

Globalization and the changing nature of adolescence

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Abstract

Modern globalization, which entails an explosion of intercultural contact via direct and indirect means, has reshaped the lives of adolescents around the world in dramatic ways over the last two decades. This article focuses both on the key vehicles of globalization, and on how globalization has altered the cultural practices, internal experiences, and core relationships of adolescents growing up in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). As revealed in this article, some effects of globalization on adolescents appear to be universal. Across cultural contexts, for instance, globalization encourages adolescent participation in global practices, adoption of global identities, and prioritization of global values. In particular, research in diverse corners of the world clarifies that autonomous values are enhanced with increasing exposure to globalization. Yet this article also clarifies that the ways in which modern globalization manifests in local contexts—and therefore the particular ways in which globalization alters adolescence—is not uniform. Rather, adolescents synthesize global practices, values, and identities alongside local ones in ways that are creative and culturally specific.

Key points

- Modern globalization has dramatically reshaped the lives of adolescents around the world.
- Over the last two decades, adolescents in low and middle-income countries have been especially affected by globalization.
- Key vehicles of globalization include: technology, travel, trade, and transnationalism.
- Globalization has altered adolescent cultural practices, internal experiences, and core relationships.
- Some effects of globalization appear to be universal—for instance, globalization exposure encourages autonomous values among adolescents.
- Because globalization manifests in locally specific ways, other effects of globalization on adolescents are culturally specific.

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Introduction

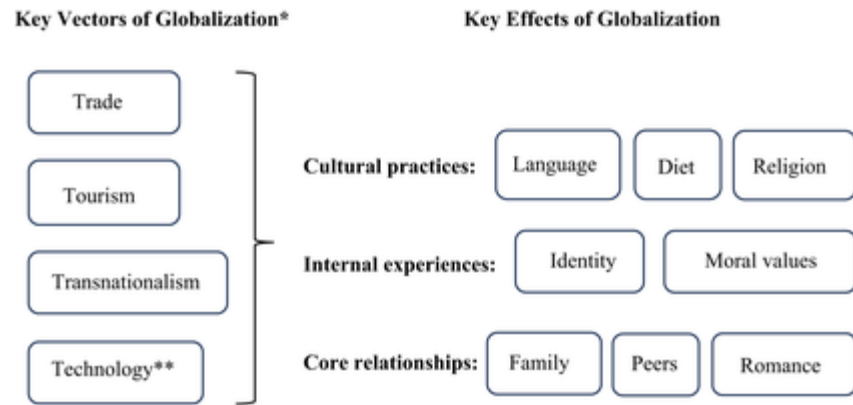
Modern globalization, which entails an explosion of intercultural contact via direct and indirect means, has reshaped the lives of adolescents around the world in dramatic ways over the last two decades. Although those across the life course, from young children to older adults, have been affected by modern globalization, no one has been more dramatically affected than adolescents. The reason for adolescents' sensitivity to the effects of globalization is twofold. First, adolescence is a developmental period characterized by pronounced openness to new cultural ideas, values, and behaviors—including those that have been introduced via globalization. Second, adolescents are generally more interested in popular and global media—key vehicles of cultural change—than are children or adults (McKenzie and Jensen, 2024).

To counteract the common exclusive emphasis on adolescents from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) societies in psychological literature (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010), this article focuses on the wide-reaching impact of globalization on adolescents growing up in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is an especially appropriate focus because, as this article will reveal, globalization has profoundly impacted adolescents in developing and emerging world regions in recent decades. To offer both a broad and specific portrait, the author's decade-long research in northern Thailand will be threaded through the article, woven together alongside relevant literature from other LMICs.

The remainder of this article is organized according to two overarching sections, previewed in Fig. 1. First, the meaning of globalization will be discussed, with particular attention paid to the components (i.e., key vectors) of globalization that are most salient for adolescents. Next, the discussion will turn to how globalization matters (i.e., key effects) for adolescents. Within that section, attention will be paid to how globalization has—and has not—altered adolescent cultural practices, internal experiences, and core relationships.

