he writes, they are abruptly exposed to a “culture of consumerism” and to an industrial and capitalist work ethic, “both of which are entirely alien to their rural ways of life” (Ganjanapan, 2003, p. 132). The urban middle class, Ganjanapan explains, is particularly affected by the disjuncture between Thailand’s historically collectivistic values and its individualistic globalized culture.

Writing specifically about northern Thailand’s complexity is anthropologist Morris (2000) and geographers Rigg and Nattapoolwat (2001). Morris (2000) contends that Chiang Mai’s consumerist culture is incongruous with its typical portrayal as a quant city, and suggests that this region at once values newness and antiquity, locality, and globality. As a result, Morris explains, Chiang Mai has been “dislocated” from its past, and the past has been “rendered . . . an object of longing” for its inhabitants (p. 58). Focusing on shifting rural livelihoods into non-agricultural professions, Rigg and Nattapoolwat (2001) suggest that economic and social changes in Thailand have also reshaped desires and values. The authors propose that rural parents often portray conflicting messages to their children about the livelihoods they should pursue, with a dissonance between parents’ actions (e.g., sending children to city schools) and their traditional values (e.g., family, farming, and filial piety). They refer to this emergent dissonance as a “split-personality approach” to child rearing: at once valuing village identity, and yet increasingly rearing their children in a way that undermines long-term village residence.

Morris’s (2000) work motivated the current investigation of the psychological effects of Chiang Mai’s “dislocation from its past,” and its unique blend of locality and globality. Rigg and Nattapoolwat’s (2001) work also informed the starting point for this project: that with globalization-related shifts come changes in values and desires. The new values about which Rigg and Nattapoolwat write—the desire for higher education and parents’ desires for their children to function effectively in the modern economy—are strongly rooted in globalization. The tension, then, speaks to the difficulty of valuing both traditionalism and modernity. This project investigates the extent to which potentially dualistic values shift moral values espoused by individuals, and the values that are passed on to future generations.

**Current Project**

Piecing together cross-disciplinary information, it is clear that Thailand is a rapidly changing society. It is also clear that these changes are likely to impact
not only the livelihoods but also the moral values of its inhabitants. From globalization literature, we know that adolescents are particularly embedded in and affected by rapid modernization. From moral psychological literature, we know that adolescents are deeply engaged in the process of moral and identity development, and that they are experiencing an expanding radius of moral socializers. What is lacking is an empirical examination that links these various lines of research by investigating the moral psychological impact of globalization on Thai adolescents.

This study embarks on such a mission by asking the following question: What is the impact of globalization on Thai adolescent and parent perceptions of the moral self? Investigating this question in both urban and rural communities offers a window into the unique impact of globalization in variably globalized contexts. A dyadic design illuminates differences across age groups and generations. Furthermore, as Thai parents are key moral socializers and yet it has been suggested that youth-elder relationships are strained as a result of rapid modernization, the dyadic design will highlight points of parent-child disconnect when considering themselves as moral persons.

Given the interdisciplinarity of this project, and the aim of examining moral reasoning and conceptions of self across cultural contexts and the life course, the design is informed by the cultural-developmental approach. As so little is known about this field of study, this project is also theory building. That is, it aims to develop an ethnographically grounded theory of the moral psychological impact of globalization, and to spurn future research along these lines.

**Field Sites**

Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews were conducted in Mae Kiaw and Chiang Mai over the course of one year. Data collection was preceded—both this visit and while residing in Thailand several years prior—by my learning Thai and Kam Muang (คำเมือง: Northern Thai dialect), making preliminary field site visits, and building relationships with informants.

Mae Kiaw and Chiang Mai districts are both in Chiang Mai Province, and hence, share a common local history, dialect, and cuisine. In spite of these similarities and their mere 25 miles in geographic distance, they are distinct cultural contexts. To interpret findings in light of globalization, an ethnographic description of each cultural context is critical. For each field site, I will first describe the community, followed by an overview of school and home contexts.
Community context. Mae Kiaw’s six sub-districts have a total population of 21,363. At the time of this fieldwork, there were no malls, supermarkets, fast food restaurants, or 7-11s in the district. Residents typically obtain food at local or mobile markets (see Figure 1, Image 1), or in their own backyard (via growing rice and vegetables, foraging for bamboo shoots, as well as pet chickens and frogs, and crabs from rice fields). Restaurants are simple, open-air, or small shacks on the side of the road. Rice fields (Figure 1, Image 2), a source of nutrition and income for its inhabitants, pervade the district. Although motorbikes are the primary form of transportation, within-village travel is often done on foot or by bicycle (Figure 1, Image 3).

During my time there, I did not encounter any farangs (ฝรั่ง: Caucasian foreigner); one young girl remarked that I was the first farang she had ever

**Figure 1.** Images from Mae Kiaw.
seen. Kam Muang is the dominant language, and it is rare indeed to hear another language, including Thai, spoken. Although tourism is rare, Mae Kiaw’s scenery and proximity to Chiang Mai was capitalized on 10 years ago when a golf resort was built. The resort draws primarily Japanese and Chinese travelers.

Temples in Mae Kiaw are relatively simple (Figure 1, Images 4 and 5) and serve as community centers. My informants and interviewees believed them important both for upholding Buddhism and for developing the community. It is not uncommon to see families standing outside together as the sun rises, waiting to offer home-cooked food to barefoot monks walking by their homes. This practice of “almsgiving” provides sustenance for monks, and an opportunity for lay Buddhists to *tam bun* (ทำบุญ: make merit for one’s soul) and pay respect to monks.

**School context.** Mae Kiaw Wittayalai, the school from which rural adolescents were recruited, is the only school in the district that offers a Matthayom 4-6 (equivalent to U.S. grades 10-12) education. Low-lying mountains and rice fields surround the school, and on its grounds, groups of chickens and hens run freely, and two dogs saunter between teachers’ offices to receive snacks. Cow moos can be heard from classrooms. Vibrant green trees surround the school property; those trees in the meditation area are adorned with Buddhist sayings.

