

# Ethical questions for the emerging scholar & academic citizen

Eric R. Weeks

Physics Dept., Emory University


# Authorship issues

Article by Hegtvedt, Weeks, Boyd Barr, and Wolpe:

# Authorship issues

Article by Hegtvedt, Weeks, Boyd Barr, and Wolpe:


did most of the  
work



helped...?




supervised, probably  
all his idea



# Authorship issues

Article by Hegtvedt, Weeks, Boyd Barr, and Wolpe :


did most of the  
work



helped...?



supervised, probably  
all his idea



Competing values: collaboration is good, want to give credit where credit is due, but don't want to inflate someone's importance if they shouldn't be an author. Author list lacks nuances.

1. How to decide who is first author?
2. How to decide who is an author at all?
3. How to get your fair share of the credit for this work?
4. What about "co-first-authors"?
5. When do these issues get decided?

I've been assuming your advisor is helpful



What if your advisor is more like this?



# My advisor may be a jerk

- What to do if you disagree with your advisor about authorship issues? Or other issues?
  - Research issue and make sure your advisor really is a jerk. Talk to them if possible
  - Talk to your PhD committee members
  - Talk to department chair
  - Other university resources: Graduate school deans, for example
  - Ethics guidelines by professional societies

# Authorship issues

- Resources:
  - American Physical Society: “Authorship should be limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the concept, design, execution or interpretation of the research study. All those who have made significant contributions should be offered the opportunity to be listed as authors. Other individuals who have contributed to the study should be acknowledged, but not identified as authors.”
  - Every discipline has similar statements, journals often have specific statements



# Who owns unpublished data?

- You work in a lab group and produce data. You leave Emory. Can you publish the data without your advisor listed as a co-author? Can your advisor publish the data without listing you as a co-author?
- Answer: Emory owns your data. Both you and your advisor have to work together to publish the data, unless you have clearly agreed otherwise.
- Usually, the lab owns your lab notebooks, but you are entitled to a copy.

# Articles get retracted sometimes

retractionwatch.wordpress.com

- some due to data fabrication
  - (often over-confidence that you know what the result is... especially dangerous when you're writing a grant application and need preliminary data)
- some due to plagiarism of others
  - (someone else says something really well and you reuse their text without giving them credit)
- some due to plagiarism of yourself (“duplication”)
  - (reuse of your own text/figures without citing prior publication; submitting same article twice. Must make clear when you are not presenting original material.)
- some due to honest errors
  - (you made a mistake, now you caught it and it invalidates your results. It happens, it's OK.)

# Bottom line

- “Character is doing what is right when nobody’s looking” (J.C. Watts)
- Sometimes they will look... make sure you’ve behaved ethically (not just legally)
- Your discipline should have ethical guidelines you can track down online
  - “The Responsible Researcher: Paths and Pitfalls” (Sigma Xi)