What is globalization?

Modern globalization is presently conceptualized as a collective chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McKenzie and Jensen, 2024) characterized by an explosion of intercultural contact—particularly via the 4 Ts: *trade*, *tourism*, *transnationalism*, and *technology* (Eales et al., 2020). Although the flow of products, people, and ideas across cultures is not new, the global scope and complexity of this flow, enabled by the 4 Ts, is unprecedented historically (Jensen et al., 2011). As the following paragraphs will make clear, each of the 4 Ts has enhanced engagement with global cultures in a way that did not exist for previous generations (Arnett, 2002; Eales et al., 2020).



Note. *Based on the work of Eales et al., 2020.

Note. **Technology is presently conceptualized as the cardinal “T” of globalization, as it enables indirect intercultural contact—even for those with little direct intercultural contact via the other 3 Ts.

Fig. 1 Key vectors and effects of globalization on adolescents in LMICs. Note. *Based on the work of Eales et al. (2020). **Technology is presently conceptualized as the cardinal “T” of globalization, as it enables indirect intercultural contact—even for those with little direct intercultural contact via the other 3 Ts.

Trade

Young people around the world now have access to a wide variety of products imported from distant countries. Especially salient products for adolescents include global clothing products (e.g., those available in multinational clothing stores) and global food products (e.g., those available in global fast-food chains, multinational convenience stores, and Western grocery stores). In urban Thai cities, for instance, the presence of retail outlets such as US-based American Eagle, Sweden-based H&M, and Japanese-based UNIQLO have rendered global fashion trends both visible and attainable—at least among youth whose families have sufficient financial capital.

Also in urban Thai settings, consumption of food from distant countries is made possible via a plethora of fast-food chains such as McDonalds, KFC, and Starbucks, 7-Eleven convenience stores, and grocery stores such as Tesco and Makro. Collectively, these global stores and restaurants make it possible for adolescents to purchase and consume products from nations with substantial cultural capital in that particular context, thereby allowing adolescents to vicariously participate in non-local cultures (Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012).

Globalized contexts, then, are those in which young people are regularly exposed to global marketplaces. Whereas adolescents growing up in urban settings generally have more opportunities to participate in the global marketplace, those growing up in rural settings are generally less exposed to this facet of globalization. Relatedly, adolescents in rural LMIC settings are often less positioned to participate in the global marketplace due to lack of financial capital (Castañeda et al., 2016; World Bank, 2022).

Tourism

With globalization, adolescents experience direct intercultural contact with people from diverse cultural contexts via tourism. Although adolescents growing up in tourist hotbeds within LMICs may have never themselves traveled abroad, they may nevertheless have considerable opportunities to see and interact with people from distant countries. This serves as a vehicle through which adolescents can learn about the practices and values of individuals from diverse parts of the world.

For example, adolescents growing up in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket, Thailand are likely to experience frequent exposure to individuals from High Income Countries (HIC) Western world regions (e.g., the US, Western Europe, Australia) as well as HIC Eastern countries (e.g., Japan, Korea). Relevant exposure includes both contact that is relatively temporary and fleeting, such as encounters with tourists on holiday and expatriates moving through their daily routine, as well as longer-term and likely more consequential contact, such as daily exposure to foreign teachers. Such intercultural contact can have a cumulative effect (Eales et al., 2020), gradually serving to influence the practices and values of adolescents.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism, or having connections and ways of life that incorporate elements from a home country and destination country (Eales et al., 2020) is another important component of globalization. For adolescents, especially relevant examples of transnationalism include experiences of having studied abroad, as well as having relatives migrate internationally as a result of transnational marriages or with the aim of improving one's own financial condition or the financial condition of one's family.