When I began my fieldwork, there were no native-speaking English teachers. During one visit, a teacher with whom I had grown close gave me a pamphlet he wrote in English that captured the vision and values of the school. Below are verbatim snippets:

**Vision:** Mae Kiaw Wittayalai is the learning place with moral for international standard

**Identity:** The Learning Place with Moral

**Entity:** Good manner Maintain Thai culture Serve Socials

**School motto:** Advanced Develop, Excellent Knowledge, Praised Moral

**The Buddha teaching of the school:** Their training is the most noble among men

Although riddled with errors, the focus on morals, Buddhist teachings, Thai culture, social service, and manners are clear. These values are reified in school practices in several ways. For example, the school encourages volunteerism by asking that students maintain portfolios with information about such activities. Brief meditation sessions take place each morning before class, and Buddhist festivals and visits from local monks are frequent, often taking up several school day hours when they occur.
Table 1. Household Characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chiang Mai</th>
<th>Mae Kiaw</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of multigenerational homes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of cars per home</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of motorbikes per home</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of TVs per home</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of computers per home</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Home context.** Mae Kiaw households were typically multigenerational in composition (see Table 1). Houses were primarily traditional teak homes on stilts; furniture and decorations inside homes were minimal. Motorbikes were the most common vehicles used by families, and the number of vehicles reported often included those belonging to extended family members. The number of televisions per household ranged from one to three, and the number of computers ranged from zero to two (see averages in Table 1). Homes that did have a computer were often desktops, and several families reported that they although they had a computer, it was broken. Many homes did not have the Internet, and some did not have cell phone reception.

**Chiang Mai**

**Community context.** Comprised of 16 sub-districts, Chiang Mai has a population of just over 234,000, and is home to Chiang Mai city, the largest city in northern Thailand. Known for its cultural significance and easygoing ambience, the city draws Thai and international travelers alike.

The sights and sounds of Chiang Mai (see Figure 2, Image 1) evince its globality. Inside the city center, signs are in Thai and English. Advertisements include those depicted in Figure 2, Images 2 and 3. Image 2, which portrays a light-skinned Thai woman marrying a farang man, markets both Western wedding attire and the notion that true love can be found in a farang—if one’s skin is sufficiently light. Advertisements for Korean skin-whitening creams and treatments are scattered throughout the city. Image 3 displays an advertisement for “Super Rich Money Exchange,” a currency exchange business that uses an image of Buddha as a symbol of wealth to be gained at this business—ironic given Buddha’s focus on temperance and moderation. Just outside the city center, one is greeted by a wai’ing (ไหว้: Thai greeting) Ronald McDonald (Image 4). On a night out, one could eat Thai food or choose from a wide variety of foreign cuisines. A potpourri of languages is spoken, and within a one-block radius, it is not uncommon to hear Thai, Kam Muang, English, Chinese, Japanese, and French.
Chiang Mai is known for its historic Buddhist temples; in the small city center alone, there are over 30 temples. These temples embody a unique confluence of local and global. At one temple, a group of monks gather at a table and whip out their laptops. A group of teens hang out on the temple grounds at night, holding pieces of paper with questions written in English to ask foreign passersby. Another temple advertises two-day meditation courses that one can register for by emailing a monk, and two-hour monk chats, providing tourists with a crash course in Buddhism, and monks an opportunity to practice English. Yet another temple just outside the city center has a sizable Donald Duck statue placed beside a Buddha statue. Temples tend to be ornate and heavily trafficked by Thais and tourists alike (Figure 2, Image 5).

School context. Chiang Mai Wittayakom is situated in the city center, surrounded by cafés and a 7-11. A large Canon advertisement is placed just in front of the school, and the school entrance is gated and lined with Thai flags. A
well-manicured lawn, groomed bushes, and a series of large buildings line the school grounds. At the center of the grounds, there is a series of flags. The Thai flag is largest and hung in the middle, higher than the rest, and is surrounded by five other flags: blue, yellow, red, purple, and green. Representing the colors into which students separate on the annual Sport Day (when teams compete against one another), these flags symbolize both competition and unity. Towards the back of the school, there is a tam-sataan (ธรรมสถัน: temple-like place) meant for meditation. Chiang Mai Wittayakom students, however, explained that this space is more often utilized as a place for play than for worship.

Foreigners are a presence at school, both as teachers (of English, Chinese, Japanese, and French languages) and classmates (exchange students). The school vision and objective, prominently displayed, emphasize the importance of students becoming global citizens. The vision translates “Chiang Mai Wittayakom is an academy where . . . [students become] citizens of the world through studying . . . in accordance with international standards.” The objective explains that students will “hone their ability to be citizens of the world” and cultivate “knowledge and skills necessary to continue studying, to live in the global society . . .” These statements emphasize global society, international standards, and Thai values.

Home context. Chiang Mai homes were typically made of concrete and had more furniture and decorations than Mae Kiaw homes. Households tended to be nuclear in composition, with only the parents and child or children living at home. Cars were the most common vehicles for these families; just one of the 20 families interviewed did not own a car. Chiang Mai households were technologically very well equipped. The number of televisions ranged from one to six, and the number of computers (typically laptops) ranged from one to five. Adolescents and parents alike reported spending a significant chunk of their days in front of a computer. Despite fewer individuals residing in a single household than in Mae Kiaw, Chiang Mai families had over double the number of TVs and nearly triple the number of computers (see Table 1).

Method

Participants

Eighty participants were interviewed, divided evenly between the rural (Mae Kiaw) and urban (Chiang Mai) community. In each community, 20 adolescents (ages 16-19 years, $M = 17.30$, $SD = 0.56$) and 20 parents (ages 37-58 years, $M = 45.93$, $SD = 5.43$) were interviewed. One parent of each adolescent formed the parent group.
Participant demographics (obtained via demographic questionnaire prior to the interview) are presented in Table 2. Across communities, more girls than boys and more mothers than fathers participated in the study. Participants reported their ethnicity as Thai, with few exceptions. Ethnic diversity in the

Table 2. Participant Demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chiang Mai</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mae Kiaw</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age (SD)</td>
<td>17.10 (0.45)</td>
<td>47.55 (5.10)</td>
<td>17.50 (0.61)</td>
<td>44.30 (5.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai-Chinese</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Muslim</td>
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<td>Parent’s education (%)</td>
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<td>Primary</td>
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<td>Graduate school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s work status (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freelance</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent’s occupation (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wage laborer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual family income (SD), in US$</td>
<td>16,480 (8,980)</td>
<td>2,250 (1,270)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table excludes a few never or rarely used categories (e.g., Other ethnicity, Other religion, Some occupations).
Chiang Mai sample is attributed mostly to migration from China to Thailand; ethnic diversity in the Mae Kiaw sample is attributed primarily to belonging to or having descended from hill tribes in northern Thailand. In both settings, the vast majority of participants self-identified as Buddhist. Non-Buddhist participants primarily self-identified as Christian, though in the rural sample, there was one Muslim dyad.

