Although the American Psychological Association (APA) (Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major, 2007) recommends that students learn about the APA Ethics Code (Goal 2, Point 1, Subpoint e), most undergraduate programs do not offer a course in ethics (Stoloff et al., 2010), and only limited training, usually in the context of research methods or experimental psychology is provided. Most texts in these courses include a historical account of some of the most egregious ethical violations in human-subjects research, how these incidents spurred the development of legal regulations and ethical codes of conduct, and how research should be ethically conducted. Quite often, students may be directed to a web tutorial (e.g., www.citiprogram.org) for additional training, certification, and background information. In fact, student researchers must receive training in ethics if they are to be involved, in any capacity, in research. Although training in research ethics is extremely important and relevant, the APA’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (hereafter referred to as the Ethics Code; APA, 2010) provides guidance for the broader set of professional activities of a psychologist. The purpose of this article is to look beyond regulatory guidelines and address the two ethical arenas that we consider more likely to affect undergraduate students, namely authorship and boundaries.

**Applicability of the Ethics Code**

As we proceed in identifying key ethical dilemmas that are likely to emerge in an undergraduate setting, we want to clarify who is affected by the Ethics Code. Members of the APA, doctoral-level psychologists are bound to uphold the code as members of the organization. Because the APA is the organization promulgating the Ethics Code for the discipline, all psychologists, regardless of professional affiliation, should adhere to the code published by the APA. In addition, when students join APA as affiliates, they also pledge to uphold the Ethics Code. So, both instructor and students should engage in research and educational practices that are ethical.

APA published the first version of the Ethics Code in 1953, and over the course of the last half-century the code was expanded to include both Ethical Principles and a Code of Conduct. The Ethics Code (APA, 2010) includes ten standards specifying rules of conduct across the discipline of psychology. The standards address the clinical practice of psychology, competence, education and training, research, and publication. Although there are only ten standards, the code contains very specific criteria for how psychologists, faculty, and students should behave across multiple contexts. These standards are enforceable, meaning that a violation of a standard can result in reprimand, censure, stipulated resignation, or expulsion from the association (APA, 2001); therefore, education, training, and the Ethics Code, are important in providing instructors and students with guidance in their practice as researchers, educators, and mentors.

In addition to the ten standards, the Ethics Code includes five general and aspirational principles that should guide the behavior of psychologists (APA, 2010). Although the Ethics Code provides specific, enforceable guidelines for the professional practice of psychology, ethical dilemmas are rarely clear-cut and require thoughtful analysis; therefore, these principles are designed to guide psychologists across all activities to be beneficent, responsible, just, respectful, and to act with integrity. These principles offer guidance
for a host of issues, key among them are the dilemmas that sometimes emerge in undergraduate departments of psychology. The principles, although important as a guide for behavior, are not enforceable in the same way as the standards. We reference the standards, along with the principles, as they relate to each of the ethical issues that we address. More specifically, in this article we review the relevant portions of the Ethics Code related to authorship and multiple authorships in an undergraduate context. Scholarship and writing are an essential part of the undergraduate experience. Students also interact with faculty in complicated and sensitive ways. Because these two issues are likely to be experienced by faculty and students in an undergraduate program, and very limited guidance is available (McCarthy, in press), we focus on ethical issues related to authorship and relationships. Ethical issues pertaining to authorship and classroom relationships are two of the most common experiences that undergraduates may encounter. We provide an overview of responsibilities of instructor and students, and offer recommendations to students for navigating the complicated landscape of ethical challenges.

Authorship

Authorship and order of authorship are important and sometimes contentious issues for researchers. Authorship is already a high-stakes endeavor for instructors (Bartle, Fink, & Hayes, 2000; Fine & Kudek, 1995; Geelhoed, Phillips, Fischer, Shpungin, & Gong, 2007; Oberlander & Spencer, 2006; Sandler & Russell, 2005) and opportunities to obtain authorship early in one’s career are becoming increasingly important. Early career publishing can even begin when an aspiring professor is an undergraduate student. With the establishment of the Council on Undergraduate Research in 1978, the whole of undergraduate education, and psychology in particular, experienced an increased emphasis on involving students in undergraduate research (Anderson & Shore, 2008). Mentoring undergraduate students in research is a more frequent practice in most disciplines (Boyd & Wesemann, 2009). Although we believe that undergraduate psychology students are increasingly publishing articles as primary authors, the literature addressing ethical considerations in assessing publication credit focuses primarily on conflicts related to doctoral students; consequently, relatively few resources are available to guide the process of equitably addressing authorship at the undergraduate level (Anderson & Shore, 2008). Although authoring a manuscript is often important for a career, guidelines for determining authorship are even more important. This point is particularly salient because of the power imbalance between faculty and student is even more pronounced in the undergraduate context (Boyd & Weseman, 2005).