In Thailand, for instance, adolescents—particularly those growing up in urban settings—may experience transnationalism directly, via opportunities to study abroad in Western contexts, such as the US and France (McKenzie, 2019a). Some adolescents are indirectly exposed to global cultures via their family members having relocated abroad for the purpose of transnational marriage (e.g., with an aunt having moved to Germany with her German husband, who she met while he was on holiday in Thailand) or for the purpose of earning money to improve the family's financial condition via remittances (e.g., with an older brother having moved to South Korea to earn a substantial salary as a factory worker). As a result of keeping in touch with these family members (via technology—a point to which we now turn), adolescents are indirectly exposed to practices and values of individuals from distant cultures.

Technology

Technology is the cardinal “T,” particularly for adolescents, and the last several years represents a period in which we have witnessed a boom in popular and scientific interest on how this component of globalization is affecting adolescents (e.g., Nesi et al., 2022). In spite of this swell of interest, the scientific gaze remains largely fixed on adolescents living in HICs such as the US and Western Europe, where digital media has been integrated into the lives of adolescents for some time (Manago and McKenzie, 2022; McKenzie et al., 2024). A focus on the impact of digital media on adolescents growing up in LMICs is long overdue, as the last two decades represent a digital media explosion for youth in LMICs in particular (Manago and McKenzie, 2022). Between 2000 and 2022, internet growth rates in Africa, Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and the Middle East ranged from 2300% to 13,000%, compared to just 200%–600% internet growth rates in Europe, North America, and Oceania/Australia during the same period of time (Internet Usage Statistics, 2023; Manago and McKenzie, 2022). Indeed, reports reveal that the countries ranking in the top 10 worldwide in internet use (which ranges between 8 h per day online in Thailand to over 9 h per day online in South Africa) overwhelmingly fall into the LMIC bracket (Statista, 2023a). Late adolescents and young adults typically spend more time online than other age groups (Statista, 2023b).

Even in settings in which adolescents experience little direct intercultural contact via the other 3 Ts (trade, tourism, transnationalism), technology renders intercultural contact possible indirectly. With technology, even adolescents growing up in relatively remote settings can be regularly exposed to the practices and values of those from distant cultures. In spite of this fact, digital divides remain within LMICs, with internet access and use generally more common in urban areas, among youth with relatively high levels of formal schooling, and among youth who are proficient in English (McKenzie et al., 2024).

It is also important to note that technology can serve as a bridge across the other Ts. Consider a Thai adolescent using LINE (akin to WhatsApp) to keep in touch with their older brother who recently relocated to South Korea; a Thai adolescent using Facebook to maintain contact with the American family who hosted them while they studied abroad in Wisconsin five years earlier; a Thai adolescent learning about and coveting global fashion trends through TikTok and Instagram, and then visiting their local H&M store to purchase these clothes for themselves. As these examples make clear, although heuristically beneficial to distinguish the 4 Ts, substantial overlap exists in how they show up in adolescents' lives and in the roles they play in (re)shaping the lives of adolescents.

How does globalization matter for adolescents?

As the previous section makes clear, the 4 Ts of globalization facilitate intercultural contact for adolescents, even for those who have not traveled beyond their hometown. Although the vectors of globalization overlap across cultural contexts, their impact is neither uniform nor homogenizing. Indeed, localization—the counterforce of globalization—can serve to promote the maintenance, defense, and even expansion of local values and practices (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007; McKenzie and Jensen, 2024). The dual effects of globalization and localization will be built out in the pages that follow.

Research suggests that globalization has altered what adolescents do (i.e., their cultural practices), who adolescents are and what they believe in (i.e., their cultural identities and values), and how adolescents relate to others (i.e., their core relationships). This section will detail how exactly globalization has altered adolescent development in each of these three arenas.

Cultural practices

Modern globalization has reshaped the cultural practices in which adolescents engage. The present focus is on how globalization has affected practices pertaining to: language (including what languages adolescents do and do not speak, as well as how and with whom adolescents speak those languages), food (including what adolescents eat and how they orient themselves toward food), and religion (including both the religion with which adolescents identify and how they think about the role of religion in their lives).