There were several demographic differences across cultural contexts. Parents’ level of education was one such difference. Most rural parents had only primary-level education; not one rural parent had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Most urban parents, however, had a bachelor’s degree. Occupation also varied widely across contexts. Whereas rural parents typically worked part-time as freelancers, urban parents tended to work full-time. The most common job among rural parents was farmer (and wage laborer, also primarily farmers); for urban parents, it was government worker, which encompasses an array of occupations (e.g., teachers, Labor Policy and Affairs employees). There were also vast differences in income, with urban families earning more than 7 times that of rural families. This difference is striking, as rural households were multigenerational and tended to have more people per household than did urban families.

Fieldwork and Interview Procedures

The ethnographic methodology included participant observation in wider community contexts, in schools from which adolescent participants were recruited, and in a selection of interviewees’ homes. It furthermore included focus groups with adolescents and informal conversations with interviewees, informants, and community members.

After spending time getting to know students, teachers, and administrators at each school, those adolescents interested in being interviewed provided contact information for themselves and their parents, whom were then contacted. Only when both the adolescent and one parent agreed to take part, and when potential participants met location-based criteria, were interviews scheduled. Participants chose the interview location. In the rural setting, the vast majority of dyads were interviewed at home. In the urban setting, most dyads wished to be interviewed at the adolescent’s school; the second most popular location was home. One urban parent asked to be interviewed at work, and another at KFC.

Participants also chose the interview language. All rural participants, and 55% of urban parents, were interviewed in Kam Muang; 75% of urban adolescents were interviewed in English. Even interviews that took place primarily in English, though, typically included at least some Thai or Kam Muang phrases.
throughout. To ensure that the project was understood as sponsored by both Thais and non-Thais, and to minimize potential misconceptions about the research agenda, a local research assistant accompanied me for each set of interviews. A native speaker of the participant’s preferred language led the interview. When in Kam Muang or Thai, I asked follow-up and clarification questions on occasion during the interview, and spent time with participants before and after interviews. When in English, a native-speaking research assistant contributed if assistance was needed in conveying a particular concept.

Individual semi-structured interviews were administered after parental consent was obtained for them and on behalf of their adolescent children. Assent was obtained from adolescents. Interviews ranged in length from 74 to 210 minutes, with an average of 113 minutes for adolescents and 123 minutes for parents. Urban parents had the longest interviews, and rural adolescents had the shortest interviews. After the interview, participants received a “thank you” gift (e.g., hat or notebook for adolescents, sarong or soap set for parents). All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by a native speaker of the interview language. For interviews that took place in Thai or Kam Muang, a native-speaking research assistant first transcribed and translated the interview into English. I then compared interview transcripts to original audio records to ensure transcription accuracy and detail prior to data analysis.

**Interviews**

Interviews included three sections: daily life, moral issues, and globalization. The topic presently analyzed was a self-generated private moral experience in the second section of the interview. The prompt was as follows:

Now I’m going to ask you to tell me about a time when you had an important experience that you think involved a moral issue. It could be a time when you did something that you think was morally right morally wrong. Please first describe that experience, and then I’ll ask you a few questions about it.

Follow-up questions included: “Do you think you behaved in a morally right or wrong way?” “Why?” and “Are there any other reasons you would like to mention?”

**Analytic Procedures**

Aiming to develop a holistic portrait of moral personhoods via data analysis triangulation, three sets of private moral experience analyses were conducted.
Analysis 1: Types of moral experiences. To generate a conceptual understanding of moral experiences discussed, an inductive content analysis of experience types was conducted. This began with immersion in moral experience discourse in order to identify themes, which were then used to develop a coding scheme based on the seven overarching categories of experiences shared: helping, hurting, social roles, dishonesty/honesty, stealing/not stealing, justice/fairness, and illicit/licit behavior. Definitions of each code were also determined.

Participants’ experiences were then coded based on framing of their behavior. An urban adolescent, for example, discussed an instance in which he stole money from his dad to buy a robot. He framed his behavior as wrong because “stealing is not good”; hence, his experience was coded as stealing/not stealing (“behavior is framed as involving theft [or lack of theft] of material goods, taking [or not] what does not belong to oneself”). He furthermore highlighted his role as a son, indicating that his behavior fractured the open line of communication that should be maintained among family members. Hence, his moral experience was also coded as social roles (“behavior is framed as fulfilling, or not fulfilling, one’s duty or obligation based on a particular social role [e.g., parent, child, relative, teacher, student, friend]”). Coding was, however, conducted parsimoniously, and only when a participant framed his or her behavior in more than one distinct manner were multiple codes administered. A total of 23 codes were administered for urban adolescents, urban adults, and rural adults, and 25 codes for rural adolescents.

Inter-rater reliability was assessed by a trained coder and me for 20% of randomly selected interviews, and Cohen’s Kappa was .93. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Analysis 2: Moral evaluations. To investigate dyadic and cultural differences in moral evaluations of behaviors, a post hoc statistical examination was conducted. First, numerical scores (1-5) were created for participants’ evaluations of their behaviors, such that 1 = totally right; 2 = mostly right, a little wrong; 3 = equally right and wrong; 4 = mostly wrong, a little right; and 5 = totally wrong. Behaviors framed as completely immoral received an evaluation score of 5; those framed as completely moral received a 1. When right and wrong elements of the behavior were discussed, a 2, 3, or 4 was assigned, depending on the framing. For example, a rural adolescent who discussed an instance of arguing with her parents expressed that it was surely wrong to disagree with, walk away from, and not apologize to them that day. At the end of her explanation, though, she mentioned that it was morally right that she eventually realized her wrongdoing and apologized. Given that she framed
her behavior as primarily wrong, and that three of her four justifications were “wrong,” her evaluation was coded as “4 = mostly wrong, a little right.”

