

Plagiarism: A Complex and Controversial Form of Academic Misconduct

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ABSTRACT: The increasing complexity of life in today’s world sheds new light upon academic life in general and on individual and institutional integrity in particular. For this reason, episodes of academic misconduct should be a matter of utmost concern for individuals, groups, and institutions. Plagiarism represents a complex and often controversial form of academic misconduct. Beyond its intricacy, dealing with the detection and elimination of plagiarism could be used as a tool in ethical training for people in academia, starting with students and ending with any other professional from the academic institutions, including management. Herein, the complexity of plagiarism is approached by identifying the causes that could explain it in terms of human habits and institutional concerns. Peculiarities of plagiarism and self-plagiarism in research, teaching, and student assignments are highlighted to explain the phenomenon and the temptation to ignore it. Finally, several reasons to strongly fight against any form of plagiarism are discussed, and guidelines are suggested to encourage personal upright behavior and institutional action to discourage such incidents in the future.

KEY WORDS: publication ethics, scientific fraud, integrity, authorship, self-plagiarism

I. INTRODUCTION

The progress of humanity makes our lives extremely complex and challenging; academic life is no exception. This complexity draws special attention to the aspect of individual and institutional integrity. The integrity of our lives proves our ability to make the transition from the state of animalism to humanism. Proving this ability should be highly valued above all in academia. The more complex academic life becomes, the more integrity matters. However, despite the high sensitivity of individuals and institutions to matters of integrity, academic misconduct must be dealt with and scientific solutions must be found.¹⁻³ Moreover, the increasing complexity of academic life implies a growing ingenuity or simply more “opportunities” to adopt improper behavior. Considering the types of misconduct as a cause of papers’ retraction in the biomedical field since 1975, most scientific articles have been withdrawn because of fraud or suspected fraud (a tenfold increase over the study period). Other causes included duplicate publication, plagiarism, and even unintentional errors, which accounts for only 25% of the total.¹ Beyond the idea that science is a self-correcting and self-policing “body”,⁴ efforts are necessary to identify different reasons that researchers risk scientific fraud.