Language

The 4 Ts have enabled the worldwide spread of global languages. Although English is the most obvious global language to which adolescents around the world are now exposed, other global languages are commonly integrated depending on the context. For instance, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese languages hold considerable cultural capital in Southeast Asian LMICs. Indeed, research suggests that adolescents in Thailand now deem these languages important to speak, alongside English (McKenzie, 2019a). For Thai adolescents, speaking these global languages is deemed important both because they are perceived as a route to accumulating financial capital in the future (as those who are proficient in global languages are commonly deemed more desirable to hire) and as a route to securing social capital in the peer context (as Thai youth often deem it “cool” to speak global languages proficiently).

As proficiency in global languages becomes increasingly expected of adolescents growing up in LMICs, a corresponding challenge arises: the potential displacement and endangerment of local languages—a trend that has resulted in the decline of linguistic diversity around the world (Endangered Languages Archive, 2023; Jensen et al., 2011). In Kenya, it has been argued that positioning English as the language of instruction is a form of linguistic imperialism that threatens the survival of local linguistic and cultural identities (Sheikh et al., 2023). One challenge for LMICs around the world, then, is that of encouraging adolescent proficiency in global languages, while ensuring that native languages, indigenous epistemologies, and local cultural identities are not erased.

Counter-examples of the trend toward native language erasure do exist—though such examples are thus far largely concentrated in higher-income nations. For example, in the face of dramatically declining Welsh language use, Wales recently mandated that all students must study Welsh language (Wightwick, 2019). As a result of this overhaul of the school curriculum, Welsh is now the fastest growing language in the United Kingdom. In this example, we see localization (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007) as a reaction to globalization—a force that is deemed a threat to maintenance of local cultural identity. This sort of reclaiming of an endangered local language, and therefore also local cultural identification, may be less common in LMICs at present because substantial pressure exists in the opposite direction (i.e., stressing the importance of global language proficiency) due to perceptions that this is a prerequisite for success in a rapidly globalized world.

With the digital media explosion in recent decades, complaints have been lodged by parents, teachers, and the like, about the inevitable decline of adolescent language and grammar skills. Although popular culture commonly problematizes digital technology and its perceived contribution to eroding adolescent language development, research suggests that this concern is largely unfounded (e.g., Tagliamonte, 2016). In fact, texting can help adolescents navigate key developmental challenges of establishing autonomy and identity, as well as establishing and maintaining intimate peer and romantic relationships (Ehrenreich et al., 2020)—a point to which we later return. Indeed, linguists suggest that adolescents’ “text talk” is contributing to language innovation and enrichment, rather than language destruction (Tagliamonte, 2016).

Diet

Much like the effects of globalization on adolescent language, the effects of globalization on adolescent diet are complex and contradictory. On the one hand, rising incomes and food availability have positively affected health, with malnutrition having eroded in many developing and emerging countries over the past several decades. On the other hand, rates of overweight and obesity are rising so rapidly that health experts have raised alarm about the “obesity pandemic” in LMICs—world regions that have not historically dealt with such issues (McKenzie, 2019a).

Adolescents residing in globalized urban regions of LMICs are more at risk of overweight and obesity given the relative availability of fast food and globalization-related time pressures (World Health Organization, 2021). In recent years, however, Western food companies such as Nestle have aggressively expanded to isolated regions of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This expansion, paired with junk food advertisements aimed at young people, has prompted skyrocketing obesity and health problems, even among youth who live in rural regions of LMICs (Jacobs and Richtel, 2017). Research in urban Jamaica has revealed two risk factors for young people’s consumption of unhealthy American foods: identification with US culture (a side effect of globalization) and the desire to achieve peer acceptance (a hallmark of adolescence) (Ferguson et al., 2018). In urban Thailand, too, adolescents often report consuming foreign fast food with friends for the purpose of securing peer acceptance, even if they do not personally enjoy eating this food (McKenzie, 2019a).

