

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 from 164 educators 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