Standard 8 of the Ethics Code specifies that publication credit should be awarded only when an author makes a substantial contribution. This standard is important because minor contributions (e.g., collecting data or entering data) do not constitute a significant contribution to the writing of a manuscript. In addition to Standard 8, the principles (i.e., beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, justice, and integrity) offer additional guidance for determining authorship. Instructors must exercise particular adherence to these principles in ensuring that authorship is determined equitably and that appropriate boundaries are maintained. Because instructors are in a position of power, they need to be particularly attentive to the disparity that exists and they must work to ensure that students are treated impartially (Campbell, Vasquez, Behnke, & Kinscherff, 2009). Sometimes, issues of authorship are addressed before the research ever begins, so that misunderstandings do not arise—we recommend this approach. In other instances, authorship may not be addressed until a project is complete. Therefore, it is important to discuss authorship at the earliest possible point in the research process.

As an example, instructors may invite students to be a part of a research group. Sometimes, the research project is already well defined and students are invited to participate in the enterprise as apprentices. Activities may include assisting in a literature review, compiling items for an instrument, and collecting data from participants. For students, these activities may seem central to the research project (and they are), but they typically do not contribute to the intellectual advances of a theory or explain behavior. In fact, these activities are sometimes conducted by people who are employed to perform such tasks. Nevertheless, these research tasks do provide important experiences that help students learn about research. If students are involved in only these activities, and authorship will not be forthcoming, then this information should
be shared with the students during the first meeting of the research team. Similarly, students should not only be aware of the types of activities that warrant authorship, but they should seek clarification about their role as either a research assistant or author, early in the research experience. In essence, students should be provided with a type of informed consent (Fine & Kurdek, 1993), which allows them to decide early on in the project if they want to be a part of the experience.

In sum, a candid discussion of how authorship will be determined should take place early in the research process. Because an imbalance of power exists, it is incumbent upon the faculty member to initiate the discussion. Although the onus for clarifying authorship status should not be the responsibility of the student, students can benefit by being knowledgeable about the process, and advocating for themselves early on. One way of ensuring a clear and equitable discussion is for the faculty member to create a contract that can be used to clarify the authorship agreement (Fine & Kurdek, 1993; McCarthy, in press). Fine and Kurdek (1993) also suggested that changes in authorship may require additional discussion if relative contributions change. It may also be helpful to consult with other colleagues as a way of seeking an objective viewpoint.

**Boundaries in the Classroom**

An inherent challenge in undergraduate teaching is attempting to successfully balance developing a classroom rapport and alliance while maintaining professional boundaries. Recently, researchers (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) emphasized the correlation between positive student-instructor relationships and learning. These researchers highlight a number of immediacy behaviors (e.g., use of humor, respect for students, self-disclosure) that are associated with positive student attitudes, course grades, and motivation. In addition, the Ethics Code (APA, 2010) specifies standards that give boundaries to student-instructor relationships. These boundaries offer guidance to students and instructors in attempting to minimize misuse of the power that instructors are ascribed. In the following section, we identify some potential hazards related to student-instructor relationships, instructor and student responsibilities when confronted with an ethical dilemma, and specific tips for students in navigating this process.

The Ethics Code (APA, 2010) details how psychologists should conduct themselves when working with others. Specifically, there are principles that address discrimination, harassment, harm, multiple relationships, and exploitative relationships (see Section 3, Human Relations). These standards apply to all psychologists’ activities, but we consider how they can pose problems specific to the college classroom.

**Discrimination**

The first of these principles addresses unfair discrimination based on “age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis prescribed by law” (APA, 2010, standard 3.01, p.6). This principle should aid in keeping instructors mindful of bias in the classroom and in evaluating student work. In addition, it should serve to maintain objectivity in the teaching process. Instructors ought to treat all students fairly. This can become difficult as some students may perceive, accurately or inaccurately, that instructors have “favorites.” As a result of this perceived favoritism, many students may believe that they are not given a fair chance to excel. In addition, if instructors disclose information related to their own religious beliefs, political views, or other personal opinions, students whose views differ may feel marginalized and potentially discriminated against if they were to disclose those views.