Underlining the complex effects of modern globalization on adolescent diet is the fact that globalization also represents a risk factor for eating disorders. In Fiji, where globalization has dramatically altered local social norms in recent years, disordered eating among adolescents is on the rise (Gerbasi et al., 2014). Researchers have tied this rise in Fijian adolescent eating disorders to the tandem effects of social and economic development, and exposure to mass media—all powerful vectors of globalization (Gerbasi et al., 2014).

Religion

Historically, religion has represented a key component of cultural identification and social cohesion in LMICs (Odukoya et al., 2022). Developmentally, religion assists individual meaning-making, helping adolescents answer key questions about who they are and how they fit into the world (Jensen, 2021; King, 2003). As with language and diet, globalization is likely to affect adolescent religiosity in complex and culturally variable ways.

Globalization has, on the one hand, made adolescents more aware of distant religions to which they have not been historically exposed. For this reason, adolescents today may be more likely to explore and identify with religions that do not align with the religion(s) that are dominant in their home country. In overwhelmingly Buddhist Thailand, for instance, this may include adolescents engaging in Christian religious practices and identifying with Christianity—perhaps due in part to exposure to Christian foreigners directly (as teach-

ers and peers) and indirectly (via technology). On the other hand, globalization and exposure to diverse religions may contribute to a rise in adolescent secularism (Jensen, 2021). Although youth in LMICs are generally more religious than those in wealthier countries, this may change as a result of socioeconomic development and exposure to diverse cultures and worldviews via the 4 Ts.

Even when adolescents maintain identification with their “birth religion,” adolescents growing up in more and less globalized contexts likely hold distinct views of religion. Research suggests, for instance, that Thai adolescents with more extensive exposure to globalization hold overwhelmingly autonomous views of religion—engaging in religious practices for their own psychological and actual benefit (e.g., making offerings to monks at the temple in hopes that this good deed will assist their admittance to a prestigious university (McKenzie, 2019b; McKenzie et al., 2019b)). Rural adolescents with minimal exposure to globalization, meanwhile, regard religion as fundamentally relational. That is, religion is practiced alongside, and aims to serve, family members—including those that are living and deceased (e.g., temporary ordination as a monk to ensure a positive afterlife for one’s recently deceased grandparent (McKenzie et al., 2019b)). Little is known about the effects of globalization on adolescent religiosity (Jensen, 2021)—a pressing area for future research.

Internal experiences

Adolescence is a developmental period in which determining who one is and how one fits into the world (i.e., identity) takes center stage. It is also a period in which determining what one believes and the moral values that guide one’s life comes to the fore. For adolescents, globalization affects both cultural identity development and the development of moral values.

Cultural identity

Over the last decade, research has convincingly revealed that globalization facilitates adolescent identification with non-local cultures. By virtue of technology and the other Ts of globalization, even relatively place-bound adolescents are now—to varying degrees—socialized into, and as a result may identify with, distant or global cultures (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007; Jensen et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2020).

“Remote acculturation” refers to the fact that, with exposure to the 4 Ts, many young people develop bicultural identities that are rooted not only in their local culture but also in remote cultures (Eales et al., 2020; Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012). This globalization-inspired biculturalism is particularly relevant for adolescents and emerging adults, who are uniquely engaged in the developmental tasks of internalizing cultural values (Knight et al., 2010) and exploring and committing to an identity (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). Among adolescents residing in urban Jamaica, roughly one-third demonstrate a bicultural “Americanized Jamaican” profile, where they added aspects of European American culture alongside a strong Jamaican identity. Compared to their island peers who retained a “traditional Jamaican” profile, bicultural Americanized Jamaicans had a stronger orientation to European American culture, distinct family values, and a distinct orientation toward family relationships (Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012)—a topic to which we return shortly.

Research in South and Southeast Asia, too, has shown that exposure to globalization promotes acculturation to remote cultures. In India (Ozer et al., 2017; Rao et al., 2013) and Thailand (e.g., McKenzie, 2019a, 2020), adolescents and young adults who were reared in or moved to a globalized urban context often identified with distant Western (e.g., North American, Western European) cultures. Notably, though, globalization can also inspire adolescents to identify with more proximal Eastern cultures that have been popularized by the 4 Ts—particularly those with significant social and financial capital. Globalization, then, may promote adolescent identification with multiple cultures, including some with universal pull (i.e., identification with Western cultures) and others that are culturally specific (i.e., in the Thai context, identification with Japanese, Korean, and Chinese cultures).

