

# HOW ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS VIEW ETHICS

## Moral Muteness, Moral Myopia, and Moral Imagination

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines how advertising agency personnel perceive, process, and think about ethical issues. We conducted in-depth, elite interviews with advertising practitioners at all levels in 29 agencies in eight cities. Many of our informants reported few ethical concerns in their own work or in advertising in general. They exhibited "moral myopia," a distortion of moral vision that prevents moral issues from coming into focus, and "moral muteness," meaning that they rarely talk about ethical issues. We find that the reasons for moral muteness and moral myopia are categorizable. There were, however, "seeing/talking" advertising practitioners who demonstrated "moral imagination" when responding to ethical problems. We compare the manner in which the ethically sensitive practitioners contemplate and respond to ethical issues with those characterized as having moral muteness and moral myopia. We also find that the agency context in which advertising practitioners work is important in terms of ethical sensitivity. We discuss implications for theory, research, practice, and education.

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