Inter-rater reliability was assessed for 20% of randomly selected interviews by a trained coder and me, and Cohen’s Kappa was .81. Differences of opinion were resolved through discussion. A 2 × 2 mixed univariate ANOVA was then conducted, with age (adolescent, adult) as the within-subjects variable and culture (rural, urban) as the between-subjects variable.

Analysis 3: Moral reasoning and discourse. To assess moral reasoning, participants’ moral experience discourse was analyzed for use of the Ethics of Community, Autonomy, and Divinity. First, the hypotheses for ethic use will be shared. Then, the coding procedure, analysis, and results will be discussed in turn.

Hypotheses. Given the traditional cultural emphasis on filial piety and community, the Ethic of Community was predicted to play a key role in moral reasoning for most participants, and particularly rural participants. It was predicted that the Ethic of Autonomy would be used more by urban than rural participants, and that use would be considerably higher for adolescents than parents. That hypothesis was based on the predication that those who are urban and young are especially exposed to and embedded in ideals that accompany globalization and that such ideals would likely result in a higher reliance upon the Ethic of Autonomy. Finally, as the overwhelming majority of Thais are Buddhist and because Buddhism is etched into everyday life—particularly for rural-dwellers—it was predicted that the Ethic of Divinity would be a core component of moral reasoning for most participants, and particularly for rural adults.

Coding. The Three Ethics Coding Manual (Jensen, 2015) was used to code moral reasoning in terms of overarching ethics and sub-ethics (each ethic includes 13 to 16 sub-ethics). Ethic of Community sub-ethics include, for example, social order harmony goals and duty to others; Autonomy sub-ethics include self’s interest and rights; Divinity sub-ethics include interest in self’s soul and scriptural authority. Coding moral reasons according to ethic and sub-ethic provides an assessment of participants’ invocation of a wide array of moral justifications.

As the manual had not yet been used with this sample, the first step in coding interviews was to qualitatively analyze moral discourse. This process began with immersion in participant discourse surrounding moral justifications, allowing an inductive identification of culture-specific concepts. As a result of this qualitative analysis, three sub-ethics (two Divinity sub-ethics
and one Community sub-ethic) were added to the manual. Karma, for instance, was added as a Divinity sub-ethic, and defined as:

the belief that one’s actions in this life or previous lives affect the current or future lives. It can refer to having already accumulated good or bad fortune, or to karmic repercussions as a result of that built up good or bad fortune.

Interviews were then coded, and a trained coder and I assessed inter-rater reliability on 20% of randomly selected interviews. Cohen’s Kappa, calculated for use of the three ethics, was .87. Differences of opinion were resolved through discussion.

**Statistical analyses.** A series of $2 \times 2$ univariate ANOVAs were then conducted, with age (adolescent, parent) as the within-subjects variable and culture (rural, urban) as the between-subjects variable. Use of the three ethics constituted the dependent variables.

**Findings**

**Types of Moral Experiences**

*Rural moral experiences.* The most common moral experience types (see Figure 3) for rural parents and adolescents pertained to helping and social roles. In fact, these two categories combined accounted for three-quarters of rural participants’ moral experience codes.

For rural parents who shared helping experiences, their help was most often provided to villagers and family members. Experiences included, for example, setting up the village water supply, helping at funeral ceremonies, and saving village boys in danger of drowning. Rural adolescents’ helping experiences included instances such as volunteering for temple events, building a dam, and helping an old man cross the road. The recipients of these helping acts included an array of others, including the temple, villagers, elders, relatives, and friends.

Rural parents’ social roles were most often tied to their status in the family. This included assisting a family member in raising her children, and continuing manual labor during pregnancy because she and her husband needed money to raise their baby. The latter parent expressed that this engendered deep concerns that she was a bad mother due to her lack of regard for her children’s safety in the womb. Rural adolescents’ social role experiences pertained to their roles as a family member, student, classmate, friend, and youth (vs. elder). One rural adolescent, for example, shared her story of being reprimanded by an elder for making temple offerings
incorrectly. Although frustrated by this, she noted that the elder knew what was best and was trying to help her, so she should have exercised more patience. Another adolescent discussed the importance of helping on the family farm when his uncle is sick, framing this as his duty as a nephew.

As seen above, rural parents and adolescents shared similar types of moral experiences. The recipient of these helping behaviors and the particular social role to which adolescents and parents referred did, however, differ somewhat. Rural parents overwhelmingly focused on helping villagers, and their social roles most often pertained to their status as a family member. Meanwhile, adolescents’ helping experiences included a wide range of others, and the social roles about which they spoke were diverse.

Urban moral experiences. Accounting for nearly half of their experience codes, social roles was a common topic among urban parents as well. Interestingly, the roles to which urban parents referred typically revolved around their roles as employees or employers. One parent, for example, discussed her role as an educator and her duty to teach her students the importance of abstinence. Others spoke of their status as a parent or child. One mother discussed her attempt to maintain patience with her son during his teenage years, as he now lies to her more than in the past. The next most common experience type was helping, and several urban parents’ helping behaviors were accompanied by a social role code. For instance, one parent discussed providing financial assistance to a bright student who could not afford to pursue...
higher education, and framed this in light of her status as a teacher helping a student “study—to have a better life.”

Urban adolescents, meanwhile, differed from both their parents and their rural adolescent counterparts. Their moral experiences most often revolved around issues of dishonesty/honesty, which accounted for over one-third of this group’s codes. This included accounts of lying or telling the truth to others, as well as action-based forms of dishonesty, such as cheating on an exam. Others discussed lying to friends, parents, siblings, and teachers. One adolescent shared a story of claiming to have submitted an assignment to her teacher, but not actually having completed it. Another kept the truth from her best friend: that she had witnessed her boyfriend cheating on her. Hurting (psychologically or physically harming others or oneself) was another common urban adolescent experience, comprising nearly one-quarter of their codes. One adolescent spoke about excluding a friend; another recalled killing snails and fish as a child.

**Conclusion.** Although rural and urban parents differed somewhat in terms of the types of moral experiences discussed, social role-based experiences were common for parents in each setting. The particular roles differed across cultural lines, with rural parents typically discussing family-based, and urban parents discussing work-based, roles. Experiences pertaining to justice and fairness were also common among parents in both contexts. Again, however, the focus differed somewhat. For rural parents, justice-based experiences were often close to home (e.g., differential treatment of animals); for urban parents, they exclusively involved work.