Moral values

Research in diverse world regions—including Central America, Africa, and Southeast Asia—has shown that exposure to one or more of the 4 Ts pushes young people’s values in a more autonomous direction. Though this appears to be a relatively universal effect, research also points to ways in which the 4 Ts may also be a vehicle through which local cultural-moral values are preserved.

Decades-long research in a Maya community of Southern Mexico, which tracked value changes over time, found that individualistic values were increasingly endorsed across generations (Manago, 2014; Manago and Pacheco, 2019). This work highlights distinct influences across generations, revealing the unique impact of three globalization-related forces at different time points: (1) the introduction of commerce in the community in the 1970s–1980s, (2) the introduction and popularization of formal schooling in the community in the 1990s–2000s, and (3) the installation of a communication tower and introduction of social media in the community in 2010. Each shift served to expose young people in this historically collectivistic context to ideas that center the individual, in turn rendering young people more likely to endorse autonomous values of personal choice, fairness, and equality.

This change in young people’s values has created a chasm between adolescents and their parents—a topic that will be addressed in greater detail in the following section. This program of research also, however, reveals that globalization does not exclusively push young people’s values in an autonomous direction, as forces of globalization (such as technology) are also used in locally determined ways. In Southern Mexico, for instance, media are envisioned as tools that can promote family cohesion and reinforce patriarchal values (Manago and Pacheco, 2019).

Field experiments in Ethiopia also show the power of technology in pushing adolescent values in an autonomous direction, without necessarily eroding traditional cultural values. In one study, Ethiopian adolescents without prior exposure to laptop computers were given laptops, and researchers tracked the values that these youth endorsed to see if they did or did not change after having been introduced to this technology (Hansen et al., 2012). One year after laptops were introduced, those adolescents who had used laptops scored signifi-

cantly higher on values emphasizing autonomous decision making and individual achievement, compared to adolescents who did not have laptops and whose laptops had broken. Notably, however, technology exposure did not decrease adolescents' collectivist values—again pointing to the endurance of local values of community and interdependence, even with exposure to this cardinal T of globalization.

In Thailand, interview and survey research alike (McKenzie, 2018; McKenzie and Jensen, 2024) has shown that adolescents growing up in a globalized urban setting prioritize autonomous values more so than do adolescents growing up in a nearby rural setting. Urban-dwelling Thai adolescents also prioritize autonomous values more so than do their parents, who were already adults by the time that digital media was introduced in this country. Yet research in the same region of Thailand also reveals that locally specific community values of filial piety and age-based hierarchy are maintained and even reasserted via technology (McKenzie et al., 2019a) and with exposure to globalization more generally (McKenzie, 2020).

With globalization, then, autonomous values do not necessarily replace, but rather become integrated in a locally specific way such that they can function alongside—and perhaps even facilitate—longstanding cultural values. Long-term research in LMICs will be necessary to clarify whether and how local values hold across future generations of adolescents, or with long-term exposure to the 4 Ts, eventually dampen in their importance.

Core relationships

Thus far, this article has focused primarily on the individual-level effects of globalization on adolescents living in LMICs. Research also reveals, however, that globalization has altered adolescent relationships with three core groups of people: family, peers and friends, and romantic partners. In the following paragraphs, we highlight a selection of this work and point to important areas for future research.

Family relationships

As previously discussed, autonomous values are increasingly prioritized among adolescents in LMICs as a result of globalization. While adolescent values are prone to shift, their parents' values are less likely to shift. Theory and research suggest that these dissonant cultural values, and to some extent also dissonant cultural practices, drives a cultural gap between adolescents and parents (Jensen et al., 2011).

