

San Diego State University

Program in Educational Leadership Dissertation Defense Announcement

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Title of Dissertation: Ethical Dispositions and Data Use: Exploring the Role of Moral Identity and Moral Reasoning in Teachers' Data Driven Decision-Making

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Abstract

The increasing use of data in education has heightened the importance of ethical decision-making in how student information is interpreted and applied. This study examined how teachers' ethical dispositions, operationalized through moral identity and moral reasoning, relate to ethical decision-making in data-related educational scenarios. A convergent mixed methods design was used to integrate quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected using the Moral Identity Scale (MIS) and the shortened Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2), with valid cases of 127 for moral identity and 86 for moral reasoning. Ethical decision-making was assessed using a custom scenario-based ethical data use instrument with a subsample of 21 participants. Descriptive results indicated high levels of moral identity, a predominance of postconventional reasoning, and ethical decision-making scores concentrated in the upper range. No statistically significant relationships were found between moral identity, moral reasoning, and ethical decision-making variables. Qualitative analysis identified five themes: student best interest, professional responsibility, equity and fairness, institutional pressures, and contextual influences. Integrated findings revealed patterns of convergence, partial alignment, and divergence between dispositions and decision-making. The central finding of this study is that teachers' moral identity and moral reasoning matter, but do not determine ethical decision-making. Instead, decision-making is shaped by contextual and organizational conditions. Implications indicate that improving ethical data use requires designing systems that support teachers in enacting ethical, equity-centered decisions.

Keywords: ethical decision-making, moral identity, moral reasoning, data literacy, mixed methods, educational data use