What is perhaps most striking in studying Figure 3, though, is the extent to which rural and urban adolescents’ moral experiences differed. Over three-quarters of rural adolescents’ codes were accounted for by helping and social role-based behaviors; this was the case for just one-quarter of urban adolescents. The helping instances that urban adolescents did share entailed helping themselves, strangers, and foreigners. Such findings indicate a cultural gap in considerations of what—and whom—falls within the moral realm. Although the recipients of urban adolescents’ moral behaviors included some more distant others, both urban and rural adolescents referred to a diverse array of social roles and diverse recipients of their behaviors, including, for example, friends, family members, teachers, and classmates.

**Moral Evaluations**

There was a significant main effect for age, with adolescents evaluating their behaviors as more morally wrong ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.27$) than parents ($M =$
There was no significant main effect for culture; in fact, the overall moral evaluation mean and standard deviation were exactly the same across cultural contexts ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.24$). There was, however, a significant interaction effect for Age $\times$ Culture, $F(1, 38) = 13.45$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .26$, indicating that rural adolescents ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.66$) and their parents ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.52$) evaluated their behaviors as more morally right than wrong (see Figure 4). Urban adolescents, meanwhile, evaluated their behaviors as more morally wrong than right ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.73$), and their parents evaluated their behaviors as almost exclusively morally right ($M = 1.15$, $SD = .49$). Hence, the significant main effect for age was pulled by differences between urban adolescents and their parents.

**Conclusion.** Rural adolescents and their parents not only shared similar types of moral experiences (as seen in Analysis 1) but also similarly evaluated their behaviors as mostly morally right. Urban adolescents and their parents, meanwhile, differed both in terms of experience types and evaluations of their behaviors.

**Moral Reasoning and Discourse**

**Ethic of Community reasoning.** In line with the hypothesis that Community reasoning would be higher for rural than urban participants, there was a main effect for culture, $F(1, 38) = 7.61$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2_p = .17$. This indicated that rural
participants reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Community \((M = 1.95, \ SE = 0.17)\) than did urban participants \((M = 1.18, \ SE = 0.17)\), with rural participants providing an average of nearly two Community justifications for their behaviors and urban participants providing just over one Community justification. A main effect for age, \(F(1, 38) = 7.61, p = .009, \ \eta^2_p = .17\), indicated that parents used more Community reasoning \((M = 1.93, \ SD = 1.10)\) than did adolescents \((M = 1.20, \ SD = 1.29)\).

There was also a trend between age and culture, \(F(1, 38) = 3.99, p = .053, \ \eta^2_p = .10\), indicating that rural adolescents and their parents used similar amounts of Community reasoning \((M = 1.85, \ SD = 1.35 \text{ and } M = 2.05, \ SD = 1.05, \text{ respectively})\). Urban adolescents used Community reasoning the least \((M = 0.55, \ SD = 0.83)\) of all four groups.

**Ethic of Autonomy reasoning.** In line with the hypothesis that Autonomy reasoning would be higher for urban than rural participants, there was a main effect for culture, \(F(1, 38) = 24.55, p = .000, \ \eta^2_p = .39\), indicating that urban participants reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy \((M = 2.08, \ SE = .16)\) than did rural participants \((M = 0.95, \ SE = 0.16)\). On average, urban participants provided just over two Autonomy justifications for their moral behaviors; rural participants, meanwhile, provided less than one Autonomy justification when discussing their behaviors. There was also a main effect for age, \(F(1, 38) = 4.46, p = .041, \ \eta^2_p = .11\), indicating that overall, adolescents spoke more in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy \((M = 1.75, \ SD = 1.32)\) than did their parents \((M = 1.28, \ SD = 1.01)\).

Finally, there was an interaction effect between age and culture, \(F(1, 38) = 4.46, p = .041, \ \eta^2_p = .11\). As predicted, Autonomy reasoning was highest for urban adolescents \((M = 2.55, \ SD = 1.15)\), and they used significantly more Autonomy reasoning than did their parents \((M = 1.60, \ SD = 1.10)\). Meanwhile, rural adolescents and their parents used the same amount of Autonomy reasoning \((M = 0.95, \ SD = 0.95 \text{ and } M = 0.95, \ SD = 0.85, \text{ respectively})\).

**Ethic of Divinity reasoning.** In line with the hypothesis that Ethic of Divinity reasoning would be higher for rural than urban participants, there was a main effect for culture, \(F(1, 38) = 5.03, p = .031, \ \eta^2_p = .12\), with rural participants reasoning more in terms of the Ethic of Divinity \((M = 0.63, \ SE = 0.13)\) than urban participants \((M = 0.20, \ SE = 0.13)\). There was, however, no main effect for age and no interaction effect for Age \(\times\) Culture.

**Overall rural moral reasoning and discourse.** Figure 5 shows overall ethic use for rural participants. Community reasoning dominated for adolescents and parents alike, Autonomy reasoning was the second most commonly used
ethic, and Divinity reasoning lagged behind both Community and Autonomy, though less so for adolescents than parents. What is most notable, though, are the near-horizontal lines, indicating that rural adolescents and their parents invoked the three ethics to similar degrees. To contextualize these quantitative findings, let us turn to examples of moral discourse.

Discussing his moral experience of helping poor villagers, a 43-year-old rural father explained as follows:

> Sometimes they have fewer chances than us—they didn’t have enough to get by. Their family did not have a convenient life. Just 1, 2 persons, I tried to find the chance to help them in their family . . . As I was born Thai, I am happy to be part of this, helping Thai people . . . Our family’s mind loves to help socially . . . We do not neglect each other. People in my neighborhood help each other.

He begins by sharing a specific instance of helping a struggling family, framing helping as a virtue of Thainess. Quickly, though, he pans out to speak in terms of “we” and his “family’s mind,” framing this as his family helping other families. Situating individuals as members of a family, community, and nation was extremely common among rural parents, and reflects the extent to which self and other are experientially and morally woven together in the rural community.

A 44-year-old rural mother who discussed helping drunkards in the village explained, “When they’re sick—they have relatives, but it seems like they don’t have anyone.” She invokes concern for others’ physical well-being by explaining that she buys medicine for them “so that they will get well from their sickness.” She went on to draw from indigenous conceptions of karma,
reasoning that, “I think I made merit. And for my future, when I get old, there will be people who take care of me.” When discussing their experiences, countless other rural parents framed supporting others as a duty that bonds community members.

