

Chapter 4

Plagiarism



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After Reading This Chapter, You Will:

- Know precisely what plagiarism is
- Understand why plagiarism is an ethical issue
- Be able to identify different forms of plagiarism
- Develop the capacity to distinguish legitimate from fraudulent references

Keywords Appropriation · Authorship · Copy-pasting · Critiquing · Inadvertent plagiarism · Paraphrasing · Patch writing · Priority disputes · Self-plagiarism · Quality control · Quotation · Summarizing

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 *The Unoriginal Sin*

René Diekstra was a psychologist and tenured professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and a celebrated author of many popular science books. In 1996, a weekly magazine unearthed details of plagiarism in one of his books. This revelation prompted an official investigation, and as a result, he had to step down from his position (see case study for further discussion). A decade later, two German ministers (Annette Schavan and Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg), both of whom held doctorate degree, were accused of plagiarism within a few years of one another. After an investigation into the matter, both were stripped of their academic title and had to hand in their notice (*The Guardian*, 2. 9. 2013).

High-profile cases of plagiarism with dramatic consequences such as these are by no means exceptions, nor is plagiarism a recent phenomenon. Some of the earliest reported cases of plagiarism go all the way back to the beginning of the Enlightenment. That is, back to the birth of modern science itself, and involved a few recognizable individuals, namely Newton, Leibnitz, and Erasmus (see Wootton 2015).

Though not exceptional, do these cases point to an underlying structural problem? While its prevalence is difficult to estimate, plagiarism has been found among tenured professors, but especially among students (Walker 2010), and some believe it's a rapidly growing problem. Neil Selwyn (2008, p. 468) found that nearly three in five students admit to copying a few unattributed sentences into an essay or



Fig. 4.1 Plagerius' Dilemma

assignment. Even further, one in three concede to copy-pasting a few paragraphs and just over one in ten to 'borrowing' upwards of a few pages.

Of course, there are vast differences between students, between disciplines, and between cultures (more about that later). Regardless of these differences, plagiarism in academia is an issue that cannot be chalked up to 'cultural differences' and deserves careful scrutiny. In this chapter, we explore the problem in more detail. What exactly is plagiarism, and how do we distinguish it from legitimate uses of reference literature? How does it affect our work, and which consequences does it have? Finally, we ask what factors contribute to its continued occurrence? (Fig. 4.1).

4.2 Plagiarius' Crime

4.2.1 A Working Definition

'Plagiarism' derives from the Latin noun 'plagarius,' meaning kidnapper. Plagiarism is understood as *literary theft*, namely the act of appropriating the work (or ideas) of others and passing it off as your own. As such, it stands apart from the appropriate uses of other people's work, which includes the *discussion* or *critique* of certain viewpoints, *summarizing* and *paraphrasing* of particular ideas, and the use of *quotations*. These all require the original source or author to be clearly identified. When plagiarism takes place, this is not the case (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1: Spot the Plagiarizer!

In *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, Barbara Rogoff (2003, p. 183) writes: ‘Worldwide, child rearing is more often done by women and girls than by men and boys (Weisner 1997; Whiting and Edwards 1988).’

Here are several examples of students referencing the passage above:

Student 1: According to Rogoff (2003, p. 183), childrearing is done mostly by women and girls.

Student 2: All over the globe, childrearing is often done by women and girls and not by men and boys (Weisner 1997; Whiting and Edwards 1988).

Student 3: According to Rogoff (2003, p. 183), ‘childrearing is more often done by women and girls,’ but her evidence is slim.

Student 4: Many believe that childrearing is a matter for women.

Student 1 *Paraphrase*: This statement contains a clear reference to the original source (correctly identified) but it is not a direct quote, hence no quotation marks are needed.

Student 2 *Patch-writing*: The wording does not exactly follow the original, but the structure of the sentence is almost identical to it, and the references to Rogoff’s sources suggest the statement is based on this literature, rather than on Rogoff. Without reference to the original source (Rogoff), this sample borders on plagiarism.

Student 3 *First quotes then critiques*: Quotation marks are in order here as well as a clear reference to the original source.

Student 4 *Gives a general opinion*: This opinion needs no references; it could be said by anybody.

4.2.2 Why Is Plagiarism a Problem?

Before we go into any further detail, let us first ask why it matters if you ‘borrow’ (appropriate) a few well-worded sentences from a source rather than crafting your own. Apart from issues of legality (making money off someone else’s work), there are two moral problems attached to plagiarism: (1) Taking credit for work you have not done is deceitful; (2) science’s reputation is built upon trust and accountability. Plagiarism violates the first principle and undermines the second.

There is another reason why it matters. Plagiarism may be both the smallest and the most unprofessional form of scientific misconduct, but in the eyes of the public, it is often met with more indignation than greater forms of fraud, such as data falsifying (about which we write in the next chapter). Possibly this is because it is such a noticeable form of misconduct that stands as a sharp contradiction to the high aspirations of science.

4.2.3 *What Does Appropriation Entail?*

By definition, whenever an author inserts a certain amount of text they didn't write themselves, and they don't adequately acknowledge the original source, that author has committed plagiarism.

This may seem clear enough, but several questions remain unanswered. When is a source acknowledged *adequately*? Is it sufficient to simply add a reference to the original text in the bibliography or is there more to it than that? Does copying just one sentence count as plagiarism? What about just *half* a sentence? In other words, is there a certain threshold after which copy-pasting counts as plagiarism? And what about translations? Suppose the original text is written in one language and you use your own translation – is that plagiarism too? And what about situations where you don't copy the original source exactly, but your work closely resembles the source in terms of structure, following the line of argumentation step by step – is that considered plagiarism as well?