In urban Jamaica, bicultural “Americanized Jamaican” adolescents (i.e., those that identify with European American culture as a result of remote acculturation) hold less traditional family values than do those Jamaican adolescents who do not identify with European American culture (Ferguson and Bornstein, 2012). That is, bicultural Americanized Jamaican adolescents felt less obligated to respect, obey, and help their parents, resulting in larger adolescent—parent discrepancies in family values than among non-remotely acculturated Jamaican adolescents. Behavioral differences were also evident, with Americanized Jamaican adolescents experiencing greater conflict with parents than non-remotely acculturated Jamaican adolescents. This research, which points to an emergent parent—child acculturation gap as a result of globalization, mirrors the immigration-inspired parent—child acculturation gap, due to adolescents and parents having dissonant ways of adapting—or not adapting—to new cultural influences (Czyrnoniewicz-Klippel, 2019; Jensen et al., 2011).

In fact, many parallels exist when considering the effects of globalization on adolescent—parent relationships and the effects of immigration on adolescent—parent relationships. Among immigrant-origin families in Western countries, for instance, one key challenge that parents may face is that of raising their child in a cultural context that differs rather dramatically from the context in which they grew up themselves (Prevo and Tamis-Lemonda, 2017). Similarly, adolescents growing up in LMICs under the heavy blanket of the 4 Ts essentially grow up in a distinct cultural context than their parents did, even if they grow up in the exact same house as did their parents.

Importantly, however, adolescent—parent relationships are not uniform within nations. Because socioeconomic development generally renders family relationships less hierarchical (Kagitebasi, 2017), we are likely to see less hierarchical relationships among urban, middle-class families in LMICs who have more exposure to globalization. Research coming out of Southeast Asia suggests that traditionally hierarchical power dynamics within the family are undergoing dramatic transformation as a result of globalization (Czyrnoniewicz-Klippel, 2019; McKenzie, 2019a; McKenzie et al., 2019a). Research further suggests that, although filial piety remains a core guiding value among Thai adolescents—even among those with substantial exposure to globalization (McKenzie, 2020; McKenzie and Jensen, 2024)—this family-centered value is adapted such that it aligns with autonomous global values of material consumption and the accumulation of financial capital.

Urban and higher-SES families in LMICs with more exposure to the 4 Ts are likely to see swifter and more dramatic restructuring of family relationships—a side effect of increasing adolescent values of autonomy, equality, and self-expression (Dost-Gözkán, 2022). Rural and lower-SES families with less exposure to the 4 Ts, meanwhile, may maintain family dynamics that are grounded in age-based hierarchy (McKenzie, 2019a), as well as other locally-specific traditional values such as familism, traditional gender roles, and the avoidance of family conflict (Dost-Gözkán, 2022). Contrary to early claims that globalization will contribute to a homogenized global culture, research suggests that globalization contributes to within-nation heterogeneity.

Peer relationships

Globalization transforms the nature of adolescent relationships with peers and friends in a number of ways. On the one hand, the intercultural contact afforded by the 4 Ts significantly broadens the kinds of people that adolescents are apt to meet, emulate, and befriend. As one example: Just two decades ago, adolescents living in LMICs who were required or wished to learn foreign languages were largely restricted to learning those languages within the walls of their high school classroom, and to studying foreign languages via textbooks and dictionaries. Today, adolescents growing up in LMICs can supplement their English language studies via YouTube, scroll English language content on TikTok, and interact with peers from diverse corners of the globe in English while gaming. Whereas the term “peers”

historically called to mind those with whom young people are in contact by virtue of schooling and neighborhood contact, globalization has rendered “peers” much broader in scope and much less place-bound.

In addition to altering the meaning of peers and the landscape in which adolescents encounter peers, globalization has altered how adolescents relate to their peers and which peers are accepted and rejected (Chen, 2011). Research at the turn of the 21st century tied economic globalization to shifting cultural values, which in turn reshaped peer acceptance and rejection. In China, shy children have historically been accepted by their peers—likely because shyness aligned with longstanding cultural values of social harmony and modesty. Between 1990 and 2002, a period marked by China's increasing embeddedness in the market economy, shy children were increasingly rejected—likely because this wave of globalization ushered in new values of independence and self-confidence—values that are essentially antithetical to shyness (Chen et al., 2005). Large-scale research across diverse settings will be necessary to reveal how local cultural norms intersect with globalization and potentially alter how young people relate to one another as peers and as friends.