Rural adolescents also frequently spoke in terms of helping as facilitating group harmony. One 17-year-old girl, for example, explained that helping an ill friend was the right thing to do because, “If we help [sick people], that must be good for the society. We live in a society with others. We should help each other, love each other. Then there will be брпднду (ปรองดอง: harmony).” Those rural participants who discussed immoral behaviors also relied heavily on the Ethic of Community. Another 17-year-old girl explained that disagreeing with her parents was wrong “because I didn’t obey them. But we are teenagers and teenagers like experiencing and doing things, taking risks without listening to their words.” She went on to say, “[I] made them sad and worried about me.” Here, she suggests her behavior was immoral because she did not fulfill her duty to obey her parents, and because it worried and saddened them. Even when discussing psychological experiences of sadness and worry, her parents are framed as a unit to be respected.

Not only was the amount of Community reasoning similar for rural parents and their children, their moral discourses furthermore implied similar moral outlooks. Rural moral discourses, then, were characterized by framing selves as members of social groups, and by highlighting the necessity of being sympathetic, helpful, and harmonized in order to flourish.

Overall urban moral reasoning and discourse. Figure 6 depicts ethic use for urban participants. Particularly notable are the contrasts between urban adolescents and their parents. Whereas parents invoked Autonomy and Community reasoning roughly equally, adolescents’ reasoning was dominated by the Ethic of Autonomy. Community reasoning was rare for adolescents, and Divinity reasoning was rarer still, with just two Divinity codes across all 20 participants.

When reasoning about the morality of their social role-based behaviors, urban parents drew from both Autonomy and Community discourses. A 48-year-old mother who discussed supporting a poor student financially so that she could pursue higher education emphasized her duty as an important socially defined person (a Community sub-ethic): “As a teacher and student consultant . . . I had to help her.” Speaking about wishing to improve the life of one student due to her academic merits, she then used Autonomy reasoning, “This kid, she deserves to study in doctor faculty. Then, her life will be better.” She then panned out to again invoke Community reasoning by contextualizing her behavior as beneficial for Thailand: “They are the future of the country. [We should] give them a chance and push them.”
Another 48-year-old mother explained that quitting her job was “morally wrong because it’s like I wasn’t responsible for my work. It’s like I left my work behind.” Here, she frames work as a personal responsibility, an Autonomy discourse. But she went on to say that her behavior was also morally right as, “I had the responsibility to take care of my children, so I think I’d better do another job that gives me more money than that job.” This time, the notion of responsibility is framed as a responsibility to her children, a Community-based concern.

Urban adolescents, meanwhile, relied on Autonomy reasoning. A 17-year-old boy explained that quitting practicing basketball was wrong in exclusively Autonomy terms:

I’m not fit, first. Second, I’m not the first five players in the game. I don’t get to start, you know—not a starter. Then I hurt my ankle, and I can’t play anymore. And in the past—my teammates, I’m better than them. But after that, they are better than me.

This action could have been considered wrong because it hurt the team; instead, its wrongness revolves around his physical well-being and inferiority.

Two urban adolescents recalled instances of helping strangers and used Autonomy discourse to describe the moral rightness of their behaviors. One such adolescent—a 17-year-old boy—explained, “When you see that someone [is] worried and then we talk to him and he smiles . . . he feels good. And I will feel good that I see someone feel good, too.” Here, the focus is on both the psychological well-being of the individual he helped and on his psychological
well-being and pleasure derived from helping. This is a stark contrast to rural adolescents, whom, even when discussing helping a specific person, typically framed their behaviors as serving a larger community or society.

In a similar vein of the rural adolescent who discussed upsetting her parents by disagreeing with them, a 16-year-old urban boy described upsetting his mother because he “played too much computer.” In explaining why this was wrong, however, he used exclusively Autonomy language: “It’s wrong because I made her cry . . . [and because] I lied to her.” He went on to explain that this “wasted [her] time and made her have a bad day.” His focus, then, is on hurting his mother psychologically and on wasting her time—both Autonomy-based concerns.

**Conclusion.** Urban adolescents and their parents not only shared different types of moral experiences and evaluated their behaviors differently but also reasoned about their behaviors in very different ways. The fact that statistical significance was obtained with such a small sample speaks to the strength of the main effect of culture for all three ethics, and to the interaction effects for Autonomy and Community. Were this study conducted only with the Chiang Mai sample, one may presume that the Autonomy and Community patterns are developmental. The fact that Mae Kiaw adolescents and parents shared a common Community-driven moral language, though, suggests that urban dyadic differences must be understood in light of distinct cultural and generational cohort experiences in the urban setting (a topic to which I return in the discussion).

Divinity was not a dominant discourse as predicted. Even when not using Divinity language to justify their behaviors, though, religion was often infused into the framework of rural adolescents’ moral experiences. Among this group, 20% of private moral experiences involved the temple or monks. Helping behaviors were commonly framed as “making merit”; this is precisely why their mean number of Divinity reasons is higher than other groups. Several rural adolescents reported going to the temple on behalf of the family, acting as religious liaisons of sorts. For rural parents, topics of religion and divinity were frequently woven into other parts of the interview and into the context surrounding the interview. Two parents excused themselves just after the interview to help prepare for a funeral at the temple; another launched into a lengthy discussion about how he must go to the temple, because “if we don’t go, our children will not recognize the temple.” Although rarely reasoning in terms of Divinity, Buddhism and the intergenerational transmission of religion were topics frequently discussed by this group.

Religion was a less common topic of discussion for urban participants. In fact, not a single urban adolescent or parent shared a moral experience
involving the temple or monks. Some urban adolescents who spoke of Divinity in other parts of the interview suggested that “superstitious” aspects of religion are silly. Of those who described religion as important, several pointed specifically to the utility of meditation at this juncture in their lives for improving their test scores, hence helping them get into college. Urban parents who spoke of Divinity in the interview more generally often shared concerns about increasing secularism in Thailand across generations.