In general, the answer to all these questions is: Yes – that counts as plagiarism. However, we will return to these issues in greater detail later in this chapter. For now, we suggest that you should view every text you write as a complex, layered structure, consisting of a mixture of voices: your own voice (your arguments and interpretations) and those of the people you've referenced (their arguments and interpretations). The whole point being, any reader of your text must know whom they are hearing from at all times. Every time the voice of someone else is borrowed, used, commented on, or invoked in your work, it is imperative that it be identified properly.

In any given discipline, there are specific methods for how to credit your sources. The social sciences often use the American Psychological Association (APA) citation format, whereas the humanities tend to use the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. There is no space here to discuss these methods in any detail, but we encourage you to further familiarize yourself with them (for example, see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* 2010, or the *American Sociological Association Style Guide* 2014).

4.2.4 *The Question of Authorship*

Failing to acknowledge referenced material is serious misconduct that can create even legal consequences when copyrights are infringed upon. This is not to imply that plagiarism can only occur with texts that are protected by a copyright, it can occur in any situation. The unacknowledged use of texts that are not under copyright, or the use of documents that have not even been published can similarly pose problems (see Saunders 2010).

Here is an example. Suppose you talk to a friend about the content of a paper you have written but not yet published, and that friend in turn uses some of your ideas in her

Box 4.2: ‘Pawn Sacrifice’

Trick employed by an advanced plagiarist. A (smaller) part of a text is referenced correctly. However, a larger part of the same text is subsequently plagiarized (that is: used *without* acknowledgement). Benjamin Lahusen, in an article entitled ‘Goldene Zeiten’ [Golden Times] gives several examples thereof, employed in a 2005 legal textbook. The plagiarist employed the trick to mask his actions and give credibility to the rest of the text as his own (2006, p. 405).

work. Perhaps they even get their paper published before you. Would you consider that fair use? Or imagine a situation where a researcher works with a paid assistant who produces a text for them (say a short note on a particular issue). If the researcher includes these texts (in whole or in part) in their work, must they attribute each and every sentence to the assistant? Should the assistant even be recognized as a co-author of the work? What about a situation when multiple students work on a document collectively and then proceed to use portions of it in their individual papers? When they upload their work into the digital course environment, they may find that the plagiarism detection software marks their papers as being plagiarisms of one another!

Part of this problem can be resolved by referring to official (institutional) guidelines. But part of the problem surrounds group work itself, and in some of these cases plagiarism cannot be resolved simply by referring to official guidelines. Then, a resolution depends on specific arrangements being made between the parties (researcher and assistant, teacher and students, etc.) as to whom takes credit and how the work will be cited (Box 4.2).

4.2.5 *When Do Intentions Come into Play?*

Everybody knows it’s wrong to copy-paste a certain amount of text and present it as their own. At the same time, honest mistakes happen. Tenured academics and students alike collect literature during their research, they print out articles that they believe are interesting, and they make notes on them before they start writing. Sometimes slip ups occur.

Imagine you are writing an article, the deadline is rapidly approaching, and in the final stretch you unintentionally neglect to cite a number of references. Will that be considered plagiarism? It was never your intention to plagiarize, of course!

Intentions do play a role in ethics, and they will often be factored in if plagiarism is suspected, but intentions (either good *or* bad) are difficult to prove, and good intentions do not absolve you from your duty to ascribe proper credit.

4.3 Copy-Paste Much Eh?

4.3.1 Patch-Writing

Earlier, we asked what it means to ‘appropriate’ a text. We found it entails the acknowledgment of the original source, and suggested that you ‘identify the voice of the other.’ Let us explore this a bit further. At which point do you still have to reference someone else’s voice? At what point does it become *your* voice?

An instructive example is given by Rebekka Moore Howard in *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators* (1999, pp. 4–5). During an undergraduate course, Howard asked her students to read an excerpt from a particular source and reflect on it. In nine papers (out of a total of twenty-six) she found several sentences that had very similar wording. Here are three examples:

1. ‘Specifically, “story myths” are not told for their entertainment value, rather they serve to answer questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live.’
2. ‘Story myths provide answers to philosophical questions about life, society and the world.’
3. ‘Davidson explains that story myths provide answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live.’

All three of these sentences lead back to the same source, which goes as follows: ‘Such “story myths” are not told for their entertainment value. They provide answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live’ (Davidson quoted in Howard 1999, p. 5).

Howard’s assignment was for her students to use *this* particular source, and these students had clearly failed to properly identify or acknowledge the original author (although some included a footnote with a reference to it). Howard’s verdict was strict: all nine students received an ‘F’. They were lectured on proper citation and documentation and subsequently had to revise their paper.

Commenting on this case, Howard observed how students tried to cut corners by appropriating phrases and even whole sentences from the original source. In the process, they had deleted what they considered ‘irrelevant’ and inserted whatever they thought was appropriate. They even changed the grammar and syntax of the original sentence, ‘substituting synonyms straight from *Roget’s Thesaurus*’ (1999, p. 6). But she also noted that, to a certain degree at least, ‘patch-writing’ is a matter of *style*. Even renowned scholars have been observed using ‘patchwork methods,’ albeit in a more sophisticated manner. In fact, the very sentence on patch-writing in this paragraph could be considered an example of patch-writing! This is all to say that the parameters distinguishing ‘plagiarism’ from questionable forms of ‘borrowing texts’ move on a sliding scale.

4.3.2 *Translations as Plagiarism*

Translations are not always recognized as sources of plagiarism. Consider the case below (observed by the author of this chapter). A student was caught plagiarizing when they translated a number of paragraphs originally written in English into Dutch without providing any references. Note that in the excerpt below, taken from the case, the sentence syntax and grammar are slightly altered. Furthermore, a crucial concept (‘predisposition’) is mistranslated (as ‘factor’), and the meaning of the sentence became vaguer when it was cut into two (what does ‘this’ refer to in the second sentence?). In spite of all this, the original is still clearly identifiable:

Original biological predisposition is not ignored, but the focus is placed on an individual’s development through interaction with other people in a certain cultural context.

