The relationship between faculty-advisor and graduate student is one of the most important factors in persistence and retention of students (Barnes, 2010; deValero, 2003). Advisors act as an informational source, departmental navigator, advocate, a role model, and mentor of growth (Gould, Le Trence, Ossewaarde-Lopez, Fenner, & Sadera, 2014). A good mentoring relationship with an advisor (one that is dynamic, emotionally connected, and reciprocal) has been associated with greater academic well-being and promoting time to degree completion (deValero, 2003; Hyun, Quinn, Martin, & Luttrell, 2006). However, a mentoring relationship can potentially result in positive outcomes for students, whereas an ethical mentoring relationship that adheres to the six ethical mentoring principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, fidelity, fairness, and privacy can benefit both mentor and mentee (Johnson, Barnes, & Copie, 2016).

While mentoring may be encouraged, there is little incentive for faculty-advisors to “go above and beyond” their supervisory duties (King, 2011, p.1). This is because of the institutional or departmental focus on productive research output, as well as the fact that mentoring is not a criterion for promotion and tenure decisions (Johnson, 2016; Margolis & Romney, 2002). Regardless of the type of relationship graduate students have with their advisor, students’ emotional, relational, and ethical well-being of their students and department through implicit and explicit messages (Acker, 2001; King, 2003). These hidden messages are accepted as true based on individual discretion and may affect how ethical mentoring is received by graduate students. The goal of this work was to explore six ethical mentoring principles for women graduate students in science and engineering and how “hidden” norms and expectations within the research culture shape these relationships.

A qualitative case study methodology was used to conduct a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions using in-depth case studies from the work of Dr. Sandra Grady (For higher education: Faculty); Second Edition (2010). Eight female graduate students were purposively recruited as participants for this study from the College of Science and Engineering at a women’s institution of higher education with varied roles (e.g. Masters student, PhD student) and disciplines (e.g. Biology, Astrophysics Engineering). (Copie, 2013). These participants were granted permission to protect their identity. Interview data from audio and visual recordings were transcribed and coded. All responses and memos were qualitatively coded using the six ethical principles as a basis for the study of ethics allowing for a more nuanced analysis of the data. Open coding methods were used to identify common ethical issues as well as “hidden” ethical principles. The data were then transcribed and analyzed using qualitative software. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed using qualitative software.

Methods

The relationship between faculty-advisor and graduate student is one of the most important factors in persistence and retention of students (Barnes, 2010; deValero, 2003). Advisors act as an informational source, departmental navigator, advocate, a role model, and mentor of growth. A good mentoring relationship with an advisor (one that is dynamic, emotionally connected, and reciprocal) has been associated with greater academic well-being and promoting time to degree completion (deValero, 2003; Hyun, Quinn, Martin, & Luttrell, 2006). However, a mentoring relationship can potentially result in positive outcomes for students, whereas an ethical mentoring relationship that adheres to the six ethical mentoring principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, fidelity, fairness, and privacy can benefit both mentor and mentee (Johnson, Barnes, & Copie, 2016).

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