**Discussion and Ethnographic Situatedness**

The multilayered analyses indicated dyadic similarities in the rural community, with adolescents and parents discussing similar moral experiences, evaluating their behaviors in similar ways, and using similar moral reasoning to describe their behaviors. In the urban community, there were dyadic differences in terms of experiences discussed, evaluations of their behaviors, and moral reasoning. There were furthermore cultural differences in moral reasoning and urban and rural adolescent moral experience types. These divergent conceptions of the moral self must be situated in light of macro-level globalization-related differences in economics, education, travel, technology, and kinship structures that characterize these communities, as well as distinct moral messages coming from parents, schools, and communities.

Analysis 1 demonstrated that rural adolescents and parents shared a focus on helping and social role experiences. To make sense of such foci, let us return to what we know about the Mae Kiaw and participant demographics, particularly with regard to economic resources, livelihoods, community structure, and kinship ties. Mae Kiaw participants typically resided in sparsely populated agricultural areas where economic resources were limited, lived in multigenerational households, and had close relationships with family members and neighbors. Farming was both the predominant occupation and primary source of sustenance, and villagers provided a great deal of support for one another. As one rural father explained, “People in my neighborhood help each other. We will not just be indifferent. Like vegetables grown here, we can ask if they want it and we will [give it]. We do not sell.” The quotidian intertwinedness of the self and others helps explain rural participants’ focus on cooperation and caring for family and neighbors. Although urban parents also focused on social role experiences, they spoke more in terms of commitments to employers and work relationships than family and village relationships. The present proposal is that shifting economies, labor markets, and livelihoods play a key role in shifting notions of the moral self and social relationships in the urban setting.
Urban adolescent experiences, on the other hand, pertained primarily to dishonesty, honesty, and hurting; they also uniquely focused on stealing. To understand their focus on the individual self, let us recall the emphasis on success and competition in the urban setting. Teachers, parents, and adolescents alike emphasized the impending opening of the ASEAN community as necessitating competition with individuals from other Southeast Asian countries. In the words of one urban adolescent, “If Thai people don’t prepare for globalization, people from Vietnam and Cambodia will come to Thailand and take the jobs, leaving Thai people unemployed.” Their daily lives furthermore reflected active preparation for impending competition. To successfully test into competitive universities and departments (e.g., medicine, engineering, and law) the following year, most urban adolescents were enrolled in intensive supplemental tutoring lessons. For youth residing in Chiang Mai, globalization-related shifts in livelihoods and international relationships have altered education practices to prepare for an increasingly competitive job market, and engendered concomitant changes in definitions of success and how free time is spent to achieve success. The emphasis placed on individual success (which implicitly—and at times, explicitly—necessitates a pitting of self vs. other) at school, at home, and in the community more generally, is a backdrop from which to interpret urban adolescents’ consideration of self-focused moral behaviors.

For both urban and rural adolescents, the variety of social others involved in their experiences demonstrates that Thai adolescents have a wide array of others considered within the moral realm, and supports Hart and Carlo’s (2005) point that adolescents are embedded in multiple moral worlds. Urban adolescents’ experiences, though, included more socially distant others (e.g., strangers, foreigners), suggesting that their moral worlds are wider than rural adolescents. Chiang Mai’s international composition provides urban adolescents with daily opportunities to encounter unfamiliar others in the community and at school. The urban school hosted students from around the world, with whom adolescent participants reported growing close. The extent of tourism in—and expatriate relocation to—the city produces a multicultural context in an otherwise rather ethnically homogeneous country, providing urban adolescents with frequent exposure to socially distant others. Tapp (2002) explains that, for Hmong residing in an increasingly modernized Asia, an explosion of social distance has rendered identity more complex. Urban adolescents’ inclusion of distant others in their private moral worlds suggests that the explosion of social distance is particularly felt by this demographic.

Analysis 2 revealed that urban adolescents stood alone in evaluating their behaviors as more morally wrong than right. Data gathered from their parents’ interviews shed light on this finding. Urban parents expressed deep
concerns about what they envisioned as the moral deterioration of the current generation of Thai teens. They spoke at length—and unprompted—about increasing selfishness, decreasing generosity and respect of elders, lack of adherence to cultural customs, and lack of understanding and interest in religion; several parents referred to their own children as exemplars of such changes. One urban parent explained, “Sharing and generosity for people who have less, now it has become less and less . . . they started to think more about themselves . . . I see that from this generation, from my boy [pause]’s friends.” Another stated bluntly, “This generation, they don’t know too much about [Buddhist] ceremonies, right? About worship, they don’t know too much.”

Urban adolescents’ unique evaluations of their behaviors should be understood alongside their parents’ discourses on a changing moral landscape, and their tendency to blame changes on youth. The present findings suggest that these adolescents may have internalized parental messages regarding the moral degradation of their generation.

Urban adolescents’ minimal Community and Divinity reasoning—indicated in Analysis 3—suggests that their parents’ concerns about moral value shifts are not unfounded. Of all participant groups, only urban adolescents had an almost unilateral focus on the autonomous self. On the relatively rare occasion that urban adolescents raised Community-based concerns, they were always voiced after framing their behavior in Autonomy terms. These findings could profitably be understood in light of the work of Ganjanapan (2003), who suggests that “most members of the new middle class tend to pay attention to their individual and material self-interests” and take family and community for granted. As a result, he argues, middle class members likely experience “moral confusion in the relationship between their ideas of self, family, and community” (p. 133). Although this study did not focus specifically on middle class members, most urban participants would be classified as such. The present results extend Ganjanapan’s argument by showing that such a self-focus is salient particularly for urban adolescents, who were expected to pursue prestigious careers and succeed in “the global society.”

The present findings must also be situated in the context of moral socialization agents, which differed both in type and message across cultural communities. Let us begin with the dominance of Community-based moral reasoning among rural dyads and the fact that Divinity reasoning was used more by rural than urban participants. For Mae Kiaw adolescents, who typically lived with parents, grandparents, and oftentimes more extended kin, family members serve as powerful moral socializers. In fact, rural parents often spoke in great detail about the necessity of spending time with their children, framing themselves as moral guides through which Thai virtues of respect, generosity, and religiosity are maintained for future generations. The
congruent rural adolescent and parent moral personhoods suggest that, in this cultural community, such virtues have been transmitted across generations. This is likely a result of not only parents’ influence on their children’s moral values but also the instantiation of community and divinity-based virtues in other settings where moral values are transmitted. The school, for instance, emphasized community-based morality via volunteerism and a moral portfolio system, and encouraging students to complete work together and to live in harmony with animals on school premises. Divinity-based morality was also emphasized via frequent monk visits and teachings, Buddhist ceremonies, and morning meditation. The symbiotic relationship between villagers and local temples is furthermore learned from a young age through practices such as almsgiving. With matching moral messages across these sites of moral socialization, it is perhaps no wonder that rural adolescents’ moral reasoning and views of self parallel those of their parents.