Student version (Dutch in original, translated back into English) biological factors play a role, but the focus is placed on individual development. This is shaped through interaction with other people in a cultural context.

[*Biologische factoren spelen een rol, maar de focus wordt gelegd op de individuele ontwikkeling. Deze krijgt haar vorm door interactie met andere mensen binnen een culturele context.*]

As in the above case, ‘translation plagiarism’ appears often in a ‘high-to-low form,’ meaning a text originally published in a ‘dominant language’ (such as English) is translated in whole or in part into a ‘smaller language’ (say Dutch, Polish, or Italian), where it is presented as original.

Another example is found in the work of psychologist Alphons Chorus, whose *Foundations of Social Psychology* (orig. *Grondslagen der sociale psychologie*), published in 1953, contained a large number of passages lifted from a well-known introduction into social psychology by Kretch and Crutchfield, published only 5 years earlier. Though Chorus wrote in the introduction of his book that he had ‘relied on Kretch and Crutchfield,’ he had actually translated numerous passages word for word without providing quotation marks or references to the original. When two colleagues confronted Chorus about this, he admitted that his referencing was ‘incomplete’ and he omitted some 100 pages from the next edition (for a discussion of this case, see; Chorus 2019).

By today’s standards, a direct translation that lacks quotation marks is considered plagiarism even if it contains a footnote identifying the original source.

4.3.3 *Self-Plagiarism*

A special case deserves our attention: using our own work without acknowledgement. This practice is known as ‘self-plagiarism,’ and notably is not often taken into account within the codes of conduct of most universities. Is self-plagiarism unethical? Some argue it’s not. You can’t, after all, ‘appropriate’ what is already yours. Others argue it

is, as we will soon explore. At its core, it is important that readers are made aware that previously published work is recycled, even if it's the author's own work.

A differentiation must be made between 'duplication publication' (complete republication without attribution of the original), 'text recycling' (reuse of portions of one's own writings), and 'secondary publication' (republication with permission from the original publisher). An element of redundancy and wastefulness is persistent in all three forms, and in as much as they distort meta-analyses, they are all also unethical. By most accounts, text recycling and duplication publication are considered 'questionable,' though not misconduct, except when copyrights are infringed (see Habibzadeh and Winker 2009).

To showcase the sensitivities surrounding text-recycling, take the case of Peter Nijkamp, professor of economics at Amsterdam University [VU]. Throughout his career, Nijkamp was a prolific author producing at one point an astonishing output of some 50 publications a year.

In 2013, Nijkamp was accused by an anonymous whistleblower of 'excessive recycling' of his own work. A university integrity commission investigated the charge in 2014 and found that he had indeed often re-used parts of his works without proper acknowledgement. The commission condemned the practice, labeling it 'questionable research practices,' though not plagiarism (Zwemmer et al. 2015). In newspaper coverage, the scientist was accused of 'self-plagiarism'.

Nijkamp was outraged. 'Self-plagiarism is a bogus reproach', he responded. He did not see any harm in the practice of re-using one's own work. He had always acted in good faith, and had never transgressed any code of conduct, he maintained (Nijkamp 2014, p. 24). Calling the anonymous complaint a 'witch hunt', aimed at destroying his reputation, Nijkamp filed a counter charge, arguing that the complaint should not have been admissible, and that his name should be cleared (Sahadat 2015). He won the case.

While self-plagiarism may not be a transgression of a code of conduct for academic authors, this would not hold for students, who hand in their own work twice for different assignments. This is not accepted. Credits earned for assignments are given for original work only.

To check for originality, most universities utilize plagiarism detection software. This software has access to not only web publications, but also to large databases containing previous submissions, and will likely spot any similarities between two texts (see the next section for further examples).

4.4 In Other Words or in the Words of Others?

4.4.1 *Stealing into Print*

Many universities strongly encourage students to work together, to discuss each other's work, and give 'peer feedback.' This is aligned with the standing practice in academia to discuss unpublished work with colleagues at conferences as well as submitting manuscripts to academic journals for (anonymous) peer reviewing.

Peer reviewing is thus at the heart of academic work, but it has invited forms of plagiarism that we need to address. Submitting an unpublished manuscript or a grant proposal for review involves the risk that others will make use of it. If not by plagiarizing it, then certainly by ‘stealing’ valuable ideas (Lafollette 1992, p. 127ff).

Although it is unclear how often it happens, it is known to happen. In 2017, the news section of the *Annals of Internal Medicine* revealed a recent case of ‘reviewer misconduct.’ Michael Dansinger, the lead author of a paper that was rejected by the *Annals*, discovered that his paper appeared in a different journal a few months later, but with the names of the authors removed and replaced by the names of others. His paper had clearly been stolen by a peer reviewer of the *Annals*.

Dansinger revealed his discovery, which led to the retraction of the stolen article. But he did not want to publish the name of the plagiarist because he was not out for revenge. Instead, he wrote about the case to illustrate how and why things go wrong. Perhaps the pressure to publish was intense, Dansinger conjectured, or maybe the culture was relatively permissive such that plagiarism was not taken seriously, or maybe it was simply a matter of believing the plagiarist would not get caught. Whatever the reasons, there is an incredible risk involved in this kind of misconduct, and by revealing it, Dansinger hoped it would help deter the this kind of misconduct (Dansinger 2017, p. 143).

Community members of ‘Retraction Watch,’ a website dedicated to ‘academic misconduct, were far less forgiving. Ralph Giorno commented: ‘The repercussions need to be that ALL authors are summarily fired, then pursue libel charges. None of these people should ever practice medicine anywhere, including in a private setting.’ Another commented: ‘This is why review should not be anonymous’ (see *Retraction Watch*, thread: ‘Dear peer reviewer, you stole my paper: An author’s worst nightmare’, 12.12.2016).