Romantic relationships

Globalization influences how adolescents meet potential romantic partners. Most obviously, the 4 Ts have made it possible for adolescents to develop romantic relationships that transcend national boundaries as a result of direct or indirect contact. In addition to influencing with whom adolescents develop romantic relationships and how those relationships take shape, globalization is also bound to influence how romantic relationships come to an end, and what adolescents look for in and expect of romantic partners more generally.

Young people in LMICs have historically held more conservative views of dating relationships. With globalization, these youth—beginning now at a very young age—are increasingly exposed to Western media and narratives of romance that are commonly promoted via Western media. As a result of this exposure, traditionally gendered values of sexual purity and chastity may loosen, pushing dating relationships to an earlier age, marriage to a later age, and fundamentally shifting the nature of dating in adolescence. We see evidence of such shifts in the fact that rural Thai adolescents with little exposure to the 4 Ts commonly echo their parents' concerns that adolescent girls and young women should preserve their sexual purity in order to preserve their dignity (McKenzie et al., 2021). Those Thai adolescents growing up in more globalized urban settings, meanwhile, rarely endorse traditional values pertaining to sexual purity—likely due to their substantial exposure to Western and global norms and values via the 4 Ts.

Exposure to the 4 Ts has also altered who is deemed a romantic partner in the first place. Exposure to Western-dominated films and media that idealize romantic love (Hatfield et al., 2020; McKenzie et al., 2021), for instance, likely reshapes the partnerships that adolescents in LMICs envision for themselves—spearheading an especially dramatic transformation in nations such as India, where family has long exerted considerable control over relationship formation. In India and elsewhere, globalization has pushed visions of relationships in an autonomous direction, with individual agency and personal satisfaction now taking center stage. As a result, love marriages are increasingly common in LMICs where arranged marriages have long been normative (Allendorf, 2013; Padilla et al., 2007).

Views of same-sex marriage among youth in LMICs are also changing with media exposure and increasing endorsement of autonomous values. The first same-sex marriages took place in the Netherlands in 2001; in the decades since, same-sex marriage has been legalized—albeit slowly—in 34 countries, the vast majority of which are HICs in North America and Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2023). Although same-sex marriage remains illegal in most of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa, popular opinion is changing, with increasingly liberal attitudes toward sex and sexuality in LMICs—especially among adolescents and young adults (Lin, 2022; The Economist, 2022; Xinghui, 2021). In Southeast Asia, increasing acceptance of same-sex relationships has largely been tied to the influence of social media, K-pop (Korean popular music), and the presence of gay characters on Netflix (Xinghui, 2021). In the coming decades, adolescents in LMICs are bound to mobilize globalization-inspired autonomous values, both to determine their own romantic partners and to advocate for LGBT rights in the eye of the law and in the gaze of society more generally.

Conclusion

Modern globalization has dramatically reshaped the lives of adolescents growing up in LMICs over the last two decades. As highlighted throughout this article, some effects of globalization on adolescents appear to be universal. Across cultural contexts, globalization encourages adolescent participation in global practices, adoption of global identities, and prioritization of global values. In particular, research in diverse corners of the world clarifies that autonomous values are enhanced with globalization exposure. Yet this article also clarifies that the ways in which this collective chronosystem manifests in local contexts—and therefore the particular ways in which globalization reshapes adolescence—is not uniform. Rather, adolescents synthesize global practices, values, and identities alongside local ones in ways that are creative and culturally specific. Although this much is clear, the empirical study of how globalization affects adolescent development is still relatively young, and future research is needed to tease apart how globalization affects adolescents' lives in ways that are both universally shared and culturally unique.

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