Meanwhile, urban adolescents were exposed to a wide array of—often-times competing—moral discourses. For instance, urban parents lamented the eradication of cultural practices in favor of global practices, as well as increasing competition and decreasing consideration of others among today’s youth. And yet, the school that urban adolescents attended emphasized the importance of becoming a global citizen and preparation for success in a competitive world. Urban parents also blamed foreigners and the media for eroding Thai culture, and yet, foreigners served as key socializers for urban adolescents in their roles as teachers, classmates, neighbors, and media-based role models. The distinct views of the moral self held by urban adolescents and parents should be understood alongside the discordant demands and discourses to which urban adolescents are exposed in their everyday lives.

With globalization comes shifting ways of spending time and people with whom time is spent (and hence, shifting moral socializers). Chiang Mai adolescents spent a considerable amount of time with friends and foreigners, both in person and virtually. They further reported spending relatively little time at the temple, and a great deal of time online. As one adolescent put it, “Facebook, I spend like 10 hours a day [giggles]. Because you know, when I wake up, the first thing I do isn’t brush teeth or go to the bathroom, but turn on my laptop—check Facebook.” Finally, most Chiang Mai adolescents resided in nuclear households, and hence, grandparents were not key socializers as in the rural setting. The present contention is that urban adolescents’ embeddedness in a maelstrom of messages regarding culture, morality, globality, and success has transformed traditional processes of moral development and intergenerational transmission of moral personhood.
Reflections by Way of Reflexivity

As a Caucasian woman conducting research in Thailand, one may inquire if my status as a racial and ethnic outsider affected my investigation of indigenous conceptions of morality and self. On the one hand, perceived similarities between the researcher and participant may breed an openness that is simply not there without sharing cultural, racial, and ethnic heritage. On the other hand, perceived similarities and assumed understanding of phenomena may cause participants to underexplain themselves when discussing, for instance, why it is wrong to disagree with one’s parents or right to help the village drunkard. Such questions are essential to consider when psychological processes are studied across cultural lines, and there are no clear answers. It is important to note, however, that I was an outsider with linguistic and local knowledge. As one Mae Kiaw informant whispered while gripping my shoulder, “Your mannerisms are just like a Thai person—you smile and speak like a Thai! We are so happy when a farang speaks Thai, because it shows they want to learn about [our] culture.” Throughout my fieldwork, I came to see my position as an outsider interested in—and capable of understanding—local subjectivities as enabling unique connections and insights.

Similarly, one may ask if interview language could have influenced participants’ responses. For instance, could interviewing in English have restricted urban adolescents’ ability to express concepts beyond their linguistic proficiency? This, too, is an important question. Recall, however, that it was exceedingly rare for an interview to take place entirely in English. Rather, those who wished to be interviewed in English switched to speaking Thai or Kam Muang if conveying a particular concept proved challenging. Future research could control for this by requiring that all participants speak standard Thai (which may have isolated rural parents, many of whom rarely speak it) or Kam Muang (which may have isolated those urban adolescents who do not often speak Kam Muang in school or at home). Mandating a universal interview language would also strip participants of some agency in the interview context. Perhaps, rather than envisioning the language that participants elected to speak as a confound, it should be viewed as a window into their preferences and the experiences they seek—which, as with their conceptions of the moral self—was distinct for urban adolescents.

Conclusion

The divergent conceptions of moral self across cultural communities separated by a mere 25 miles, and between urban adolescents and parents, indicate a double-gap in models of moral personhood. Situating these findings in
light of the relative degrees of globalization in each cultural community, this study speaks to the moral psychological impact of globalization. In so doing, it supports theoretical work that proposes an emergent cultural gap between adolescents and parents as a result of globalization (Jensen, 2011b; Jensen et al., 2011). Importantly, it also extends such work by demonstrating that the urban dyadic gap is not only cultural, but also moral, in nature. The present focus on moral development furthermore expands the emerging psychology of globalization, which to date has focused almost exclusively on identity and cultural identity development. Pointing to the malleability of morality and self, findings reveal the implications of shifting sociocultural contexts on conceptions of oneself as a moral person.

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Notes

1. To protect the identities of those in this small community, the rural field site has been given a pseudonym. The schools in both communities have also been given a pseudonym.
2. The criteria were as follows: First, adolescents and their parents must both live in the district. Second, in order to ensure a sufficiently “urban” sample, only those Chiang Mai dyads who lived in a 10-mile radius of the school were eligible. In Mae Kiaw, it was necessary to expand the radius to 20 miles given that there was only one Matthayom 4-6 school in the entire district.
3. The Private Moral Experience Content Analysis Coding Scheme is available from the author upon request.
4. A priori ANOVA indicated that participants did not differ in number of moral reasons provided; hence, total number of reasons was not entered as a covariate.
5. Only one rural adolescent participant intended to enroll in tutoring, but he quickly dropped out due to the distance and financial resources required to drive to the city for tutoring sessions.
6. Demographic questionnaire data indicate that Buddhist urban adolescent participants attended the temple roughly once a month; Buddhist rural adolescent participants, meanwhile, reported attending two to three times per month.

7. It is not the case that rural adolescents were unexposed to media but that it was less integrated into their daily lives. Recall, for instance, that many rural adolescents did not have Internet and/or a working computer at home. Many adolescents reported having to go to school or an Internet Café for Internet access.

References


**Author Biography**

Jessica McKenzie is an assistant professor in the Department of Child, Family, and Consumer Sciences at California State University, Fresno. Her primary research interests fall into two domains: moral development across cultural contexts and the psychological impact of globalization. She is particularly interested in the intersection of those domains, and she has also examined related topics such as identity development, socialization, and religion. In addition to her work in northern Thailand, she has analyzed moral discourses of children, adolescents, and adults from evangelical and mainline Presbyterian communities in the United States.