4.4.2 Authorship

While plagiarism is unethical, even worthy of punishment, a more subtle problem lies underneath. This relates to different views of *authorship* and *text ownership*.

Typically, in Western societies, scientists are looked at from a somewhat paradoxical view. While on one hand they are considered to be autonomous authors, solely responsible for what they write, they are simultaneously expected to act as selfless parts of the ‘academic community,’ whose aim is the extension of our collective knowledge.

Accordingly, in the West, texts are viewed as ‘private property,’ while ideas are more or less considered ‘common goods’ (for further discussion, see; Marsh 2007). However, a nearly inverse relation exists in other parts of the world. In China, collectively accepted knowledge is associated with authorities and individuals of high esteem, and ‘copying’ (plagiarizing) these authors without credit can be seen as ‘paying respect’ to them rather than stealing (see Bloch 2007; Hsu 1981).

As a result of its recent rise as an economic superpower, China’s output of scientific publications has increased immensely, but so has its number of retracted

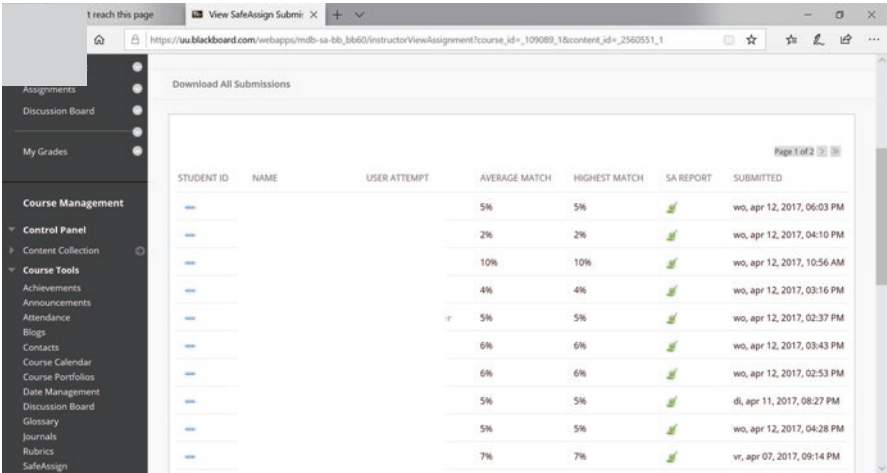
articles. Often due to plagiarism, these retractions have tainted the reputation of Chinese research. Authorities in China began to recognize this problem and are now implementing strict plagiarism policies (for a discussion, see; Gray et al. 2019).

4.4.3 Two Cases

Plagiarism software is good at spotting similarities between texts, not at identifying who plagiarized whom. Consider these two cases of suspected plagiarism reported at Utrecht University (in the Netherlands).

In the first case, the plagiarism detection software revealed the following similarities between the papers of two undergraduate students:

- Identical title
- A match of 66% in the second sentence
- Identical quotation [source correctly identified]
- A match of between 66 and 77% in the following three sentences
- 100% match in next sentence
- A match of 82% in the subsequent sentence
- A match of 90% in the main question
- 4 more sentences paraphrasing another source, with a 100% match between the two papers
- Several more sentences matching between 75 and 100%
- In the conclusion two sentences had a 70–80% match (Fig. 4.2)



STUDENT ID	NAME	USER ATTEMPT	AVERAGE MATCH	HIGHEST MATCH	SA REPORT	SUBMITTED
---	---	---	5%	5%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 06:03 PM
---	---	---	2%	2%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 04:10 PM
---	---	---	10%	10%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 10:56 AM
---	---	---	4%	4%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 03:16 PM
---	---	---	5%	5%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 02:37 PM
---	---	---	6%	6%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 03:43 PM
---	---	---	6%	6%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 02:53 PM
---	---	---	5%	5%	✓	di, apr 11, 2017, 08:27 PM
---	---	---	5%	5%	✓	wo, apr 12, 2017, 04:28 PM
---	---	---	7%	7%	✓	vr, apr 07, 2017, 09:14 PM

Fig. 4.2 Teacher’s view of student submissions to a plagiarism detection software as presented in Blackboard. The names of the students are redacted. The two middle columns give percentages of ‘matching texts’. In this sample they range between 4 and 10%, indicating very low or no occurrence of plagiarism in the submissions

In sum, the two papers had an overlap of 20%, enough to be flagged as suspected plagiarism. The case was brought before the board of examination who, following Utrecht University procedure, requested the students to respond. The first student stated that, ‘I am quite startled by your request, because I am not aware of any wrongdoing. I wish to state that I have shared my paper with two of my fellow students for review, and it may be that they have copied parts of it.’ The second student replied, ‘I assume that my paper is coupled with that of [Student 1], who is not to be blamed. She sent her finished work to me and I may have focused a bit too much on her paper, by free riding on it.’

The second student was found guilty of plagiarism. This student received an official reprimand; her exam was annulled and she was removed from the course for the duration of a year. No action against the first student was undertaken however, even though she had actively made plagiarism possible by sending her paper to the other student, and the code of conduct of this university rules that ‘inciting of plagiarism’ is also punishable.

In a second, somewhat less clear-cut case, the plagiarism detection program again revealed substantial overlap between two papers, and even to a much higher degree (49%). Suspicion of misconduct was raised. Again, the students were requested to respond.

When they appeared before the board of examination, they declared that the overlap between their papers could be explained in part because they had worked in close collaboration with each other, and in part because they had shared a document on Facebook, co-authored by the two of them. Neither had plagiarized the other, they claimed.