In order to maintain a classroom that is free of discrimination, instructors must be aware of their own biases. When students become aware of possible discrimination, it should be brought to the professor’s awareness in a respectful and straightforward manner. An example of potential discrimination can occur when teaching Abnormal Psychology and discussing eating disorders. Comments by an instructor about how thinness is reinforced in “our” society can unintentionally marginalize some students. Such a comment delivered to a classroom full of predominantly White American students can unintentionally render students from other cultural or ethnic backgrounds invisible. It is important to create an environment where all students can respectfully disagree. If done in a respectful way, direct comments by students can allow instructors to acknowledge the narrowness of their thinking and the need to encourage alternative explanations from diverse viewpoints. Although this is a subtle form of discrimination, it is not unlike the experiences of many students when their views, rooted in other dimensions of diverse
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life experiences, are not endorsed or recognized by instructor. Instructors can try to be aware of these pitfalls, but it is incumbent upon the student to approach the instructor in a respectful way to bring about awareness.

If a student does not feel comfortable speaking up during class about an uncomfortable situation, what are some alternative approaches? What about situations in which students may not initially feel discomfort, but upon further reflection they develop feelings of discomfort? The important theme here is to find a venue to express your reactions in a positive manner. A student might be more comfortable with a chat during office hours or emailing the instructor, rather than an in-class conversation. Perhaps expressing one’s concerns through a teaching assistant for the course via an online discussion board would suffice. Students need to remember that faculty members are not perfect, and these faculty members are driven to improve and minimize harm, as dictated by the ethical standards and principles. However, if students fail to speak up, or wait until the end-of-semester teaching evaluations to express their displeasure, then these harms (even if accidental) could continue unchecked longer than necessary.

Sexual and Other Harassment

A second principle addresses sexual harassment, and more broadly, behavior that is harassing or demeaning to students (APA, 2010, Sections 3.02 & 3.03). Although this principle may appear more obvious and therefore less likely to occur, there are several ways in which an instructor can create a hostile educational environment. When instructors use their power to coerce or make students uncomfortable in the classroom or during individual meetings, they are engaging in unethical behavior. Because of the inherent power differential, students are put in a difficult and vulnerable position when confronted with this behavior. They are likely to fear the consequences of bringing the behavior to the instructor’s attention.

An example that illustrates perceived demeaning behavior is when one group of students may feel they are being judged differently in the classroom. Perhaps a rumor begins that a certain instructor shows favoritism towards traditional students, and non-traditional students feel unfairly judged. This same scenario could occur in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and race, and if instructors are not aware of these perceptions, then students will continue to feel mistreated. Many students likely feel that instructors are demeaning towards them and this may have an effect on their participation and engagement in the class.

Avoiding Harm

A third principle addresses avoiding harm to students (APA, 2010, Section 3.04). Although we do not think most instructors deliberately inflict harm on their students, there are situations that are, indeed, harmful. For example, using deception in a classroom demonstration could result in unintended harm. Although these classroom demonstrations may help to engage students directly by making learning experiential, there are pitfalls to consider. For example, in an attempt to give first-hand experience with the flaws of eyewitness testimony, instructors sometimes ask the confederate to run into an introductory psychology class and steal a briefcase. Following the theft, the instructor gives a questionnaire to get a full description of the assailant. Student feedback following this demonstration tends to be positive overall, but some students may find it to be over the top, and even traumatic. Students may not share these concerns until the end of the term on course evaluations. Given this feedback, instructors ought to think about how much informed consent prior to the demonstration should students give if they are going to be deceived. Some of the discussions, video clips, or subject matter can be perceived as harmful by students as well. These are all concerns that instructors should consider before delving into potentially harmful topics. If students feel uncomfortable, they ought to be given the option to opt out. If students are not made aware that the demonstrations, videos, assignments have potential harmful effects, they need to inform the instructor immediately. This, again, can be difficult to navigate.