In this case, the board ruled that as far as their close collaboration was concerned, it could *not* be considered plagiarism, but rather ‘inadequate course preparation’ (they were supposed to write an individual paper). As to sharing a document, it *was* ruled plagiarism because ‘no adequate references to the source were given.’ The students were not removed from the course but both received an official reprimand and had to rewrite the paper (Box 4.3).

4.4.4 *Priority Disputes*

Another form of appropriation demands our attention. It is commonly referred to as a ‘priority dispute.’ Typically, in such cases, one author accuses another of stealing their pre-published ideas or discoveries, claiming priority over the idea in dispute. The history of science is full of these disputes. We shall briefly examine one such example below.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, years before he became a household name as the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud befriended a Berlin otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat specialist) by the name of Wilhelm Fliess. Fliess advocated for the idea that all human beings are bisexual in nature. Furthermore, he proposed that the major events in life are ‘predetermined’ by two biological cycles,

Box 4.3: ‘Appropriation, but not Plagiarism’

Melanie has had great difficulties finishing her BA thesis. Her teacher has already pointed out several flaws in the first version and warned her that unless she substantially changes the design, she will fail. With the deadline looming, Melanie doesn’t know what to do. She considers the following strategies:

Strategy 1: She’ll ask a fellow student to discuss the thesis with her and help her identify its weaknesses. Melanie will cook dinner while her friend reads the draft. During dinner they’ll discuss any possible changes and revisions.

Strategy 2: She’ll ask to look at the theses of two of her friends who have already finished to see what they did differently.

Strategy 3: She’ll pay for the services of a professional agency. They say the work is produced by certified teachers and charge a fee of 250 Euros. They promise to rewrite her thesis in a week, based on her first draft.

Strategy 1 is entirely legitimate and should in fact be encouraged. **Strategy 2** is also legitimate, provided Melanie doesn’t copy these theses. **Strategy 3** is cheating.

one lasting 23 days, the other 28. Fliess discussed these ideas with Freud but failed to publish them until much later, when their friendship had already withered away.

In 1903, psychologist Hermann Swoboda, published a book on a distinctly Fliessian notion of ‘periodicity,’ and a year later philosopher Otto Weininger published a highly successful book that discussed, among other things, bisexuality. Fliess recognized these as his unpublished ideas, and he suspected foul play.

In a letter dated July 20th, 1904, Fliess demanded that Freud explain himself. In a response sent on July 27th, just a week later, Freud sheepishly admitted to having discussed Fliess’ ideas with Swoboda, who had subsequently passed on the information to his friend Weininger. He acknowledged Fliess’ ‘priority rights’ with respect to bisexuality, but he denied that he had given any *detailed* information to Swoboda (Masson 1985, pp. 462–8). In other words, both Swoboda and Weininger had merely acted upon a hint and worked out the rest on their own. This did not convince Fliess, who published an angry pamphlet accusing Freud of betrayal for giving away vital information that belonged to him.

Had Freud been careless with his former friend’s ideas? Was he responsible for the ‘theft’ (or plagiarism) of Fliess’ intellectual property? In a paper discussing the case in detail, Michael Schröter (2003) compared the content of both Swoboda and Weininger’s books and found that they both contain ideas resembling Fliess’ work. That being said, Schröter noted that Swoboda’s work contained notable differences as well, and Weininger’s ‘appropriation’ of Fliess’ ideas were few and far between, effectively as little as a mere sentence. However, Schröter does admit that Fliess’ accusations, although exaggerated, do contain ‘a kernel of truth.’

Fig. 4.3 Freud (left) and Fliess (right), here still friends, ca. 1895. (Source: Ernst Freud [2006](#), p. 156)



Fliess' priority claim (right of intellectual property) stands as an example of how the majority of priority disputes occur. Seldom do we see the theft of a final product. More often, authors find themselves grappling with similar ideas at the same time as one another, and subsequently accusing the other of stealing their ideas. Historians argue that, in these types of cases, the ideas were essentially up 'in the air.' Does that mean priority disputes aren't 'real' disputes? No. As with other forms of plagiarism, priority disputes point to the fact that ideas cannot develop in isolation; they need *other* ideas to develop, and often competition plays a major role in these developments (for further discussion, see Michael White's [2002](#) book *Rivals*). Conscientious authors give credit where credit is due – not merely out of politeness or to avoid unpleasant priority disputes, but precisely because acknowledging contributions allows them to establish their *own* claims (Fig. 4.3, Box [4.4](#)).

4.5 When Do Intentions Come into Play?

4.5.1 Intentions Matter

Not everyone who commits the 'unoriginal sin' of plagiarism does so on purpose. Some don't fully grasp that what they're doing is wrong and when caught plagiarizing, their defense often reads like this: I may have been sloppy, but I did not *intend* to plagiarize. Well then, let's explore a few examples (drawn from Kolschooten [2012](#)) to see whether that defense holds any water.

Box 4.4: ‘Plagiarism, but not Intentional’

Oddly enough, Freud almost committed plagiarism himself with respect to Fliess’ ideas on bisexuality. It happened during a discussion when they were still friends. Freud explained to Fliess that he believed that the problem of neurosis could be resolved if the individual’s bisexuality were taken into account. Fliess allegedly responded matter-of-factly: ‘That’s what I told you two and a half years ago, but you would have none of it then’ (Freud 1901/1960, p. 144).

Have you ever had a seemingly novel idea or solution to a problem suddenly come to mind? Of course. Have you ever then remembered, or been informed, that the idea or solution was in fact something you had previously heard? The answer is likely yes. The act of forgetting something that you’ve heard and the subsequent reappearance of that memory believed to be your own idea is known as *cryptomnesia*, and it may cause *inadvertent plagiarism*.

In a series of psychological experiments, researchers were able to produce cryptomnesia in a group of students. The participants were tasked to take turns spontaneously generating lists of items in specific categories such as ‘sports’ and ‘animals.’ When asked to recall the items they had listed before adding new ones, subjects would ‘appropriate’ items others had produced earlier during the session, and presented them as their own (see; Brown and Murphy 1989).

4.5.2 Plain Sloppiness or Culpable Carelessness?

Our first example is focused on a senior lecturer that contributed several chapters to a handbook that was flagged for possible plagiarism. The lecturer maintained before the integrity commission that he had relied on the help of a student who, it turned out, had copied parts of a text verbatim, without reference. When questioned, the student admitted to having been ‘sloppy.’ Was it then the student’s fault? The commission determined that because the chapters were published under the lecturer’s name, the lecturer was responsible, not the student. The author was found guilty of plagiarism because they should have checked the student’s work. Ultimately, the case was ruled ‘nonintentional’ and therefore held less culpability.

The next example followed a junior researcher who submitted a paper to a conference. A reviewer detected ‘significant similarities’ between the junior researcher’s paper and a paper published by a senior researcher the year before. After an investigation, it was determined that the junior researcher had indeed copied portions of the other’s work. Despite asking the senior researcher for permission to use certain tables, the junior researcher failed to identify the source properly. The junior researcher’s contract was subsequently terminated on the grounds of ‘unsuitability, in casu plagiarism.’ The senior researcher thought it wasn’t a case of willful plagiarism, but a case of ‘bad citation by a rookie.’

	Intention to commit plagiarism	No intention to commit plagiarism
Severe infringement of university policy	Stealing source material	Faulty/sloppy referencing Inadvertent plagiarism
Light infringement of university policy	Patch-writing Improper paraphrasing	Minor transgressions and irregularities, sloppy referencing

Fig. 4.4 Taxonomy of Plagiarism (after Walker 1998)

Box 4.5: ‘List of Objects That Can Be Plagiarized’

- Ideas;
- Research findings;
- Phrases;
- Entire texts;
- Charts;
- Illustrations (including photographs, scans, and figures);
- Lecture notes and PowerPoint slides;
- Lecture summaries;
- Exams.

Note that lecture summaries, PowerPoint slides, and exams, all content university students regularly encounter, are specifically included in this list. Students have the right to inspect exams and use slides and summaries as reference material, but to plagiarize their content is considered misconduct in most universities.

Notably *not* on this list are particular expressions which are often too well-known to be considered plagiarizable – for example expressions like ‘resilience’ or ‘unconscious.’ However, if these expressions relate to specific authors, they would need referencing. For example: ‘paradigm shift’ (Kuhn), ‘survival of the fittest’ (Darwin), or ‘unintended consequences’ (Merton).

Additionally, ‘reference lists’ are not considered plagiarizable because typically such lists are supposed to act as a safeguard *against* plagiarism. Thus, when a classroom of students work on an assignment comparing several articles, their bibliographies will be (nearly) identical. Plagiarism detection software will still spot these ‘similarities,’ but a teacher will recognize that they aren’t ‘matches’ for plagiarism. It’s a different story, though, if two students work on an open-ended assignment and their bibliographies come back identical; then suspicion may arise.

The final example followed ‘an Egyptian serial plagiarizer.’ In 2003, a mathematician learned through a colleague that one of his papers had been plagiarized by a mathematician in Egypt. When the journal was alerted, the fraudulent paper was quickly withdrawn. Further investigation into the Egyptian mathematician exposed routine plagiarism. Their articles were withdrawn and they were put on the publication blacklist (Fig. 4.4, Box 4.5).

4.6 Factors That Facilitate Plagiarism

4.6.1 *Factors*

The cases discussed in the previous sections reveal how different intentions play a role in plagiarism (and how these intentions are weighed into establishing a verdict), but also how specific scientific customs and traditions (such as the difference between US and Chinese citation practices) must be taken into account. In short, a variety of factors contribute to the occurrence of plagiarism and awareness is key. In this section, we briefly review relevant literature that points to the most important factors currently inciting students to commit plagiarism (or inversely keep them away from it).

4.6.2 *Experience*

A number of authors writing on the subject perceive there to be a higher prevalence of plagiarism among junior (first and second year) undergraduate students. They attribute this to a lack of experience in academic writing (Park 2003). The underlying idea being that senior (third and fourth year) undergraduate students are supposed to have developed better writing skills, and should therefore be better able to avoid plagiarism. Walker (2010), however, found just the opposite. Students 20 years and younger plagiarized significantly *less* than students 21–30 years of age. Walker reasoned this was likely due to feeling more pressure to perform.

Regardless of whether or not junior students plagiarized more than senior students, the lack of experience may still elicit feelings of uncertainty surrounding issues of plagiarism. This uncertainty was expressed by a UK master's student, who was interviewed on the prevalence of cheating and plagiarism, noting: 'You don't know what is cheating, if you've got an idea of an article, or if it is your own idea and you write it down in your own words' (Ashworth et al. 1997, p. 191).

4.6.3 *Externalization*

Lack of academic experience and feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty may well contribute to an 'externalizing' of the problem. As some students expressed, plagiarism is something university professors find important, but isn't something perceived to be 'a real problem.' Often, students consider plagiarism 'a minor offence' at best, even 'no big deal' (Park 2003). The concept of intellectual property is not (yet) common knowledge to these students; and as Power (2009) concluded following interviews with students on their perceptions of plagiarism, it is rather 'imposed on them by authorities or other people in power outside of themselves' (p. 654).

4.6.4 Pressure to Perform

Most, if not all universities across Europe and the US have become very demanding, competitive institutions in the last few decades. Universities have begun nurturing a ‘culture of excellence’ that requires students to hand in an abundance of assignments over short periods of time, further expecting a continuous performance at the highest level. As identified by Comas-Forgas and Sueda-Negre (2010), the three most relevant causes of plagiarism are: lack of time to carry out academic assignments, poor time-management and personal organization, and performance pressure.