Multiple Relationships and Exploitation

A fourth and final principle addresses multiple and exploitative relationships (APA, 2010, standards 3.05 & 3.08). According to these principles, instructors should clearly define the professional relationship with students while doing their best to minimize any likelihood of maintaining or encouraging a personal relationship. In addition, instructors should refrain from entering into an instructor-student relationship with someone whom they already have a personal relationship. In some cases, this personal relationship may be indirect (e.g., a friend’s child) but should still be avoided.
if possible. These principles again emphasize the inherent power dynamic that can occur in an instructor-student relationship and how this can eventually end up harming the student.

The language of this principle gives clear guidance to avoiding multiple relationships, but some situations warrant further discussion. For instance, if a student is a research assistant for an instructor, should the student avoid taking classes with the instructor? On the surface this would appear reasonable and perhaps show a level of student focus and interest. The concern would arise if the student is unable to meet obligations as a researcher or student and how this affects the ability of the instructor to objectively view their performance in either context.

Another example of multiple relationships is when students are actively involved in campus organizations for which an instructor is an advisor. For example, what if a student decided to step down in his role as an officer in a campus organization for which the instructor is the faculty advisor? The student would likely be concerned about how the instructor would view him should he enroll in future classes. With direct communication at the outset, the instructor and student can discuss the need for the instructor to be objective in the future course and address the student’s concerns in an attempt to keep those two relationships separate.

Social Networking
The plethora of social networking opportunities raises another issue about multiple relationships. Social networking sites can be used in the classroom to enhance instruction and specifically aid in creating an engaged classroom. If these sites are used to create a sense of professional community, then the benefits seem significant. If instructors and students also use these sites to communicate about personal relationships, a blurring of relationships could emerge. Imagine an instructor who shares personal views on politics and religion on social networking sites and how this could impact a student’s views of the instructor. Likewise, if instructors can see students’ profiles, friends, posts, and likes, this could create bias for or against some students. In addition, if a social networking site is required by an instructor, yet some students object, this puts students in a bind.

All of the aforementioned issues that revolve around multiple relationships are particularly difficult to address head-on. Students are in a vulnerable position and want to do as instructors say, but this obedience can cause significant problems with objectivity and potentially exploitation. First, instructors should be mindful of the pitfalls that are present when blurring these roles and need to be open to student feedback and concerns. Secondly, students need to bring concerns to the instructor quickly when they feel put in a position in which they could be exploited or their personal relationships may impact their ability to feel comfortable in the learning environment.

Recommendations for Students
Authorship
What process should a student follow to clarify an authorship role? Students are working within a relationship (i.e., instructor versus student) that contains an imbalance of power. Negotiating authorship and navigating relationships are difficult processes. As a student, it will be important to find ways to understand the nature of authorship and relationships, while at the same time working to achieve academic goals.

Negotiating authorship, from students’ perspective, is difficult and potentially risky. If we consider the perspective of students, it will be important to begin clarifying their role by examining their intentions. Will a student serve as an apprentice? Collecting and entering data and setting up equipment are important activities and provide great opportunities for learning about research; however, working in a lab does not entail conceptualizing hypotheses, analyzing data, or writing results. To use an analogy, nurses in a drug study may distribute medications and their role would be critical to the success of a specific publication; therefore simply assisting with the study does not qualify one for authorship. Nevertheless, working in a psychology laboratory is an excellent way to gain experience and may lead to additional opportunities to engage in research.

Students should evaluate their academic obligations and how much time they can devote to a research project along with identifying the reasons for being involved in the research project. For example, do they want to gain experience, demonstrate skills that might result in a letter of recommendation, or produce a manuscript that is worthy of publication?

If students plan to engage in research and want to earn authorship, then their investment and contributions will be more significant. Even so, there
are multiple levels of contribution that are typically present when people work together on a research project. For example, students may conduct a literature search; however, earning authorship will require more than merely searching and obtaining articles. If drafting a review of the literature, then authorship may be warranted. Quality of the draft is one consideration when evaluating relative contributions. Order of authors remains subject to relative contributions to the entire manuscript. So, if students’ intent is to gain experience with writing and securing a publication, then they will want to clarify their intentions before seeking an opportunity to become involved in a research project. Students may want to specifically address what types of contributions to the research process will warrant authorship.