4.6.5 Availability

The internet allows access to a seemingly infinite number of sources. Copy-pasting from internet sources (*cyber-plagiarism*) has become almost too easy – were it not for plagiarism detection software. Inversely, it is becoming difficult to *not* rely on internet sources, and considerable effort gets put into hiding that fact. As one student put it: ‘Things are a lot easier to get away with on the internet if you wanted to (give false information for example). But copying work without sourcing it is easier from books in my opinion, as universities have methods of screening essays for plagiarized works through the internet’ (Selwyn 2008, p. 473). The lesson to be drawn from this is that acquiring good writing skills should be a priority, since poor writing has become both easy and dangerous.

4.6.6 Faulty Teachers

Some students blame their teachers, or the educational system as a whole, for failing to properly define the difference between legitimate use of source material and plagiarism: ‘[Teachers] just say “Don’t plagiarize.” But they never tell you what to do to not plagiarize’ (Power 2009, p. 655). There may be more to this than a simple justification of laziness, as another student explains: ‘Well, listen, I’m terribly confused what it actually means – I mean that might sound stupid: there’s a policy that... the wholesale copying is obviously quite obvious, but there’s a hell of a lot of grey area in between that I really don’t even understand’ (Gullifer and Tyson 2010, p. 470).

4.6.7 Cultural Expectations

In Sect. 4.3 of this chapter, we touched upon the different cultural perceptions of authorship, particularly between Western (in our case, the US and Europe) and Eastern (in our case, China) societies. 25 years ago, Deckert (1993) found that

Chinese students enrolled at an English college in Hong Kong hardly had any notion of what plagiarism was at all, and held a very different view on authorship compared to American students. Walker (2010) confirmed what others have since observed, namely that international students at Western universities show higher rates of plagiarism (and more serious forms as well).

Of course, these (isolated) findings should not be taken as incitements of cultures in general, but rather of different norms and expectations with regard to publication behavior and source referencing. Indeed, Hu and Lei (2015) acknowledge that Chinese student often have limited knowledge of Anglo-American intertextual conventions, and emphasize the need to develop effective instructional strategies to master these literary practices, and help ‘raise international students’ awareness of cross-cultural differences in intertextuality. Further, the need to equip them with the requisite skills and strategies to engage in legitimate textual appropriation’ (2015, p. 255) (Box 4.6).

Box 4.6: ‘Who’s to Blame? A Dilemma’

Jack and Jill are third year sociology students. They have been working independently on an assignment about the prisoner’s dilemma game. When the deadline comes, Jack is the first to upload his paper, followed by Jill a few minutes later.

While Jack and Jill put a great deal of effort into their papers, the plagiarism software detects a 58% match – meaning there are many examples of nearly identical sentences, and the two papers even have a matching structure. It appears obvious that one has plagiarized the other. The question is: who did the copying?

When asked for clarification, both Jack and Jill claimed priority and accused the other of being the plagiarizer. The teacher knows the two students well and is aware that Jack is a rather weak student. The paper appears almost ‘too good’ for Jack, and seems much more at Jill’s level. But the teacher can’t prove this.

What should the teacher do? Of the three options presented below, which do you think is the most fair? Discuss your choice with your classmates.

1. It may be likely that Jack and Jill have struck a deal to blame each other to ensure the real offender goes unpunished. With no available proof of who plagiarized whom, the teacher must accept the situation as it is and grade both papers.
2. There is undeniable proof that one student has copied from the other. Although it cannot be established who is the plagiarizer, any participation in plagiarism is considered misconduct and the teacher determines both students are in the wrong and as such, both must do the assignment again.
3. One of the papers is undeniably copied from the other. It’s much more likely that Jack has plagiarized Jill. Therefore, Jack must do the assignment again, with Jill is also reprimanded since she has allowed her paper to be plagiarized. She gets a deduction in her grade. Instead of receiving an A+, as she was initially assessed, the paper gets a B–.

4.7 Conclusions

4.7.1 Summary

In this chapter we have explored the litany of problems surrounding plagiarism, which we understand to be the *appropriation of someone else's work (or ideas) without appropriate referencing* of the original sources.

We have learned to distinguish plagiarism from legitimate forms of referencing, including *quotations*, *paraphrasing*, and *summarizing*. There are ample *publication manuals* that contain detailed rules on how to properly reference your sources, be it written or oral communications, translations, and parts of or even whole sentences. The underlying principle to remember is that your reader must be able to identify the source of every piece of information you use.

While plagiarism is morally and often legally wrong, certain cultural or social circumstances allow for a nuanced view. Thus, different views on *authorship* and especially the role of *intentions* complicate matters to the point that cases of plagiarism must be judged on an individual basis, to establish what went wrong, who is to be blamed, and why. *Cryptomnesia*, a form of inadvertent plagiarism, serves as an interesting case in point here.

Of special interest are the forms of appropriation that involve stitching together a somewhat loose patchwork of source material called *patch writing*. Patch writing borders on plagiarism because it borders on copy-paste techniques. Patch writing is considered a 'grey area' (neither wrong, nor right), although it involves stylistic matters too.

Furthermore, we discussed *priority disputes* surrounding plagiarism and considered whether or not *self-plagiarism* can be regarded as bona fide plagiarism, or if it is actually a form of 'passive self-citation.'

Finally, we explored the *factors that facilitate* plagiarism, including experience with writing (or lack thereof), externalization of the problem (perceiving plagiarism to be someone else's problem), performance pressure, availability of sources (books vs. online), inadequate teachers, and cultural beliefs.

4.7.2 Discussion

The object of this chapter is to familiarize you with the problems surrounding plagiarism. By becoming aware of this issue's many facets, we hope you will be able to act responsibly and avoid being caught in a situation like the ones we explored. Plagiarism can and must be avoided, but it takes training. Everyone has a responsibility here, including you and your university.

Institutions and universities must, at a minimum, provide clear guidelines regarding their referencing requirements, and stipulate the consequences of noncompliance. Hopefully they'll do even more, and allow you and your fellow students time to adequately train yourselves. Newton et al. (2014) found that even short-duration

plagiarism training programs significantly enhance students' in-text referencing skills. Offerings such as this can allow you to better understand how to properly utilize the work of others and to feel better equipped to carve out your own niche in the scientific community.

There is no better time to start thinking through these issues than now. Begin by discussing some of the issues outlined in this chapter, in particular involving the problem of authorship. Who 'owns' texts and ideas and why is that? How private is your work? What steps must you take to become the 'author' of a text?

Case Study: René Diekstra

René Diekstra, a professor of clinical psychology at Leiden University in the Netherlands, gained notoriety in the summer of 1996 after he was accused of plagiarism, and subsequently resigned.

The situation, described in detail by Frank van Kolfschooten (2012), meant the end of a highly successful academic career. Internationally recognized as a leading expert in suicidal behaviors, Diekstra was the founder of the International Academy of Suicide Research. He was also the founder of the scientific journal *Archives of Suicide Research*. He had been the manager of the 'Psychosocial and Behavioral Aspects of Health and Development' of the World Health Organization (WHO) program and was one of the first recipients of the Stengel Award, the world's most prestigious honor in the field of suicide research.

When Diekstra lost his university position in 1996, he was ousted from his organizational positions and at least one of his awards was revoked. Effectively, he became a persona non grata. How did this fall from grace come to pass?

Being a prolific writer, Diekstra had written numerous scientific publications, as well as multiple popular science and self-help books. The publication that sparked his downfall was 'No Stone Unturned' (*De Onderste Steen Boven*, 1996), written for a large non-academic public. The charge of plagiarism had been levelled by two journalists of a local Dutch weekly newspaper. Allegedly, Diekstra had copied entire sections from *How to Deal with Depression* by Bloomfield and McWilliams (1994). The journalists responded with indignation: 'Who is this Diekstra? And this man calls himself a professor!' (quoted in Danhof en Verhey 1996) (Fig. 4.5).

Despite being on vacation, Diekstra quickly responded. He admitted to having copied roughly twenty pages from *How to Deal with Depression*, but he also placed some of the blame on the publisher, suggesting a possible lapse in communication. The scandal did not end there, though. When he returned from his vacation, a subsequent publication in the same journal revealed further indications of plagiarism. Apparently, Diekstra had translated 26 pages from an unpublished manuscript by Gary McEnery and incorporated them into his self-help book 'When Life Hurts' (*Als het Leven Pijn Doet*), published in 1990.

While Diekstra was out on sick leave, an independent commission began investigating the case, and in that time, another allegation of plagiarism came to the

reconsider the commission's verdict. They stated that the report of the commission was sloppy and the punishment (dismissal) 'disproportional' (Dijkhuis et al. 1997). The following year, in 1998, Diekstra published an autobiographical account of the affair titled 'O Holland, Land of Humiliation!' (*O Nederland, Vernederland!*), which detailed his feelings of being wronged. He notes how the investigative commission had acted in 'bad faith' and 'twisted the facts,' but that the damage had been done: he was ridiculed in public by his friends and his former colleagues turned their backs on him. Throughout it all, Diekstra maintained his innocence, and that the allegations of plagiarism were false (though he again admitted 'carefree handling' of other people's materials).

His self-defense strategy ran along the following three lines: (1) popular science books are exempt (at least to a degree) from the same standards as scientific publications; (2) the plagiarized parties had been offered financial compensation; (3) he had not *intended* to steal from others. Therefore, he argued, the accusation of plagiarism did not stand, and was at best simply 'sloppiness.'

None of these arguments, nor his colleagues plea, were accepted, and the conviction remained. Diekstra, however, continued to seek rehabilitation for many years. By 2003 he was still attempting to sue Leiden University, but to no avail.

In the years following 1997, Diekstra became the Director of the Center for Youth and Development in The Hague, the Netherlands and between 2004 and 2011, was head of the Social Science Department and professor of psychology at the [Roosevelt Academy](#) in [Middelburg](#). However, as he was reassembling his life, Diekstra's past continued to haunt him. In 2004, his position as a professor at Roosevelt caused a stir because according to the responsible parties, his reappointed as a professor was unlawful.

Willem Koops, the acting Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Utrecht University during this time, strongly opposed Diekstra's appointment at Roosevelt. He was quoted as saying: 'Diekstra views himself as the victim instead of the offender (...) That's why I think that Diekstra cannot be engaged as role model in the training of students and PhDs' (Kolfshoten 2012, p. 78).

Assignment

1. Examine Diekstra's three self-defense arguments. Do any of his arguments exonerate him (partially or fully) from the accusation of plagiarism? Does it make a difference when a clear definition of plagiarism is lacking (as was the case in 1996)?
2. Diekstra felt that he was being 'persecuted' and treated 'unfairly.' He complained that the Dutch people were unwilling to forgive him, and that they would never let the past go. To what degree (or for how long) should misconduct be considered a stain on one's reputation? Is there a point at which someone found guilty of misconduct should be allowed to start with a clean slate? What conditions should this depend upon?

3. If someone accused of plagiarism were to ask you for advice, how would you have responded? Would you recommend a different defense strategy?

Suggested Reading

A very good introduction into debates surrounding plagiarism is offered by R.M. Howard, *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators* (1999). Another notable contribution comes from M.C. LaFollette, *Stealing into Print. Fraud, Plagiarism, and Misconduct in Scientific* (1992). Finally, we recommend Ashworth et al. 'Guilty in Whose Eyes? University student's perception of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment' (1997) for an excellent overview of student perspectives on plagiarism.

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