A third possibility is to develop a research proposal and conduct the study under the direction of the instructor as the principal investigator: sometimes this is called a senior thesis. The research proposal may emerge from an experimental psychology course, or it may emerge as a result of interest in a specific content area (e.g., cognition). In this case, students are guiding the study, and they are performing most of the intellectual work to develop a manuscript. In this instance, the student is the primary, and perhaps only, author. If the intent is to publish an article as the sole author, then it will be important to clarify intentions before seeking a research mentor. Be aware that there are a number of undergraduate grant programs at most universities, as well as Psi Chi grants (e.g., http://www.psichi.org/awards/undergraduate.aspx) to aid in funding this type of independent research.

After clarifying intentions (e.g., research apprentice, secondary author, or primary author), it is possible for students to seek the appropriate research experience to meet their needs. Regardless of the goal, it is always useful to engage in a discussion with a research mentor before entering into the research experience. We recommend that students do their homework prior to engaging in this conversation with a professor. In other words, do not approach a professor and ask them about what areas of research are they currently studying. Rather, conduct a PsycINFO search, read about previously published work, and then approach an instructor to ask about available opportunities to conduct research. A second useful question is to ask for an explanation of the expectations for the research experiences. This information can help students to decide if the opportunities are a match with their goals.

If students believe that instructors can offer a research experience that is consistent with their intentions, then a second step may be to share their goals with instructors. It is always helpful to be clear about goals before a research experience begins. It is much more difficult to clarify misunderstandings later in the research process. If students share their goals with the instructors, then it is possible that respective roles will be much easier to navigate throughout the process.

**Boundaries in the Classroom**

In addition to negotiating authorship, students will experience a number of interactions that may be difficult, or potentially awkward. As we indicated earlier, faculty usually strive to ensure that students are treated equitably and with respect; however, unintentional actions may cause them to feel uncomfortable. If students are members of an underrepresented group, a slight may feel particularly stinging. They need to communicate their discomfort if they would like instructors to learn from the experience. Professors may not be aware of their own biases or inadvertent actions towards students, and they can learn from students if feedback is communicated effectively.

If an instructor conducts a classroom activity that feels threatening, is demeaning towards students, or shows favoritism, how can students make their objections known? This is certainly a difficult process to navigate. Remember that most instructors want students to feel comfortable and accepted in their classroom, and hope to treat all students with respect. If approached from this vantage point without malicious intent, but instead from a place of bringing about awareness, most instructors will appreciate the honesty and reflection.

In addition, as students and potential leaders within the psychology department, it is likely that students will have the opportunity to engage in multiple roles with faculty members. As such, it is partly the student’s responsibility to keep these roles separate if at all possible. Be wary of providing services for faculty members that are outside the scope of the classroom or research lab. Clarifying these roles at the outset will reduce the likelihood of blurred boundaries.

Below are general recommendations for all students when confronted with uncomfortable situations in the classroom:
Be proactive rather than reactive. It is always more difficult to find ways to resolve a disagreement than to have clear expectations in advance. If a problem does arise, every school has some process for resolving conflict, and it may be necessary to engage the process, but this is not the best solution.

Engage in direct communication. Although all instructors may not be mindful of the power dynamic that is created in many of the aforementioned situations, we can expect that instructors are aware of some of the potential pitfalls. If students can approach instructors in a direct way, expressing concern over publication credit or blurred boundaries, a good outcome is possible. One of the basic tenets of the Ethics Code (APA, 2010) asserts that psychologists must attempt an informal resolution before involving others (see standard 1.04). Approaching a professor to address issues of concern is an excellent way to practice skills in conflict resolution. Certainly there are exceptions, particularly in the case of sexual harassment. But, in general, going over the head of an instructor by contacting the Department Chair or College Dean is unlikely to lead to an outcome that includes meaningful communication.

Assert your power. Students have power, too. They can assert this power by clarifying goals and articulating the issues with the instructor in a thoughtful way. If presented as a concern, without attacking or putting the instructor on the defense, they can expect that most instructors will engage in the conversation and likely will seek some form of remedy. If an instructor is not willing to engage in the conversation, then further resolution must be sought by going through the appropriate channels in the college or university.

In reality, ethics “training” never ends. Behaving ethically is a life-long professional commitment to being vigilant about one’s attitudes and behaviors. It also includes working to ensure that students receive the maximal benefits from their undergraduate education and experiences. When harm does occur, it means acting to minimize those harms—both in the present and for the future. This training extends to faculty members as well, and these uncomfortable experiences offer both students and instructors the opportunity to experience real world ethics.

References